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Rhodes, Neil (ed.). English Renaissance Translation Theory.
Intro. and notes by Neil Rhodes in collaboration with Gordon
Kendal and Louise Wilson

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Rhodes, Neil (ed.).

English Renaissance Translation Theory. Intro. and notes by Neil Rhodes in collaboration with Gordon Kendal and Louise Wilson.

Tudor and Stuart Translations 9. London: Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA), 2013. Pp. 543. ISBN 978-1-907322-05-1 (hardcover) \$44.99.

The series in which this title appears is dedicated to the publication of major translations—those best known to contemporaries—from what they are calling “the long sixteenth century,” from Caxton to the early Stuarts. If the present volume is representative, these editions are modernized both for spelling and punctuation, with glosses at the end, curiously, and notes at the bottoms of pages—notes which become, of necessity, streamlined and at times bibliographically cryptic, entailing some index work in the originals if you want to track down specific passages. The placement of these components could have been reversed, but that may just be my old habits. I must say my pinched heart delights in seeing the accommodation of modern readers with fully mediated texts, shedding the pointless pedantry which for so long prevailed while losing nothing whatsoever of substantive value. My reservations aside about the presentation, the glosses and footnoted materials have been judiciously chosen and clearly expressed. (I’m now, of course, talking about the present edition.) There are “textual notes” as well, outlining the substantive variants in multiple editions both early and modern, painstakingly identified by their STC numbers.

It is what scholars do, but the look of a series of winning lottery numbers will surely keep reader fingerprints out of those margins.

Neil Rhodes's volume is a most important odd one out for being not a translation but instead a handbook to the series consisting of a generous and representative collection of the most engaging statements made by Tudor and early Stuart translators and "theorists" about the arts and methods of translation, whether as philological exercises, a humanist mission, an act of cultural appropriation and transmission, or a contribution to literary nation building. Rhodes opens his introductory essay with a discussion of the rhetorical terms through which the translators of that age were inclined to assess their practices, beginning with *interpretatio*, which covers both translation *tout court* of a word-by-word kind, as well as imitation, through which practice the sense is translated into sense in accordance with audiences, cultural leaps, necessary paraphrase, stylistic echelons, and moralizing glosses. The ambiguities and latitudes permitted by that term alone encircle most of the debates of the age, more often grappled with metaphorically and morally than technically. "Dialoguing with sources," for example, is a metaphor that struggles to comprehend the computational processes of the mind, with its residual lexicon, elected stylistic constraints, and perceived rhetorical mission, by which the act of textual transmission and recreation is constrained. But the early theorists had no other terms of access to the cognitive aspects of the act where texts meet the aptitudes of the human brain. Rhodes fully recognizes the degree to which this struggle for precision with a limited vocabulary falls short of our modern notion of "theory," and hence the worry marks. Nevertheless, these early statements (prefaces for the most part) seek to come to terms with the gamut of choices as their authors understood them, characteristically teetering between debts to the donor text, its culture, vocabulary, and style, serving as potential models for the extension of English writing, and the need to make it common for English readers in their own linguistic and cultural dialects, as it were. Certainly they are conscious of such matters as philological precision in contradistinction to the use of paraphrases, interpretations, axiomatic summaries, syntactical doubling, and moralizing inferences. Rhodes's introduction, in this regard, provides an excellent analysis, as he moves chronologically through the three categories of writers into which the anthology is organized, placing the contributors in their respective contexts—some of them characterized by acrimonious debate.

The prefaces and excerpts from early treatises take up pages 73–458, and constitute a miscellany of the 56 most representative contributors. Only the lack of something by Sir Thomas North, the greatest translator of them all (do I hear rumblings?), came to my mind, and not much mention was made of the Leicester Circle in general, but this is not a history of translation per se. These texts are subdivided into: “Translating the Word of God,” “Literary Translation,” and “Translation in the Academy.” This could make for a great conference round table, whether the entire early modern translating enterprise might be carved up best under these or other headings. But the present division works for me. Rhodes’s introduction is wonderfully enlightening on the challenges, polemics, and dangers of translating the Bible. What sources should be used: Septuagint, Vulgate, or Hebrew? Should the unwashed be given the sacred texts to shred up with misguided zeal? Thomas More did a complete about-face on that one. Will Reformation Bibles not be tilted towards embedded heresies? Which approaches make the scriptures common to all? Which cater to a stylistic elite? Can the job be done for all time in relation to emergent cultures? Read Tyndale, Coverdale, and the translators commissioned by James I; it is stimulating stuff. Then we bounce back to Caxton and his self-debate over the uniformity of print, the diversity of English readerships, and the tendency to translate everything for the readers at court. Taking these “literary” prefaces *seriatim*, there is a study to be made of the chronological progression of views that accompany the emergence of commercial printing, increased literacy, and the rise of the “common reader” and women readers, making for a history perceived through the choices of translated texts and their chosen styles. Tellingly, some translators began to see themselves as public servants and benefactors. Humphrey identifies the translator with the orator, and then proceeds to identify the qualities of the man requisite to a qualified and trustworthy translator: clean living makes for clean texts. Analogical inferences kept spreading along lines of cultural shaping and influence. Attached to the very act were questions about alien manners and mores, English good-enough patriotism and xenophobia versus curiosity, cultural enrichment, and renescent learning for non-specialists. By the end of the period, commentators like Drant were treating the classical authors, themselves, as hacks, and the English translations of their works as conquests and elevations. Meanwhile, the metaphors describing translated texts became more fanciful, as in seeing them as strangers welcomed to England where, once naturalized, they have no right to complain of the

hospitality. There is an implicit progression from reticence to the downright cockiness of cultural conquistadors.

Well, you get the idea. Not only is the anthology representative, but it is rich in the diversity of opinions expressed. In sum, this addition to the MHRA Tudor and Stuart Translation series is a welcome labour of love. Honour is due to Neil Rhodes and his collaborators for ferreting out these many texts, editing them skilfully, annotating them appropriately, glossing them efficiently, and introducing them intelligently. The work of Gordon Kendal and Louise Wilson (who collated the texts and compiled the commentary on the variants) should also not go unsung. Needless to say, this is a must acquisition for those interested in those redoubtable early English translators as artisans and cultural mediators reflecting, after the fact, upon how the instruments of translation do what they do, and according to whose bidding.

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