

Goslicius' Treatise of the Ideal Senator and Its Ideological Transformations in Translation

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In 1568 a Latin treatise entitled *De Optimo Senatore Libri Duo . . .* (Two Books on the Ideal Senator) was issued by the well-known Venetian publisher Ziletti.¹ Its author was the Pole Wawrzyniec Grzymała Goślicki, or – Latinized – Laurentius Grimalius Goslicius, one of the relatively few Polish authors to have enjoyed a protracted, though at times intermittent presence in the Western literary culture over a period of more than four centuries, thanks to the fact that he wrote in Latin and that his treatise happened to be translated into English within less than two decades of its *editio princeps*. The book's arrival and dissemination in Elizabethan England before 1584 launched what at first sight appears to be a string of random occurrences, earning this writer a singular position among his countrymen in the history of works by Polish authors translated into a global language and ultimately attracting the attention of present-day scholars of the history of political ideas. All the more peculiarly, as although Goslicius wanted his treatise noticed by an international readership, wrote it in the erudite humanist style of the Late Renaissance, and had it published in the cultural metropolis of Venice, he addressed it primarily to his own compatriots, dedicating it to his monarch and discussing issues then being debated in the parliament of his home country.

Yet although *De Optimo Senatore* caught and held the attention of English translators, their patrons and their public, the picture of the treatise that emerged in outcome of their services cannot be called a true reflection of the original work, indeed can only be regarded as a distorting mirror of the original Mirror of the Ideal Senator. The story of Goslicius' presence in English writings on political doctrine is a catalogue of manipulative practices effected under the guise of translation accruing against a background of the accidents of history, and may serve as the classic argument for the Manipulation School of Translation, whose adherents claim that all translation unavoidably involves manipulation of the original text.²

Goslicius extolled the political distinction and prerogatives of the Senate in a tripartite Mixed Republic composed of King, Senate (the Upper House), and People (the Lower House of the Parliament), at a time when in his own country a controversy between the latter two component parts of the *Respublica Mixta* was rearing towards, then passing through its apogee, bringing defeat for the august Senate and the ceding of rights to a victorious Lower House of Sejm, representing the People, in other words the enfranchised *szlachta* or Polish gentry. In the aftermath of the turbulent sessions of Sejm of the early and mid-1560s marking the definitive ascendancy of the *szlachta* at the expense of the aristocratic Senate, which he must have observed from outside Poland during his Italian studies, Goslicius was championing, diplomatically but certainly not apologetically, the cause of the losing party. Moreover, in the years following the close of the Council of Trent when the Counter-Reformation was only starting out and Poland was still a profoundly multi-denominational society, Goslicius resorted to the ideas and language of the Tridentine resolutions, overtly identifying with the principal senators of Poland, the Roman Catholic bishops, whose status in the secular affairs of the state had been seriously challenged by a preponderantly Protestant lower house. While not denying the political rights of the People (as represented by their deputies in the lower house), he called for the containment of what he considered the dangerously inordinate demands of the “democratic element” in the Mixed State. In anticipation of the extinction of the Jagiellon dynasty (which actually happened four years

later) he advocated an elective monarchy limited by the law and governing in close co-operation with the Senate and People.³

All this, couched in an elegant Latin full of references to Cicero, the historians, philosophers and “most excellent” lawgivers of Antiquity, found a ready response in Europe, particularly in England, where it circulated in the legal profession, which was attuned to the notion of a mixed state as propounded in Sir Thomas Smith’s *De Republica Anglorum* (1562 – 1565). By the mid 1580s Goslicius’ treatise appears to have reached the hands of law students at Cambridge. A volume containing a translation of Book One of *De Optimo Senatore*, by one Robert Chester, is preserved in the manuscript section of the British Library. It carries a letter of dedication to Justice Thomas Meade of the Court of Common Pleas (who died in 1585), suggesting that the translator was a Robert Chester of Royston in Cambridgeshire, not far away from Justice Meade’s home at Elmdon in Essex. If this identification is right, then the translator was a student of nineteen at the time and probably translated Goslicius’ work as a gift for Justice Meade, in the hope of patronage for a start in a career in the legal profession in London. The translation, redolent of the type of shortcomings one may expect of a novice in the art of translation, stops at the end of Book One. Presumably the translator lost his incentive after the Judge’s death. Robert Chester did not establish himself in the London legal milieu until much later; he became a member of the Middle Temple in 1599, at the age of 36. The fact that Goslicius’ work was available to a nineteen-year-old Cambridge undergraduate by 1584/85 says a lot for its circulation in England.

