

GENDERING THE LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN WORLD



Kirsten Inglis

# Gifting Translation in Early Modern England

Women Writers and  
the Politics of Authorship

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# Gendering the Late Medieval and Early Modern World

This series provides a forum for studies that investigate women, gender, and/or sexuality in the late medieval and early modern world. The editors invite proposals for book-length studies of an interdisciplinary nature, including, but not exclusively, from the fields of history, literature, art and architectural history, and visual and material culture. Consideration will be given to both monographs and collections of essays. Chronologically, we welcome studies that look at the period between 1400 and 1700, with a focus on any part of the world, as well as comparative and global works. We invite proposals including, but not limited to, the following broad themes: methodologies, theories and meanings of gender; gender, power and political culture; monarchs, courts and power; constructions of femininity and masculinity; gift-giving, diplomacy and the politics of exchange; gender and the politics of early modern archives; gender and architectural spaces (courts, salons, household); consumption and material culture; objects and gendered power; women's writing; gendered patronage and power; gendered activities, behaviours, rituals and fashions.

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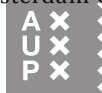
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# Giftling Translation in Early Modern England

*Women Writers and the Politics of Authorship*

*Kirsten Inglis*

Amsterdam University Press



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The publication of this book is made possible by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Cover illustration: Federico Barocci, *Quintilia Fischieri*, c. 1600. National Gallery of Art  
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Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden

Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 94 6372 120 2

e-ISBN 978 90 4854 296 3

DOI 10.5117/9789463721202

NUR 685

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# Acknowledgements

I have been tremendously fortunate to have had the support of the most wonderful family, friends, and mentors through the process of researching and writing this book. It is dedicated to the memory of the two most influential women in my life: Hilary Inglis and Gwen Pease.

My deepest thanks to Mary Polito, Jim Ellis, and Susan Bennett of the University of Calgary, whose guidance through the development of this project was invaluable and whose friendship and collegiality has been truly a joy. I am grateful for Christina Luckyj's perceptive questions many years ago in a classroom at Dalhousie University, which became the genesis of this research, and for the generous and thoughtful mentorship of Patricia Demers many years later, which influenced this work at a crucial point in its development. I would like to thank the staff of the archives whose work of caring for and offering access to manuscript materials makes possible research such as this; I feel privileged to have worked in the British Library; the National Archives of Scotland; the University of Edinburgh Library; the Bodleian Library; Christ Church Library, Oxford; the Kent Archives; and the Inner Temple Library. The incomparable Banff Centre offered solace and solitude to write what became the final chapter of the book. I am indebted to the ideas sparked by lively conversations with colleagues at various conferences including the Rocky Mountain MLA; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; British Shakespeare Association; ACCUTE; and the Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies. The financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada afforded me the time and the ability to travel to carry out this research. I am sincerely grateful for the support offered by the funding they provided at the doctoral and postdoctoral level. Thank you to Erika Gaffney for her patience and kind support, and for the work of the AUP readers and editors who made the work so much stronger. Special thanks are due to Lourdes Arciniega: without your encouragement, the theatre nights, and all that coffee, this work would never have come to fruition. Derek, Mara, and Sonja: my light, my life, my loves, there is not world enough nor time to thank you for all you give. Thank you for walking hand in hand with me through it all and for your unfailing love and support.



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# Introduction

## 'Transformance': Renaissance Women's Translation and the Performance of Gift Exchange

**Abstract:** This introduction situates the translational practice of early modern women writers within its historical and political context and argues for the essential connection between translation and gift culture in early modern England. The introduction offers a brief history of translation theory and practice in the period by examining medieval and Renaissance paratexts such as dedications and prefaces. The introduction considers these in connection with modern theories of translation and argues for seeing the early modern translations studied in the book as participating in a translational ethics rooted in the idea of 'transformance'. Translation as performance and resistance is effected through the patronage networks and gifting practices of early modern England.

**Keywords:** gifting; patronage; Renaissance; translation; women's writing

*The feminist translator immodestly flaunts her signature  
in italics, in footnotes – even in a preface*  
– Barbara Godard

Barbara Godard describes in the epigraph above a translational practice completely at odds with the model of translation prevalent from the end of the seventeenth century and still largely privileged today, in which the success of a translation is judged by the 'invisibility' of its translator and its illusion of transparent transfer of meaning from one language to another. Translators and theorists have strenuously challenged this model in recent years, with Lawrence Venuti the most 'visible' of these commentators. Transparency, the absence of linguistic or stylistic peculiarities, effectively 'conceals the numerous conditions under which the translation is made,

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Inglis, K., *Gifting Translation in Early Modern England: Women Writers and the Politics of Authorship*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023

DOI 10.5117/9789463721202\_INTRO



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starting with the translator's crucial intervention'.<sup>1</sup> Venuti and others find such transparency ethically problematic, as it silently colonizes the source language of a text and elides both the translator's creative work and her cultural biases. The epigraph from Godard above emphasizes the way in which the twentieth-century feminist translator challenges the ideal of transparency, working to emerge from the shadow of her source text and make herself visible in the materials and paratexts of her book. For Godard, feminist discourse *is* translation as it 'set[s] out to "destroy the discursive mechanism" by assuming the feminine role deliberately, in an act of "mimicry," which is to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation and to challenge an order resting on sexual indifference'.<sup>2</sup> Godard asserts that feminist discourse must first of all define itself within and against the dominant, masculine language even as it seeks to find a space wherein women can represent themselves and exert their agency by means of a new language. In this way, all feminist writing must be translation, as it sets out to transform masculine discourse into a language capable of articulating female agency.

