Faithful Translators

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Chapter One

Private Spheres
Margaret Roper, Mary Basset, and Catholic Identity

When Richard Hyrde introduced Margaret More Roper’s translation of Erasmus’s *Devout Treatise upon the Pater Noster* (1526) to English readers, he helped forge an enduring link between translation, humanist study, and leisure time. As John Archer Gee noted decades ago, Roper’s work was one of the first published translations to follow humanist standards, and Hyrde’s preface is likewise an early presentation of humanist translation as a private activity.¹ Hyrde defended women’s training in classical languages by noting the ability of humanist learning to stave off dangerous fantasizing:

Redyng and studyeng of bokes so occupieth the mynde/that it can have no leyser to muse or delyte in other fantasies/whan in all handy werkes/that men saye be more mete for a woman/the body may be busy in one place/and the mynde walkyng in another: & while they syt sowing & spinnyng with their fyngers/maye caste and compasse many pevysshe fantasies in their myndes/whiche must nedes be occupyed/outer with good or badde/so long as they be wakynge.²

While those opposed to women’s learning had suggested that women need only be occupied with physical labor such as “sowing & spinnynge,” Hyrde notes that these activities allow women to “caste and compasse . . . pevysshe fantasies in their myndes.” An education, however, leaves no room for this problematic mental “leyser.” This need to avoid idleness was not gender-specific, for John Wilkinson prefaced his 1547 translation of Aristotle with a similar concern about wandering minds: “Although the feble and werie bodye . . . be satisfied with a restinge place: yet the mind cannot be so quieted or reposed, but that of necessitie
it is evermore busi. Therfore it shal be good for every man to provide for some vertuouse occupiyng [sic], against the multitude of phantasies, wherin may be fixed the labour of the mind, so that it stray not to[o] ferre in vaine.”3 These concerns about leisure reflect two humanist contentions: that idleness was unprofitable and even detrimental to the state and that classical study provided an appropriate activity for spare time. Translators could in turn frame their work as tangible evidence of their private occupation and its profit to the nation.

Hyrde was only the first of several male editors who presented women’s translations within a domestic framework. Since women generally could not hold public roles in early modern England, scholars have often taken these claims of female translators’ privacy at face value, inadvertently minimizing the public aims of their works. For example, the Oxford History of Literary Translation in English relegates its only sustained discussion of early modern female translators to a chapter by Gillian Wright entitled “Translating at Leisure: Gentlemen and Gentlemen-women.” If this title suggests that women’s translations had few public applications, Wright emphasizes the private nature of translation during this period: “As the holdings of major manuscript repositories show, translation was commonly performed throughout the early modern period for private purposes (such as education and spiritual devotion) by both women and men of the leisured classes.”4 Yet Wright primarily discusses printed translations by women such as Anne Cooke Bacon, Anne Lock, and Elizabeth Cary, whose works may have had private origins yet nevertheless clearly participated in public religious debates. A similar tension appears in Peter Burke’s recent distinction between amateur and professional translators: “a relatively small number of translators were professional, at least in the general sense of devoting a considerable amount of their life to this task, often for money.” Burke categorizes female translators as amateurs, mentioning women such as “Margaret Beaufort, Aphra Behn, Elizabeth Cary, Ann Cook, Ann Lok, Jane Lumley, Margaret Roper, Mary Sidney and Margaret Tyler.”5 Most of these women translated at least two works, and some of them—such as Lumley and Sidney—translated regularly over a span of years. The inclusion of Behn on this list further reveals the problems caused by identifying female translators as amateurs. A woman often seen as the first professional female author, Behn relied in part on translation to make a living by her pen. This impulse to view women’s translations as private or amateur responds to the frequency with which female translators and their editors positioned women’s translations outside of the public sphere.6 Such characterizations may have helped preserve the female translator’s
virtuous reputation, but her apparently private work could also publicly symbolize her family’s piety.

This chapter will examine the way that printed translations by Margaret More Roper and her daughter Mary Roper Basset helped establish this tradition of the female translator’s domesticity. Both women’s published translations were strongly associated with the private life of Thomas More. Margaret Roper’s translation of Erasmus suggested the connection between the female translator and her family’s religious and political agendas, and scholars have been particularly interested in considering the extent to which Roper’s work can be separated from the life and legend of her father. Mary Basset followed the example set by her mother, using translation to advance the cause of English Catholicism and to emphasize More’s legacy as a martyr. Indeed, Roper and Basset subtly rework their source texts in ways that intersect with their translations’ political contexts and paratextual agendas, suggesting that neither woman was a submissive tool of patriarchal agendas. Rather, both Roper and Basset actively participated in the familial and political causes evoked by their editors. The ways that their translations attempted to shape public conceptions of Thomas More reveal that the female translator could possess an oblique political power despite her apparent confinement within the domestic sphere. The translations of the More women consequently offer new ways of viewing women’s use of the modesty topos and their involvement in the early modern public sphere.

Leisure Pursuits: Translation and Humanist Study

As humanist education gained traction in early modern England, translation became associated with the private sphere. Proponents of the new learning had presented reading as a worthwhile alternative to other leisure pursuits, and male translators built on this development to cast their work as the product of a leisure time that complemented their public careers and aspirations. Thomas Elyot’s The Boke Named the Governour (1531) characterizes idleness as a lack of profitable labor: “It is not only called idlenes / wherin the body or minde cesseth from labour / but specially idlenes is an omission of al honest exercise: the other may be better called a vacacion from seriouse businesse: whiche was some tyme embraced of wise men and vertuous.” This redefinition of spare time as “a vacacion from serious businesse” echoes the preface to Elyot’s translation of Plutarch (The Education or Bringinge Up of Children, 1530): “I therfore in tymes vacant from busynes & other more serious study, as it
were for my solace & recreation, have translated . . . this lytell treatise.”

Elyot, then senior clerk of the king’s council, presents his translation as the fruit of private “study,” suggesting that it provides concrete evidence of how he profitably disposes of the time not devoted to “busynes.” Similarly, Thomas Phaer, solicitor to the council in the Welsh marches, dedicated his translation of Virgil to Mary I, portraying it as the natural counterpart to his “diligence [while] employed in [her] service in the Marchies”: “So your highnes hereby maie receive the accompltes of my pastyme, in all my vacations, in whiche vacations I made the saied worke, since I have been preferred to your service.”

Jürgen Habermas’s concept of representative publicity provides a useful way of understanding how Elyot and Phaer manipulated their public and private personae through translation. Before the emergence of the modern public sphere, noblemen held public roles by virtue of their ability to govern: “In medieval documents ‘lordly’ and ‘publicus’ were used synonymously; publicare meant to claim for the lord.” As a result, an aristocrat or officeholder had a public role insofar as he represented the king or his office: “This publicness (or publicity) of representation was not constituted as a social realm, that is, as a public sphere; rather, it was something like a status attribute, if this term may be permitted. In itself the status of manorial lord, on whatever level, was neutral in relation to the criteria of ‘public’ and ‘private’; but its incumbent represented it publicly. He displayed himself, presented himself as an embodiment of some sort of ‘higher’ power.”

By the early sixteenth century, both aristocrats and bureaucrats connected with the state held representative publicity as signifiers of Henry VIII’s power, and male translators associated with the state took advantage of this phenomenon to craft an appearance of privacy that served more public ends. By mentioning their leisure time so pointedly, Elyot, Phaer, and other translators of literary works both advertised their private devotion to learning and publicized their own capacity for government service. Nevertheless, references to leisure time are far less common in prefaces to men’s translations of religious works, even though these translations could be taken as evidence of the translator’s personal virtue. For example, William Caxton notes that he translated the *Legenda aurea* (1483) to avoid the vice of idleness condemned by Saint Jerome and Saint Bernard: “I have concluded & fermelye purposed in my self nomore to be ydle but wyl applye my self to labour and suche ocupacion as I have be accustomed to do.” After the Reformation, men translated devotional and doctrinal works related to public debates over religion, presenting these translations as urgent interventions in ongoing controversies. While Thomas Hoby
characterized his translation of Castiglione’s *Courtyer* as a product of his “time and leyser,” he had framed his earlier translation of Martin Bucer as a timely contribution to the Edwardian Reformation, stating that he would be remiss to “let slippe suche a mete, apt, and necessarye epistle . . . written and indited to the whole churche, or congregation of Englande.”

If male translators of religious works could openly participate in religious controversies, women rarely had any such expectations of taking on a public role. As a result, women’s translations—whether secular or religious in nature—were frequently presented as part of their leisure time, both by female translators themselves and by their editors. Nicholas Udall described the Edwardian court as a locus of women’s pious reading in his preface to Mary Tudor’s translation of part of Erasmus’s *Paraphrases* (1547): “It is nowe no newes at all to see Quenes and Ladies of moste highe estate and progenie, in stede of Courtly daliaunce, to embrace vertuous exercises of readyng and wrytyng.” Much as Hyrde had done with Margaret Roper, Udall sets up Mary as an exemplar of studious piety by revealing that she is one of the aristocratic women who have replaced “Courtly daliaunce” with “readyng and wrytyng.” Likewise, G. B.’s preface to Anne Cooke’s translation of Bernardino Ochino anticipates potential criticism by reminding readers of the aristocratic indulgence typically associated with her rank: “remember it is a womans yea, a Jentylwomans, who commenly are wonted to lyve Idelly.” Through prefaces that emphasized the female translator’s abhorrence of idleness, male editors situated these texts within the larger humanist tradition of profitable leisure time. While these women did not have public occupations, both were related to well-known men, and their translations could in turn symbolize their families. Such assertions of the female translator’s domesticity indicate that the privacy associated with translation was not enough to protect the female translator from scorn. Prefaces composed by male editors therefore placed the female translator at a double remove from the public sphere, as if to guarantee the translator’s feminine virtue.

