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Stefan Willer, Andreas Keller (Hg.)

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Mit Beiträgen von

Ronja Bodola, Cornelius Borck, Héctor Canal, Sietske Fransen,
Patricia A. Gwozdz, Andreas Keller, Maria Oikonomou,
Pascale Roure, Caroline Sauter, Dagmar Stöferle,
Knut Martin Stünkel, Dirk Weissmann und Stefan Willer

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Jan Baptista van Helmont and his Theory of Translation¹

SIETSKE FRANSEN

When the organist hears a new song, he will have difficulty playing it at first. His soul, on the one hand, understands the sound, but his fingers, on the other hand, (as the producers of tones, like other body parts produce words) do not follow so deftly, and will therefore not bring forth the perfection of the song so quickly and accurately. Then, seeing the organ tablature, he plays it immediately, as if it is natural to the mind to send the same to his fingers as soon as he sees the tablature. However, if the same song is written down in standard musical notation, and not in tablature, it is more uncommon, and therefore harder to play, since he first needs to transform the musical notation into tablature in his mind before he is able to play it. Even harder and more uncommon is it to play from a lute tablature directly on an organ, or to play from organ tablature on a lute. It seems similarly hard to me to transform the first idea of the soul – which is still a raw tone, and which needs the mind – into words or writing.²

This is the simile Jan Baptista van Helmont (1579–1644) invokes in the introduction to his Dutch medical book *Dageraad* (Daybreak) to illustrate the process of translation. For Van Helmont translation does not just take place from language to language, but also in the mind from ideas

¹ I would like to thank my former PhD supervisors Guido Giglioli and Rembrandt Duits; Andrew McKenzie-McHarg for his support and for correcting my English; and the participants of the Early Modern translation reading group at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, the Early Modern Medicine reading group at the Department of HPS in Cambridge, and the members of the research group Visualizing Science in Media Revolutions at the Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max Planck Institute for Art History for their insightful criticisms on earlier versions of this paper.

² Jan Baptista van Helmont: *Dageraad, ofte nieuwe opkomst der geneeskunst*, Amsterdam 1659, sig. [*4]^v–*[*1]^r: »Den orgelist, hoorende een nieuw gesang, kan het ten eersten stracks met moeyten spelen; sijn ziele begrijpt eensdeels 't geluydt, maer sijn vingers (als maeckers der toonen, gelijk andere leden zijn maeckers der woorden) en volgen niet soo behendigh, noch en mogen soo snel, en soo bescheydentlyck de volmaecktheydt des gesangs niet volbrengen; dan, wel siende een tablature des orgels, speelt hy het stracks, als zijnde sijn verstandt gewoon, soo haest de tablature gesien wordt, de selve te senden naer de vingeren. Doch, soo het selve gesang is gestelt in musijck, en niet in tablature, is des ongewoonder, dies hy oock swaerder kan spelen, als moettende eerst van 't musijck sijn gewoone tablature in den geest maecken, eer hy die speelt. Noch swaerder en selsaemer is een tablature des luyts stracks op de orgel te spelen, oft een tablature des orgels te spelen op de luyt. Even gelijk heeft het my gedocht het eerste begrijp der zielen, 't welck noch een ruwen toon is, en 't gemoedt vereyst, om in woorden oft in schrift gebracht te worden.« All translations by Sietske Fransen unless otherwise stated.

to words. According to him, the transformation from the first idea that comes to mind into words is a translation step that happens before any language-to-language translation. In the musical simile we can distinguish two steps of translation: one from hearing music to the musician's soul; and a second step involving the translation of this understanding of the soul into movements of the fingers, as makers of sound. Van Helmont compares this with the understanding of ideas. Namely, the difficulty in first comprehending an idea can be compared to hearing a song which the instrumentalist cannot immediately repeat on his instrument. The idea that pops up in one's mind will need to be translated into words, using the faculties of the mind. The idea that comes in the form of images in the mind, or as organ tablature to the mind, will naturally let itself turn into words in the mother tongue, just as the music appears without problem from the organist's fingers as soon as the player understands the notation. Van Helmont's point about the different musical notations compares the translation of different languages into one's most natural language, which according to his theory is one's mother tongue.³

In the first half of this article I will further explore Van Helmont's philosophy of language and translation, in part by contextualizing it within the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century traditions upon which he drew. Since Van Helmont is so explicit about the philosophy of language and translation that he developed, I will investigate in this article if he turned his philosophy into practice. Therefore, the second half of this article will discuss Van Helmont's practices of using and translating between his two main languages (Dutch and Latin). The way in which he employed the languages in which he wrote raises questions about his practice of self-translation and the use of language. Did his mother tongue always figure as the first language into which his thoughts were translated, or could it also have been Latin as the first language for his profession? Van Helmont might have been switching primary languages for the different purposes of his writings. Before going into more detail about his philosophy and use of language, I will briefly introduce this relatively unknown author to the reader.

³ See *ibid.*, sig. **[1]ʷ.

I. A Biographical Introduction

Born in 1579 in Brussels, Van Helmont's mother tongue was Dutch, yet his education at the University of Leuven as well as at the newly founded Jesuit College in the same town was entirely in Latin. Van Helmont, who became a physician, was not impressed by the university's educational system as he describes in the autobiographical chapters of his best-known work *Ortus medicinae* (The Rise of Medicine), whose first edition was published in Amsterdam in 1648. In these chapters he details the ten years he spent travelling through Europe before finally accepting his degree in medicine from the University of Leuven on his return. Unfortunately, his account of those years is incomplete, but it is certain that he visited England and France, among other European countries. More important than the countries he visited is the way in which he acquired knowledge during these travels. Both the books he had the opportunity to study during his travels and the people whom he met on his journey provided sources of knowledge. A medical tradition he encountered during these years and that sparked his interests was the one associated with the Swiss physician Paracelsus (1493–1541). This physician was not only famous for his new method of medicine that focussed on treating specific parts of the body instead of diagnosing an unbalance of the four humours, he also advocated the use of vernacular languages at university and more generally in the learning process of students. By reworking Paracelsus's ideas into a more comprehensible theory and method, Van Helmont became one of his most important followers, not least by advocating the use of vernacular languages.⁴

To today's historians of medicine and science Van Helmont is especially known for the kind of early modern medicine that is now called ›chemical medicine.‹⁵ Van Helmont had a major influence on the development of this field in early modern England, partly due to the early translations into English of his works and their considerable popularity. He came up with many neologisms in order to give a name to the new discoveries he made both in chemistry and medicine. The most famous is the discovery

4 However, Van Helmont read Paracelsus in Latin, and not in the original Alemannic German.

5 See Walter Pagel: *Jan Baptista van Helmont. Reformer of Science and Medicine*, Cambridge/New York 1982; Allen G. Debus: *The English Paracelsians*, London 1965; William Royall Newman/Lawrence M. Principe: *Alchemy Tried in the Fire: Starkey, Boyle, and the Fate of Helmontian Chymistry*, Chicago 2002; Georgiana D. Hedesan: *An Alchemical Quest for Universal Knowledge: The ›Christian Philosophy‹ of Jan Baptist Van Helmont (1579–1644)*, Abingdon 2016.

and coinage of ›gas,‹ a word and concept that made it into contemporary times, in contrast to its sister-concept of ›blas.‹⁶

Van Helmont published several small works between 1621 and 1624. His first publication was on the curing of wounds with the weapon salve (*De magnetica vulnerum curatione*, Paris 1621). This publication would have major implications on his life, as some parts of his treatise were seen as heretical by the Jesuits and later by the Inquisition. For one, he did not publish between 1624 and 1642, possibly because he was not able to gain an imprimatur. What is more, during this period he was interrogated and imprisoned several times by the Inquisition, as well as put under house arrest. It was only two years after his death in 1646 that he was entirely absolved of these charges.⁷ In the last years of his life, however, he managed to publish a work consisting of four treatises on fevers, kidney stones, and the plague, in a collection called *Opuscula medica inaudita* (Small Unknown Medical Works), which appeared in Cologne in 1643. These works were republished another seven times together with his main work *Ortus medicinae*, with the last two editions (1682 and 1707) entitled *Opera omnia*.