This study examines manuscript translations made by four women of the English Renaissance and argues that these translations – by subverting dominant modes of discourse through the act of translation, both linguistic and inter-semiotic and the performance of self/identity through the conventions of gift-giving – participate in what we would now recognize as feminist discourse. The term *translation* as I use it throughout the study is informed by Godard's notion of feminist discourse and translation as 'transformance'. Transformance describes the way in which feminist discourse challenges the 'poetics of transparency and ethics of wholeness of writing oneself into existence through writing directly one's own experience' and instead allows for a 'poetics of identity that [...] emphasize[s] the work of translation, the focus on the process of constructing meaning in the activity of transformation, a mode of performance'.<sup>3</sup> Godard and other feminist translators frame their discourse in terms of issues of identity and difference, arguing that language as a masculine construct alienates women and forces them outside dominant literary discourses. For Godard, feminist translation (and feminist writing) works from within this space of otherness in order to articulate and make visible a poetics of identity that seems to at once deny and subvert the dominance of male discourse. While the English Renaissance women

1 Venuti, *Invisibility*, p. 1.

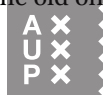
2 Godard, 'Theorizing', p. 90.

3 *Ibid.*

considered in this study are far from the feminist project of creating a new language within which to frame female selfhood, I argue that for these women, translation offered a way in which to express a 'poetics of identity' that at once conformed to and subverted dominant social conventions around women's literary and political participation.

Mary Bassett (c. 1522–1572), Jane Lumley (1537–1578), Jane Seager (fl. 1589), and Esther Inglis (1571–1624) each translated an existing printed text into English; each woman translated her source text on a linguistic level – from Greek, or Latin, or French into English – and also translated on an inter-semiotic level – from print to manuscript, sometimes with striking additions in terms of painting, drawing, needlework, calligraphy, and bindings. I suggest throughout this study that the late Renaissance offered a transitional moment in the conceptualization of translation and that each of these women recognized and exploited the ambiguities of translational authority during the period so as to maintain the ability to both claim and repudiate a politicized speaking voice. The early modern women of this study, like the feminist translator described in the epigraph from Godard, make themselves visible through the materials and paratexts of their manuscripts and through established conventions of gifting and patronage. The intersection of translation and Renaissance gift-culture has been little studied; I suggest that Bassett, Lumley, Seager, and Inglis adroitly negotiate the rhetorics of translation *and* gift-culture in order to articulate personal identities and political and religious affiliations and beliefs. The translations examined here were produced between the mid-sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, in the period immediately prior to the solidification of the ideal of the invisible translator, and the women who produced them capitalized on a moment during which ideas of authorship and translation were very much in flux. These writers recognized and utilized this transitional moment in order to enter into political discourse.

The theoretical framework through which I conceptualize Renaissance translation in this way is twofold. On the one hand, contextualizing women's translations in terms of Renaissance ideas about originality, authorship, and transmission reveals the degree to which these writers understood and made use of competing discourses surrounding translation and gift-culture in order to authorize their literary self-presentations. On the other hand, approaching these translations through the language of feminist and post-structuralist theory that underlies current thinking about translation allows for a more flexible, inclusive, understanding of translation – one in which the translator and her interventions are central to the new text, rather than peripheral to the old one.



## i. Tracing Early English Theories of Translation: Middle Ages to Renaissance

Translation theory in the English Renaissance inherits a paradoxical (and sometimes competing) framework in its conceptualization of the relationship between author and translator (and source and target culture) that is related to the shifting value of literary 'authorship' in this period. As I discuss below, medieval translation of secular texts generally (and of course it is unwise to speak in generalities about so complex a subject as translation) took a 'freer' and more creative approach to translation in the sense that translators felt justified in changing and reshaping source texts to ensure their beauty and utility in the English culture. Such an approach threatens to make the translator's work invisible, as the new text thus *seems* transparently English. However, the paratexts of medieval translations are frequently self-reflective, explicitly reflecting on the processes of translation and forcing the reader to acknowledge the labour of translation. The English Renaissance inherits both this medieval model of translation and the developing humanist model of translation, in which translation is conceived of as the exercise of studiously rendering a source text into English with the greatest possible degree of accuracy and fidelity to the original. In the humanist model, the original author's intention becomes paramount and the labour of the translator tends to be elided, while in the former model, the goals of the translator and the usefulness of the text to the target culture take precedence. The complex framework of Renaissance translation is shaped by changing understanding of identity and authority in this period.

Many critics have identified a shift from collective to individual identity and the concomitant shift from authority to author that occurs throughout the early modern period. Michel Foucault famously calls this a 'reversal' and locates its origin in the late seventeenth century, when 'scientific discourses began to be received for themselves, in the anonymity of an established or always demonstrable truth', while 'literary discourses came to be accepted only when endowed with the author function. We now ask of each poetic or fictional text: From where does it come, who wrote it, when, under what circumstances, or beginning with what design?'<sup>4</sup> The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries marked the beginning of the end of the ambiguous and fluid translation practices of the Middle Ages as the centrality of the original author and thus the importance of fidelity to him began to be more strongly asserted.

4 Foucault, 'Author', p. 109.



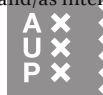
Nevertheless, the early Renaissance inherits a great deal from the medieval period in terms of thinking about translation, and there are some striking consistencies in the vocabulary of and imagery associated with translation from period to period.<sup>5</sup> Critics tend to identify the medieval period as one in which translation was particularly fluid or flexible, eschewing literality and the authority of the source in favour of an interpretive strategy based in experiential knowledge. The text's authority over its translator can be mitigated by personal experience during this period: 'Where the translator could visualize in his own terms, or add understanding on several dimensions, he stretched fidelity beyond the literal'.<sup>6</sup> As Sherry Simon puts it, '[d]uring the Middle Ages, the boundary between one's own words and those of another was fragile, equivocal, often purposefully ambiguous'.<sup>7</sup> This kind of translation allowed for a wide range of practices to be considered under its aegis and, in many cases, encouraged translators to reflect on their particular practice in prefaces and epistles to the reader. These paratextual materials are what critics now look to in formulating a theory of medieval translation, but their very particularity (of purpose, practice, audience, etc.) makes it difficult to articulate a single, coherent theory of translation in the Middle Ages.