When circulating their work in manuscript, women may have felt more freedom to address readers, but they nonetheless expressed similar sentiments about the privacy of their compositions. William Rastell’s preface to Mary Basset’s printed translation of Thomas More (*Of the Sorowe of Christ*, 1557) indicates Basset’s reluctance to enter the public sphere associated with print, reporting that Basset had translated the work “for her owne pastyme and exercyse.” Rastell’s language echoes Basset’s own dedicatory preface to her manuscript translation of Eusebius
(c. 1547–53), in which she informs Mary Tudor that the work was done “for myne owne onely exercyse.” In both cases, Basset’s work is associated with leisure activity (“pastyme,” “exercyse”), yet her refusal to speak on her own behalf in print indicates her awareness of contemporary restrictions on women’s public speech. Likewise, John Bale presents Elizabeth Tudor’s translation of Marguerite de Navarre as a personal enterprise meant to increase her knowledge and devotion: “Chefely have she done it for her owne exercyse in the frenche tunge, besydes the spirytuall exercyse of her innar sowle with God.” By characterizing the translation as simply intended for individual use (“her owne exercyse,” “her innar sowle”), Bale heightens the privacy associated with this translation, which was originally a New Year’s gift for Katherine Parr. Bale also removes Elizabeth’s preface to this manuscript version of the translation, which asks that “no other, (but your highnes onely) shal rede it, or se[e] it, lesse my fauttes be knowen of many.” Both Basset and Elizabeth found limited manuscript circulation an appropriate arena for a female voice, yet each one shows concern about circulating their translations within a more public realm. Whether early modern readers encountered women’s translations in manuscript or print, the translator’s apparent privacy would have met expectations about the domesticity associated with both women and translation.

The Doctor and the Gentlewoman: Margaret Roper, Erasmus, and Anti-Lutheranism

Within the familial and scholarly circle surrounding Thomas More, translation was a practice strongly linked to humanist pedagogy that emphasized training in Latin and Greek. Translation is an ideal activity for language instruction, as the translator must inevitably pay close attention to the nuances of diction, syntax, and style. While the schoolroom and the translations composed there might appear to be ideologically neutral, many of the translations published by members of the More circle promulgate a radical outlook indicative of Morean pedagogy: that humanist tenets could inculcate pious morality, particularly in women. As Lutheranism gained strength within England, the circle’s translations began to address the threat of heresy, which was of prime concern to More during the 1520s and 1530s. The only woman from the More circle to publish a translation, Margaret More Roper played a unique role in this program, for her work—itself the product of Morean pedagogy—could help justify women’s education. At the same time,
Roper was the first to follow her father’s example and publish an English translation, providing a model for later printed translations by her tutor and her brother.

Members of the More circle valued translation as a pedagogical tool that permitted the translator to acquire and display linguistic skills. More himself engaged in competitive translations to hone his Greek, translating epigrams from the *Anthologia Graeca* with William Lily (*Progymnasmata*, c. 1504, published 1518) and Lucian’s dialogues with Desiderius Erasmus (1506). More prefaced his translations of Lucian by emphasizing their moral and religious applications: “*Philopseudes* . . . will teach us this lesson: that we should put no trust in magic and that we should eschew superstition, which obtrudes everywhere under the guise of religion.” Erasmus’s preface to his Latin translation of the Greek tragedy *Hecuba* (1506) also suggested the possible religious applications of secular translation: “Having resolved . . . to translate Greek authorities in order to restore or promote, as far as I could, the science of theology . . . but wishing to avoid risking my potter’s skill all at once on a great jar, as the Greek adage has it, or rushing into such a large enterprise with feet as yet unwashed, as the saying goes, I determined first to test whether the labour I had spent on Greek and Latin had been wasted by experimenting on a subject which, though very taxing, was secular in nature.” Recognizing the pedagogical value of translation, More ensured that his children’s schooling included this activity. As Thomas Stapleton recorded, More’s children frequently practiced double translation: “The pupils exercised themselves in the Latin tongue almost every day, translating English into Latin and Latin into English.” More himself instructed his children to begin their letters to him in English and then translate their compositions into Latin: “It will do no harm if you first write the whole in English, for then you will have much less trouble and labor in turning it into Latin; not having to look for the matter, your mind will be intent only on the language.” Furthermore, two of More’s daughters translated his Latin letter to Oxford defending the study of Greek, as Stapleton notes: “I have seen another Latin version of this [letter] made by one of his daughters, and an English version by another.” This exercise was not merely a show of filial piety but also representative of the More family’s controversial views on education. While a group of Oxford faculty calling themselves “Trojans” had publicly attacked the utility of learning Greek, More endorsed Greek by citing its religious value: “To whom is it not obvious that to the Greeks we owe all our precision in the liberal arts generally and in theology particularly.” For More and his children, translation was simultaneously
a means of exercising the linguistic skills acquired through a humanist education and of pursuing the larger Morean ideal of learned piety.

Five translations linked to the More circle, including Roper’s Erasmus, were published during Henry’s reign, and these works provided a public record of the household’s pedagogical and religious programs. More initiated this practice in 1510 by printing his translation of Gianfrancesco Pico’s life of his uncle Giovanni Pico della Mirandola as well as several texts by Pico. Scholars have proposed that More translated the work in 1504 as a means of considering his potential vocation at the Charterhouse. Whether or not the translation was completed earlier, its publication in 1510—the same year that More entered into a public career by becoming undersheriff of London—is suggestive. More’s own dedicatory preface of this work as a New Year’s gift to Joyce Leigh, a nun and family friend, positions the translation as a vehicle for his moralistic view of humanist learning. More emphasizes the spiritual worth of his translation in contrast with the typical presents exchanged at this time: “I . . . have sent you such a present as may bere witnes of my tendre love and zele to the happy continuancce and gracious encrease of vertue in your soule: and where as the giftis of other folk declare that thei wissh their frendes to be worldeli fortunate myne testifieth that I desire to have you godly prosperous.”31 As critics have noted, More reworks the Life so that it has a more devotional nature by removing references to Pico’s literary achievements as well as his rejection of a political career.32 By reshaping the work in this way, More publicly indicated his continued interest in learning despite his nascent public career. In 1529 Richard Hyrde, a tutor at More’s “school,” translated Juan Luis Vives’s De institutione foeminae christianae, a treatise that defended women’s learning and praised the More women’s exemplary education. Hyrde’s dedicatory preface to Catherine of Aragon makes it clear that More, who corrected Hyrde’s translation, strongly approved of the book: “He had entended / his manyfolde busynes nat withstandyng / to have taken the tymes to have translated this boke hym selfe / in whiche he was (as he said) very glad that he was nowe prevented / nor for eschewyng of his labour / whiche he wolde have ben very glad to bestowe there in / but for bicause that the frute therof may nowe soner come forthe.”33 The work thus became a public expression of More’s personal support for women’s education.

The More circle also utilized translation to spread religious views that dovetailed with More’s efforts to stamp out heresy. After More resigned his office as lord chancellor in 1532, he penned original works that attacked heresy as well as Henry’s separation from Rome. In 1533, his
son John More published two translations of recent works that actively complemented these treatises: Damião de Góis’s *The Legacye or Embassate of the Great Emperour of Inde Prester John* (Legatio magni Indorum Imperatoris, 1532) and Frederic Nausea’s *A Sermon of the Sacramint of the Aulter* (“Hoc facite in mei commemorationem” from *Tres evangelicae veritatis homiliarum centuriae*, 1530). A Portuguese humanist, Góis had translated several Portuguese documents concerning Prester John into Latin. John More asserted that these works revealed that the legendary Christian kingdom ruled by Prester John had preserved the primitive church established at Jesus’s death and thus justified the Roman Catholic Church’s rejection of heretical doctrines: “In this treatysye ye also se[e], that the great thynges which have ben byfore this tymes establyshed agaynst heretyques by generall counsayles of olde, agaynst whych old determynacyons these new heretyques make newe besynesse nowe, the selfe same thynges have the chrystyen people of that great chrystyn empyre from the tyme of theyre fyrste conversyon, whych was forthwynth upon the deth of Chryste, contynually byleved.” These “thynges” included transubstantiation, veneration of saints, the seven Catholic sacraments, and the pope’s authority, all of which had been challenged by Luther and other reformers. While More’s preface to his translation of Frederic Nausea, bishop of Vienna, was not polemical, the sermon itself defended transubstantiation (“what more mervaylous then this sacrament, in whych brede and wyne is veryly converted into the body and blood of Jesu Cryste”) and suggested that recent epidemics and riots in Germany had occurred because the sacrament was mishandled. If the More circle had a vested interest in translating and publishing texts related to their educational and religious agendas, Margaret Roper’s translation of Erasmus first suggested the political and religious work that could be performed by this activity.

As English authorities grew increasingly concerned about Lutheran heresy, Roper’s published translation of Erasmus’s *A Devout Treatise upon the Pater Noster* (*Precatio dominica*, 1523) tacitly argued for the doctrinal orthodoxy of Erasmus himself. Before Pope Leo X excommunicated Luther in 1520, Erasmus and Luther had been fairly friendly due to shared concerns about corruption within the church. Luther’s condemnation of church abuses followed Erasmus’s earlier complaints, and both men agreed that commoners should have access to vernacular versions of the scriptures. Because of such similarities, some contemporaries suspected that Erasmus was secretly a heretic, and even a few of Erasmus’s most ardent supporters believed that he was directly responsible for the
spread of Lutheranism. By June 1524, Vives was warning Erasmus about the ramifications of an intended visit to England that had fallen through: “Your arrival would have been popular and welcome with the king, the cardinal, and all the nobility. But if you do decide to do so, begin at the same time to write something against the man [Luther]; for otherwise you will raise a frown on some faces when it is particularly important for you that they should be all smiles.” When Erasmus finally did attack Luther with the publication of *De libero arbitrio diatribe sive collatio* (On the Freedom of the Will) in September 1524, he took special care to inform his English friends of this fact. Henry VIII and Wolsey had long urged Erasmus to refute Luther, and Erasmus sent copies of his new work to both of them. In addition, Erasmus immediately informed several other prominent allies—Cuthbert Tunstall, bishop of London, and John Fisher, bishop of Rochester—of the publication of his work. That November, Vives reported to Erasmus that the king and queen were pleased with his treatise: “Your book on the freedom of the will was handed to the king yesterday, and he read several pages of it between services and showed signs of being very much pleased with it. . . . The queen too is quite devoted to you as a result of this same book.” Indeed, in 1525 Catherine of Aragon asked Erasmus to write a treatise on marriage, a commission indicating her continued favor. Yet despite this success, Erasmus’s reputation in England remained problematic, and by April 1526 he complained to Wolsey: “I am told that my *Colloquies* have been banned in your country.” While this rumor was false, it nevertheless suggests the potential for English mistrust of Erasmus’s works. In this same letter, Erasmus expresses concern that Henry Standish—who had once tried to persuade Henry and Catherine to burn his books—had now been appointed to lead a commission that dealt with heretical books. Erasmus laments, “If the outcome is to depend on the judgment of such men, no book of mine will escape the flames.” He furthermore reports that some parties in England welcomed the personal attacks and vitriolic criticism directed his way: “Recently a Dominican brought into England on his back some volumes containing a scurrilous attack on me. . . . They found a purchaser, while my *Colloquies* are banned from the bookshops.” That December, Robert Aldridge wrote to Erasmus with a fresh account of public reactions to Erasmus’s corrections of errors in religious texts: “At noisy public meetings, in the buzz of conversation, at the table, even from the pulpit one hears that Erasmus is ruining good and holy books, because he is replacing old and ingrained
errors with something new and apt.” These incidents suggest that Erasmus was strongly linked with religious innovation and even heresy in the minds of many English men and women, no matter how much he refuted Luther.

