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Faithful Translators

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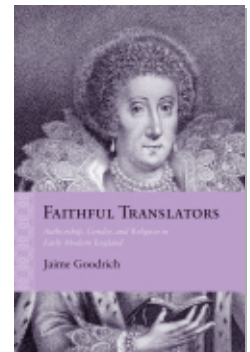
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CONCLUSION



Authority and Authorship in Early Modern England

In 1590, Anne Lock Prowse described her published translation of Jean Taffin's *Of the Markes of the Children of God* as a modest contribution to the larger project of furthering Calvinism: "Everie one in his calling is bound to doo somewhat to the furtherance of the holie building; but because great things by reason of my sex, I may not doo, and that which I may, I ought to doo, I have according to my duetie, brought my poore basket of stones to the strengthning of the walles of that Jerusalem, whereof (by grace) wee are all both Citizens and members."¹ Prowse's contrast between the "great things" done by men and her "poore basket of stones" might seem to support the idea that translation was a denigrated literary activity fit for women. Yet, as this book has demonstrated, female translators and their editors manipulated contemporary gender expectations to develop various forms of literary authority that achieved larger cultural goals. If Prowse gestures at the dictum that women should remain within the private sphere, her "poore basket" nevertheless contributes to ongoing religious controversies over the English church, and she legitimated her views by associating them with Taffin, a prominent continental Calvinist. Indeed, Prowse herself acknowledges that she translated Taffin to rouse English Protestants from their complacency, and she dedicated the book to Anne Russell Dudley, Countess of Warwick and lady-in-waiting to Elizabeth I. Even as Prowse conformed to standards of feminine modesty, her translation of Taffin served as an authoritative means of petitioning the courtly elite to support the agendas of "hotter" Protestants.

As the case studies discussed in the previous chapters suggest, faithful translators like Prowse—whether female or male—often held cultural power precisely because of the authorial multiplicity inherent in translation. Religious translations had a number of functional and

practical habitus during the early modern period, allowing translators to advance their doctrinal views by drawing on the authority of their source texts. Translators who circulated their work in print could shape public views of their private lives by associating translation with their leisure time. In these cases, the original author often took precedence over the translator, who denied that the work had a public purpose. If this evocation of privacy was useful for Thomas More and John More, then Margaret Roper and Mary Basset could eschew any appearance of claiming a public voice. Sometimes the translator's reputation equaled or eclipsed that of the original author, as when Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, translated Calvin to restore his own reputation and to support the Edwardian Reformation. Translators with a high social rank could popularize theological doctrines and devotional practices, allowing the translations of aristocratic women such as the Tudor princesses to serve a political function. Meanwhile, translators might associate themselves with authoritative source texts to cultivate their own political influence. Male and female courtiers ranging from Anthony Cooke to Elizabeth Tudor presented patrons with unique manuscript copies of translations that offered counsel on religious policy. The limited circulation of these works helped female translators circumvent restrictions on women's public speech and political careers, while male translators supplemented their official roles within the Tudor government. Finally, some translators cloaked their identities to associate their larger religious communities with particular source texts, attempting to influence public opinion about specific groups or religious orders. Faithful translators thus made use of a rich variety of authorial positions tailored to serve vital cultural functions. Further work now remains to be done on the forms of authorship developed by translators of religious texts, particularly by nonaristocratic translators such as merchant women.

Throughout, this book has argued that women were not simply relegated to the role of translators because translation itself was deemed secondary and therefore suitable for women. Nevertheless, translation clearly appealed to women because of the limitations imposed by contemporary gender stereotypes. Since women generally did not occupy official positions in the government, they had less scope to develop a public voice or participate in politics. Elite women, for example, translated religious works for political ends more frequently than did male aristocrats and gentlemen, who already had the ability to influence Tudor policy through governmental service. When elite men circulated religious translations—as in the cases of Thomas More and Edward Seymour—they often did so to accomplish specific purposes outside of their official

capacities. Female translators differed from their male counterparts in other ways. Women generally did not translate source texts beyond their confessional identities, meaning that they had little reason to develop the freer translation strategies used by men such as Thomas Rogers. Women may have translated more conservatively than some of their male counterparts, but many men display a similar deference while translating the Bible or source texts written by authors of their own faith. Furthermore, female translators often dedicated their work to other women, creating a special sense of religious community, whether Catholic (Mary Basset and Mary Tudor), Protestant (Elizabeth Tudor and Katherine Parr), or interconfessional (Mary Tudor and Katherine Parr). It may be significant that many female translators of this period knew other translators, meaning that their work responded to models established within families or monastic communities. Female translators frequently participated in closely knit, identifiable religious networks that normalized their productions.