The distinction made in early prefaces between word for word and sense for sense translation is central to formulating a medieval theory of translation. Alfred's preface to his translation of Gregory's *Pastoral Care* is one well-known example. In it Alfred identifies both the pragmatic reason for his translation – the decline of scholarship in the monasteries and the consequent loss of knowledge available only in Latin editions – and notes that in forging an Old English prose style that remains true to the Latin of his source, 'ongan ic ongemang oðrum mislicum ond manigfealdum bisgum ðisses kynerices ða boc wendan on Englisc [...] hwilum word be worde, hwilum andgit of andgiete' [I began among other various and manifold concerns of this kingdom's to translate the book into English [...] sometimes

5 In what follows, I am drawing on ideas about secular, not scriptural translation. As Neil Rhodes points out, biblical translation in English was 'more vexed' than in any other language ('Introduction', p. 5). For English Renaissance theories of scriptural translation specifically, see Rhodes's introduction to *English Renaissance Translation Theory* (pp. 6–30). Other recent work on translation theory in the Middle Ages and Renaissance includes Blumenfeld-Kosinski, von Flotow and Russell, *Politics of Translation* (2001); Kittel et al., *Übersetzung, translation, traduction* (2008); Le Blanc and Simonutti, *Le masque de l'écriture* (2015); and Ballard, *Histoire de la Traduction* (2013).

6 Kelly, *True Interpreter*, p. 208.

7 Simon, *Gender in Translation*, p. 44. See also Guillermin, 'L'intertextualité démontée' (1984) for a consideration of translation and/as intertextuality.





word for word, sometimes sense for sense].<sup>8</sup> Critics have sometimes taken these strategies – of word for word fidelity and sense for sense exegesis – to be opposing theoretical positions on translation, in this period at least. As Nicholas Watson argues, however, these strategies, inherited from Horace's *Ars Poetica* and Augustine and Jerome's early biblical translations, are in fact 'conceived as interlocking pragmatic resolutions of this conflict [between literal meaning and linguistic construction], not as differing theoretical positions'.<sup>9</sup> Alfred's early invocation of these ideals in his preface bears out Watson's observation, as do many early translation prefaces that comment upon and develop a theory of translation based on pragmatism and necessity, in the service of original authors but not in thrall to them.

The pragmatism of translation theories in the Middle Ages leads critics to characterize the period as one in which relatively 'free' translation was the dominant paradigm. Daniel Russell describes medieval and early Renaissance translation's cultural imperatives when he argues that 'the goal of the translation was not to replicate, with as much reproductive accuracy as possible, the original text and the intent with which the author had produced it. On the contrary, the goal was usually to appropriate the text being translated for the needs of the target culture'.<sup>10</sup> Thus the translator had relative freedom to make interpretive changes to the source text depending upon his or her own personal obligations and/or cultural requirements. Not only was there greater freedom to manipulate the original text, but Russell concludes that the name of a source text's original author 'was a mere name attached to a text and drew his or her authority only from the text; the name implied no specific intention and left the work open to appropriation for other localized needs in other cultures'.<sup>11</sup> It is this malleability and flexibility of authority that allowed medieval translators to work in what we now consider to be a strikingly liberal framework.

I do not want to suggest that this framework was taken for granted or without consideration by medieval translators. On the contrary, the role and responsibilities of the translator with regards to his or her source text and target language were taken seriously by translators and readers alike. Flora Ross Amos, in an early study of medieval and Renaissance translation theory, finds that medieval translators were very much in the habit of commenting

8 Alfred, 'Preface', para. 5. Translations throughout the book are mine, unless otherwise noted.

9 Watson, 'Theories of Translation', p. 74.

10 Russell, 'Introduction', p. 29.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 34.



on their creative process, and she notes that ‘there is an advantage in their very garrulity’; still, Amos seems frustrated by the quality of the theoretical discussions by translators like Bokenham, Caxton, and Lydgate, calling their comments ‘confused and indefinite’ and lamenting that ‘they do not recognize any compelling necessity for faithfulness’.<sup>12</sup> John Lydgate reflects on the question of faithfulness and the translator’s privileged position in regards to his source when he comments on Laurent de Premierfait’s *Des Cas des nobles hommes et femmes* (1409), Lydgate’s intermediary source for *The Fall of Princes* (pub. 1527):

In his [Laurent’s] prologe affermyng off resoun,  
 Artificers hauyng exercise  
 May change and turne bi good discrecioun  
 Shappis, formys, and newli hem deuyse,  
 Make and vnmake in many sondry wyse,  
 As potteres, which to that craft entend,  
 Breke and renew ther vesselis to amende.<sup>13</sup>

Lydgate here ascribes great responsibility to the translator. The translator (‘artificer’) has the right – due to his ‘exercise’, or experience, and ‘discrecioun’ – to make substantial changes to the matter and form of his source material. In Lydgate’s formulation, the source text becomes the clay which the translator-as-potter can and must reshape to suit his own ends. The violence of the image of the translator breaking his vessel in order to amend it may tempt us to recall Lawrence Venuti’s objections to modern practices of transparent translation in which the target language violently extinguishes all remnant or remainder of the source language’s cultural otherness. As I have suggested, however, one of the things that distinguishes medieval and early Renaissance models of translation from the problematic, invisible ideal of modern translation is the visibility of the translator in the paratexts of the new work. While modern translators may work without comment (or even recognition in many cases), the very processes of dedication and reflection in medieval translations render the translator and his practice visible to the reader.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Amos, *Early Theories*, pp. 46, 45.

<sup>13</sup> Lydgate, *Fall of Princes*, Book I Prologue, ll. 8–14.