This connection between Erasmus and heterodoxy caused Roper’s translation to come under scrutiny in March 1526, when Richard Foxford, vicar-general of the bishop of London, investigated Thomas Berthelet for publishing several works without approval: Roper’s Devout Treatise, Berthelet’s translation of Erasmus’s Dicta sapientum, Gentian Hervet’s translation of Erasmus’s De immensa dei misericordia, and a sermon by John Fisher, a friend of Erasmus as already noted. A close look at these unlicensed publications suggests that Berthelet was interested in cementing Erasmus’s reputation as a scholar and in publishing humanist texts that opposed Luther. Dicta sapientum was a widely used grammar school text with sayings from Cato and other classical authorities. Fisher’s sermon was directly connected with efforts to root out Lutheran heresy, as the title indicates: A Sermon Had at Paulis . . . Concernynge Certayne Heretickes, Whiche Than Were Abjured for Holding the Heresies of Martyn Luther. Indeed, Fisher praises “the boke of maister More,” or the Respondio ad Lutherum (1523), for its successful refutation of Luther. In addition, scholars have characterized both De immensa and Precatio dominica as subtly anti-Lutheran because of their advocacy of mutual forgiveness. Erasmus composed these texts between 1522 and 1524, while he refused to choose sides in hopes of healing the Reformation, a split which he described as “almost more incurable” than war, his bête noire. During this period, Erasmus attempted to play peacemaker by urging mutual reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants. In 1523, Erasmus laid out a plan for peace to Pope Adrian VI that called for general amnesty: “If God deals with us on that principle every day, forgiving all our offences as often as the sinner shows himself penitent, is there any reason why God’s vicegerent should not do the same?” De immensa also advocates reciprocal forgiveness through its repeated calls for reconciliation: “Forgyve/ & ye shalbe forgyven: And by what measure ye have met[e] to your neyghboure/by the same god shall met[e] to you.” As Hilmar Pabel has demonstrated, the Precatio linked this idea of reconciliation with the Lord’s Prayer, which Erasmus saw as “a communal Christian prayer.” Berthelet’s publications therefore defend Erasmus by emphasizing his anti-Lutheran position as well as his connection with Fisher, an established Lutheran foe.

Despite the orthodoxy of these particular works, Berthelet’s publications were swept up in the campaign to prevent the importation of
Lutheran books into England. In October 1524, Foxford had ordered London booksellers, including Berthelet, to cease purchasing and selling foreign texts and to submit all newly imported books to a council of bishops: “Should they import new books into England or buy books already imported, provided that these were newly composed and made, they were not to sell or part with them unless they first showed them either to the Lord Cardinal [Wolsey], the Archbishop of Canterbury [William Warham], the Bishop of London [Tunstall] or the Bishop of Rochester [Fisher].” Berthelet freely admitted that he had failed to follow this order, and Foxford “enjoined him that he should not hereafter sell any copies of the above works, and that he should not print any works without first exhibiting them before him in Consistory.” Despite noting the “curiously Erasmian” nature of these books, James McConica concluded that Berthelet was in trouble for a regulatory slip alone, and therefore there was no “apprehension about Erasmian opinion.” The religious authorities whose permission Berthelet had failed to gain were all allies of Erasmus, and the books were subsequently licensed without a problem. Foxford’s targeting of Fisher’s sermon certainly indicates that he was making an example of Berthelet. The order in question only concerned “imported,” or foreign, books, and since Fisher was one of the bishops responsible for authorizing publications, his orthodoxy was clearly undeniable. Yet the preponderance of Erasmian texts here seems too marked to be a coincidence. Erasmus’s dubious reputation in England suggests that these translations were suspect precisely because they had a potential connection to Luther. Foxford’s concern, then, was probably with Erasmian humanism itself, which remained a possible source of quasi-Lutheran ideas despite Erasmus’s own refutation of Luther.

If Foxford’s investigation suggested potential English hostility toward Erasmian texts, the second and licensed edition of Roper’s translation offered visual evidence that English authorities supported Erasmus. This edition interposed a woodcut of Cardinal Wolsey’s coat of arms between the title page and the dedication (see figure 1). Wolsey was one of the clergymen appointed to approve imported texts, and his arms may simply indicate that he had licensed the work. Yet none of Berthelet’s other reissued publications features this woodcut, hinting that Roper’s translation was particularly important, perhaps due to its association with More. Suggestively, the woodcut obliquely indicates royal support of this publication, as its border contains the Tudor rose associated with Henry VIII and a pomegranate emblematic of Catherine of Aragon, along with a cardinal’s hat symbolizing Wolsey himself. This second edition
Figure 1. Signature A1 verso of *A Devout Treatise upon the Pater Noster* (1526), Margaret Roper’s translation of Desiderius Erasmus. © The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved, 15 November 2012. C.37.e.6 (1).
of Roper’s translation therefore evoked a courtly coterie of prominent humanists who presumably endorsed Erasmus’s views. Notably, however, none of their names appears within the text or paratexts, a fact perhaps explained by hardening attitudes toward heresy. Wolsey had already conducted public burnings of Luther’s works in 1521 and then again in February 1526, while More himself was busily leading raids to uncover and burn Lutheran books.\textsuperscript{58} Since Wolsey and More were taking ever harsher measures against heretics on Henry’s behalf, they may have realized that overtly linking their names with Erasmus would have seemed contradictory to an English public that associated the Dutch scholar with unorthodox opinions. Indeed, More was famously later forced to defend his friendship with Erasmus in the face of William Tyndale’s attacks: “He asketh me why I have not contended with Erasmus whom he calleth my derlynye. . . . I fynde in Erasmus my derlynye that he detesteth and abhorreth the erroors and heresyes that Tyndale playnely techeth and abydeth by/ and therfore Erasmus my derlynge shall be my dere derlyng styll.”\textsuperscript{59} Furthermore, More may have felt that the ramifications of his political career prevented any public defense of Erasmus. During the mid-1520s, More served as Henry’s private secretary, an association that heightened More’s representative publicity for Henry. As John Guy has noted, those who took up this position “could not act independently.”\textsuperscript{60} While More did compose the \textit{Responsio} to refute Luther, he probably did so at Henry’s command.\textsuperscript{61} More did not write against Lutheranism again until he received a commission from Tunstall in 1528 to rebut heresy. This pattern suggests that even if More felt inclined to defend Erasmus’s reputation, he could not do so publicly without coming into conflict with his position as a state servant.

Margaret Roper, however, was under no such obligation to refrain from defending Erasmus, and the paratexts to her translation suggest the More family’s support of Catholic piety based on humanist ideals. Both the title page and dedicatory preface written by Richard Hyrde, a tutor for the More “school,” use the modesty topos to define Roper’s voice as strictly private. The full title presents Erasmus as a “moost famous doctour” and Roper as “a yong vertuous and well lerned gentylwoman of .xix. yere of age,” contrasting a publicly renowned male humanist with a modest female scholar to create a divide between the public realm of Erasmus and the private sphere of Roper. Furthermore, Roper’s anonymity implies her lack of interest in fame or public agendas, and the title page’s woodcut continues this impression by presenting a woman apparently reading for her own personal benefit (see figure 2). Quentin Metsys’s 1517 portrait of Erasmus had influentially portrayed the Dutch
Figure 2. Title page of *A Devout Treatise upon the Pater Noster* (1526), Margaret Roper’s translation of Desiderius Erasmus. © The British Library Board. All Rights Reserved, 15 November 2012. C.37.e.6 (1).
humanist in his study, an apparently private space that nevertheless evoked typical portrayals of Saint Jerome and thus gestured at Erasmus’s role as Jerome’s biographer and editor. On the title page to Roper’s translation of Erasmus, the female reader similarly sits alone in a room with her books, gazing out into space as she turns the pages of the book before her, so that the reader seems to catch Roper in the act of solitary contemplation that defines her personal virtue. Although publication may have been a radical step for a woman, the title page’s depiction of Margaret Roper as an exemplar of self-contained study implies that her work is “private” and therefore appropriately feminine.