Another manuscript translation from the same period survives in the Ogden Collection of University College at London University. The translator (or translators) are unknown, but the text entails both books and has the dates April 9 and May 23, 1584, entered at the end of Books One and Two respectively. This translation, with only a slight amount of editorial amendment, was published in 1598 as *The Counsellor*. In 1607 part of the edition was fitted out with a new title, *A Common-wealth of Good Counsaile*, and title-page. Both versions are curious already at first glance, because they reproduce Goslicius’ original dedication to Sigismund Augustus, King of Poland – by that time deceased for over a quarter-century. There is no trace in them of the customary local patronage that usually accompanied the publication of translations. Yet it is unlikely that the translation was published without an English sponsoring party to secure it financially. The other remarkable feature in this translation is the absence of a large section of the Tridentine material on the pre-eminent position of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in the secular state, and on the preferability of elective to hereditary monarchy. The translation was pre-censored already by the Ogden Manuscript stage – long before it was entered in the Stationers’ Register on 6 March 1598. The 1598 publication of *The Counsellor* was essentially a bowdlerized version of Goslicius’ original, diametrically different on two key issues. With these two amputations, there was no need for any official proscription, as is sometimes alleged; the translation was perfectly fit to be passed by the Elizabethan censoring authority supervising the procedure for entry in the Stationers’ Register. On the other hand, it is quite possible that the translation was published as part of a diplomatic campaign following a debacle in English-Polish relations in the summer of 1597, when Queen Elizabeth felt offended by a forthright speech delivered during a public audience by a Polish ambassador with a complaint from the King of Poland. It was feared that her impulsive retort could be taken by her Polish counterpart Sigismund III as an insult and thereby prompt him into an alliance with England’s arch-enemy, Philip II of Spain. While congratulating her on her reply, Elizabeth’s ministers took action to counteract any potential setbacks in relations with Poland. They instructed their diplomatic representative in Poland to effect a reconciliation. Surviving documents state overtly that even before he left England (August 1597), Ambassador Działyński was informed that steps would be taken to protect English interests (mainly commercial) in Poland by “procuring men among the

Senators whose goodwill was already ensured.”⁴ By this time Goslicius was already a bishop and senator with a reputation for diplomatic versatility, having successfully thwarted a Jesuit attempt to take over the University of Kraków and also as the only ecclesiastical senator to have signed the Warsaw Confederation, a document guaranteeing religious toleration (1573). All the indications are that *The Counsellor* of 1598, with the manipulative devices behind it, was part and parcel of a diplomatic campaign, and that it was quietly sponsored by Elizabeth’s government as an approved translation at home, and a complimentary token of apology in Poland. Corroboration for such a conclusion comes in an address made to Goslicius in a 1599/1600 publication by his countryman, the writer and diplomat Krzysztof Warszewicki (Varsevicius):

On receiving reliable information from someone that in England there is no other book more popular with readers but your own *De Optimo Senatore*, I think no-one will doubt how much glory *De Optimo Senatore* will bring not only you but also all of our nation. . .⁵

Goslicius continued to be read in England during the pamphlet war between the Royalists and the Roundheads, who referred to Poland and the Scandinavian countries as viable examples of limited monarchy. In 1660, following the restoration of the monarchy, one J.G. Gent. (identified in the Wing Catalogue as John Grimefield) published a pamphlet entitled *The Sage Senator Delineated*, which was in fact a manipulative plagiarism of *The Counsellor*, large extracts of which were reproduced in a rearranged order, supplemented by scurrilous invective against the regicides and a eulogy of the Divine Right of Kings. Goslicius’ work had been parasitized to convey the very opposite meaning of its original message. Another 17th-century “edition” of Goslicius’ book which we today would call a plagiarism, this time of the Latin original, came out in Frankfurt-am-Main only a few years after his death, allegedly as the work of one “Liberius à Bodenstein.” It is an almost full reproduction of the original text, except for the dedication to the king of Poland, some of the references to Poland and – remarkably – the very same passages on the Catholic religion that had been removed in *The Counsellor*, which suggests that its publisher decided to launch it on the German Protestant market mainly for commercial reasons.

After another seven decades yet another English translation appeared, this time by a professional translator of the Classics and journalist, William Oldisworth. Again his motive was not exactly academic objectivity. Oldisworth had been a Tory controversialist, editor of *The Examiner* and a combatant in the Jacobite uprising of 1715.⁶ In the aftermath of defeat he fled to France, where he stayed many years and probably met another political exile and French protégé, Stanisław Leszczyński, pretender to the Polish throne. It was probably from Leszczyński’s entourage that Oldisworth learned of Goslicius’ treatise and translated it into a mellifluous English, by far the most elegant of all the translations. *The Accomplished Senator*, which he published in 1733 dedicating it to the victorious Whigs in a vain attempt to effect a rehabilitation in England, contains all the material excised in *The Counsellor* and (except for a single detail on religious matters) is faithful to the spirit and letter of Goslicius’ text. Yet it still manipulates the original, by supplying it with a lengthy preface full of erroneous information on Goslicius, e.g. by shifting his biography about thirty years back in order to conceal the fact that Goslicius was a Counter-Reformation ecclesiast. Unlike the cut method of *The Counsellor*, and *The Sage Senator’s* cut-and-paste scheme, Oldisworth employed a far subtler, more devious mode of manipulation: the frame method. It failed to bring him the public comeback he wanted: a year later he died in a debtor’s jail.

