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# Review of Printers without Borders: Translation and Textuality in the Renaissance

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# Review of Printers without Borders: Translation and Textuality in the Renaissance

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*Printers without Borders: Translation and Textuality in the Renaissance.*

A. E. B. Coldiron.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. xv + 340 pp. \$99.

This important book is indispensable reading for scholars of Renaissance translation studies, but its interdisciplinary scope makes it valuable for scholars of book history and Renaissance literatures, particularly English. Readers will gain important insights on the international transmission of texts and culture and on the ineluctable presence of the foreign in English. As described in her introduction, A. E. B. Coldiron draws from the disciplines of translation studies and book history to detail printing's contributions as a "co-process" of translation. Alongside the translators, English Renaissance printers were central agents in the mediation of foreign literary resources, and the design elements of the text — such as typeface, page layout, ornamentation — are as much a translation as the text itself. The book explores these dual forms of verbal and "material-textual" Englishings in ten case studies taking place between 1473 and 1588, which Coldiron divides into three translation processes: catenary, radiant, and compressed.

Chapter 2 discusses catenary translation, or nonlinear translation patterns, through three works printed by William Caxton: *Recuyell of the Hystories of Troye* (1473), the *Dictes or Sayengis of the Philosophres* (1477), and Alain Chartier's *Le Curial* (1483). The *Dictes*, for example, defies the normal *translatio* trajectory (Greek-Latin-Italian-French-English) by moving from Arabic to Spanish, and then to French and eventually English, with a back translation into Latin along the way; Coldiron traces these permutations of text and paratext in manuscript and print by translators, scribes, illuminators, and printers. The next process, radiant translation — the printing of the same work in multiple languages — is covered in chapter 3. Coldiron's focus text here is the *Quadrins historiques de la Bible*, printed by Jean de Tournes in seven different languages, including English, from 1553 to 1564. Coldiron analyzes the paratexts accompanying the translations to show how Tournes and the translator tailored each version for its specific language community. For example, the English paratext expresses anxieties about its illegitimate linguistic status vis-à-vis the Continental vernaculars.

The final three chapters cover varieties of compressed translation, where untranslated foreign texts share the page with English ones, which "intensify the reader's experience of the foreign" (159). Chapter 4 focuses on John Wolfe's 1588 trilingual edition of Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*. Coldiron demonstrates how the edition's *mise-en-page* forces English readers to encounter the Italian and French versions. This printer-facilitated interlinguistic acculturation embodies the aspirational principles of a late Tudor "polycultural courtiership" (196). In chapter 5, Coldiron treats readers to the first extended scholarly treatment of a rare octolingual broadside celebrating England's 1588 victory over the Spanish Armada: "Ad Serenissimam Elizabetham Reginam," printed by

George Bishop and Ralph Newbery. Applying polysystem theory, Coldiron shows how the English verse jockeys for a victory “in the world-poetics microcosm” of the broadsheet in analogue to the nation’s victory over the Spanish (213). Finally, chapter 6 samples a century worth of macaronic verse. Through her survey of this neglected genre, Coldiron demonstrates how printer and author exploited the “untranslated residues” of foreign texts so as to be “harmonizers of difference or inflammatory sites of discord and rupture” (270).

Each case study seems to challenge some ossified beliefs about Renaissance translation and literature. Catenary translations subvert the linear transmission of texts embodied by the *translatio*. Radiant translations complicate nationhood strictly defined by language and political borders. Compressed translations correct the narrative that appropriative English translation fully naturalized the foreign source text. And, overall, Coldiron shows how monoglot-based understandings of literary culture are incomplete: English literature is indelibly shaped by the foreign and still contains a “vibrant foreign presence” (3). The transmission of texts during this period was more dynamic and less insular than most of our criticism would have us believe.

Coldiron convincingly argues that English Renaissance literature depended on printers without borders, and this book succeeds so well because the author herself is so comfortable moving across disciplines. In a bravura interpretive display, Coldiron draws from the resources of French and English literary criticism, translation studies, and book history as she analyzes typefaces, title pages, illustrations, *mise-en-page*, poetic forms, paratexts, ornaments, and translations. Coldiron remarks that she is not sure “that we write our best, richest literary history inside the strict limits of nation and language” (283), and her book is proof positive of the richness of a literary criticism without borders.

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