In keeping with this restriction of Margaret Roper’s work to the private sphere, Richard Hyrde’s dedication presents her learning within a domestic and familial context. Hyrde frames the translation as an expression of her personal sentiment, praising Margaret Roper as a model of “prudent/humble/and wyfely behaviour/charitable & very christen vertue” (“DP,” DT, A4v). Hyrde’s inclusion of “wyfely” within this catalog of praiseworthy traits reinforces his contention that learning enhances traditional feminine roles. Indeed, Hyrde claims that Roper’s education has only strengthened her bond with husband William Roper: “With her vertuous/worshipfull/wyse/and well lerned husbande/she hath by the occasyon of her lernynge/and his delyte therin/suche especiall conforte/pleasure/and pastyme/as were nat well possyble for one unlernd couple/eyther to take togyder or to conceyve in their myndes” (“DP,” DT, B1r). Roper’s learning, witnessed by her translation, provides an example of worthwhile leisure activity (“pastyme”) that not only is studious but also increases marital “delyte.” Hyrde’s presentation of Roper as an ideal spouse both justifies the More family’s project of female education and situates her translation within the private sphere. As if to drive home the idea that Roper has composed her translation for a domestic audience, Hyrde states that she prefers private esteem over public praise: “She is as lothe to have praye gyvyn her/as she is worthy to have it/and had leaver her praye to reste in mennes hertes/than in their tonges/or rather in goddes estimacion and pleasure/than any mannes wordes or thought” (“DP,” DT, B2v). Hyrde denies that Roper takes any interest in the presumable outcome of her publication—that is, “praye” expressed through her readers’ “wordes or thought.” Furthermore, Hyrde suggests that the translation does not contain Roper’s voice by assuring the reader that she has accurately rendered Erasmus’s original, praising her “dyscrete and substancyll judgement in expressyne lively the latyn” (“DP,” DT, B2v). These strategies allow Hyrde to separate Roper from the public realm by locating her work within a space devoted to private study.
This emphasis on Roper’s domesticity signals Hyrde’s participation in a larger effort to establish Margaret Roper as a model of female erudition. One of the few Englishwomen of her time to learn Latin and Greek, Roper was known throughout Europe thanks to the commendations of several learned men associated with her father. Roper’s learning was praised by both Juan Luis Vives (De institutione foeminae Christianae, 1523) and Erasmus (published letter to Guillaume Budé, 1521; dedicatory preface to his commentary on Prudentius’s *Christmas Hymn*, 1523; “The Abbot and the Learned Lady” in his *Colloquies*, 1524). Mary Ellen Lamb has shown that their testimonials, dedications, and letters constituted an elaborate publicity machine intended to spread Margaret Roper’s fame to an international audience. Many of these works insisted that Roper’s learning helped enhance household piety, fending off potential criticism that education was unfit for women. Such precautions were necessary since humanists had framed the new learning as a means of preparing young men for government service, which meant that women’s education might seem unjustified. In contrast, Erasmus’s dedicatory preface to his commentary on Prudentius’s *Christmas Hymn* imagines that the text will be of use in the nursery as the infant Jesus “will give the offspring of your marriage a happy outcome and be the true Apollo of all your reading, whose praises you will be able to sing to your lyre instead of nursery rhymes to please your little ones.”

Margaret Roper may have had a relatively high degree of public fame for a gentlewoman, but contemporary praise of her talents portrayed Roper within a domestic sphere associated with Thomas More. The publication of her translation, an activity associated with both the private sphere and her humanist training, thus allowed Roper to take on a public role without flouting limitations on women’s participation in the public sphere.

The paratexts to this publication carefully situate Roper’s translation within a public arena by hinting at her identity as More’s daughter. The title page provides the anonymous translator’s social rank, “gentlywoman,” and age, “.xix. yere[s].” The dedication gives even more specific clues: Hyrde was a tutor at the More “school,” while the dedicatee, “Fraunces S.,” could be identified as Frances Staverton, Margaret Roper’s cousin. Finally, Hyrde wrote the dedication “At Chelcheth,” or Chelsea, a town internationally famous as the site of More’s household. Anyone familiar with the More “school,” More’s children, or the More clan could have unraveled these hints. In addition, the dedication’s defense of female education and praise of the translator as a model wife would have revealed her identity to any reader aware of the More circle’s campaign to publicize women’s learning through Roper. No other
young Englishwoman of her generation lived in such a household and was so famous for her learned devotion to husband and family. After all, female education was rare enough that the More daughters’ scholarship preceded even the classical training of Mary Tudor, their nearest contemporary. The paratexts therefore frame her voice as private—even as they continually hint at her identity—using the modesty topos to excuse the publication of her work. More important, the paratexts allow her private voice to be identified in concert with More’s personal voice. If the More circle used Roper’s scholarship to indicate her father’s humanism, Margaret Roper’s translation in turn signaled More’s approbation of Erasmus. Roper’s translation carefully positions her as a representative of the More household to underscore the bond between More and Erasmus in a coded, protected manner.

Roper’s strategic alterations of Erasmus’s original text suggest that she enthusiastically participated in this effort to reclaim Erasmus’s English reputation. While Roper’s translation is largely conservative in nature, she freely enlarges on the text through doublets. These alterations help associate Erasmus with a scholarly piety that supports Catholicism rather than Lutheranism. Throughout, Roper emphasizes the idea of following divine will, strongly contrasting the antiauthoritarian tendencies perceived in Lutheran tenets. For example, Luther’s *Babylonica* had angered Catholics because it threatened to demolish not just the traditions of the church but also papal authority, the basis for many of those traditions, by suggesting that Christians should adhere to only religious practices present in the gospels. Erasmus refutes this antiestablishment view by arguing that true Christians should continually seek to obey heavenly dictates without questioning God’s purpose:

> They . . . in this worlde/go about to folowe the *unite and concorde* [concordiam] of the hevenly kyngedome/whiche all the tyme they lyve bodily in erthe/as it becometh naturall and obedient children/*studye with all diligence* [student] to fulfyll those thynges/whiche they knowe shall content thy *mynde & pleasure* [voluntas]/and nat what their owne sensuall appetite gyveth them/*ne jugying or disputyng* [dijudicantes] why thou woldest this or that to be done/but thynkyng it sufficient/that thus thou woldest it/whom they knowe *surely* [added] to wyll nothing/but that that is best.

Roper highlights Erasmus’s emphasis on union with God by translating “concordiam” (concord) as “unite and concorde” and “dijudicantes” (judging) as “jugying and disputying.” More important, her translation
promotes scholarship as a means of achieving this compliance with God’s will. By adding the intensifier “surely” to “knowe,” Roper indicates that study can allow Catholics a reliable means of understanding heavenly precepts. Furthermore, she translates “student” (strive) as “studye with all diligence,” combining the primary meaning of this verb (to be diligent) with a secondary meaning (to study) that evokes scholarly piety. Similarly, Roper renders “voluntas” (will) with the doublet “mynde & pleasure,” adding an intellectual valence that is not present in the original Latin. Erasmus thus seems to argue that by engaging in rigorous “studye” of heavenly dictates, Catholics can “knowe” God’s “mynde” and so form an intellectual bond with the divine. Neither “jugyng or disputyng” God’s will, as Luther has done, true Christians carefully engage in cerebral activities of “thynkynge,” “know[ing],” and “study[ing].” Such thorough consideration of God’s “pleasure” allows Catholics a sound basis for asserting that Catholic devotional practices have divine approval, since God “wyll[s] nothing but that is best.” This contention that Catholics can come to know God’s mind gives humankind a larger agency for salvation within the divine framework than is possible in Protestantism, confuting Protestant emphasis on faith alone. Besides rejecting the idea of abandoning devotional customs unsupported by the gospels, Roper’s interventions also indicate that thoughtful practice of such customs is not simply valuable but in fact the hallmark of true religion. Roper’s translation therefore distinguishes Erasmus’s views from Lutheran theology while refuting the argument that Catholics practice mindless conformity to papal authority.

Roper also defends the classical study promoted by More and Erasmus by justifying its applicability to Christian worship. Erasmus presents Jesus Christ as a teacher who came to earth to instruct humankind in heavenly knowledge. The Lord’s Prayer is one example of Christ’s teachings, as Christ has “assigned us also a way of prayeng to the[e]” (Roper, DT, B4v). By paying close attention to Christ’s teachings, a Christian will be able to discern the correct spiritual mode. For example, Erasmus rejects aspersions that learning decreases Christian piety with a reference to the living bread of heaven in John 6:32: “For verily / the breed [bread] and teachynge [panis] of the proude philosophers and pharises/coude nat suffice and content our mynde: But that breed of thyne / whiche thou sendest us . . . by this breed we are norysshed and fatted” (Roper, DT, E3r; Erasmus, Pd, 1225B). Roper expands Erasmus’s reference to the intellectual component of Christian piety by translating “panis” (bread) with a doublet that underscores Erasmus’s point: “breed and teachynge.” In Roper’s rendering, Christian devotion has an intellectual
basis, allowing the humanist student to reject the “teachynge of the proude philosophers” in favor of Christian “breed” that will “norysshe” the “mynde.” As a result, Roper causes Erasmus to signal his support of Christian humanism while scoffing at the religious limitations of pagan learning (“philosophers”) and Judaism (“pharises”). The translation also validates scholarly study of Christ’s teaching as an effective means of defeating the devil: “As we . . . onely worshyp and enbrace the precious and gostly lernyng of the gospel [margaritum Evangelicum] . . . So often father thou warrest in us and overcomest the realme of the devyll” (Roper, DT, D2v; Erasmus, Pd, 1223A). Here Roper translates “margaritum Evangelicum” (the pearl of the gospel) as “the precious and gostly lernyng of the gospel,” in turn endorsing biblical study (“lernyng of the gospell”) as a means of serving God even more strongly than her source text does. Roper’s version could thus be taken as evidence of the Christian humanist premise that study of classical languages would facilitate pious reading of religious texts. This alteration allows the translation to subtly reject the Lutheran idea that study of the gospels would lead to a purer form of worship since Catholic study instead authorizes existing rites. Indeed, Erasmus condemns those who offer Christ’s teachings without a true understanding of their purposes: “He that teacheth the lernyng [sermonem] of the gospell he is he that gyveth us forthe this breed/whiche yet he gyveth all in vayne/except it be also gyven by the[e]” (Roper, DT, E3v–E4r; Erasmus, Pd, 1225E). Once again, Erasmus seems to champion pious scholarship since Roper strengthens the pedagogical nuances of his language (“docet”; “teacheth”) by rendering “sermonem” (speech) as “lernyng.” As a result, Roper’s version of Erasmus might appear to allude to the false teachings of Luther, who may cite “the lernyng of the gospell” but whose tenets do not stem from a reasoned understanding of the doctrines provided by God and so are “in vayne.” Through her translation, Roper reshapes Erasmus’s English reputation both by validating the importance of biblical scholarship as a devotional tool and by hinting at Erasmus’s own doctrinal correctness.