As cultural views about female authorship changed over the course of Elizabeth's reign, the number of women's translations dwindled, particularly of religious works. The comparatively large body of translations produced by Elizabeth I and Mary Sidney Herbert may appear to refute any such decline, but most female translators of the late Elizabethan era and early Stuart period had been educated decades earlier. Elizabeth Cooke Hoby Russell, for instance, published a translation of John Ponet's *Way of Reconciliation* in 1605, but she had translated the work before 1572. Retha Warnicke has argued that Elizabeth's court did not foster a cadre of highly educated women, and the Stuart court was similarly inhospitable to women's learning.² Consequently, it became less fashionable for aristocratic women to translate even though Elizabeth and others of her generation continued to do so. By this time, women had already developed alternative means of disseminating their religious beliefs. Katherine Parr emphasized study of "goddess wordes" in her spiritual memoir *The Lamentacion of a Synner* (1547), demonstrating how biblical knowledge could authorize women's original compositions.³ Subsequent publications such as Thomas Bentley's *Monument of Matrones* (1582) provided alert readers with models of other genres appropriate for women, such as prayers, meditations, religious poetry, and mothers' advice tracts. Translation certainly remained a valid option, but its importance lessened as women ranging from Eleanor Davies Douglas to Mary Wroth penned secular and religious works. After the civil wars, women concentrated on translating creative works rather than religious texts, as in the cases of Aphra Behn, Lucy Hutchinson, and Katherine

Philips.⁴ In doing so, they developed further models of authorship; Margaret Ferguson, for example, has noted that Behn productively clouded “distinctions between translation, imitation, and original creation.”⁵ English nuns such as Catherine Holland continued to translate spiritual works from French into English, but many of their works remained within the cloister.⁶

Although translation of religious texts became less characteristic of women’s literary pursuits over the course of the early modern period, the figure of the faithful translator retained its cultural power. If in 1526 Richard Hyrde had felt the need to defend Margaret Roper’s learning by depicting translation as an appropriately feminine activity, a century later Edward Denny castigated Mary Wroth for writing an original work (*Urania*, 1621) rather than translating. Believing that an episode in Wroth’s *Urania* lampooned his family, Denny scathingly urged Wroth to abandon “lascivious tales and amorous toyes” and instead to “followe the rare, and pious example of your vertuous and learned Aunt [Mary Sidney Herbert], who translated so many godly books and especially the holly psalmes of David, that no doubt now shee sings in the quier of Heaven those devine meditations which shee so sweetly tuned heer belowe, and which being left to us heer on earth will begett hir dayly more and more glory in heaven as others by them shalbe enlightened, who as so many trophies shall appeare to her further exaltation in gods favour.”⁷ Denny’s response depends on the rhetorical ploys associated with earlier female translators, which had cast translation as not just an acceptable enterprise for “vertuous and learned” women but also as an acceptable form of public service that could “enlighten” others. Denny’s critique thus reveals how influential the paradigm of the female translator became, especially as a model of women’s pious learning.

Female translators have been peripheral to studies of early modern women writers and early modern literature in general. Nonetheless, translation raises questions of authorship that are germane to our understanding of the relationship between intertextuality and literary authority during this period. Male and female authors used a variety of intertextual strategies while composing secular and religious literature, appropriating the work and ideas of past authors through techniques such as translation, paraphrase, and imitation. Allusion and citation allowed writers to deploy intertextuality through heteroglossia, a device that Mikhail Bakhtin first identified in novels but that also operates in other literary genres: “Heteroglossia . . . is *another’s speech in another’s language*, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way.