<sup>14</sup> To extend Lydgate’s metaphor then, modern translation amends its vessel by reshaping it and filling the cracks so as to be invisible. The reader is never meant to consider the shape of the original vessel. On the other hand, medieval translation practice, through its paratexts

Lydgate's Italian contemporary, Leonardo Bruni, articulated one influential model of Renaissance translation theory in his 1420 treatise *De interpretatione recta*. This text espoused the first coherent theoretical formulation of translation as the transfer of one text from one language to one other language by one writer, and Belén Bistué has argued that Bruni's treatise inaugurated the humanist model of translation with its innate respect for the sanctity of the original author and concomitant elision of the labour and creative input of the translator. Bruni's text is innovative in a number of ways; it uses, for the first time, the verb *traducere* to designate linguistic translation. The word's Latin meaning 'designated a physical transfer, from one place to another, or from one status to another, as well as a passage through time'.<sup>15</sup> In addition to this lexical innovation, Bruni's treatise implemented radical new guidelines for the translator and his craft, guidelines the significance of which we fail to appreciate since they now form our foundational understanding of translation practice.<sup>16</sup> Bruni presents three central criteria for 'the correct way to translate': the translator must have a 'wide, idiomatic, accurate, and detailed' knowledge of both the source and target languages; he must appreciate and attempt to render the rhythmical qualities of the original; and finally, he must attempt to retain the stylistic properties of the original.<sup>17</sup> The rigour Bruni demands of the translator's knowledge and skill recalls Lydgate's claim that the translator has the right to change his text by virtue of his experience and skill. Bruni differs from Lydgate, however, in his insistence on the primacy of the original. In Bruni's formulation, the translator's principal responsibility is to the particularities of his source, while for Lydgate the translator is responsible primarily to his own and his culture's needs. This distinction highlights the changing conceptions of authorship and translation in the period; the fact that these two conceptions could and did exist simultaneously illuminates the competing discourses surrounding translation and the transitional nature of this period in translation theory.

and practices, reshapes the vessel with its cracks still visible to the reader. It forces the reader to recognize the original and the labour of the translator.

15 Bistué, 'Task(s)', p. 142.

16 There is little evidence regarding the extent of Bruni's influence in early modern England. His treatise was known among humanist scholars and provoked lively debate in works by Alfonso de Cartagena, for example. This suggests that Bruni's ideas proliferated amongst educated humanists and were likely available to English humanist thinkers and translators. For a discussion of humanism and *De Interpretatione*, see Charles le Blanc, 'Introduction'.

17 Bruni, 'On the Correct Way to Translate', pp. 218–20.



While humanist ideals such as Bruni's encouraged fidelity and responsibility to the source text and – more importantly – to its author, many translations in this period nevertheless exercised great freedom in their shaping of the new text. The ideal of humanist translation spread, but its acceptance occurred along different timelines in different European nations. F. O. Matthiessen argues in his early and tone-setting study of Renaissance translation that early English translators felt a great freedom to change and shape their source material:

Perhaps his [the translator's] greatest gift, that which more than any other accounts for the freshness and vigor of his work, was one that he shared with the dramatists of his day. He had an extraordinary eye for specific detail. Whenever possible he substituted a concrete image for an abstraction, a verb that carried the picture of an action for a general statement. The result was an increased liveliness, a heightened dramatic pitch that often carried the words into a realm of imagination and feeling unsuspected by the original. Theoretically, there may be no defense for such a method of translating, but in practice it succeeded as no other method could. For it made the foreign classics rich with English associations; it took Plutarch and Montaigne deep into the national consciousness.<sup>18</sup>

Matthiessen celebrates the free-spirited approach to translation that he identifies in English Renaissance translations as a patriotic and nationalistic project that helps to consolidate the English language as one capable of poetic greatness. Lawrence Venuti finds such a domestication of the source text to the target language problematic in modern texts that perform their work of domestication violently and silently and thus deny a translational practice 'motivated by an ethics of difference' that he considers essential in ethical translation.<sup>19</sup> The Elizabethan translators, however, do not perform their work silently, and many Renaissance translations are accompanied by paratexts in which their translators sign their own names and illuminate the work of domestication they perform.

This approach, grounded in freedom and liberality, in fact coexisted in the period with the humanist-inspired ideal of fidelity to the original author and his text. Thomas Hoby, for example, subscribes to a translational theory grounded in literality. He claims in his preface to Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* to 'have endeavoured my selfe to follow the very meaning and

18 Matthiessen, *Translation*, p. 4.

19 Venuti, *Scandals*, p. 115.



wordes of the Authour, without being misledde by fantasie, or leaving out anye parcell one or other'.<sup>20</sup> Massimiliano Morini argues that this stated intention 'finely sums up the awe these early translators felt towards their originals'.<sup>21</sup> However, as many commentators have noted, taken in conjunction with his actual translation practice, Hoby's claim to literalism seems disingenuous. This tension between translation theory and practice in the period allows for a unique space within which women writers could insert their own voices through the perceived 'safety' of translation. The works of Bassett, Lumley, Seager, and Inglis studied here all rely on (and at times actively exploit) this space between contingent authority and authorial agency. What makes their works unique is the intersection of translation and materiality in their texts and the participation of their works in the cultural practice of early modern gifting.

There is a rich and diverse body of scholarly research on early modern women's translation, and I think it is important to situate these writers within this critical context. As many scholars have observed, women were active translators of classical and vernacular texts, and their textual interventions frequently represented important avenues for self-representation and social and/or political agency.<sup>22</sup> Tina Krontiris's foundational study, *Oppositional Voices* (1992), argues that translation offered women an unprecedented opportunity to write and publish in a society that valued women's silence and obedience. Because writing-women wanted to have their voices heard and listened to, they had to 'accommodate rather than reject dominant notions regarding virtuous female behaviour'.<sup>23</sup> Krontiris cites Margaret Tyler's preface to her translation of Diego Ortúñez's Spanish romance *The Mirror of Princely Deeds and Knighthood* (1578) as an example of the way in which women could safely hide behind an already authorized male author through the act of translation. Krontiris reads Tyler's statement that translation is 'a matter of more heed than of deep invention or exquisite learning' as a pre-emptive counterargument for the charge that a woman should not be translating and publishing a secular romance.<sup>24</sup> Margaret Tyler in fact argues strenuously for her right to translate the Spanish romance despite the fact

20 Hoby, *The Book of the Courtier*, p. 6.

21 Morini, *Tudor Translation*, p. 20.

22 Women's works of translation could of course also be framed by others in order to serve specific political or personal ends. See, for example, Gemma Allen's discussion of Matthew Parker's prefatory letter to Anne Bacon's 1564 translation of John Jewel's *Apologia Ecclesiae Anglicanae* (in 'Lady Anne Bacon's 1564 Translation').

