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Hamlin, Hannibal and Norman W. Jones (eds.).

The King James Bible after 400 Years: Literary, Linguistic, and Cultural Influences.

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xi, 364. ISBN 978-0-521-76827-6 (hardcover) \$39.99.

The gong of the Bible has resounded for centuries. Marking the quadricentennial of the publication of the King James Bible, this excellent collection of essays by distinguished scholars explores its resonances, iconoclastic interpretations, and resignifications in our language, literature, and cultural history. Remarkable for the richness and breadth of insights, the essays clarify both the potential blasphemy and contested readings initiated by the act of translation.

Successfully avoiding AVolatry, Hamlin and Jones's introduction is a concise recall of the perils of the 'unapproved' translator, in the examples of the burned and strangled, exhumed, and burned remains of Wyclif and Tyndale. The editors also underscore how, following the Hampton Court conference, the sanctioned work of the company of translators—"doubtless all in buckram suits," as Stephen Prickett quips later in his essay—was in reality a recension of Tyndale, Coverdale, Geneva, Bishops', and Rheims texts. As well as surveying the impressive scope of the contributors' chapters, they enlarge the possible field by alluding to the biblical resonances in the work of Canadian poet Jay Macpherson and novelist Margaret Laurence along with the Ezekiel-like incantation in Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* and the revision of Jacob wrestling with the angel in Kushner's *Angels in America*.

Essays by Stephen Prickett and Robert Alter draw attention to the KJB's "steady gravitational pull on the ordinary speech, not to mention poetry, of future English" (38) and, despite inaccuracies, "the solemn music of the language" (57). Prickett explains some of the ways the "King James steamroller" came into existence, flattening the differences between Hebrew, Aramaic, and Koine Greek into a "dignified amalgam" (33). Tyndale's translation of *ecclesia* as "congregation," which was interpreted as handing over control from the clergy to the "rank-and-file in the pew" (30), was replaced by "church;" and the military associations of "heavenly soldiers" for *stratias ouraniou* became "heavenly host," thus passing into the language "without scholarly falsification" (31). Concentrating on Ecclesiastes, Alter makes the case for the elegant plainness and compactness of the Hebrew, often not caught in the proverbial

English translation. The well-known “vexation of spirit” is, according to Alter, “altogether wrong” (51). The vivid Hebrew metaphor, *hevel re’ut ruah*, capturing the futility of human endeavour, conveys the sense of “mere breath,” like “herding the wind.” Assuming the joint roles of linguist and construction engineer, Alter maintains that the injunction against idleness, in which “the building decayeth” and “the house droppeth through” (10:18), misconstrues *yimakh* (to go down low or sag); a more accurate and clearly understood rendering would be “Through sloth the roof-beam sags and through slack hands the house leaks” (55).

Whether dealing with famous opponents or upholders of the clerical establishment, the essays start new kinds of conversations about the KJB. Jason Rosenblatt comments on Milton’s metrical translations of Psalms 80–88, observing how Milton’s notation of *chased* in 86:2 as “*I am good, loving, a doer of good and holy things*” may “actually be superior” (185) to the KJB. Hannibal Hamlin’s essay on Bunyan, whose *Pilgrim’s Progress* is “all Bible, all the time” (207), speculates about the function of the mysterious word *Selah*, frequently appearing in Psalms. That this diacritical marker is Christian’s last word, Hamlin suggests, “is a sign of just how rooted in the Bible Bunyan’s writing tends to be” (211). Isabel Rivers explicates the harmonized organization of dissenter Philip Doddridge’s *Family Expositor*, showing how its paraphrase, footnotes, prayer, and meditation made it the most original commentary by an eighteenth-century evangelical. Adam Potkay’s focus on Wordsworth, Shelley, and Blake demonstrates how they re-shape biblical phrases, so rich in indeterminacy and such “sublime affronts to clear representation” (220). While the “still sad music of humanity” might recall I Kings 19:11–12, Wordsworth’s whole passage in “Tintern Abbey” registers “opposition to ‘harsh and grating’ commandments” (222). With an antithetical bravado removed from providential wisdom, Blake’s Proverbs of Hell “celebrate energy, action, and exuberance” (227).

As the editors forecast, one of the striking features of this examination of the KJB’s 400-year history is the continuous working of the text “often in new and surprising ways—when contested” (21). Katherine Clay Bassard surveys the polarizing roles of the KJB in African American literature, as both a text of oppression prized by white ‘missionary’ slaveholders and a conjure book of the miraculous and supernatural effecting radical social change. Bassard’s argument is especially powerful in examining the de-authorizing challenge mounted by Denmark Vesey, David Walker, and Nat Turner to the reading of

the KJB as a racialized pro-slavery text. Heather Walton's treatment of Jean Rhys and Elizabeth Smart illustrates their unorthodox but generative coupling with the KJB.

The range and depth of the volume's contributions by leading scholars convey the fructifying, continuing capacity of the word that "watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater" (Isaiah 55:10).

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Horodowich, Elizabeth.

Language and Statecraft in Early Modern Venice.

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. xi, 245 p. ISBN: 978-0-521-89496-8 (hardcover) \$85.

Ces dernières années, les historiens subissent de plus en plus la fascination de l'oralité et du rôle qu'elle a joué dans l'évolution des sociétés. Cet engouement pour la parole non écrite remonte certes aux études incontournables de Walter Ong, mais, en ce qui concerne l'histoire d'Italie, c'est à Peter Burke que l'on doit la première tentative de créer une « ethnographie rétrospective », à savoir une discipline fondée sur une cartographie de l'oralité en tant que pratique sociale de la communication. Burke avait repéré plusieurs objets de recherche, notamment les manifestations verbales liées à l'exercice des pouvoirs judiciaires : les blasphèmes, les injures et aussi le « gossip », à savoir le commérage avec ses répercussions sur la réputation des personnes visées et concernées.

Le livre de E. Horodowich se situe exactement dans ce sillage méthodologique, en essayant d'étudier les objets de cette recherche dans un contexte bien précis, autant d'un point de vue géographique que chronologique : la Venise du XVI^e siècle (mais aussi des premières décennies du XVII^e). Horodowich articule son discours autour de cinq chapitres, dont l'objet est, à chaque fois, bien délimité, pratiquement autonome par rapport à l'organisation générale du volume. Le premier et le dernier chapitres sont consacrés à ce qui avait été écrit (et publié) au sujet de l'oralité par les théoriciens de l'art de la conversation (chapitre 1) ainsi que par les courtisan(e)s, dont les affirmations étaient