Another posthumously published work was his *Dageraad, ofte nieuwe opkomst der geneeskunst* (Daybreak, or the New Rise of Medicine) (Amsterdam, 1659), his sole production in Dutch. The precise printing history of this publication is unclear; uncertainty exists about when exactly Van Helmont wrote the book and why it took so long to be published. Nevertheless, the German translation (Sulzbach 1683), which was produced by Christian Knorr von Rosenroth in collaboration with Van Helmont's son, Franciscus Mercurius (1614–1698), provides the following information:

⁶ On gas and blas, see Allen G. Debus: *The Chemical Philosophy: Paracelsian Science and Medicine in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 2 vols., New York 1977, pp. 314–317, 341–342; Sietske Fransen: *Exchange of Knowledge through Translation: Jan Baptista van Helmont and his Editors and Translators in the Seventeenth Century*, PhD thesis, London 2014, pp. 64–79; Guido Giglioni: »Per una storia del termine ›gas: da Van Helmont a Lavoisier: Costanza e variazione del significato,« in: *Annali della Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell'Università di Macerata* 15–16 (1992–1993), pp. 431–468; William R. Newman: *Gehennical Fire: The Lives of George Starkey, an American Alchemist in the Scientific Revolution*, Cambridge/London 1994, pp. 110–114; Walter Pagel: »The ›Wild Spirit: (Gas) of John Baptist van Helmont (1579–1644) and Paracelsus,« in: *Ambix* 10 (1962), pp. 1–13; idem: *Jan Baptista van Helmont* (fn. 5), pp. 60–70, 87–95.

⁷ See on Van Helmont and the trials for example Craig Harline: »The Perfectly Natural Cure of Wounds,« *Miracles at the Jesus Oak*, New York 2003, pp. 179–239, 291–304, and Mark A. Waddell: »The Perversion of Nature: Johannes Baptista Van Helmont, the Society of Jesus, and the Magnetic Cure of Wounds,« in: *Canadian Journal of History* 38, no. 2 (2003), pp. 179–197.

Originally, it had been his father's wish to write the entire work in Dutch; he had already produced a large part of it, including an introduction in Dutch. But because he realised that he needed to use many new expressions (*Redens-Arten*) which were uncommon to Dutch people, he gave this Dutch treatise – which he had named after the dawn, or *Dageraad* in his mother tongue – to his daughter. From her a good friend borrowed it and took it straight to the printers. And because his father had not written an introduction to the Latin work, he, the son, after his father's death, had added to its publication the same Dutch preface.⁸

II. Van Helmont's Philosophy of Language

The fact that Franciscus Mercurius translated the introduction from Dutch into Latin for the first edition of the *Ortus medicinae*, was mentioned on the title page.⁹ Although the exact period of conception of the *Dageraad* is unknown, the German introduction at least confirms that the parts of the Dutch text already existed before the Latin text (i.e. the *Ortus*). Who might have made up the intended audience for the book (was it indeed meant for his daughter?) and how it was received upon publication, will be discussed in the last part of this paper.

Interestingly, Franciscus Mercurius translated only the first of two introductions his father included in the *Dageraad*. The first one (which includes the musical example) is a dedication to God («Den onuytspreeckelijcken naeme Iod.He.Vav.He. ter eeren Holocaustum vernaculum, quo Author se, suaque litat verbo ineffabili»), and the second introductory letter is addressed to all practitioners of medicine («Aen de Oeffenaers der Geneeskunst»). In both of these introductions, Van Helmont expresses his ideas about language, the use of the mother tongue, and the consequences

⁸ Jan Baptista van Helmont: *Aufgang der Artzney-Kunst, das ist: Noch nie erhörte Grund-Lehren von der Natur ... Geschrieben von Johann Baptista von Helmont ... auf Beyrahten dessen Herrn Sohnes, Herrn H. Francisci Mercurii Freyherrn von Helmont, In die Hochteutsche Sprache übersetzt, in seine rechte Ordnung gebracht, mit Beyfügung dessen, was in der Ersten auf Niederländisch gedruckten Edition, genant, Die Morgen-Röhte ... auch einem vollständigen Register*, transl. by Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, Sulzbach 1683, sig.)(iii: »Es sey zwar sein Herr Vater anfänglich Willens gewesen / das ganze Werck in Niederländische Sprach zu schreiben; daran er auch schon ein grosses Theil verfertigt / und zwar unter einer auch Niederländischen Vorrede. Weil er aber befunden / daß er nothwendig viel neue und denen Niederländern ungewöhnliche Redens-Arten darinnen gebrauchen müste / so habe Er selbigs Niederländische Tractätlein / dem er sonsten den Namen von der Morgenröhte gegeben / und es in seiner Mutter-Sprache Dageraet genennet / seiner Tochter geschencket; von welcher es ein guter Freund entlehnet / und gleich so bald in den Druck befördert; weil aber zu dem Lateinischen Werck sein Herr Vater keine Vorrede machen können / so habe Er / der Sohn / nach des Vaters Tode / bey dessen Herausgebung selbige Niederländische Vorrede vor anfügen lassen.«

⁹ Jan Baptista van Helmont: *Ortus medicinae*, Amsterdam 1648, title page: »Edente authoris filio, Fransisco Mercurio van Helmont, cum ejus Praefatione ex Belgico translata.«

of translation. Take for example the following two quotations from Van Helmont's first »Preface« to the *Dageraad*; they give an immediate insight into his views on language:

O You, who are everything, and all I can wish for, it seems fair to me, for the benefit of my neighbours, to express my praise and the assignment of my being, and the properties which I have in fief from you, into my mother tongue which I do not have on loan but own for the duration of my life. For although the first understanding in the soul [*d'eerste zielen begriip* in Dutch; *primus animae conceptus* in Latin] is beyond words, and thus without its own language, I feel that this concept is still raw and undifferentiated, as long as it is not polished, and brought to the mind, and not yet changed into thoughts, words and writings. I feel that this rawness makes the first notion [*inval* in Dutch; *obiectum* in Latin] of my understanding feeble and unstable, and almost obscures it again, and that is why You, in Your eternal wisdom have allowed it to ascend to the mind.¹⁰

And then he expands on the complex relationship between thinking and articulating one's thoughts in different languages:

[B]ut as man has indeed embodied or ensouled his mother tongue [*moeders taele* in Dutch; *vernacula* in Latin], having learned it from the beginning, and is moreover used to bear in his mind his thoughts, which turn into reflections, speech or writing, in his mother tongue, it is unnatural and alien to the soul to translate again, without the incorporated habit, the first notion of one's understanding – represented in the mind through words in one's mother tongue – into another language. Because the intellect obscures, dilutes and tires itself in the effort of translation, and also drifts apart from the pure and simple spiritual understanding of the first notion [*inval* in Dutch; *obiectum* in

¹⁰ Jan Baptista van Helmont: Chapter »Den onuytspreekelijcken naeme,« in: *Dageraad* (fn. 2), sigs [*]^v: »O Al van alles! en al mijnen wensch, my dunckt billick te doen mijn verheffing en opdracht mijns wesens, en de eygendommen die ick van u te leen houde, ten behoeve mijns naestends, en in mijn moeders ongeleende taele tot lijftocht besit. Want hoewe d'eerste zielen begriip zy buyten woorden, en dus sonder eygen tale: soo voel ick doch dat 'et noch rauw is, en ongescheyden, soo lang het niet en wordt gevijlt, en tot het gemoet gebracht zijnde, niet verandert in gedachten, woorden, oft geschrift. Ick voel dat dese rauwheyt d'eerste inval mijns begriips onvast en wankelbaer maect, oock haest weder verduystert; en daerom heeft U eeuwige wijsheydt het selve laeten voorder klimmen tot het gemoet.«; idem: »Verbo ineffabili,« transl. by Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont, in: idem: *Opera omnia*, Frankfurt a. M. 1707, sig. B2^r: »O omne, omnis, et omne meum votum, merito videor vernacula lingua tibi offerre, nec non vovere feudum meae essentiae, et proprii, quibus a Te investitus auxilio proximi mei utor fruor. Quamvis enim primus animae conceptus extra verba consistat, atque sic absque propria lingua, sentio tamen adhuc esse crudum, neque sequestratum, quousque non limetur ac menti iunctus in cogitationes, verba scripturamque abeat. Hancce cruditatem percipio mihi facere primi conceptus obiectum infirmum et instabile, citoque rursus obfuscare. Eapropter aeterna Tua sapientia eam porro ad mentem usque evehi concessit.« In the rest of this article I will quote from this 7th and last edition of the *Ortus medicinae*, called *Opera omnia*, unless otherwise stated. For an overview of all the editions, see Pagel: *Jan Baptista van Helmont* (fn. 5), pp. 209–213.

Latin]. And every notion of first understanding, put into words, is always first in one's mother tongue.¹¹

In these passages, Van Helmont seems to allude to two different levels of translation in the way human beings articulate their thoughts into words. One – the deeper level – is the process through which we express the innermost, ›ineffable‹ truths of the soul in thoughts, which we might call ›raw thinking.‹ The other is the process through which these thoughts are put into words and the *conceptus* (*begrijp*) becomes *cogitatio* (*gedacht*). These words will be closer to the truth of the soul if one's familiarity with the used language is greater. According to Van Helmont, the vernacular is a more reliable vehicle for the expression of one's knowledge of reality – inward and outward – than Latin or other foreign languages.

Looking into Van Helmont's philosophy, it becomes clear that this translational process is faced with a linguistic predicament: God is ineffable (*verbum ineffabile*) on the one hand, yet needs words to be expressed in human communication on the other. Similarly, our mind, which Van Helmont defines as the ›image of God‹ (*het beeldt Gods* in Dutch, *imago Dei* in Latin), cannot be represented by our imagination, nor described with words. Our attempts to articulate our idea of God, our soul and the reality of nature therefore seem destined to fail. In keeping with characteristic Platonic and Augustinian motifs, Van Helmont argues that knowledge starts with the knowledge of our soul. He is of the opinion that our understanding of reality is in fact a process of increasing clarification of ideas and concepts already embedded in our soul as a divine bequest for being the *beeldt Gods/imago Dei*. The ›idea of the understood thing,‹ born as it were in the deepest recesses of our soul, is what Van

11 Van Helmont: »Den onuytspreekelijcken naeme« (fn. 10), sigs ^{**rv}: »[M]aar alsoo den mensch sijns moeders taele eygentlijck, van den beginne geleert hebbende, ingelijft heeft, oft ingegeestet; en oversulcks gewoon zijnde sijn gepeyns, komende tot bedachtheyt, spraeke, of schriftte, te draegen in 't gemoedt, en tot sijn moeders taele, soo is't oneygen en vreemt aen de ziele, sijn eerste begrijps inval, in 't gemoedt verbeelt zijnde, tot woorden in zijn moeders taele, wederom over te stellen, buyten sijn ingelijfde gewoonte, in een andere spraek. Waer in 't verstandt de moeyte doende, verduystert, verswackt, en vermoeyt sich selven in 't oversetten, en vervreemt oock des eersten inval's suyver en enckel geestelijck begryp. Dat immers alle inval van 't eerste gepeyns, gaende naer en tot woorden, zy altijd eerst in de moeders taele [...]«; idem: »Verbo ineffabili« (fn. 10), sig. B2^v: »Sed vero, quum homo vernaculae proprietate ab initio imbutus eam incorporatam vel inspiratam obtineat, et praeterea suas cogitationes, in meditationes, linguas vel scripta abeuntes, menti et vernaculae communicare soleat, animae inconueniens et mirum videtur primi conceptus obiectum, in mente vernacula lingua verbis depictum, praeter consuetudinem ingenitam peregrino idiomate donare. In quo intellectus laborans, vertendo semet obumbrat, debilitat ac fatigat, nec non primi obiecti purum et plane spiritualem conceptum alienat. Verum enimvero, omnis primae cogitationis obiectum in verba abiens, in vernacula prius semper haberi compertus sum in homine.«

Helmont calls *inval* in Dutch and his son translated as *obiectum* in Latin.¹² Van Helmont considers the mind to be an intellective power, capable of turning itself into the object of its own representative activity: »the intellect transforms itself naturally into the idea of the understood thing.«¹³ Depending on the nature of such an object, the mind may either ascend to the contemplation of God, or descend to the lower regions of bodily life, which Van Helmont characterises as the domain of the sensitive soul (*dierlijck verstand* in Dutch, *anima sensitiva* in Latin). Being a physician, Van Helmont is convinced that these ascending and descending movements of the soul, facilitated by the work of the imagination, may have dramatic consequences for the mental and physical health of the individual human being. The highest object that the mind can attain and into which it can transform itself is *het beeldt Gods/imago Dei*. It is not by accident that both *Dageraad* and *Ortus medicinae* open with a dramatic invocation to יהוה (in Dutch written as יod.He.Vav.He., i.e. ›YHVH‹ or ›Yahweh,‹ the Old Testament name for God), the ineffable word (*verbum ineffabile*), to whom Van Helmont offers his book as a sacrifice in the vernacular (*holocaustum vernaculum*). It is worth noting that the Latin adjective *vernaculus* indicates both that the offering is written in his mother tongue and that it results from the innermost part of his soul.