Finally, Roper’s version of the paraphrase takes on an important role as a means of uniting a church torn apart by schisms and even extending its reach. The universality of the Lord’s Prayer among Christians makes it an ideal tool for unifying them into one body: “We all one thynge praye for and desyre/no man asketh ought for hym selfe specially or a parte [peculitariter]/but as membres of one body/quyckened and releved with one soule” (Roper, DT, C1r; Erasmus, Pd, 1219D–1220A). By reciting the Lord’s Prayer, even separately, Christians are unified into “one body” and share “one soule.” Roper emphasizes this unity with
a doublet for “peculitariter” (specially): “specially or a parte.” More important, Roper’s translation of Erasmus itself has the potential to unite England and the international Catholic community. By providing the public with an English version of Erasmus’s treatise, she allows readers without knowledge of Latin to join the larger group of petitioners evoked by the paraphrase. If Christians follow Erasmus’s counsel of obeying God’s commands, then they will facilitate the mending of breaches within the church: “All the \textit{membres and partes} [membra] of thy sonne be gathered together/and . . . the hole body of thy sonne/safe and sounde be joyned to his heed [head]/Wherby neyther Christe shall lacke any of his \textit{partes and membres} [membrorum]” (Roper, \textit{DT}, D4v; Erasmus, \textit{Pd}, 1223F–1224A). Roper’s chiasmatic doublets for “membra” (limbs) indicate that while Christians are simultaneously identifiable as separate “partes,” they are also “membres” of a larger body. This spiritual cohesion is particularly important in accomplishing the greatest task remaining to Christians, which is to unify all humankind within the larger body of Christ: “There is nat yet one herde/and one herde mayster/whiche we hope shalbe/whan the jewes also shall bryng and submyt them selfe to the \textit{spirituall and gostely lernyng of the gospell} [in regnum Evangelicum]” (Roper, \textit{DT}, D3r; Erasmus, \textit{Pd}, 1223B). Roper again emphasizes biblical study by rendering “in regnum Evangelicum” (in the kingdom of the gospel) as “the spirituall and gostely lernyng of the gospell,” a translation indicating that the conversion of the Jews depends on their intellectual acceptance of Christ. Once more, Roper’s version suggests that the ability to “submit” to God’s doctrine extends from a person’s knowledge of Christian doctrine, a contention that justifies the importance of Erasmian humanism as a means of ratifying and empowering the church rather than destroying it.

Roper’s \textit{Devout Treatise} performs the sort of Catholic intellectual inquiry that Erasmus advocated, suggesting an alternative to Reformation spirituality endorsed by Luther. Furthermore, the paratexts and the text’s reception all reveal that Roper’s work contributed to the ongoing political controversy linked to Lutheranism during the 1520s. Roper’s small but crucial interventions in the source text promote a piety based in humanist scholarship even as they establish Erasmus’s orthodoxy. Given Foxford’s concerns about the publication of this translation, contemporaries probably viewed Roper’s work as part of a confessional struggle with larger public implications rather than as a solely personal exercise. While the paratexts might seem to contradict the public applications of Roper’s work, their emphasis on Roper’s privacy paradoxically assured the translation’s larger importance by associating it with More and other
courtly humanists. By evoking Roper’s private world, Hyrde presented the translation as evidence of her profitable pastime and consequently guaranteed its authenticity as a reflection of the More family’s support for Erasmus. Rather than being silenced by patriarchal agendas, Roper was at the center of this familial effort, actively reworking Erasmus’s text so that it promoted the More circle’s identification with and endorsement of humanist scholarship and Catholic doctrine.

More’s English Tongue: Mary Basset, Thomas More, and the Marian Counter-Reformation

During the mid-Tudor era, the Morean tradition of translation entered a new phase as the circle around Mary Roper Clarke Basset, the daughter of Margaret Roper, used this activity to disseminate staunchly Catholic views. Roper created a home school along Morean lines for her own children, meaning that translation very likely played a role in Basset’s education. Yet the translations produced by Basset and her tutors John Christopherson and John Morwen did not have a pedagogical purpose. If Margaret Roper and John More had translated works that participated in religious controversies of the Henrician era, Basset’s circle produced translations of Greek works, particularly by the church fathers, to strengthen underground Catholic resistance to the Edwardian Reformation. The core religious debates of this period revolved around the practices associated with the primitive church, and translation of patristic texts—particularly by the Eastern church fathers, whose works often remained unknown even among the educated—offered crucial testimony regarding the early Christian church. Basset herself helped establish her circle’s association with Greek patristic texts by translating Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History* into Latin and English during the Edwardian period. The 1557 publication of Basset’s translation of More’s final Tower treatise, *De tristitia Christi* (*Of the Sorowe of Christ*), was closer to the model pioneered by her mother but nevertheless maintained the link between translation and Catholic polemic forged by Basset’s circle.

If Mary Basset, like her mother, first encountered translation in the schoolroom, her education took place in a more politically charged atmosphere. Basset’s interest in the Greek church fathers stemmed from the Morean ideal of pious training in Latin and Greek. More’s 1518 letter to Oxford had noted the need for translations of Greek literature, including the church fathers: “However much was translated of old from Greek, and however much more has been recently and better translated,
not half of Greek learning has yet been made available to the West.” John Clement, one of the tutors at More’s “school,” later translated Gregory Nazianzen’s letters and Nicephorus Callistus’s Synaxarion, containing saints’ lives, from Greek into Latin with the assistance of his wife Margaret Gigs Clement. Roper herself was committed to finding tutors who could provide instruction in Greek, particularly from a Catholic perspective. While she unsuccessfully attempted to hire Roger Ascham, a Protestant well versed in Greek, both Christopherson and Morwen had attended colleges with Greek readers (respectively Trinity College, Cambridge and Corpus Christi College, Oxford), and Morwen became the Greek reader at Corpus Christi. The careers of both men flourished under Mary I. Christopherson, who had entered exile under Edward, would become Mary’s chaplain and bishop of Chichester, while Morwen served as secretary and chaplain to Edmund Bonner, bishop of London and a dogged opponent of heretics. Christopherson himself participated actively in the governmental campaign against heresy, along with Henry Cole, another of Basset’s tutors who was appointed dean of Saint Paul’s in 1556. Basset’s education thus fused the humanist training of Roper’s own schooling with an emphasis on Catholic orthodoxy.

As the Edwardian Reformation unfolded, Basset’s circle turned to translations of Greek religious works to establish the continuity between Catholic tradition and the primitive church. While Greek patristic texts do not appear to have been an established part of the university curriculum, reformers such as John Cheke and Roger Ascham had already translated the Eastern fathers into Latin to demonstrate their Protestant credentials. The translations of Basset’s circle held a similar polemical weight. In 1553, Christopherson published a Latin translation of four works by Philo, a first-century Jewish writer, that made clear his personal interest in translation of Greek texts: “Nam nihil nobis magis in optatis est, quam ut omnes Graeci authores in Latinum sermonem quam elegantissime convertantur” (For I hope for nothing more than that all the Greek authors should be translated into the Latin language as elegantly as possible). Perhaps because the work was dedicated to Trinity College, which had funded his exile, Christopherson only mentions the translation’s relevance for Christians in general: “nihil certe vel meis studiis aptius, vel utilius reip[ublicae] Christianae putavi” (I certainly thought nothing more apt for my studies or more useful for the Christian commonwealth). That same year, Christopherson intended to print his Latin translation of Eusebius’s Ecclesiastical History but did not, perhaps as a result of Edward’s impending death and Christopherson’s return to England. This translation was posthumously published at Louvain in
1569, and Christopherson’s preface explicitly asserts Eusebius’s value in relation to the Reformation and its effects: “Nam quid est, in quo majore cum fructu quisquam tempus suum, studium & diligentiam ponere pos- sit, his praesertim temporibus, cum tot sectae, tot schismata in variis locis oberrantia, veram Evangelii lucem obscurare, veros Dei cultus adulterare, tranquillam Ecclesiae lucem obscurare, veram Evangelii lucem obscurare, veros Dei cultus adulterare, tranquillam Ecclesiae concordiam disturbare, superstitionis caecitatem defendere, errorum perversitatatem propugnare assidue pro viribus mol- liantur” (For what is there, in which anyone can invest his time, study, and diligence with greater fruit, especially in these times, when so many sects, so many schisms blundering in various places, strive assiduously according to their strength to obscure the true light of the Gospel, to adulterate the true worship of God, to disturb the tranquil concord of the church, to defend the blindness of superstition, to fight for the perversity of errors). Christopherson clearly viewed Eusebius as a useful ally in refuting Protestant tenets and promoting Catholic doctrine.

Morwen, meanwhile, composed several manuscript translations that were even more polemical in nature, possibly because he hoped these displays of learning would secure patronage from prominent Catholics. He sent William Roper four Latin translations of Greek works: Basil the Great’s letters “To a Lapsed Monk” (45), “To a Fallen Virgin” (46), and “To Optimius the Bishop” (260); and Cyril of Alexandria’s homily on hell (De exitu animi; Homilia 14). While “To a Lapsed Monk” had obvious relevance to the dissolution of the monasteries, Morwen’s translation of Cyril paid an elaborate compliment to William Roper as Basset, his daughter, had given Morwen his Greek exemplar. Similarly, Morwen dedicated a Latin translation of a fragmentary portion of Symeon Metaphrases’s Menology, a work containing saints’ lives, to Mary Tudor during Edward’s reign. Morwen’s dedicatory preface observes that Basset had inspired his work with her translation of Eusebius: “Optimum itaque mihi visum est, si illius vestigia subsequere; & quod illa in Euse- bii interpretatione in patrium sermonum longe purissime, ac exactissime traducta perfeceunt, id ego in graeca quodam authore, qui latine loqui non didicerat, pro virili prestarem” (It therefore seemed best to me, if I followed in her footsteps; and what she had accomplished in the translation of Eusebius, rendered most purely and most exactly by far into the language of our fatherland, for my part I would surpass that with some Greek author who had not learned to speak Latin). As Morwen notes, the difficulty of this task was increased by the lack of Latin translations of his source text. Morwen then demonstrates his Catholic credentials with a defense of transubstantiation based on patristic authorities such as Basil, Clement, Cyprian, and Augustine: “Hanc ob causam tam multis
sum usus, ut excellens tua prudentia perspiciat, quanta haeretici impu-
dentia, sint praediti, qui nunc corpus, nunc sacrificium, nunc presentiam,
nunc humanitatem in sacramento pernegant, & nuda esse symbola, ad
propriam ipsorum damnationem contendunt” (I have used so many
[examples] for this cause: that your excellent wisdom may see with how
much imprudence the heretics are furnished, who deny now that a body,
now that a sacrifice, now that a presence, now that humanity are in the
sacrament, and they assert it is a bare symbol, to their own personal
damnation). 79 Just as Protestants cited the church fathers on behalf of
religious reform, so Morwen could invoke Greek authorities to defend
Catholic tradition.