23 Krontiris, *Oppositional Voices*, p. 22.

24 *Ibid.*, pp. 78–79.



that her readers might believe it to be ‘a matter more manlike then becometh my sexe’.<sup>25</sup> Tyler uses various strategies to authorize her text, including her age and middling social status, both of which helped to guard against the charge of wantonness or promiscuousness in the publishing of a print romance. She also uses the fact of translation to help legitimize her publication of the text, reminding her reader that ‘[t]he inuention, disposicion, trimming, & what els in this story, is wholly an other mans, my part none therein but the translation’.<sup>26</sup> While it may sound like Tyler is attempting to ‘hide behind’ Ortúñez’s already authorized work, her rhetoric is far more complicated as she at once distances herself from the text and claims her authority for and over it. Tyler, like many other Renaissance translators, revels in the paradox that although the work is ‘an other mans’, she herself is sufficiently responsible for the new text that she could be censured for its content and suitability. It is no accident that Tyler describes her work of translation in the terms used by other Renaissance poets to describe the function of poetry when she tells her reader the book is ‘by me [...] done into English for thy profit & delight’.<sup>27</sup> Renaissance translations demand that we read the complicated and self-conscious way in which the translator manipulates conventions of hierarchy and authority, source and target text.

Anne Bacon’s 1564 translation of Jewel’s *Apologia Ecclesiae Anglicanae* (see note 22) is an important example of the complexities of the translator’s agency. In the case of this text, a prefatory letter is supplied by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker. Allen notes that the preface supplied by Parker ‘is a deliberate framing device, designed to obscure any suggestion that this translation fulfilled official needs’. This framing is significantly at odds, Allen argues, with the textual evidence of Anne Bacon’s translation.<sup>28</sup> Alan Stewart calls the letter – which claims Bacon’s translation was a domestic production, a private exercise sent unsolicited to Parker – ‘blatantly disingenuous’.<sup>29</sup> In this case, the paratextual material supplied by someone other than the translator works to obscure the collaborative nature of the translation (Stewart suggests, for example, that some of the revisions to the translation must have been authorized by Parker) and to encourage its reception as the production of a learned, pious gentlewoman writing for pleasure and devotion, rather than as a work with official connections

25 Tyler, *Mirroure of Princely Deedes*, A.iii.r.

26 *Ibid.*, A.iii.v.

27 *Ibid.*, A.iii.r.

28 Allen, *Letters*, p. 6. See also Allen’s *Cooke Sisters*; Demers, ‘Neither bitterly nor brabingly’ and ‘Introduction’ (2016); and Magnusson, ‘Imagining a National Church’.

29 Stewart, ‘Voices’, p. 93.



to the men who commissioned it, Parker and William Cecil.<sup>30</sup> Alongside the 'official' positioning of the work in its paratextual materials, however, are the textual interventions of Bacon herself, which include such aspects as the 'credal emphasis' of the translation, Bacon's use of Old and Middle English words in her translation (in line with contemporary translation theory) and her use of the first person pronoun; all of these interventions, Allen argues, are ways in which 'Anne imposes her personal agency on the translation'.<sup>31</sup> Bacon's authorial agency as translator paradoxically coexists with the paratextual framing of her voice as domesticated, a simple conduit for textual meaning in this complex work of translation.

The potential for women to use translation as a genre for self-expression has long been acknowledged. Margaret Hannay's influential *Silent but for the Word* (1985) argued that such expression included the political: 'women occasionally subverted the text, even in translation, in order to insert personal and political statements'.<sup>32</sup> While Hannay recognizes the capacity 'even in translation' for women to assert an authorial or political identity, she hardly overstates the case and, in light of much subsequent work on women's translations, perhaps understates it quite radically. I argue here that translation, particularly when combined with other representational media, offered the most effective means for a woman in this period to assert a public, personal, political, and literary identity. Women who translate are not simply taking advantage of what Deborah Uman calls a 'valuable loophole' that allows women to write without 'breaking the restrictions of silence, obedience, and chastity';<sup>33</sup> rather, they are engaging with an important, effective, and controversial genre of writing that cannot necessarily be considered 'safe' simply because it contains the name of another, original, author. Translation and the competing and complex authorities inherent in it offer an unprecedented way for women of the English Renaissance to voice political and personal affiliations.<sup>34</sup>

30 Ibid., pp. 93–94.

31 Allen, *Cooke Sisters*, pp. 65–70.

32 Hannay, *Silent*, p. 4.

33 Uman, *Women as Translators*, p. 11.

34 Religious translation, which is beyond the scope of this study, is an important and of course highly politicized genre in which women translators of this period worked. As Femke Molekamp has noted, 'translation was [...] a vital tool of the pan-European Protestant Reformation, which placed individual reading of the scriptures at the centre of devotional life. The Bible was translated and retranslated into a host of European vernaculars, with the aim of extending the personal act of reading the scriptures to the widest possible readership, without compromising accuracy' (p. 151). The translation of scriptural and devotional materials in the period was a significant and politically fraught arena of textual production, and works in translation could and did

The writers considered in the study – Mary Bassett, Jane Lumley, Jane Seager, and Esther Inglis – avail themselves of the competing imperatives around translation that coexisted at this point in time. They each rely to some extent on the perceived ‘safety’ of humanist translation with its deference to the original author, but they also remove themselves from that safety through their employment of earlier models of translational strategies, paratexts, and participation in patronage networks.<sup>35</sup> On the one hand, these women translated with a fluidity and interpretive purpose that was at odds with the emerging paradigm of faithful, invisible translation and that resembled more closely earlier models of the translator’s task. On the other hand, they also claim an authorial position and privilege through the signing of their proper names to their translations and in their efforts to circulate their work (and themselves as learned personages) within a system of patronage and gifting that helped to establish literary works as objects of value and their authors’ names as commodities.