Echoing characteristic tenets of Platonic philosophy, Van Helmont argued that any expression of a concept in a vernacular language – although closer than any other linguistic expression to the truth of the represented *inval/obiectum* – is already derivative and secondary with respect to both thinking and the original unity of being. All original thoughts are expressed in the vernacular and are already a fragmentation of the primordial unity of truth and being. Knowledge of this ultimate nature of things – i.e., God – cannot be articulated into concepts, images or words. In the end, we can only have experience of our *invallen/obiecta* and not a series of mental representations of discursive processes. Can this kind of ›experience,‹ however, be somehow rendered into words?

In his treatise on the uselessness of logic (*Logica inutilis*), Van Helmont explains how these ideas that enter the mind are essential in the acquisi-

12 ›Inval‹ is an interesting word, as it has a mystical connotation in the early modern Dutch, as well as in German (›Einfall‹). However, the Latin ›objectum‹ does not capture the same metaphor of a good or bad idea falling into the mind (like the Latin *illapsus* or *ingressus*). See ›Inval‹ in Middel Nederlands Woordenboek, accessed via <http://gtb.inl.nl/search/> (last accessed 9 April 2020).

13 Jan Baptista van Helmont: »Imago mentis,« § 50, in: idem: *Opera omnia* (fn. 10), pp. 253–262, here p. 262: »[...] intellectus, naturaliter se se transformat, in ideam rei intellectae.«.

tion of new knowledge, as well as for the origin of knowledge.¹⁴ He is referring to Aristotle when he asserts saying that the *scientia principiorum* (the knowledge of the principles) is not seated in the faculty of reason. This is of major importance for Van Helmont's understanding of knowledge, as he argues that, because the seat of knowledge is not based in reason, the application of logic for the acquisition of further knowledge is entirely useless. With this statement he put himself in opposition to the contemporary, commonly accepted understanding that the role of logic (*logica* or *dialectica*), as it was taught as part of the liberal arts educational program, was essential to build up arguments. The method of *demonstratio* was, after all, a thoroughly logical means of constructing such arguments. However, Van Helmont was adamant that the syllogism and invention, as parts of the logical method, are only able to repeat already known knowledge; although an example of perfect reasoning, they could never produce new knowledge. *Scientia*, therefore, comes only from God.¹⁵

Since it was not in the repetition of logical demonstrations, but rather through divine *invalen* that knowledge was acquired according to Van Helmont, the process of translation from the first idea in the mind to a spoken or written word, was essential in progressing along the path from ignorance to knowledge.

III. Advocacies for the Use of Vernacular at University

The aforementioned Paracelsus, fully named Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, advocated the use of vernacular languages in education. He made an attempt himself to teach in German during his short-lived appointment as professor of medicine at the University of Basel. The authorities in Basel did not approve, however, and Paracelsus had to flee the city.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Paracelsus came up with a new nosological system and he emphasized the value of experience instead of reliance upon the inherited authorities when it came to acquiring medical knowledge. Another important part of his contribution to the study of medicine lay in the way he advocated the use of the vernacular for instructing students. Despite Paracelsus's efforts to vernacularize medicine it would still take

¹⁴ See Jan Baptista van Helmont: »Logica inutilis,« in: idem: *Opera omnia* (fn. 10), pp. 39–43.

¹⁵ See *ibid.*, p. 43: »Scientias, autem, sola dat sapientia, filius sempiterni Patris luminum.«

¹⁶ The literature on Paracelsus is vast. To name a few: Walter Pagel: *Paracelsus. An Introduction to Philosophical Medicine in the Era of the Renaissance*, Basel 1958; Debus: *The Chemical Philosophy* (fn. 6), pp. 45–76; Charles Webster: *Paracelsus. Medicine, Magic, and Mission at the End of Time*, New Haven 2008.

more than a century to see a noticeable increase in the medical works primarily published in a vernacular language. And some of the most important followers of Paracelsus, such as Johann Hartmann (1568–1631), Oswald Crollius (1560–1609), Petrus Severinus (1542–1602), Daniel Sennert (1572–1637), and Van Helmont himself, would continue to write in Latin, especially to reach their learned academic colleagues.¹⁷ In this way Paracelsian medical theories did become integrated into learned medicine relatively soon, while the terminology invented by Paracelsus needed a much longer period before it fully found acceptance.¹⁸ Discussions about changing the educational system, including the language of teaching, were reflections of the broader developments in science taking place during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In the Dutch context, specific to Van Helmont's direct experiences, it seems that the political situation of the ongoing war against Spain increased the awareness of the use of Dutch as a common language and stimulated the promotion of Dutch as a language of scholarly discourse. In his book *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe*, Peter Burke has shown that Dutch was one of the many vernacular languages that, during this period, won in popularity over Latin as a local language for administration, jurisdiction and science.¹⁹ The increase in the popularity or even the awareness of Dutch can be traced by the numbers of works and translations that were printed in Dutch.²⁰ Another sudden increase is noticeable in the publications of Dutch grammars, texts about the usefulness of the language and efforts at standardisation. In 1584, the first Dutch grammar, written by Hendrick Laurenszoon Spiegel (1549–1612), was published by the famous Antwerp publishing house of Plantijn. This grammar, *Twe-spraak van de Nederduitsche Letterkunst* (A Dialogue on Dutch Grammar), aimed to glorify the Dutch language, to improve it and to purge it from impurities.

17 See Dietlinde Goltz: »Die Paracelsisten und die Sprache,« in: *Sudhoffs Archiv* 56 (1972), pp. 337–352, here pp. 344–345; Joachim Telle: »Die Schreibart des Paracelsus im Urteil deutscher Fachschriftsteller des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts,« in: *Medizinhistorisches Journal* 16 (1981), pp. 78–100, here p. 93.

18 See for an article discussing the aversion to Paracelsian and Helmontian terminology Stephen Clucas: »Margaret Cavendish's Materialist Critique of Van Helmontian Chymistry,« in: *Ambix* 58 (2011), pp. 1–12.

19 Peter Burke: *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 2004, esp. Chapters 2 (»Latin: A Language in Search of a Community«), pp. 43–60, and 3 (»Vernaculars in Competition«), pp. 61–88.

20 See Theo Hermans: »Inleiding,« in: idem (ed.): *Door eenen engen hals. Nederlandse beschouwingen over vertalen, 1550–1670*, The Hague 1996, pp. 5–26.