Basset was the only member of this circle to translate Greek into Eng-
lish, thus combining the Morean precedent of Englishing works from
classical languages with her circle’s interest in patristic texts. Sometime
during Edward’s reign, Basset presented Mary Tudor with a manuscript
containing a Latin translation of book 1 of Eusebius’s Ecclesiastical
History and an English translation of books 1 through 5. Basset’s par-
tial Latin translation participated in Christopherson’s and Morwen’s
agenda of turning the Greek fathers into Latin, and she cut short her
endeavor only after learning of a competing Latin version (possibly by
Christopherson). Yet the primary model for Basset’s Eusebius is that of
Margaret Roper’s Erasmus. Basset’s dedicatory preface demonstrates a
deep modesty that is consistent with her mother’s own reputation for
humility, framing the text as a product of her leisure time even though
she circulated the work among her friends as well as “mo then one
or twayne very wyse and well learned men.” 80 In disseminating her
work and presenting a copy to Mary, Basset promoted a shared sense
of Catholic identity that was opposed to Edwardian religious policy. 81
The dedicatory preface only obliquely suggests the work’s relevance by
praising the “prymyteve churche, in which floryshed so many gloryouse
martyrs, so many holy confessors, so excellent, so sincerely learned doc-
tors, so notable workers of myracles, so noble prelates, and bysshoppes,
so dylygently tendring the weale of theyr flocke.” 82 Yet the effect of Bas-
set’s translation on Morwen suggests just how charged this text could
be, and her encouragement of Morwen indicates Basset’s personal inves-
tment in using translation to support Roman Catholic doctrine. When
Basset and her tutors translated, then, they engaged in an activity meant
to assert the doctrinal validity of Roman Catholicism.

By contributing an English version of Thomas More’s final treatise, Of
the Sorowe of Christ (De tristitia Christi, 1535), to the publication of The
Workes of Sir Thomas More Knyght (1557), Mary Basset adapted her circle’s interest in translation so that it served a new purpose: establishing the saintly legacy of her grandfather. John Fisher and Thomas More had been executed in 1535 for refusing to accept Henry’s separation from Rome, and the two men’s deaths were consequently linked in the popular imagination. By the Marian era, however, Fisher had come to overshadow More. As a bishop and, briefly, a cardinal, Fisher may have had more symbolic resonance as an example of Henry’s tyranny than More possessed as a layman. Fisher may also have taken precedence because he opposed Henry’s divorce vocally, unlike More. Fisher publicly validated Henry’s marriage to Catherine of Aragon in De causa matrimonii . . . Henrici VIII cum Catharina Aragonensi (1530), and while Fisher’s Brevis apologia (c. 1532) was never published, this work directly refuted Henry’s justification of the divorce (Gravissimae censurae).83 More, meanwhile, indirectly criticized Henry’s proceedings by attacking governmental apologist Christopher Saint German in the Apology (1533) and the Debellation of Salem and Bizance (1533). During the Edwardian period, the publication of an English translation of Utopia (1551) drew attention to More’s fame as a witty secular author rather than a martyr. Thomas Wilson consequently praised More for his rhetorical abilities in two Edwardian treatises (The Rule of Reason, 1551; Arte of Rhetorique, 1553), suggesting in the Arte that More deserved eternal fame for his jesting: “Sir Thomas More with us here in England, had an excellent gifte not onely in this kinde, but also in all other pleaasunt delites, whose witte even at this houre is a wonder to al the worlde, & shalbe undoubtedly, even unto the worldes ende.”84 The republication of More’s works during Mary’s reign suggests that this view of More remained potent. Only two works specifically attributed to More were reprinted before 1557: A Dialoge of Comfort Against Tribulacion Made by Syr Thomas More Knyght (1553) and Utopia (1556). Neither of these works deals directly with Protestantism, and both display More’s talent for writing fictional humanist dialogue. Meanwhile, Fisher’s fame for devoutness and orthodoxy was reinforced by the republication of his 1526 sermon against Luther in 1554 and 1556 with a new title emphasizing the work’s application to contemporary issues: “wherin it may appeare howe men sithens that tyme have gone astray.”85 The year 1555 saw the publication of Fisher’s Treatysse Concernynge the Fruytfull Say-inges of Davyd the Kynge . . . in the Seven Penytencyall Psalmes. Thus the Marian print history of works by Fisher and More reveals the crystallization of their respective reputations as a holy bishop and a witty humanist.

By 1556, the deaths of Fisher and More had become grist for the mill of the Marian Counter-Reformation, as figures associated with the
regime reminded the public of Catholic martyrs to counteract Protestant models of martyrdom. On March 21, 1556, Henry Cole gave a public sermon before Thomas Cranmer’s execution that offered a macabre tallying of Catholic and Protestant deaths: “It semed mete, according to the law of equality, that as the deth of the duke of Northumb[erland] of late, made even with Tho[mas] Moore chancellor that died for the church so there shold be one that shold make even with Fisher of Rochester[er] & because that Ridley, Hooper, Ferrar were not able to make even with that man it semed mete, that Cranmer shold be joyned to them to fill up this part of equality.”

According to Cole’s “law of equality,” More and Northumberland are equivalent, since each was an important statesman. Fisher’s execution must be equalized by the deaths of four bishops, a claim that may possibly reflect his elevation to a cardinalship but could also suggest that More was a less worthy martyr than Fisher. Two polemical works dedicated to Mary in 1556 offered similar assessments of Fisher and More. In *The Displaying of the Protestantes*, Miles Huggarde, Mary’s hosier and an influential propagandist, included the two in a list of Englishmen who died for the Catholic faith: “What shall I stande here upon the death of John Fyssher semetyme Byshop of Rochester, a man of notable learning & innocencie of lyfe, or the death of the second Cicero, syr Thomas More, a man endewed with heavenly eloquence.”

While Fisher is notable for his learned piety, Huggarde characterizes More for his rhetorical style (“the second Cicero”). Huggarde’s description of himself on the title page as “servant to the Quenes majestie” may have given the work additional weight as evidence of the government’s opinions, and the treatise was immediately popular, going through two editions in June and July 1556. James Cancellar’s *Pathe of Obedience* placed Fisher and More at the head of a similar catalog: “those which have suffered for the unitie of the Catholycke churche of Christe, as dyd that holy father Docter Fysher sometyme Byshop of Rochester, and Sirre Thomas More sumetyme Chaunceler of thys Relme.”

Cancellar also emphasizes Fisher’s devoutness (“holy father”), describing More only in terms of his secular position as “Chaunceler.” The work’s title page noted Cancellar’s position in Mary’s Chapel Royal, thus linking Cancellar’s views to the regime. These references to Fisher and More reaffirmed Fisher’s prominence, suggesting that he was of greater value than More in promoting the Marian Counter-Reformation.

The More clan was probably well aware of these sentiments through its connections to Cole and possibly even Huggarde, who—like Morewen—was associated with Bonner. Scholars have certainly noted that the More family began an aggressive literary campaign to reframe More
as a martyr who could benefit the Counter-Reformation. William Roper, Basset’s father, wrote a hagiographic manuscript biography of his father-in-law, which family friend Nicholas Harpsfield then used as the basis for his own manuscript biography of More. In May 1557, William Rastell, Basset’s cousin, printed More’s English Workes, a monumental volume in folio format that totaled nearly fifteen hundred pages. Rastell’s dedication of the volume to Mary I presented More’s works and saintly death as crucial props for the Counter-Reformation. Rastell states that More’s writings contain “the trewe doctryne of Christes catholike fayth” and “the confutacion of detestable heresyes,” meaning that this publication, “beinge red of many, as it is likely to be, shall much helpe forwarde youre Majesties most godly purpose, in purging this youre realme of all wicked heresies.” Rastell also presents More as a proto-saint who serves as a heavenly intercessor on behalf of Mary herself: “now (beynge with almyghtie God, and lyvynge in heaven with hym) . . . [he] ceaseth not to praye to God for the kingses majestie, for your hyghnesse, your subjectes, your realms, and domynions, and for the common welth, and catholyke religion of the same, and for all christen realmes also.” Besides providing the Counter-Reformation with practical assistance through his writings, More facilitates the divine implementation of Marian religious policies as well as the refutation of heresy throughout Europe. If Cole, Huggarde, and Cancellar had suggested that More had less worth to the Counter-Reformation than Fisher, Rastell emphasizes the centrality of More’s life and death to the key narratives of Mary’s religious policies: the eradication of heresy and the restoration of the Roman Catholic Church within England. The material characteristics of the publication further substantiated the significance that Rastell attributed to the volume, as More was the first English author after Chaucer to have his collected works issued in hefty folio format.