## ii. A ‘Renaissance in Translation Studies’? Contemporary Translation Theory

The post-Enlightenment paradigm of the invisible translator and the transparently accessible target text has been challenged in recent decades by theorists like Venuti and Godard, cited earlier, and by practitioners like Caroline Bergvall and Robert Majzels and Claire Huot in their postmodern translations of early-period texts.<sup>36</sup> Such recent challenges to the dominant

intervene in the religious and political controversies of their time. See, for example, Micheline White’s ‘Renaissance Englishwomen and Religious Translations’ and Jaime Goodrich’s *Faithful Translators*.

35 On translation as collaboration and the importance of paratexts in asserting the translator’s authorial agency, see Smith, *Grossly Material Things*, pp. 30–40. In Chapter 2 of the same work, Smith offers a nuanced discussion of women’s participation in patronage networks, which she argues must be construed broadly, ‘reflecting the broader social networks and occasional or contingent aspects of the interwoven discourses and practices of patronage’ (p. 54).

36 These translators challenge the ideals of fidelity, unity, and transparency in works like Bergvall’s ‘Shorter Chaucer Tales’ (collected in *Meddle English*, 2011) in which the translator reworks Middle English tales using a variety of strategies including translation, transcription, homophonic translation, and pastiche. The work of Robert Majzels and Claire Huot in their ‘85s’ project likewise participates in an ethics of translation that destabilizes historical notions of translation and works to ‘apply a non-mastering ethical view of the translator’s task’ (para. 2). The project translates Chinese poems into English visual poetry. Each poem consists of 85 letters and forces the reader to confront the words of the poems in vertical lines without spaces between the words, asking the reader to question her response to cultural and literary ‘otherness’.



paradigm have not yet had a major impact on mainstream publishing and academia. Ideas about the relatively valueless nature of the translator's labour, I suggest, continues to colour our current perceptions of the value of translation in the early modern period.<sup>37</sup>

Luise von Flotow observes in 'Translation in the Politics of Culture' that the devaluation of translation in modern literature has much to do with cultural investment in national literature and celebration of not only individual but national 'genius', as critical attention remains focused on creative and original works that displace translation to the margins of canonical hierarchies of reading and study. Nevertheless, recent years have seen what von Flotow calls a 'renaissance in translation studies',<sup>38</sup> as critical interest in translation and its political and cultural significances increases. Von Flotow provides a succinct statement of the state of translation theory and the academy in her essay introducing the work of theorists in medieval and Renaissance translation. She uses the phrase 'a renaissance in translation studies' principally to highlight the topicality of the collection of essays she introduces; it is in fact particularly apt as it expresses the state of translation studies in general today, and, more obliquely, suggests that there may be a current renaissance in *Renaissance* translation studies.<sup>39</sup>

Not only is there a growing interest in translation across literary genres and periods as a literary activity to be studied in its own right; there is a shift in the conceptualization of the task of the translator informed by the work of post-structuralist and feminist theorists in recent decades. The formulation 'task of the translator' refers of course to Walter Benjamin's seminal essay of that name ('Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers'). Benjamin began the process of destabilizing the centrality of the author/translator to translation as he formulated the translator's task as being to 'release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work'.<sup>40</sup> Benjamin's formulation liberates the translator from servitude (as when he compares translation to a 'tangent [that] touches a circle lightly

37 Helen Smith articulates a similar problem with regard to women's translations specifically in what she calls a 'critical double bind' in which 'the devaluing of women's labour as mechanical and the devaluation of translation as derivative perpetuate each other' (*Grossly Material Things*, pp. 31–32).

38 Von Flotow, 'Politics of Culture', p. 9.

39 Such a 'renaissance' is signalled by current critical work and projects like the MHRA Tudor and Stuart translations series and University of Warwick's Renaissance Cultural Crossroads (<https://www.hrionline.ac.uk/rcc/>).

40 Benjamin, 'Task', p. 80.



and at but one point' and which then 'pursues its own course according to the laws of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux') but it imposes upon the translator a task that is surely rendered impossible in real terms: the achievement of 'pure language'.<sup>41</sup>

Benjamin's work challenged theorists like Jacques Derrida and Paul Ricoeur to recognize and worry over the paradox of a model of translation possible in theory and impossible in practice. Benjamin's 'dream of the perfect translation amounts to the wish that translation would gain, gain without losing'.<sup>42</sup> For Ricoeur this becomes attainable (at least in a compromised form) in the concept of linguistic hospitality, in which the translator must 'translate differently, without the hope of filling the gap between equivalence and total adequacy' in order to achieve 'linguistic hospitality [...] where the pleasure of dwelling in the other's language is balanced by the pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home, in one's own welcoming house'.<sup>43</sup> For Derrida, translation must be theorized in the language of gift, debt, obligation, and paradox. Derrida reflects that after Babel, God 'at the same time imposes and forbids translation [...] Translation then becomes necessary and impossible, like the effect of the struggle for the appropriation of the name'.<sup>44</sup> Derrida identifies the problem as residing in the translation itself as an object in the cycle of debt and obligation: 'the bond or obligation of the debt does not pass between a donor and a donee, but between two texts'.<sup>45</sup> It is the text that requires or demands translation: the original 'is the first debtor, the first petitioner; it begins by lacking and by pleading for translation' and it would do so even if it never found its translator.<sup>46</sup> Following the conceptual shifts begun by Benjamin and continued in the writings of post-structuralists like Derrida, important questions about translation begin to be asked anew in the 'cultural turn' in translation studies.

The cultural turn, Sherry Simon explains, includes a shift towards understanding translations as documents that 'exist materially and move about', so that critics begin to ask not what constitutes 'correct translation', but what the translation does and how it circulates.<sup>47</sup> Simon's influential *Gender in Translation* does much to situate feminine and feminist voices

41 Ibid., pp. 80, 82.

42 Ricoeur, *On Translation*, p. 9.

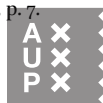
43 Ibid., p. 10.