Spiegel and his friends produced further books on grammar, such as *Ruygh-bewerþ vande redenkaveling* (An Outline of Dialectics), published in 1585. In the introduction to this work, dedicated both to the burgo-masters of Amsterdam and the board of the newly founded University of Leiden (1575), the authors pleaded for Dutch instead of Latin as the language for teaching at university:

It is our most special intention to request that, since the university is not bound to any language, but aims to do everything in the most competent manner and with the greatest amount of progress in mind, that you will make our mother tongue into a mother tongue of all the great arts and sciences, that you will promote this case, and will consider how incredibly useful it will be for our country. We emphasise the advantage you might gain from this, for if you see what students, who were not looking any further than to get their heads around the material, have accomplished in a short period of time: then you can ask yourself what a scholar could manage over a longer period in the expectation of a salary. This will make it possible for you to be the first (undoubtedly to the glory of the entire country, and especially the university) to formulate general rules, to achieve for the first time no poor work as at present, but a truly excellent piece of scholarship that will (in accordance with our most stringent wish) put the present one to shame, and in due course also other sciences. This will be to the immense advantage of every lay-person, who will be able to become knowledgeable in all the arts with pleasure, without the difficulty of learning languages.²¹

This passage shows a striking similarity with the ideas of Paracelsus and also hints at the apparent struggle of learning languages and the disadvantage that is incurred when a scholar feels obliged to write a work in a foreign language. The introduction to the *Twe-spraack* was written by Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert (1522–1590), the first Secretary of State of the Republic of the Seven United Provinces. He was one of the first in the Northern Netherlands to follow the purist movement advocated by some authors from the Spanish Netherlands, who were trying to structure

21 Hendrik Laurensz Spiegel: *Ruygh-bewerþ vande redenkaveling*, Leiden 1585, pp. 5–7: »Zulx is óóck hier ons byzonderste wit: verzoeckende, alzó de Schole an ghene tale ghebonden is, maar in alles de bequaamste, tót meeste vórdere bezicht; dat ghy van onze Moeders-tale een Moeder-taal aller ghoeder kunsten maken, deze zake behertighen, ende de gróte nutbaarheid die den Vaderlande hier duer magh gheschieden overweghen wilt. Nópemde de moghelyckheid, die mooghdy hier an afnemen, bemerckende, wat leerlingen niet verder ziende als om zelf de zake wys te werden, in een korte wyle hebben kunnen doen: overleggen wat een gheleerder, in langheid van tyd, midts hope van lóón, in zulx zoude vermoghen: Dies u vervorderen (onghetwyfelt tót gróten lóf des ghemeenen Vaderlands, ende zonderling des Hóghen Schools) d'eerste te zyn, om door alghemeene lessen voort eerst int werck te stellen, niet dit slechte werck, maar deze hóoghwaardighe kunst met zulck werck dat dit (na ons hóoghste wenschen) te schande make, ende metter tyd andere kunsten meer. Tót onuytsprekelyck voordeel van elck leeck-mensche, die zonder moeijelycke arbeyd int leeren der talen, met lust alle kunsten dies zullen moghen wys werden.«

and organise the Dutch language according to good grammar, based on classical models, and to expand the Dutch vocabulary.²²

Simon Stevin (1548–1620), a mathematician, was another important supporter of the improvement and more extensive use of the Dutch language, especially in scientific texts. He started publishing his works in Latin, but switched entirely to Dutch during his life. Stevin gives a number of reasons for promoting the use of Dutch as a language for scientific texts: first of all, the conciseness of the language, which includes many words of one syllable; secondly, the possibility of combining words into new words; thirdly, its suitability for scientific argumentation; and, finally, its power in convincing listeners and touching them emotionally, as Protestant preachers have shown in the German countries.²³ Johannes Goropius Becanus (1519–1572) went even a step further, claiming that Dutch, and specifically the Antwerp dialect, was the language spoken in Paradise before the Fall.²⁴ Becanus, who was originally from Gorp in the Brabant, lived most of his life in Antwerp, where he had his practice as a physician. He was a close friend of the publisher Christoffel Plantijn (1520–1589), who published Becanus' works on language after the latter's death.²⁵ Becanus' theory was based on the very word ›Dutch,‹ as a testament to its primeval origins, for *Duits* would mean *doutst*, i.e., the oldest.²⁶

Spiegel's *Twe-spraack* also refers to Dutch as a language that has to be cleaned from ›bastardised‹ words:

[W]e have tried, to the best of our ability, to give our language a good structure formed on its own basis, with its own natural declensions and conjugations. Sometimes it was necessary (since we have tried to avoid loanwords as much as possible) to represent new things in our language with unusual words. But we feel excused to do this as it would have been permitted among the Greek and Romans in equal measure.²⁷

22 See Karel Porteman/Mieke B. Smits-Veldt: *Een nieuw vaderland voor de muzen*, Amsterdam 2008, pp. 97–99.

23 See Simon Stevin: »Uytspraeck vande Weerdicheyt der Duytsche Tael,« in: idem: *De Beghinselen der Weeghconst*, Leiden 1586, sigs dD^v–dD3^v.

24 See Eddy Frederickx: *Johannes Goropius Becanus (1519–1573). Brabants Arts En Taalfanaat*, ed. by Toon Van Hal, Hilversum 2015.

25 See Johannes Goropius Becanus: *Opera hactenus in lucem non edita, nempe Hermathena, Hieroglyphica, Vertumnus, Gallica, Francica, Hispanica*, Antwerp 1580. On Becanus and the reception of his language theory, see Tom Deneire/Toon van Hal: *Lipsius tegen Becanus. Over het Nederlands als oertaal. Editie, vertaling en interpretatie van zijn brief aan Hendrik Schottii (19 december 1598)*, Amersfoort 2006.

26 See Marijke van der Wal/Cor van Bree: *Geschiedenis van het Nederlands*, Houten 2008, p. 189.

27 Hendrik Laurensz. Spiegel: *Twe-spraack van de Nederduitsche Letterkunst*, Leiden 1584, sig. A3^v: »[W]ant wy hebben ons beste vermoghen in dezen ghetracht om onze taal yst haar zelfs grond in ghoede schicking, door haar eyghen natuurlyke buyghing ende ver-

This last argument appealing to the Greek and Romans who would also have come up with their own words and were able to teach and write in their mother tongues, is a recurring argument throughout Europe at the time in defence of the use of vernacular languages. Cornelis Kiliaan (1528/9–1607), proof-reader and typesetter at the publishing house of Plantijn in Antwerp, wrote an influential Dutch-Latin dictionary, first published in 1574. The third revised edition of this work, the *Etymologicum Teutonicae linguae sive dictionarium Teutonico-Latinum* (1599), reveals in particular how he tried to clear Dutch from words borrowed from other languages, by adding the words taken from Romance languages only in the Appendix.²⁸

The tendency to avoid loanwords among Dutch authors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries can be seen as a response to the translators of the previous centuries. Among the difficulties faced by the latter, Geert Grote (1340–1384), the initiator of the movement of the Brethren of Common Life and the *Devotio moderna* in the Netherlands, mentioned the differences in syntax between Dutch and Latin, but also the lack of words in Dutch.²⁹ During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the ability to translate into the Dutch language improved substantially as a result of the wealth of mystical treatises written in Dutch and the creative work of various translators.³⁰ Translators could follow various options when they were faced with the difficulty of rendering original notions into Dutch. They sometimes kept the Latin word, but often they chose to pursue some kind of translation or to invent new words. The historian Saskia Bogaart distinguishes three forms of neologisms from Latin into Dutch: 1. loanword: a word made up by the translator which is similar in sound and meaning to the Latin original; 2. loan translation: a word

voeghing te brenghen: zyn wy somwyl ghenóódzaackt, (alzó wy zó veel doenlyck is, alle bastaardwóórden ghemyt hebben) om onghéhóórde dinghen in onze taal met onghewone wóórden (doch uyt de grond onzes taals ghenomen) uyt te beelden: wy eyschen daar in verschoning alzo zulcx by den Grieken ende Latynen in ghelyken gheval elck gheóórloft is gheweest.«

28 See »Appendix peregrinarum, absurdarum, adulterinarumque dictionum,« in: Cornelis Killiaan: *Etymologicum Teutonicae linguae sive dictionarium Teutonico-Latinum*, Antwerp 1599, pp. 691–725.