The English Workes established a new narrative for More’s life that undercut the importance of his earlier humanist productions such as Utopia. Rastell arranged the volume in a chronological fashion, using the table of contents to mark the increasingly polemical and religious nature of More’s works as well as his rise to and resignation of the chancellorship. By moving from rhymes “written by Syr Thomas in his youthe, for hys pastyme” to “certen letters and other thinges which Sir Thomas More wrote while he was prisoner in the towre of London,” the volume underscored More’s own self-presentation of his trajectory away from worldly affairs and toward spiritual matters. Indeed, while the title page proclaimed that the book’s contents would be in More’s own English (The Workes of Sir Thomas More Knyght, Sometyme Lorde
Chauncellour of England, Wrytten by Him in the Englysh Tonge), Rastell included several short Latin compositions and English translations of Latin texts, such as a brief prayer entitled “A Godly Instruction,” More’s self-written epitaph, a Tower letter to Antonio Bonvisi, and Basset’s translation. Rastell appears to have chosen these texts—and omitted Utopia—because they conform to a narrative that emphasizes More’s eventual martyrdom. It is well established, for example, that More wrote his own epitaph in order to separate himself from his earlier role as Henry’s civil servant: “He therfore irke[d] and wery of worldly busines, giving up his promocions, obtained at last by the incomparable benefite of his most gentil prince (if it please god to favour his enterprise) the thing which from a childe in a maner alway he wished & desired, that he might have some yeres of his life fre, in which he litle & litle withdrawing himself from the busines of this life, might continually remembre the immortalite of the lyfe to come.” More’s mixture of flattery and spiritual sentiments may seem at odds, but both elements present his resignation as a voluntary withdrawal from “worldly busines” to private contemplation. By praising Henry as a “most gentil prince,” More implied that he remained in the king’s good graces, leaving only because he had grown “wery” of the “worldly busines” accompanying his “promocions.” This trajectory from “worldly” affairs to “immortalite” provided a template for the English Workes. Rastell specifically chose to publish Latin texts that could help shape More’s saintly legacy, which the liberal thrust of Utopia might undermine. Both “A Godly Instruction” and Of the Sorowe legitimate More’s lack of vocal opposition to Henry by suggesting that fearful sainthood is as valuable to the Catholic cause as bold martyrdom. Furthermore, More’s letter to Bonvisi is presented as his final correspondence with those outside his family, as it precedes the last text in the Workes, More’s farewell letter to Margaret Roper. Of the Sorowe is the most significant of these translations, providing an explanation for More’s hesitant approach to his own death. As a result, Basset’s translation plays an important role in verifying the authenticity of More’s saintliness, just as her mother’s translation had indicated More’s private allegiance to humanist learning.

Unlike the other translations included in the Workes, Basset’s translation was accompanied by a separate introduction that suggested its importance by establishing her identity and credentials. The title introduces Basset as “one of the gentlewomen of the queenes majesties privie chamber, and nece to the sayde syr Thomas More” (OS, 1350; YE, 1077). As lady-in-waiting to Mary and wife to James Basset, gentleman-in-waiting to King Philip, Basset held a privileged position at
the Marian court. Rastell accordingly prioritizes Basset’s role as Mary’s lady-in-waiting over her kinship to More, establishing the translation’s connection to the regime just as Huggarde and Cancellar had linked their publications to Mary. The intimacy between Basset and the queen evokes Rastell’s depiction of the mutual admiration between More and Mary within the dedicatory preface to the Workes: “Syr Thomas More . . . whyle he lyved, dyd beare towards your highnesse a speciall zeale, an entier affection, and reverent devocion: and on thother syde lykewyse your grace (as it is well known) had towards him in his life time, a benevolent mynde and singular favoure.” This portrayal might hint that Mary appointed Basset as one of her ladies-in-waiting in recognition of More’s unwavering Catholicism. At the same time, Rastell firmly situates Basset within a private domain at odds with the world of public affairs, much as Hyrde had presented Roper as a praiseworthy wife: “Somewhat I had to doo ere that I could come by thys booke. For the gentlewoman which translated it, semed nothing willing to have it goe abrode, for that (she sayth,) it was firste turned into englishe, but for her owne pastyme and exercise, and so reputeth it farre to[о] symple to come in many handes” (OS, 1350; YE, 1078). Because Basset appears to define her work as a “pastyme and exercise” meant only for her personal use, Rastell is able to portray her translation as private rather than public. In actuality, Basset had a very real stake in the publication of the Workes. The anonymous Latin Chronicle of Henry’s first divorce claims that the volume was printed “ope et impensis nobilissimae simul ac doctissimae feminae, Thomae Mori ex filia neptis” (with the help and at the cost of a most noble and at the same time most learned woman, a granddaughter of Thomas More by his daughter). Besides providing funding for the book’s printing, Basset may have supplied the copies that her mother had preserved of More’s writings, including the crucial final Tower letters. Rastell’s presentation of Basset’s demure refusal of public acknowledgement may not accurately reflect her participation in this venture, but it did frame Basset as an exemplar of female modesty. In addition, Rastell’s emphasis on Basset’s leisure time characterizes the translation as a private composition, depicting her studious engagement in pious learning during her hours away from Mary’s service. As in the case of prefaces to the works of male translators such as Phaer, this description of Basset’s “pastyme” suggests that Basset’s leisure pursuits complement her official service to Mary. Despite her apparent privacy, Basset takes on a quasi-official role as a proponent of Catholicism. Rastell had yet another reason for insisting on Basset’s modest repudiation of any public agenda or speech, as he positions her translation
as a manifestation of More’s private, contemplative voice. According to Rastell, the translation does not exhibit Basset’s own literary style or voice at all. Rather, her work “goeth so nere sir Thomas Mores own english phrase that the gentlewoman (who for her pastyme translated it) is no nerer to hym in kynred, vertue and litterature, than in hys englishe tongue: so that it myghte seme to have been by hys own pen indyted first, and not at all translated: suche a gyft hath she to folowe her grundfathers vayne in wryting” (OS, 1350; YE, 1078). This remarkable passage casts Basset not as a translator but as a medium who channels More’s indubitable English voice. The prerequisites for Basset’s assumption of More’s voice are her blood ties (“kynred”), piety (“vertue”), and learning (“litterature”). Just as Basset follows her grandfather’s example of Catholic humanism, so she inherits his facility with the “english phrase.” As More’s granddaughter, Basset is capable of translating the text into her “grandfathers” English, and it is Basset’s privacy that allows her translation to become an acceptable and even authentic expression of the contemplative persona More shaped in his final years. Basset’s marginal notes participate in creating this illusion that her voice does not exist within the text proper. For example, she calls attention to a particularly creative rendering of the source text: “Whereas the latine texte hath here somnia speculantes Mandragore, I have translated it in englishe, our mindes all occupied wyth mad fantastical dreames, because Mandragora is an herbe as phisycions saye, that causeth folke to slepe, and therin to have many mad fantastical dreames” (OS, 1375F–G; YE, 1119). Here Basset demonstrates her facility with both Latin and medical knowledge, a pet discipline of More and Margaret Roper. By scrupulously explaining her reasoning for translating “mandragora” (mandrake) with “mad fantastical dreames,” Basset asserts her faithfulness as a translator and demonstrates that she continues the Morean tradition of educated women. Such meticulous fidelity implicitly limits Basset’s authorial role, reinforcing Rastell’s claim that the translation should be regarded as a genuine part of More’s English Workes. Furthermore, by speaking on her own behalf only in the margins of the text, Basset performatively enacts the extreme modesty that Rastell had already attributed to her, so that she both endorses and constructs the apparent privacy of this text.

Basset and Rastell may have felt compelled to validate her translation as More’s genuine speech because Basset does not channel More’s voice so much as adjust it to fit a familial agenda. In Basset’s rendering, Of the Sorowe becomes both a theological justification of cautious martyrdom and textual evidence of More’s death. As the work’s full title indicates—Of the Sorowe, Werinesse, Feare, and Prayer of Christ before
More is primarily interested in the question of why Christ felt pain, weariness, and fear in the garden of Gethsemane. More notes that Christ’s all-too-human emotions might seem to discount his divinity: “Some man may happily here mervel, how this could be, that our saviour Christ beyng very god equal with his almighty father, could be hevy, sad, & sorowful” (OS, 1354C; YE, 1083). Of the Sorowe answers this question by arguing that two classes of martyrs exist: the bold and the timorous. Christ’s anxious questioning of God’s will in the garden thus functions as evidence that timorous martyrs justifiably scrutinize God’s purpose. In redefining martyrdom through Christ’s Passion, More provides scriptural validation for his own careful resistance to Henry’s policies. Engaging in translation practices similar to those of her mother, Basset in turn heightens More’s defense of his conduct with careful modulations and marginal notes that both corroborate her grandfather’s saintly death and indicate that his timorous martyrdom corresponded with Christ’s precedent. Basset’s translation therefore substantiates the existence of fearful martyrs even as it presents More himself as this kind of martyr.

Basset’s deviations from her source text, though small, consistently portray timorous martyrdom, which is conveniently similar to More’s own death, as superior to bold martyrdom. More is adamant that both kinds of martyrs are equally worthy of admiration, although he cautions against seeking martyrdom too readily. Yet Basset modifies that sense of parity by implying that bold martyrs suffer only in a physical sense. Citing Christ’s statement in Matthew 10:23 regarding persecution—“yf they persecute ye (sayth he) in one citie, geat ye into an other” (OS, 1355B; YE, 1085)—More asserts that the true test of martyrdom occurs when a Christian must sacrifice either his life or his faith: “Whosoever therefore is broughte to suche a straighte, that neded he must either endure some paine in his bodye [ei], or els forsake god, this man may be right wel assured, that he is by gods owne wil come to suche distresse” (DtC, 307; OS, 1355E–F; YE, 1086). The undeniable need to choose between bodily or spiritual death is the hallmark of a true martyr, and Basset heightens this distinction by translating “ei” (to himself) as “in his bodye.” Basset also associates bold martyrs with physical pain, suggesting that these martyrs do not undergo the mental torment experienced by timorous martyrs. More refers to some martyrs as “bold and hardy”; these Christians fit the traditional conception of martyrdom by “joyful-lye speed[ing] them towards their deathe apase” (OS, 1370D, B; YE, 1110). More’s epithet for these martyrs is “alacer” (eager), which Basset
translates with the doublet “bold and hardy” as well as the adjective “joyfullye” (*DtC*, 249, 251). By qualifying “bold” with “hardy,” Basset links the traditional idea of the martyr’s jubilant death with physical endurance. Basset likewise inserts a reference to physicality that underscores More’s point that bold martyrs may sacrifice their bodies all too easily: “Christs valiant Champions have . . . of their owne accord, professed themselfes christen men, when no creature required it of them, & of theyre own mindes, offred their bodies [se] to martirdome when no man called for them” (*DtC*, 65; *OS*, 1355C; *YE*, 1085). Basset stresses the physical nature of their sacrifice by translating “se” (themselves) as “their bodies,” once again demonstrating a crucial opposition between bold and timorous martyrs. Because their “mindes” have no scruples about the rightness of their actions, these bold martyrs are able to offer up “their bodies” to physical torments without any mental anguish. By adding these references to physicality, Basset insinuates that these martyrs suffer only in a bodily manner.