44 Derrida, 'Tours', p. 170, emphasis in original.

45 Ibid., p. 179.

46 Ibid., p. 184.

47 Simon, *Gender in Translation*, p. 7.



in translation and she elucidates the multiplicity of ways in which gender 'reframes conditions of textual authority'.<sup>48</sup> Simon's work is foundational to this study in the way that it foregrounds feminist theory as a means of uncovering 'a renewed sense of *agency* in translation [...] [that] must be understood in relation to the various sites through which the translating subject defines itself',<sup>49</sup> and I do not wish to underestimate her relevance to the field of gender and translations studies. That said, I think Simon allows her understanding of translation theory today to colour her perception of translation in the Renaissance too radically, particularly in her assessment of women's relationship to translation.

When Simon traces (in the introduction to a book otherwise concerned with current, feminist, translation theory) the rise of the 'translatress' in the Renaissance, her understanding of the operation of authorship in the Renaissance and the fact that translation was one of the few intellectual activities authorized for a woman's participation leads her to posit an either/or situation for women translators: 'We are led to wonder whether translation condemned women to the margins of discourse or, on the contrary, rescued them from imposed silence'.<sup>50</sup> In either scenario, it seems to me, the agency in fact lies with the translation itself, rather than with its practitioner. In neither instance posited by Simon do the translators exercise agency, as *translation* itself either 'condemns' or 'rescues' them. I will argue throughout this study that the choice to translate is not one that women of the period make purely out of necessity or fear. They choose to work in translation precisely because it affords them the most effective means of expressing a specific political agenda and/or asserting an authorial identity. One would hardly suggest that translation condemned Thomas Hoby or John Florio to the 'margins of discourse'. Translation was absolutely central to the humanist educational curriculum, as is made clear in works such as (most prominently) Roger Ascham's *The Schoolemaster*.

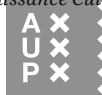
Translations in this period were 'works creating ideals and sharing ideologies, and allowing people to be part of an ever-widening reading community'.<sup>51</sup> Part of the work necessary in early modern studies is to more clearly recognize the centrality of translation in the period and to sift claims of valuelessness made in Renaissance translation-prefaces – and which are rooted in a conventional and expected modesty topos – from

48 Ibid., p. 167.

49 Ibid., p. 29, emphasis in original.

50 Ibid., p. 46.

51 Barker and Hosington, *Renaissance Cultural Crossroads*, p. xxii.



current-day preconceptions about the valuelessness of translation stemming from a critical and cultural heritage of devaluing translation as a secondary and derivative art. Translation was of central importance in creating and circulating cultural energy in a period defined by its textualities. Ideas about translation were very much in flux during this period and the translators of this study exploited the very malleability of the genre in order to express political and subject positions in their writing.

### iii. Having it Both Ways: Translation and Renaissance Gift-Culture

If the transitional nature of translation theory and practice in this period gave women an opportunity to express their personal and political agency from a position of perceived safety, the powerful, complex, networks of Renaissance patronage offered the possibility of circulating their work within specifically targeted communities of readers. Patronage, Smith argues, should be 'described as a network of associations [rather] than as a coherent system or structure',<sup>52</sup> and in the manuscripts considered here, paratextual materials such as dedicatory letters reveal the aspirations of each translator for the reception of her work by its dedicatee and its circulation among a particular group of potential readers. These manuscript gift books are material objects with perceived value within a culture of gifting, and their translators recognize the gift's potential as a means of entering into the patronage networks so crucial to the social and political life of early modern England.

The intricacies and social obligations attendant upon gift-giving in the Renaissance are explored in Natalie Zemon Davis's important study, *The Gift in Sixteenth Century France*, in which she invokes Marcel Mauss's conception of gift-giving as a system of obligation and reciprocity that nevertheless exists outside of economies of trade and exchange. Davis identifies two main conceptual strains underlying Renaissance ideas of gift giving: one, that all creation is a gift from God and humanity has a responsibility to honour Him as the original giver; and two, that humanity in-the-world is 'held together by reciprocity', a belief inherited by the Renaissance from Aristotle.<sup>53</sup> These two conceptions link human and divine giving and reciprocity and helped to perpetuate a social system within which

<sup>52</sup> Smith, *Grossly Material Things*, p. 54.

<sup>53</sup> Davis, *Gift*, p. 12.



the importance of gift-giving cannot be overestimated. Social, political, economic, and familial relationships between and among all classes were predicated on a complex system of giving and receiving that, depending on the precise situation, could be formal or informal, obligatory or free.<sup>54</sup> Cecily Hilsdale draws attention to the term 'prestation', important in the critical discussion of gift culture of this period since, instead of carrying the connotation (as 'gift' does) of a free and disinterested act: 'Prestation [...] clarifies any ambiguity about the contradictory nature of the gift. When speaking of prestation, one invokes a larger economy of indebtedness'.<sup>55</sup> This reminds us to see gifting as crucial to the 'creation and maintenance of social structures of reciprocity and bonds of debt and obligation' in the period,<sup>56</sup> and when I consider gifting in this study, it is with the broader systems of prestation in mind.

The giving of books in early modern England frequently occurred within formal occasions of gift exchange, like the New Year's gift exchange between monarch and courtiers in Tudor England.<sup>57</sup> It also occurred in more informal, voluntary ways, and it is into this latter category that the manuscripts I examine in this study fall. As manuscripts intended for limited and targeted circulation these books-as-gifts are untroubled by the ambiguity inherent in the gift of a printed book in which 'the public gaze interrupts what can be represented as a private offering, and the market and gift registers are intertwined in a highly visible manner'.<sup>58</sup> They can thus participate more easily in the tacitly and collectively maintained 'self-deception' that the gift is free and disinterested while implying the terms of reciprocity in carefully crafted epistolary paratexts.<sup>59</sup>

54 See Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *The Culture of Giving* (2008) for a comprehensive study of informal networks of gift exchange in the English Renaissance. Ben-Amos distinguishes support (gifting) into categories of informal/formal and voluntary/involuntary. Other important studies specific to gift practices in early modern England include Alison Scott's *Selfish Gifts* (2006) and Felicity Heal's *The Power of Gifts* (2014).

