

Review

Reviewed Work(s): English Printing, Verse Translation, and the Battle of the Sexes, 1476-1557 by Anne E. B. Coldiron

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keep close to a cheap edition of Tasso's text; while the American version of 2000 can be read on its own terms, but only if one reminds oneself that Tasso's style is quite a different proposition from Asolen's.

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*English Printing, Verse Translation, and the Battle of the Sexes, 1476–1557.*  
 By Anne E. B. Coldiron. Pp. vii + 264. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009.  
 £49.50.

Anne E. B. Coldiron's book studies a group of late medieval French popular poems deriving from the *querelle des femmes* and their English translations dating from the early decades of English printing. An introductory chapter on print, translation, and poetics in the period is followed by an account of the English reception and translation of Christine de Pizan's work, with a case study of her *Prouerbes moraulx*. Here Coldiron persuasively challenges the common view that Christine was suppressed or ventriloquized in England. In the remaining four chapters she offers detailed comparative readings of the French and English versions of seven further verse texts showing how the shift from French to English and from manuscript to print reshaped the texts, created new paratexts, changed the relationship between text and illustration, and quite altered the perspective, tone, and cultural significance of the original. Three of the poems chosen debate the nature of women: *Interlocucion, with an argument, betwixt man and woman* (from Guillaume Alexis' *Débat de l'homme et de la femme*), *The Letter of Dydo to Eneas* (from Octavien de Saint-Gelais' French reworking of Ovid's *Heroides VII*), and *The Beaute of women* (from an unidentified original). Two are marriage complaints: *A Complaynt of them that be to soone maryed* (from the anonymous *Complaincte de trop tost marie*) and *The complaynte of them that ben to late maryed* (from Pierre Gringore's *La complainte de trop tard marie*). One is a long misogynous satire, *The Fyftene Joyes of Maryage* (from the anonymous *Quinze joyes de mariage*); and one is a farce, *A mery play between Johan Johan the husbande, Tyb his wife, and Syr Johan the preest* (from the anonymous late fifteenth-century *Farce du pasté*). Three appendices provide transcriptions of four of these texts, together with the paratexts accompanying *The Fyftene Joyes of Maryage*.

Coldiron's work constitutes a 'recovery project' of unfamiliar texts and an unfamiliar culture. She increases our knowledge of early English printing and the dissemination of non-canonical works; she offers easier or more attractive access-routes to these works than EEBO or a few research libraries allow; she develops at large a sense of their historical and cultural contexts; and she rebalances English literary history by giving due weight to works that are intermediary between French and English, between script and print, and between medieval Franco-Burgundian culture and later Tudor culture. Rewriting literary history in this way, Coldiron gives novel prominence to issues of translation. Translation, negotiating its outcomes between at least two literary and cultural systems, is instructive about both systems, while its study informs the most plausible interpretations of literary history in this period. It challenges the complacent acceptance of the autonomy of literary production and received notions of what it means to be an author and what it means to create an 'original' text. The translated poems on women, marriage, and gender relations that Coldiron discusses form, she says, 'a wide-ranging record of precise moments of cultural contact'. At her hands they enable a nuanced account of how such contact works. Translation and translators transmit new knowledge and transform cultural norms, but they also exhibit a process of give and take, illustrated with admirable clarity in this under-researched area of anti-feminine poetry.

Coldiron's examination of these early printed poems renders the boundary between 'medieval' and 'Renaissance' extremely hazy. The reproduction and enduring popularity of these late medieval originals, in however modified a form, display the continuities in the literary and intellectual cultures of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. By inviting us to consider the importance of 'popular' as well as 'courtly' translated texts in literary history, Coldiron locates the level at which such continuities work, not in the translations of 'elite' or 'prestige' texts belonging to the *translatio studii*, nor only in translations of popular devotional or hagiographical material, but also in English renderings of French works that addressed such perennially pleasing topics as women and marriage, and that had proved their popular appeal and commercial attractiveness on the Continent.

The attention to translation and print history together is one of the most interesting and original features of Coldiron's book, as well as one of the most needed. H. S. Bennett's remarks on printed translation in *English Books and Readers 1475–1557* are already forty years old. Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards, writing in the *Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, Volume III, make the point that one of the

'most notable continuities' in the period was supplied by English translations from French. Edward Wheatley, writing in the *Oxford History of Literary Translation in English*, Volume I, briefly remarks the link between translation and the new print culture. Coldiron, however, turns suggestive asides into historical argument by examining a manageable corpus, closely comparing source and target texts, describing translation methods, and setting the discussion of each work within the context of early modern print. Context is of crucial importance to her critical method. Exploiting the 'full, polyglot and international' context of her specimen texts, the 'comparative new historicist' method she has elsewhere argued for (*Comparative Literature*, 2001) delivers their rich potential. She thus offers a model for the study of early modern translations.

Print technology permits a novel treatment of paratexts and encourages radical interventions on the part of the translator. Coldiron's chapter on *The Fyftene Joyes of Maryage* shows how the printer Wynkyn de Worde and his anonymous translator collaborate in offering a new prologue and an adapted 'Prohemye of the Auctor' that together impose a cultural filter on the French prose source, making it fitter and more accessible for an English audience. The invented Chaucerian prologue 'translates' the work into a different and specifically English literary context, while the 'prohemy' contains omissions, additions, and changes that shift its criticism of marriage from playful to serious. Print technology also encourages new developments in the management of illustrations. By exploiting at little cost the visual appeal of illustration, print creates commercially attractive possibilities for the bookseller. And by making available a stable repertory of images, it emblematically fixes a set of attitudes to women and marriage.

Methodologically sound, original, sensitive in its interpretations of both source and target texts, and written not without humour, as befits the texts being discussed, Coldiron's book invites us to rethink poetic translation as well as literary history in the early decades of the sixteenth century. The book has its shortcomings. Coldiron's dismissal of prose translation as a medium in which 'the conveying of content is the main goal, and departures from content are relatively few or at least relatively clear in rationale', is rather cavalier. While it is true that poetic translation entails negotiating questions of prosody, form, and lineation, prose translation too, despite what she says, requires attention to issues entailed in the management of point of view, voice, tone, intertextuality, and especially – as Burton Raffel has argued – syntax. Literary prose contains varying levels of 'poeticity' that issue their own challenges to the translator. Coldiron's