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Sent: Tuesday, December 22, 2020 2:26 PM
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Subject: LEDs Journal Article for Coldiron Faculty #92851 request

Request #92851

Submitted on Tuesday, December 22, 2020 - 14:25

Submitted by user: Anonymous

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Status: Faculty

Department: English

Item Type: Journal Article

Title: Journal of the Printing Historical Society

Book/Journal Call number: Z124.A2 P7

Article Title: Review of English Printing verse translation...

Author: Wilson, Louise

Page Numbers: 93-94

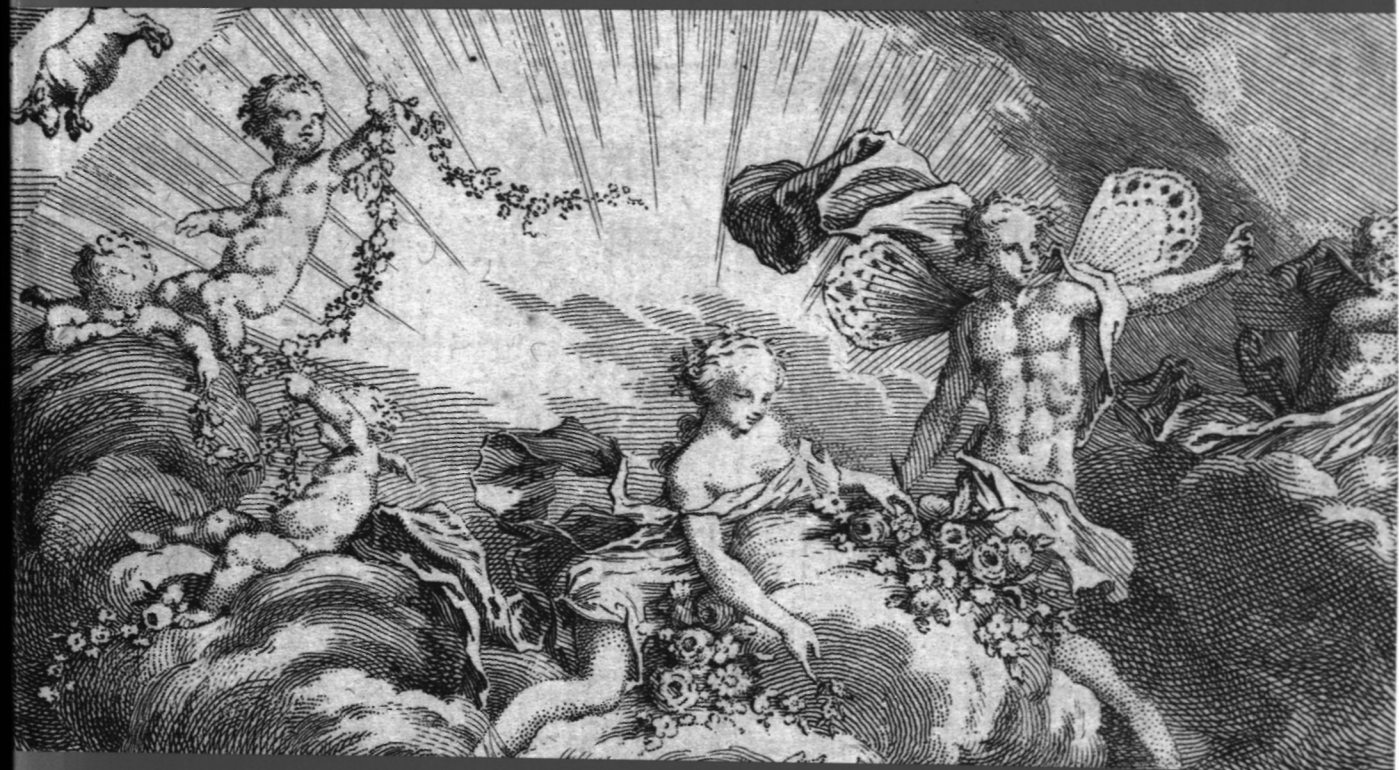
Journal Article Year of Publication: 2012

Volume(Issue), page numbers: vol 18-19, pp 93-94

Request Notes: Thank you!

Journal
of the

Printing
Historical
Society



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n. s.
no. 18/19
2012

NEW SERIES number 18/19 2012

Anne E. B. Coldiron, *English Printing, Verse Translation, and the Battle of the Sexes, 1476–1557*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2009, 234 × 156 mm, pp. 280, ISBN 978-0-7546-5608-1, £60, illustrated.

Part of the 'Women and Gender in the Early Modern World' series, Coldiron's study begins with the modest claim that 'This book is a recovery project, bringing to new light a body of early printed poetic translations about women, marriage and gender relations'. Mindful of the restricted access to such texts, she is keen to make them available to a wider readership than academics with access to large library collections and Early English Books Online (EEBO) – an act, she points out, likely to mimic the wider, non-elite availability of the texts at the time of their original printing. The monograph presents, explains and glosses early poems on women. It includes long appendices which transcribe several of the poems Coldiron discusses but which are not available in modern editions, but in each chapter she moves beyond a simple exposition of the poems to a complex thesis that argues that the poems in their early material forms are sites for 'the transformational arts of early English print ... the technical and aesthetic experiments in language and media that the first two or three generations of printers used'. Positioned between the more frequently studied 'medieval' and 'Renaissance' canons, the poems exemplify a crucial moment in the twin transformative acts of translation and printing.