Such speech constitutes a special type of *double-voiced discourse*. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions.”⁸ Scholars have already focused on intertextuality to identify early modern writers’ sources, to consider their politics, and to trace the development of the English literary canon.⁹ Recently, Susan Felch has noted that women’s paraphrases and scriptural collages involved a heteroglossia requiring significant authorial dexterity and originality.¹⁰ If borrowing from biblical, classical, and continental models allowed writers to compensate for the perceived poverty of English literature, intertextuality could also be an aggressive means of asserting literary authority. The title page to George Gascoigne’s *Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* (1573), for example, states that the work was “Gathered partely (by translation) in the fyne outlandish Gardins of Euripides, Ovid, Petrarke, Ariosto, and others,” allowing Gascoigne to position himself within the company of elite classical and continental poets.¹¹ Since *Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* was Gascoigne’s first publication, this commingling of translation, imitation, and original composition helped to establish his literary aspirations and may have even attracted readers. Gascoigne offers a particularly interesting example of ways that intertextuality could create a sense of literary authority, but many works of this period exhibit some form of polyvocality.

Just as female translators capitalized on their knowledge of foreign languages to advance their political goals, other writers displayed their learning and rhetorical skill through commonplaces and allusions. Sententiae create isolated moments of heteroglossia, subordinating the source text to the aims of the writer while also incorporating its authority. If William Cecil’s letters judiciously use sententiae to develop political authority, Thomas Wyatt integrates sententiae into his poetry, deploying the phrase *circa regna tonat* (it thunders about thrones) from Seneca’s *Hippolytus* in “Who Lyst His Welth and Eas Retayne” to underscore the dangers of the Henrician court.¹² Women with humanist educations—including Cecil’s sister-in-law Elizabeth Cooke Hoby Russell—similarly cited classical writers for rhetorical effect.¹³ The Bible was perhaps the single most popular source of sententiae for women writers, permitting them to demonstrate a praiseworthy knowledge of scripture that could justify their theological positions.¹⁴ Katherine Parr promoted Lutheranism by referring repeatedly to Paul’s epistles in her *Lamentacion*: “As Saynt Paule sayeth, no man can say the lorde Jesus, but by the holy ghost. The spirit helpeth our infirmities, and maketh continuall intercession for us, with suche soroful groninges, as can not be expressed.”¹⁵ Marginalia accompanying this passage helpfully identify Parr’s incorporation of

Romans 8:26 and 1 Corinthians 12:3, passages supporting justification by faith. Meanwhile, Catholic women such as Barbara Constable interlaced quotations from biblical, patristic, medieval, and contemporary religious authorities within their works.¹⁶

Modes such as paraphrase and imitation allowed authors to experiment with intertextuality in a more sustained manner. Besides associating the writer with well-known works much as translation did, these activities invited readers to appreciate the author's clever adaptations and extensions of his or her source(s). Thomas Wyatt and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, made good use of this effect in their imitations, adaptations, and paraphrases of Petrarch and the Bible. Other writers paid homage to their literary models more freely, as when Edmund Spenser invoked Virgil and adapted Ovid in the *Faerie Queene*, or Milton reworked Genesis and imitated classical epic in *Paradise Lost*. Women likewise turned to precedents as a means of establishing literary authority. Elizabeth Grymeston modified verse from the commonplace book *Englands Parnassus* (1600) and other publications so that they matched the crypto-Catholic tenor of her *Miscelanea, Meditations, Memoratives* (1606).¹⁷ The Bible provided a ready source of material for women writers, such as Aemilia Lanyer, in her loose adaptation of Christ's Passion (*Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, 1611). Sometimes women writers acknowledged the polyvocality inherent in their work to carve out a public position as an author. Isabella Whitney emphasized her creativity in versifying sententiae from Hugh Plat's *Floures of Philosophie* (1572): "[I] did step into an others garden for these Flowers: which I beseech you . . . to accepte: and though they be of an others growing, yet considering they be of my owne gathering and makeing up: respect my labour and regard my good wil."¹⁸ Whitney's distinction between "growing," "gathering," and "makeing" casts her versification as a genuine literary "labour."