29 Geert Grote started the so-called *Devotio moderna*, a movement that strongly emphasised the use of the vernacular for religious purposes. For a standard work on the *Devotio moderna* and its founder, see: Regnerus Richardus Post: *The Modern Devotion. Confrontation with Reformation and Humanism*, Leiden 1968. Grote touches upon translation issues especially in his introduction to the Dutch translation of the *Hours of the Virgin*, see Paul Wackers: »Latinitas en Middel nederlandse Letterkunde. Ter inleiding,« in: idem (ed.): *Verraders en bruggenbouwers*, Amsterdam 1996, pp. 22–27.

30 See Saskia Bogaart: *Geleerde kennis in de volkstaal: Van den proprieteyten der dinghen (Haarlem 1484) in perspectief*, Hilversum 2004, pp. 24–25; Stephanus Axters: *Scholastiek Lexicon: Latijn-Nederlandsch*, Antwerp 1937, pp. 3–13.

similar to the original term in meaning, but not in sound; 3. loan meaning: a word that already existed in Dutch, but which has been given a new meaning.³¹

Bogaart calls these forms neologisms, but it would be more precise to call them translations; the »true« neologism, »a word or phrase which is new to the language; one which is newly coined,« forms in fact a fourth category in its own right.³² A large part of the activity of writing scientific texts at the time consisted of translating and re-writing older medical and scientific treatises. This practice left its trace in the vocabulary and syntax of vernacular languages. Over the course of the fifteenth century, a vernacular vocabulary for philosophical, theological and scientific topics began to emerge. Although the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw many Dutch authors elaborating new theories and concepts rather than merely translating previous works, these authors still had to deal with the available, Latin-based vocabulary.

This is the situation in which Van Helmont also found himself: although appalled by the bookish culture of the schools, he could not avoid using the established vocabulary of the metaphysical, theological and medical tradition.³³ Van Helmont came up with several neologisms when he had to describe a new concept, including, for example, the aforementioned famous cases of ›blas‹ and ›gas.‹ Although he maintained the view that the vernacular is closer to the understanding of nature than Latin, he received his education from the University of Leuven in Latin. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that his philosophical, theological and medical vocabulary is based on Latin terminology. Yet, it also means that he had to translate terminology, concepts and ideas from Latin into Dutch, as can be seen in the sections of the *Dageraad* and the *Ortus medicinae* devoted to the study of the mind. From God to the mind (*begrijp/conceptus* and *inval/obiectum*), from the mind to nature, and from one mind to other minds. In all these cases, Van Helmont was dealing with different forms and levels of translation, i.e. translation of the unfathomable divine image impressed in the human soul into an intelligible *inval* (mental translation),

³¹ See Bogaart: *Geleerde kennis* (fn. 30), p. 25.

³² Oxford University Press: »neologism, n.,« *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/126040?redirectedFrom=neologism> (last accessed 10 April 2020).

³³ See Jan Baptista van Helmont: Chapter »Aen de Oeffenaers der Geneeskunst,« in: *Dageraad* (fn. 2), sig. *3^v: »Dus heb ick voorgenomen te schrijven, niet 't gene, tot walgens toe, de Geleerde soo dickwils hebben heschreven: noch en wil andere lieden gepeynsen niet uytleggen, (ick ben daertoe niet verkoren,) maer wel die gaven, voor de welke ick den Almogenden in 't schuld-boeck stae, begeer ick mede te deelen.« In translation: »Thus I do not intend to write about those things, which have been rewritten by the Scholars, to loathing, nor do I want to explain other persons' thoughts (for that I have not elected), but I do wish to speak of those talents, for which I am in the debt to the Almighty.«

translation of this *inval* into a communicable representation using the vernacular (translation into words), and finally translation of the vernacular *inval* into a Latin *obiectum* (translation between languages), capable of being shared by all members of the European republic of letters.

IV. Van Helmont's Translation Practice and the Use of Two Languages

If we follow Van Helmont in arguing that the effect of translation is to obfuscate the original meaning, then this raises a crucial question: Which language was Van Helmont's own first or dominant language? Evidently, the answer may vary depending on the topic. Yet Van Helmont was not willing to differentiate in this way. Although he clearly stated that his mother tongue was indeed Dutch, and although he was adamant about his wish to employ this language in order to be able to communicate better with his fellow countrymen (his ›neighbours‹), this statement is evidence of his philosophical allegiance to the Paraceselsian tradition, as well as the movement of promoting Dutch as a language for science, rather than of a real statement in the complex nature of his relationship to language.

In the second introduction to the *Dageraad*, ›To the practitioners of medicine,‹ which was not translated into Latin, Van Helmont describes once more his reasons for writing in Dutch:

I am writing this in the language of my fatherland, so that all my neighbours can enjoy it, understanding that the truth is nowhere more naked and appears there where it is undressed from all jewellery. In contrast, if I were to write only for the Learned, I should be worried, that after the written text is blown out of proportion, my work will prosper as in many other situations, where disputes distract everything. [...] [T]herefore it seemed good to me to write in a language in which the general public understands me the best.³⁴

In the *Ortus medicinae*, the chapters in which he sets out his epistemology (i.e. the chapters on the human mind, on logic and those against the teaching methods of the schools) employ a rather fixed philosophical vocabulary, based on Aristotelian philosophy. There was a multitude of religious texts written in Middle Dutch during the late Middle Ages,

³⁴ Ibid., sig. **3^v: »Ick schrijve dit in mijn vaderlandsche tael, op dat mijnen naesten in 't gemeyn daer af geniete, verstaende dat de waerheyt nergens naeckter en verschijnt, dan daer sy van alle cieraet ontbloomt is. Andersins schrijvende alleen voor de Geleerden, staet te beduchten, dat naedemaet de letter opblaest, mejinen arbeydt mocht gedyen als in menige andere, alwaer de strijdt-reden alles verstroyt. [...] [S]oo heeft het my goet gedacht te schrijven in een spraecke, waer in de gemeynthe my ten besten verstonde.«

which led to an early formation and standardisation of religious language in Dutch. By the seventeenth century, the philosophical vocabulary in Dutch, English, French and German, the vernacular languages used by Van Helmont and his translators, had emerged, but in none of these languages was this vocabulary as stable as it was in Latin. This can be inferred from examples taken from Van Helmont himself, since he often added the Latin term while writing in Dutch, presumably to make sure that his readers were able to understand him. In his chapter »On Reason and Intellect« (Van Reden en Verstandt), he includes for example »een vermeynt gepeyns, een *ens rationis*« (a rational being); »de toedracht, oft *habitude*« (the circumstances); »strydt-reden, oft *disputatie*« (a dispute).³⁵

When writing about non-religious and non-philosophical topics in the vernacular, Van Helmont had to create new vocabulary. He often invented entirely new words, which he used in both Dutch and Latin, and he also took over Paracelsian terminology. In both cases he would explain the meaning of the term, something he does rather consequently throughout the entire *Dageraad*. Here are two examples, one describing the Paracelsian term *archeus*, the other explaining the etymology of Van Helmont's own term *gas*.