But that was not the end of Goslicius’ journey through the gullet of manipulation. Copies of his treatise and its translations crossed the Atlantic to find themselves in collections such as Thomas Jefferson’s private library. In the early 20th century, soon after the restoration of

Poland's independence, Tytus Filipowicz, an associate of Piłsudski and later Polish Ambassador to the United States, presumably in a gesture of amity and gratitude to President Woodrow Wilson, concocted a theory that Goslicius' book had "inspired the American Declaration of Independence." He could not have read the book, or at least not devoted much attention to what he was reading. He presented his hypothesis in an after-dinner speech at the 1932 Annual Meeting of the American Society for International Law, and was introduced with subtle irony by the master of ceremonies: "It is almost unbelievable, but it is a fact that the ambassador who I am shortly to introduce is not merely familiar with the British Museum, having seen it from the top of a bus, or having the automobile in which he was riding pass it; he has actually entered the British Museum, he has fingered its treasures, and he is here tonight to show that an ambassador may be a scholar to his fingertips, and how lightly he may wear his learning."⁷ Nonetheless, Filipowicz's fantastic claim was soon to find employment in the propaganda campaigns of the Second World War and during the Cold War that followed. It was broadcast in *The Miracle of the Good Senator*, a private publication dated 3 May 1941 and issued by an academic from Alliance College, Pennsylvania and a New York lawyer,⁸ and later taken up by numerous other authors (some connected with the Hoover Institution),⁹ none of whom thought of actually reading the book to check whether Goslicius could justifiably be regarded as the harbinger of American democracy. The fabrication was finally challenged during the Polish Renaissance Conference held at the University of Indiana (Bloomington) in 1982, to the amazement of its hitherto advocates, who heard that there were no grounds to suppose that Goslicius, a 16th-century critic of the 16th-century Polish notion of democracy, could have "inspired" the pioneers of American democracy in the late 18th century.¹⁰ Many, especially in the American Polonia community, who had taken the claim *bona fide* as a scientific truth, were no doubt disappointed, and some still cling on to it...

The story of how Goslicius has fared in his English transmogrifications is indeed a feather in the Manipulationist cap. But the question is: was Goslicius simply unlucky in the accidents of history which encouraged manipulators to tamper with his text, or is it a general rule that the translation of any text with a political and/or ideological message is subject to inexorable manipulation?¹¹ After all, translation means the lifting of a text out of its original cultural context and transposition into another culture. And different cultures betokening different societies are conditioned by different historical traditions, which bestow a given text with different interpretative potentials. What's more, very few (if any) translations of political texts are done for the pure academic purpose of providing accurate information on another society and its culture, and those that are tend not to be diffused into the public awareness.

References

Laurentii Grimalii Goslicii *DE OPTIMO SENATORE LIBRI DUO. In quibus Magistratum officia, Civium vita beata, Rerumpublicarum fœlicitas explicantur.* Opus plane aureum, summorum Philosophorum et Legislatorum doctrina refertum, Omnibus Respu. rite administrare cupientibus, non modo utile, sed apprime necessarium. *Accessit locuples rerum toto opere memorabilium Index.* CUM PRIVILEGIO. Venetiis, Apud Iordanum Zilettum, MDLXVIII.

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¹ For details on the source texts and reference literature cited, see Bibliography.

² The manipulation theory of translation has accumulated a considerable body of publications worldwide, by researchers like Theo Hermans, André Lefevre, and (recently in Eastern Europe) Aiga Kramina and Aiga Dukate (see above for selected bibliography).

³ The most recent work on Goslicius includes an over 200-page monographic study in English (Bałuk-Ulewiczowa 2009), and a collective volume in Polish with English summaries (Stępkowski ed. 2009). Both publications contain extensive bibliographies.

⁴ Original document in the *Mercurius Sarmaticus* ms. (passage in Polish translation in Marciniak 48; my translation into English, T.B.-U.) See Bałuk-Ulewiczowa 2009: Chapters 7 and 8.

⁵ Varsevicius 1599/1600: fol. 202–203 (letter dated XV Augusti 1600: my translation from the Latin, T.B.-U.) .

⁶ For more information on Oldisworth, see Allen 1947.

⁷ See Filipowicz 1932 with the adjunct introductory commentary by the master of ceremonies, who also made scathing remarks on the speaker who followed Filipowicz on that evening – Hans Frank, future Nazi governor-general of German-occupied Poland during World War 2, who spoke on the “humanity” of the Nazi concept of international law.

⁸ Arthur P. Coleman and Charles S. Haight.

⁹ Especially W. J. Wagner.

¹⁰ See Bałuk-Ulewiczowa in Fiszman ed. 1988.

¹¹ Questions of this kind were recently being put at the conference on Translation, the History of Political Thought, and the History of Concepts (Begriffsgeschichte), held in the City University of New York, 29 September – 1 October 2005.

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