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Tyler, Margaret. Mirror of Princely Deeds and Knighthood. Ed. Joyce Boro

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Tyler, Margaret.

Mirror of Princely Deeds and Knighthood. Ed. Joyce Boro.

Tudor & Stuart Translations 11. Cambridge, UK: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2014. Pp. ix, 279. ISBN 978-1-907322-16-7 (hardcover) US\$44.99.

The genre of “romance” in early modern Europe encompasses a broad category of literature containing verse and prose, and a wide variety of subjects. In English, romance literature has long been divided between highbrow verse and lowbrow prose. This distinction has been handed down from sixteenth-century critics and has meant that the verses of poets like Sydney, Spenser, and Shakespeare have received far more scholarly attention than the prose works of Greene, Nash, and Heywood. All of these works contain sexuality and violence, but in verse romance they emphasize notions of chivalry and honour for the social elites; in prose romance, sex and violence tended to be used in a more salacious manner and were meant for proletarian consumption. The verse-prose divide, as described, was not universal to Europe; for example, Iberian prose romance had a much higher status and engaged in portrayals of honour and nobility. However, the divide in English literature has proved tenacious, and prose romance has remained a lesser cousin to verse romance, at least until recently.

Margaret Tyler’s *Mirror of Princely Deeds and Knighthood*, first published in 1578, is a translation of Diego Ortúñez de Calahorra’s Espejo’s prose romance *de príncipes y caballeros* (1562). It is a tale of knights on honourable quests in far off lands, and slaying giants by the score. Tyler’s work focuses on the elite topics of knighthood and honour, but, being a work of prose has, until recently, been overlooked in English scholarship. Tyler’s work has also been tainted by a disdain held by modern scholars for works of translation. Nevertheless, the *Mirror* is a notable work of Elizabethan literature for two reasons: it was the first romance of the Iberian tradition to be translated into English, and, more significantly, it is a very early example of a woman’s work on a secular topic published in England.

Tyler’s book has thus generated considerable interest from scholars in recent decades. For example, there were three different editions of the *Mirror* published between 1997 and 2001. Joyce Boro’s critical edition published in 2014 will naturally elicit the question of whether another edition of such a frequently published work is needed. The answer is an unqualified yes. Boro’s introduction does a fine job of summarizing the previous fifteen years of intense scholarly

interest on Tyler's work, and clearly articulates avenues for further investigation and inquiry.

Although building on the work of other scholars, Boro concisely reviews how the study of Tyler's romance has moved from the novelty of a woman writer standing out in a male-dominated discipline to a more nuanced criticism of specific issues, some of which move away from discussions of gender. Certainly, Tyler's erudition for a woman who was a servant in a noble household still garners attention; it has naturally prompted interest in the education of women in early modern England, and their role in a literary culture. Thus the disdain for English prose romances, both by writers of the sixteenth century and by literary scholars of the twentieth century, has been turned on its head. The genre is now seen as defining an identity of women as literary consumers. Moreover, scholarly work on Tyler's romance, through the investigation of Tyler's editing and alteration of the Spanish original, has helped to challenge the modern scholarly bias against translation as literature and to blur the line between author and translator.

Boro's edition of the *Mirror* meets the needs of an academic user. The footnotes provide an in-depth explanation of editorial choices and expository information. Boro provides the textual differences between the various sixteenth-century editions of the book (1578, 1580, 1590, and 1599). She also provides a full glossary of the original vocabulary. Some readers may disagree with the decision to put these last two sets of information as separate appendices and not as part of the footnotes, but, this is largely a matter of taste. The only other criticism one could make is the choice to present the text in modern corrected spelling. For the modern academic, this is only a trivial point; modern databases make it easy to find a digital copy for the original spellings. Yet the modern spelling, which makes the text more accessible to a public audience, seems to be at odds with the physical layout of the book: the folio size prohibits informal reading. Overall, however, the book is a strong contribution to three areas of study: early modern women writers, early modern translation in general, and English romance literature.