Dese levende lucht, setel van alle vermogen, noemen wy *archeum*, d'uyte-werkende oorsaecke, den smit, en het naeste lijf des saets, hy draegt in hem het beelt sijns voorsaets, nae wiens stieringe sich selven voegende, hy volbrengt de geschiedenissen der predestinatie, oft beeltenisse sijnder geboorten.³⁶

(This living air, the seat of all power, we call archeus, the creating cause, the blacksmith, and closest in form to semen – it carries in itself the image of its forefathers, and following its leads, it will fulfil the histories of predestination, or in other words the image of its births.)

Om beter te begrijpen hoe de locht uyt het water eenen gas, (dat is eenen griexschen water-chaos) maect, en by verscheyde middelen dan de wermte uyt het waeter eenen damp baert, soo moet ick herhalen dat den eeuwigen Heere heeft in den beginne hemel en aerde geschapen [...].³⁷

(To better understand how air can make gas (that is a Greek water-chaos) from water, and that through more than only heat water can produce vapour, I have to repeat that the eternal Lord created in the beginning the heavens and the earth [...].)

From Van Helmont's introductions it becomes clear that he intended to write more in Dutch, but that he lacked the necessary technical vocabulary. This deficit might have had less to do with the state of the Dutch

³⁵ Jan Baptista van Helmont: Chapter »Van Reden en Verstandt,« in: *Dageraad* (fn. 2), p. 20.

³⁶ Van Helmont: *Dageraad* (fn. 2), p. 43.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

language, and more with Van Helmont's lack of fluency in Dutch as a professional language, since his entire education had been in Latin.³⁸ Van Helmont declared Dutch to be his first language, his mother tongue, but, reading his works, one could argue that, at least with regard to his professional field of expertise, this honour fell to Latin. While his Dutch vocabulary might not show any signs of insufficiency and although his writings are full of Dutch idioms, indicating a certain flair in the use of his native language, he nevertheless chose to write the far greater part of his works in Latin. This decision might have been motivated by a perceived lack of available terminology in Dutch. However, if we look at his own writings and those of his contemporaries who write about medicine in Dutch, the discussion does not seem to have been hobbled by a paucity of exact terminology.

This leads us to suspect other reasons for Van Helmont's tendency to continue to write in Latin instead of Dutch. One of the most likely reasons lay in his wish to reach and communicate with colleagues on an European scale. Of course, knowledge of Dutch could not be presumed in that context. Therefore, he turned to Latin. Apart from the international community, which could now read his texts, he himself seemed to have been more comfortable with writing in Latin, as both Latin syntax and vocabulary are manifest in his Dutch text in the *Dageraad*. Therefore I would suggest that, professionally, Van Helmont's first language was actually Latin rather than Dutch. I will show this with a brief example from his famous treatise on the plague, which he wrote in both Dutch and Latin. For sake of comparison I have interspersed the Latin with the Dutch:

Artaxerxes per epistolam mandabat Peto, ad se veniret
Wy lessen dat Artaxerxes door eenen brief aan Paetus begeert,
 ad curandum morbum (adhuc anonymum)
dat hy de pest wilde komen genesen
 qui suos cives & milites interimebar
die sijne ondersaten vernielde
 eo quod acceptis muneribus in hoc devinctus esset.
*overmits hy door ontfangen weldaeden daer toe verplicht was.*³⁹

³⁸ On bilingualism and dominant languages in different fields, see François Grosjean: *Bilingual. Life and Reality*, Cambridge, Mass. 2010, pp. 28–38.

³⁹ Jan Baptista van Helmont: »Tumulus pestis,« in: idem: *Opera omnia* (fn. 10), p. 210; idem: Chapter »Eerste Pael: De Pest wesende in haer jonckheydt,« in: *Dageraad* (fn. 2), p. 267. In English (translating the Latin) it reads: »Via a letter Artaxerxes asked Paetus to come to him / to cure an illness (so far unknown) / that was destroying his civilians and military / because he had accepted money, he was obliged to do this.«

In this opening passage of the treatise, in which Van Helmont is setting the scene for the reader by referring to an outbreak of the plague in ancient Greece, we can easily see how the Dutch text follows the exact same pattern as the Latin. There are a few minor differences: Van Helmont defined the illness in Dutch as the plague, while in Latin he mentioned it as an unknown disease. In Dutch he speaks of »ondersaten« (subjects) who had fallen ill, whereas the Latin text speaks more specifically of civilians and military. However, apart from these small deviations, we can clearly see how Van Helmont's Dutch syntax is following a Latin structure, even though the Dutch was written first.

Another example of Van Helmont writing in ›Latinized‹ Dutch can be found in a letter he wrote to the Bishop Boonen of Mechelen in which he tried to explain his misfortune after the publication of his first book (*De magnetica vulnerum curatione*, Paris 1621). According to his own account, this book was published against his will and even without his knowledge. And after its publication the Jesuits almost immediately judged it to be full of heretical ideas. We can see that even in this letter Van Helmont is writing in a way that seems influenced by Latin:

Ik heb dan geschreven int iair 1617 een boexken pro magnetica cura vulnerum tegens dopinie vande voorseyde Jesuit, onder den tytel van disputatie, dewelke is hem gesonden, hij met mij daerover gedisputeert, gebeden ic die soude laeten int licht kommen. seer prijsende mijn groot verstant etc.⁴⁰

(In the year 1617, I then wrote a booklet in favour of the magnetic cure of wounds, against the opinions of the aforementioned Jesuit, in the form of a disputation. This was sent to him [the Jesuit Jean Roberti]; he, having discussed it with me, requested that I make it public, very much praising my great mind etc.)

The parts of the sentence are short and the way they follow each other is far from eloquent. This lack of eloquence is obviously not characteristic of Latin, but rather a result of transforming Latin grammatical structures, such as the use of participles, into Dutch instead of observing the more common Dutch practice of using subclauses. We can recognize these structures for example in the four final parts of the sentence, with the verbs ›gesonden,‹ ›gedisputeert,‹ ›gebeden,‹ and ›prijsende.‹ It was and is uncommon in Dutch to use so many participles in a row.⁴¹ From reading Van Helmont's form of Dutch it is tempting to think that his Dutch was influenced by his language of learning, Latin. As we have seen earlier, the rise of vernaculars as languages for scientific use was still very much a

40 »J.B. van Helmont to Archbishop Boonen of Mechelen,« Mechelen, AAM, Archief officialiteit, inv. nr. 434, part 2, 87'.

41 See Marijke Mooijaart/Marijke van der Wal: *Nederlands van Middeleeuwen Tot Gouden Eeuw*, Nijmegen 2008, pp. 106–108.

work-in-progress in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This movement was created, supported and executed by those early modern scientists who were very much able to read and write in Latin themselves. Van Helmont opted for a form of Dutch which was most probably already in his own time hard to read and understand. Nevertheless, this was presumably done to invest the language with a seriousness that in his opinion it would otherwise not have possessed.