In contrast with this emphasis on the bodily suffering of the bold martyr, Basset’s translation stresses the physical and mental pain that timorous martyrs endure. Mental anguish was characteristic of More’s ordeal, amply demonstrated by letters written from the Tower and printed by Rastell in the same volume. These “heavy, sorowfull, and timorous” martyrs “right sore affrayde [cunctanter et timide], creepe faire and softly” toward death (*DtC*, 249; *OS*, 1370D, B; *YE*, 1110). Here Basset collapses More’s doublet “cunctanter et timide” (hesitantly and timidly) into “right sore affrayde,” a phrase that insists on the emotional torments undergone by timorous martyrs while eliding the idea of indecisiveness. As a result, Basset removes a moment that might remind the reader of the fact that More’s own martyrdom had been criticized as overly hesitant. As if to forestall any further objections to More’s cautious behavior, Basset’s translation defines timorous martyrdom as a combination of physical and mental suffering, heightening More’s contention that Christ exhibited hesitation to provide comfort to later martyrs: “Wherefore forasmuch as Christ dyd foresee, that many ther wold be so tender of body, that . . . they shold fele themselfes so feareful & faint-herted [meticulosam], & . . . uppon feare to be enforced to faynt and geve over [vincerentur], might mishap wilfully to yeld & not go through [se dederent], Christ vouchsaves therefore I say [added], to comfort theyr weake spirites with the example of his own sorow, heaviness, werines, & incomparable feare” (*DtC*, 101; *OS*, 1357G–H; *YE*, 1089–90). Here Basset highlights More’s emphasis on the mental weakness of these timorous martyrs with a judicious use of amplification: “meticulosam”
(fearful) becomes “feareful & faintherted,” “vincerentur” (they would be conquered) becomes “be enforced to faynt and geve over,” and “sua se sponte dederent” (they would willfully surrender themselves) becomes “mishap wilfully to yeld & not go through.” These doublets underscore More’s argument that a timorous martyr must conquer the frailties of both flesh and mind. Basset furthermore adds in “therefore I say,” drawing the reader’s attention to the significance of Christ’s intention to use his Passion to legitimate a careful approach to death. It is tempting to identify this “I” as evidence of Basset’s authorial voice. Since these words are not in the source text, it might seem that Basset—and not More—is the one speaking so emphatically. Yet Basset’s own marginal note on “mandragora” demonstrates her encouragement of the idea that her voice does not exist within the translation proper. This emphatic “I” is neither More nor Basset but the version of More that Rastell’s edition works to construct: the martyred More. Basset therefore shapes her source text to fit political circumstances even as she glosses over her manipulation of More’s legacy, much as her mother’s translation sought to adjust Erasmus’s reputation.

Basset’s marginal notes function as an even more overt means of heightening the text’s relevance to More’s final days. Since the treatise argues that those who are “over feareful and faintharted” should consider “this bitter agony of Christe” (OS, 1370E–F; YE, 1111), the subject matter of De tristitia could be taken as an indicator that More qualified as a timorous martyr. Two of Basset’s marginal notes make this parallel between More and Christ even more explicit by pointing out the unfinished nature of the text and reinforcing More’s martyrdom (see figure 3). In doing so, Basset parleys her capacity to speak for More into a new role as his editor, gaining a greater amount of authorial agency in the process. One note emphasizes More’s inability to look over the text, presumably because of the seizure of his writing materials: “I have not translated this place as the latine copye goeth, but as I judge it shoulde be, because my graundfathers copy was for lacke of laysure never wel corrected” (OS, 1399E; YE, 1157). Here Basset refers to a particularly tricky passage, which both she and the Yale editors rearrange for the sake of clarity: “Whan I consider here these woordes of the Evangelyste that they all forsoke him and ran awaye, I can nowe no more doubte, but that he went to theym all and found theym all a slepe” (OS, 1399E; YE, 1157; DtC, 563). More had placed the biblical quotation at the end of the sentence, an awkwardness that Basset corrects while drawing attention to More’s final “lacke of laysure.” Basset mentions her correction of another imperfection in the text to similar effect. As the Yale
Figure 3. Page 1399 of *The Workes of Sir Thomas More* (1557), which includes Mary Basset’s translation of Thomas More. Reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
edition’s facsimile of More’s manuscript shows, a gap remains after this sentence: “Whereupon at lengthe they lefte him all alone, and got theym clearye from hym. Whereby were verifyed both this sayinge of our saviour Chryste, This nighte shall ye all have occasyon in me to fall and this prophecie lykewyse.” Basset’s translation provides a suitable “prophecie” by citing Jesus’s reference to Zechariah 13:7 in Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27: “I will stryke the shephearde and the shepe shall be scattered abrode.” Basset explains that she herself has interpolated this phrase: “This prophecie . . . was not writen in my grandfathers copye, & therfore I do geasse that this or some other like he woulde hymselfe have written” (OS, 1399F; YE, 1157). These lapses in the source text allow Mary Basset to develop her own editorial authority, shown by her repeated use of “I,” as she makes revisions denied to her grandfather by his untimely death. The legitimacy of these changes derives from Basset’s role, both self-appointed and established by Rastell’s paratexts, as a representative of More. Basset must not only write in her grandfather’s “english phrase” but also anticipate what he might have written (“he woulde hymselfe have written”). This very need for Basset to act as More’s editor due to his “lacke of laysure” reinforces the text’s partial nature and confirms More’s martyrdom. Significantly, the majority of marginal notes in More’s Workes are didactic in nature, summarizing the gist of a passage or identifying allusions. As a result, Basset’s editorial interventions are unprecedented within the Workes, further marking the singularity of her role as More’s representative and editor.

That Basset’s voice exists only on the peripheries of the text she translates may appear to substantiate the idea that translation subordinated the voices of early modern Englishwomen. Yet this marginal space allows Basset an active—and visible—role as a shaper of More’s message. Indeed, she colludes with Rastell, who appends a brief note to the end of the text that also notes the work’s unfinished nature to gesture at More’s martyrdom: “Syr Thomas More wrote no more of this worke: for . . . sone after was he putte to death” (OS, 1404; YE, 1165). Even more strikingly, Rastell’s preface to the translation parallels More’s execution with Christ’s Passion: “(eaven when he came to th’exposicion of these wordes, Et injecerunt manus in Jesum) [More] was bereaved and put from hys bookes, pen, inke and paper, and kepte more straightry than before, and soone after also was putte to death hymselfe” (OS, 1350; YE, 1077–78). At the moment that the Roman soldiers lay their hands on Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane (“Et injecerunt manus in Jesum”), so Henry’s stricter imprisonment abruptly ends More’s narrative. Rastell’s use of the intensifiers “also” and “hymselfe” highlights the similarity between the
The printed translations of Margaret Roper and Mary Basset offer a basis for a fresh understanding of the relationship between women, translation, and the domestic sphere. While Hyrde and Rastell characterize both translations as the result of domestic leisure, their descriptions parallel those found in prefaces written by male translators, whose translations evoked a private life that that complemented their public personae as gentlemen and public servants. As an idealized daughter and wife, Margaret Roper used her leisure time to translate Erasmus, and this composition could in turn serve as evidence of the More family’s private commitment to humanist study. A lady-in-waiting to Mary I, Mary Basset translated More’s *De tristitia* for her own pastime, demonstrating both filial piety and a personal commitment to Catholicism that was congruent with the Marian Counter-Reformation. In addition, Basset’s privacy recalled both her mother’s example and More’s retreat from the world, allowing Basset’s translation to pass as More’s own words. In categorizing these translations as private compositions, Hyrde and Rastell simultaneously vouchsafed the translators’ modesty and politicized their texts. Furthermore, both Roper and Basset demonstrably reshaped their source texts in ways that attempted to alter public views of Erasmus and More, underscoring the translator’s ability to intervene in public debates without speaking independently. Even Basset’s marginal notes sought to elide her own voice and to substantiate the version of More that her translation presents.

The complex ways in which Hyrde, Roper, Rastell, and Basset negotiated the public and private sphere indicate that we must pay closer attention to apparently formulaic declarations prefacing women’s texts if we are to understand better the ways in which these works functioned. Although it is tempting to view male-authored prefaces to women’s translations as a form of patriarchal control that elides women’s agency,
in many cases these prefaces mark the cooperative nature of these enterprises. By offering an interpretive framework for the female translator’s work, a male collaborator could suggest that the translator conformed to the stereotypically feminine virtues of silence, chastity, and obedience even as he legitimated a public display of learning that might otherwise seem presumptuous. Hyrde and Rastell may appear to limit and even erase the agency wielded by Roper and Basset, but the ways in which their paratextual frameworks operate in concert with the translations themselves suggest that both editors and translators were working collaboratively on joint projects. If Hyrde and Rastell associated these translations with More’s private life, Roper and Basset themselves were responsible for producing the translations that supported such assertions. Besides demonstrating the translators’ considerable learning, these works subtly transformed Roper’s and Basset’s source texts into an outlet for their political aims. As cooperative participants in the fashioning of their public reputations, Roper and Basset eschewed public speech even as they manipulated the public voices of the works’ male authors. By collaborating with men who praised their feminine modesty, these women developed a covert form of authorial and political agency thanks to the very prefaces that asserted their domesticity.