The potential benefits of heteroglossia and intertextuality were so great that some writers downplayed their own originality. Gascoigne's revised *Posies of George Gascoigne* (1575) presented his original narrative "The Adventures of Master F. J." from *Hundreth Sundrie Flowres* as a translation from Italian: "The pleasant Fable of Ferdinando Jeronomi and Leonora de Valasco, translated out of the Italian riding tales of Bartello."¹⁹ By recasting "Master F. J." as a translation, Gascoigne distanced himself from the salacious content of the story even as he appealed to contemporary interest in Italian literature.²⁰ Women may not have indulged in such outright misrepresentation, but at times they did overstate their reliance on their sources. Anne Dowriche explains that her

French Historie (1589) resulted from a process of “collecting & framing,” observing that “the same Storie in effect is alreadie translated into English prose.”²¹ This reference to accounts such as Jean de Serres’s *The Three Parties of Commentaries . . . of the Civill Warres of Fraunce* (1574) permitted Dowriche to deny responsibility for the work’s content and to place herself within ongoing conversations about the civil wars in France. Nevertheless, Dowriche’s text is largely her own, thanks to her decisions to write a poetic narrative, add two new narrators, and incorporate a host of biblical allusions. As Elaine Beilin has noted, Dowriche “grossly underplays her ambitious and largely successful undertaking to transpose historical narrative into a form that would both teach and delight her coreligionists.”²²

Finally, the paratexts by male editors that accompanied the work of some female translators created a sense of religious community that implicitly legitimated the translations themselves. Early modern publications frequently intermingled the compositions of various writers, often imitating the literary coterie of manuscript circulation. Verse miscellanies—whether in manuscript or print—incorporated multiple authors by their very nature, legitimating minor authors by associating them with more famous writers. The title page to *Tottel’s Miscellany* emphasizes Surrey’s poetry even though Wyatt’s verse formed the bulk of the book, drawing attention to Surrey’s nobility and avoiding the negative associations of the Wyatt name after the unsuccessful rebellion led by Wyatt’s son: *Songes and Sonettes, Written by the Right Honorable Lorde Henry Haward Late Earle of Surrey, and Other* (1557). A second edition accentuated Surrey’s prominence by facing the title page with a woodcut featuring his image.²³ Later poets attempted to mimic the coterie involved in manuscript circulation and printed miscellanies. Isabella Whitney included a series of poetic exchanges in *The Copy of a Letter* (1567), and she addressed poems to relatives in *A Sweet Nosgay* (1573).²⁴ Commendatory verse also allowed the construction of literary communities through print, one well-known instance being Ben Jonson’s prefatory poem for Shakespeare’s First Folio.²⁵ Similarly, Jonson and others wrote prefatory poems for Alice Sutcliffe’s *Meditations of Man’s Mortalitie* (1634), placing her work within a domestic context.

Women’s religious translations have significant implications for our understanding of the early modern period and its authorial practices. Translation offered male and female writers an extreme form of polyvocality, but it was not the only means of using intertextuality to create literary authority. The time is ripe for scholars to examine heteroglossia and intertextuality on their own terms, seeing polyvocality

as a means of developing authorial credibility rather than simply as a form of literary appropriation. A turn to intertextuality allows us to ask new questions about the ways that early modern authors worked with preexisting texts and narratives. What profit did Shakespeare or his company derive when he wrote plays based on popular texts, such as Thomas North's translation of Plutarch, or well-known myths, such as the story of Venus and Adonis? When Wyatt revised Petrarch and Elizabeth Cary reworked Josephus, how did they challenge or benefit from the prestige of their sources? Ultimately, how were English writers—whether as translators, imitators, or original authors—positioned in relationship to authors from other cultures? As this book's consideration of women's religious translations has attempted to demonstrate, association with other authors can place writers in a position of strength rather than weakness. In fact, translation and other so-called derivative forms of authorship were at times attractive to early modern writers precisely because of their polyvocality. When women translated religious works, they were not simply participating in a politicized activity that was vital to the English Reformation—they were also cultivating an intertextuality essential to developing literary authority in early modern England.