In the introduction/chapter one, Coldiron sets out her thesis that translators reshaped their French source material for both aesthetic and intellectual reasons and that, moreover, printers often 'strenuously repackaged' the material themselves, imposing stylistic, intellectual, and material changes to position the texts towards their English readers. Therefore both translators and printers made interventions in the texts which we might term 'literary', working to please and also challenge the literary tastes of the new readership. These multiple acts of revision are read as symptomatic of contemporary attitudes to women and marriage, and also expose a rich vein of literary material outside of the more frequently studied romances, and courtly and Petrarchan texts of the period.

Chapter two focuses on the French writer,

Christine de Pizan, whose writing on the misogyny of French literature was widely debated in early fifteenth-century France. It revises current critical opinion to argue that she was not suppressed or ventriloquised when translated into English but rather presented as a wise and authoritative writer; however, in presenting her in this way, translators and printers moved away from her work on gender and concentrated instead on texts such as the *Prouerbes moraulx*, which were framed by Caxton and Pynson as authoritative advice.

Chapter three presents a number of early poetic translations on 'bad men': the first, an early printed debate poem, the *Interlocucyon betwixt a man and a woman*, was significantly reshaped in English translation to allow greater space to the female speaker; the *Letter of Dydo to Eneas*, a single-voiced poem provided a critique of the ideal of the romance hero; and the *Beaute of Women*, a moralising and prescriptive poem of uncertain sources. The latter text, which has no female speaker, silences and fragments the female subject and is accompanied by a lewd title woodcut. Taken as a group, the poems illustrate the range of debate on the nature of women available to early modern readers; what is more, they show the re-shaping of French material from various textual and manuscript sources, the paratextual reframing of the material often at odds with the 'argument' of the text, and – perhaps most significantly – by the 1520s, printers keen to exploit visual marketing strategies in the form of woodcut images.

The final three chapters all concentrate on the presentation of marriage in poetry. Chapter four, on the prologue and proem to the *Fyftene Joyes of maryage*, discusses the translation of a popular misogynistic anti-marital satire, which follows its French source. However, the treatment of the paratexts is of particular interest: one French epilogue which makes a promise to women readers to rectify their vicious treatment in a subsequent text is not translated (perhaps because the printer did not have access to a version containing it) but a frame containing non-misogynistic arguments against marriage is translated. Wynkyn de Worde places woodcuts in the text in similar positions to the French source but chooses different scenes to illustrate the text; Coldiron suggests that their ceremonial style complements the Chaucerian literary pretensions of the translation, with both

working to distance the translation from the racy French original.

Chapter five focuses on a pair of marriage complaints, the *Complaynt of them that be to soone marryed* and the *Complaint of the to late marryed*. Robert Copland, a printer, poet and translator printed a number of satirical works on women and translated the two complaint poems which were printed by de Worde. The translator and printer worked together to reshape the poems: Copland adds a ribald and self-deprecating authorial acrostic to the first poem, and also adds an acrostic to the second which is imitative of the French author Gringore's acrostic to the French version of the *Complaint of the to late marryed*. Copland avoids identifying his texts as translations, however, and works to present the two complaints as a pair; moreover, the English woodcuts present the texts as a discussion among men, unlike the French woodcuts' representations of conversation between men and women. Coldiron suggests that the paratextual attempts to frame the poems as male discourse create a dissonance with the insistent female voice in the poems.

Chapter six discusses John Heywood's *A Mery Play berwene Johan Johan the husbunde, Tyb his wyfe, and Syr Johan the preest*, the only Tudor translation of a French sexual farce. While Heywood translates with artistic sympathy from the French original, he chooses not to advertise the 'Frenchness' of the work. Coldiron notes that the lack of paratexts means that it is particularly difficult to decipher the aims of the translator and printer in Englishing the play.

The book is generously illustrated with images of early modern pages under discussion although, in a work so concerned with the interventions of printing agents, it is a shame that the images are not presented in a more aesthetically pleasing and user-friendly fashion; some fill only half of an otherwise blank page, and one must rotate the book to view others. Some might find the structure of the book unsatisfying with each chapter organised around a case study, multiple strands of exposition and inquiry within each chapter and no final conclusion, but Coldiron is explicit that this particular treatment is demanded by the diffuse nature of the material and the plurality of her approach. She notes that 'real literary change is messy', and invites others to investigate the numerous points she outlines more fully. Her work is richly

detailed, thoroughly researched and extensively footnoted, and is set forth with great clarity and readability. It makes a valuable contribution to our thinking about the cross-cultural and material dimensions of translation in the first decades of print and its impact on conceptions of gender in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. For print historians, there is much of great value in the historical accounts of the agency of makers of the material text and in the detailed analyses of paratexts, woodcuts and *mise-en-page* which, she argues, were not only exciting and experimental in the first age of print but shaped printing in an enduring way.

Louise Wilson