Multilingualism in early modern science, in the case of Van Helmont Dutch and Latin, has important implications for our understanding of the mixture of Latin and vernacular as it was present throughout the seventeenth century. In some fields the dominant language was still very much Latin, as for example in philosophy and theology, but also in Paracelsian medicine, as we can deduce from the fact that most Paracelsian authors wrote in Latin. Within the late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century tradition of Paracelsian and chemical medicine, however, a difference arose between the more theoretical texts, where Latin was dominant, and the more practical ones, where the general trend favoured the use of vernacular languages.⁴²

The concept of ›mother tongue‹ has been analysed throughout this paper. It has become clear that this term needs to be reevaluated in the case of bi- (or multi-)lingual authors. As I have indicated more than once, Van Helmont argued that the words which were the final result of the first translational step from ideas and images were the words of the mother tongue (*moederstaele*, or *vaderlandsche taele*). However, a closer examination of Van Helmont's text both in his mother tongue and in Latin reveals that Latin is far more dominant in his writings than Dutch – indeed, one can even say that the influence of Latin percolates down into his use of Dutch. At the same time Van Helmont uses vernacular terminology for new concepts, such as *archeum* and *gas*, in the exact same form in both his Latin and his Dutch writings.

Against a background of (i) Platonic and Augustinian philosophical understandings of the soul and the source of knowledge, (ii) a Paracelsian tendency to idealize the power of the vernacular, and (iii) the use of Latin as the *lingua franca* of intellectual exchange, Van Helmont had to make many choices. His concept of translation can be generalised to encompass the translation from (divine) images to words and subsequently to any other language. And he made very clear that for him it is the mother

⁴² See Telle: ›Die Schreibart des Paracelsus‹ (fn. 17), pp. 84–89; Sietske Fransen: ›Latin in a Time of Change: The Choice of Language as Signifier of a New Science?,‹ in: *Isis* 108 (2017), no. 3, pp. 629–635; John Gallagher: *Learning Languages in Early Modern England*, Oxford/New York 2019.

tongue that is the language closest to the mind's truth, as the natural and embodied language in which the most truthful ideas translate in first instance. His eventual choice for Latin as his main language for scholarly publications shows the tension between his philosophy and idealism on the one hand and his practice on the other. Van Helmont was multilingual (we have writings in his own hand in Dutch, Latin, and French, and he most likely also knew some Spanish), as were most of his colleagues. On the basis of the analysis of his languages it is fair to say that Latin was, first and foremost, his working language. Even though this reality is at odds with his philosophical views about translation from the mother tongue into any other language, it is not strange to assume that Latin was actually his first language when account is taken of his profession and of his education, which had occurred entirely in Latin. Although his use of Latin for most of his written work is inconsistent with his understanding of language and truth, it is all the more interesting to realise that he is putting into practice his ideas about the value of the mother tongue when he is coining new terms for new ideas and concepts. Parallel to Van Helmont's campaign for the use of the language closest to one's ideas, other followers of Paracelsus were also dealing with this tension between ideals and practice, as can be inferred from the fact that they were publishing in Latin rather than adhering to the practice advocated by their master to write and communicate in the vernacular.

V. Van Helmont and the Concept of Self-Translation

These explorations give rise to a number of questions: If Van Helmont was convinced of the devaluation of truth after translation and self-translation, why then did he write in Dutch and Latin? Was there indeed translation involved in this process? And to whom was he tailoring his Dutch text, and how was it actually received?

Looking at Van Helmont's use of Dutch and Latin, and the clear dominance of Latin, it seems that the *Dageraad* was written entirely for idealistic reasons, combining the Paracelsian notion of sharing knowledge with common people (as well as remaining open to learning from the common people), together with the intention to make Dutch a language appropriate for science. This idealistic intention was emphasized by the inclusion of the introduction from the *Dageraad*, originally written in Dutch, in Latin translation in the *Ortus medicinae*. In Latin this text was defending the use of the mother tongue because of its alleged proximity to (divine) truth as well as the possibility to reach out to vernacular (and unlearned) readers.

Did Van Helmont manage to reach a wider audience among his neighbours by writing the *Dageraad* in Dutch? This is a hard question to answer. His Latin works were widely read, already from his first publication about the weapon salve onwards. The popularity of his works only increased through the inquisitorial investigations, and after Van Helmont's death scholars were eagerly waiting for the publication of the *Ortus medicinae*, which they knew was now in the hands of Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont.⁴³ There were no such expectations about the *Dageraad*. However, if we can trust Knorr von Rosenroth's statement, the manuscript of the book was in the hands of one of Van Helmont's daughters (we do not know which one of the two), and one could imagine it was both read and used at home.⁴⁴ In addition, the reception of the *Dageraad* is traceable through translations and manuscript notes. There is an English manuscript translation, probably from the 1680s, of the introductions and first chapter; a German printed translation of the treatise on the plague using the *Dageraad* as the source text; another German printed translation which contains a full translation of the *Ortus medicinae* with additional translations from the *Dageraad* at those places where the Dutch and Latin texts diverge; and a Dutch manuscript recipe book that also contains parts of the treatise on the plague.⁴⁵ This means that within twenty-five years after the first publication of the *Dageraad* (Amsterdam, 1659) the book was read in English, Dutch and German environments. However, all four of these translators and compilers were physicians and apothecaries, who all knew Latin as well as Dutch, and they thus do not represent the intended audience of non-Latin readers. The existent copies of the *Dageraad* that I have seen in libraries in England, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany are rarely annotated, and therefore cannot help us in understanding the readership of this particular book.

Van Helmont's ideal to reach out to his neighbours has worked out insofar as he was certainly read in Dutch, even though unexpectedly

43 See »Chapter 3: The Role of Francis Mercury in Disseminating the Works of His Father,« in: Fransen: *Exchange of Knowledge* (fn. 6), pp. 98–148; Leigh T.I. Penman: »A Heterodox Publishing Enterprise of the Thirty Years' War. The Amsterdam Office of Hans Fabel (1616–after 1650),« in: *The Library* 15 (2014), pp. 3–44.

44 On women reading medicine, see for example Elaine Leong: »Herbals She Peruseth: Reading Medicine in Early Modern England,« in: *Renaissance Studies* 28 (2014), pp. 556–578.

45 English manuscript: British Library, London, Sloane 623, ff. 26–41 (second half 17th century; probably transl. by Daniel Foote). German translations: Johannes Henricus Seyfrid: *Tumulus Pestis; Das ist, gründlicher Ursprung der Pest dero Wesen Art und Eigenschafft*, Sulzbach 1681; Van Helmont: *Artzney-Kunst* (fn. 8); Dutch recipe book (many thanks to Saskia Klerk for making me aware of this manuscript); BPL 3603 (compiled and written by J.M.H: Van de Sande, approx. 1677).

also by non-Dutch speakers – neighbours in thought maybe. His second non-direct goal, to influence the Dutch language and to elevate it onto the level of a language suitable for science, has undoubtedly been far more successful. Admittedly this did not occur in the way he most likely expected, namely, by standardizing a Latinate form of Dutch. Of greater impact was instead Van Helmont's inventive vocabulary and neologisms, which he used in his Dutch as well as in his Latin texts. Here was a form of self-translation that did not change the form of the neologisms, but which as a result exerted a far greater influence on later generations.