55 Hilsdale, 'Gift', p. 172.

56 Ibid.

57 Jane Donawerth records the fact that Tudor New Year's gift lists include books-as-gifts only from male courtiers, never from women, though Princess Elizabeth's gift of 'The Glass of the Sinful Soul' belies this as a hard and fast rule ('Women's Poetry and the Tudor-Stuart System of Gift Exchange', p. 8). Lawson has recently edited all surviving gift rolls in *The Elizabethan New Year's Gift Exchanges* (2013). It is also likely that Jane Seager's *Divine Prophecies* was given or intended as a New Year's gift to Elizabeth (see discussion of this manuscript, Chapter 3). On books as gifts in Renaissance patronage culture, see also Jason Scott-Warren's *Sir John Harington and the Book as Gift* (2001).

58 Heal, *Gifts*, p. 45.

59 Bourdieu, *Outline*, p. 6.



Each of the manuscripts considered here includes either a dedication or an epistle dedicatory to the giver's potential patron explaining the circumstances and hinting at the political and personal implications of the gift. As Jane Donawerth argues of gifts in the period more generally, the letter that accompanies it must be read as an integral part of the gift. This is certainly the case with the gift books I examine in this study, and I will read the letters both as gifts and as performances of identity with myriad and sometimes competing agendas. The gift of a book to a friend, family member, or potential patron could have immense significance in terms of the giver's own social standing, but it also (and more importantly for the purposes of this study) allowed a carefully calculated avenue for the dissemination of one's own written work.

The Renaissance system of gift-exchange offered a way of circulating works with political implications to an audience who may have been amenable to or capable of assisting in the circulation of contentious views. Translation likewise offered a medium from within which women could offer images of themselves and their political viewpoints while maintaining a pose of deniability. The conjunction of gift-exchange and translation, far from diluting self-expression, in fact allowed for a striking range of personal and political affiliations to be exercised. Translation – from the careful choice of a source text to the accompanying epistles/prefaces, to lexical choices and even decorative symbolism – allowed women an unprecedented opportunity to make their voices heard and seen by allies, friends, family, and patrons.

The chapters that follow analyse the manuscript-gifts of Bassett, Lumley, Seager, and Inglis in order to illuminate particularities in the relationship between text, translator, reader, and dedicatee. Chapter 1 considers Mary Bassett's translation of Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*, written and presented to Princess Mary Tudor c. 1547–1553. The terms of Bassett's dedication to Mary are unequivocal and even daring. Written during the reign of Edward VI, the dedication celebrates the Princess Mary, whose 'synguler and manyfolde gyftes bothe of god and nature' include learning, virtue, and piety.<sup>60</sup> Bassett and Mary shared a devotion to the Catholic faith, and Bassett refers throughout the epistle to 'my moste lefe and deryst freends',<sup>61</sup> a reference I argue is intended to remind Mary of the community of Catholic readers associated with Bassett. Far from eliding her own identity or her religious affiliations in the epistle, Bassett uses the medium of translation in order to express her loyalty and devotion to her faith and to the Princess

60 Bassett, *Ecclesiastical History*, BL, London, MS Harley 1860, fol. 3v.

61 *Ibid.*, fol. iv.



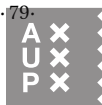
Mary as a potential defender of that faith. Chapter 1 offers a close reading of Bassett's lexical choices and what these reveal about her own cultural milieu and her articulation of both political and religious community in the manuscript.

Chapter 2 treats Jane Lumley's translation of Euripides's *Iphigenia at Aulis* in the early 1550s. The translation exists in a single manuscript held at the British Library. It is the only one of the manuscripts in this study without a clear dedication, but I suggest, based on the pattern of translation-gifting in the family, that it was likely intended for Lumley's father, Henry Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel. As Patricia Demers argues, the composition of this translation comes at a time when its subject matter – including 'the turn of fortune's wheel and the attempt to use daughters and young women to advance political power' – would have been extremely topical.<sup>62</sup> The likely date of composition includes the period of Lady Jane Grey's attempted coronation in between the death of Edward VI and the accession of Mary I, events with which Arundel was politically involved. This chapter situates Lumley's work as a translation intimately associated with the social and political events of its day.

In Chapter 3 I consider Jane Seager's *The Divine Prophecies of the Ten Sibills*, dedicated to Queen Elizabeth I in 1589. Seager crafted an exquisite physical setting for her translation of her Latin source, and I argue that the forging of the material book itself constitutes an act of translation. Like many of her contemporary translators, Seager opens her text with a dedicatory epistle that addresses the desires and purported inadequacies of the translator herself. Seager's dedication is less concerned with the kind of theoretical issues of translation that concern Bassett in her epistle dedicatory; it does, however, constitute a clear and confident statement of Seager's affiliation (specifically as a virgin) with Elizabeth I and constructs carefully the author's right to speak frankly through her translation to the Queen. Again, the text itself articulates a politicized voice, but most strikingly in Seager's manuscript, the visual imagery and dual translation into English and a shorthand system called 'characterie' combine to offer a multi-semiotic (rather than simply an inter-semiotic) translation of political and personal desire.

Finally, Chapter 4 considers Esther Inglis, the famed calligrapher, as a translator. Inglis, who dedicated and presented manuscripts to a wide variety of patrons, is in some ways the most difficult of these writers to categorize as a translator even as she is the figure most clearly associated with the

62 Demers, *Women's Writing*, p. 79.



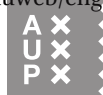
culture of gifting in the period. Many of the recipients of her manuscripts were unacquainted with Inglis, though one common thread among them is an association with the Protestant cause in England. Dedicatees include Queen Elizabeth I; Christian Friis, Chancellor to the King of Denmark; the Earl of Essex; Anthony Bacon; Prince Henry; and Prince Charles, among many others. Inglis's source texts are mostly religious works, including the *Discours de la Foy*, the *Octonaires* of Antoine de la Roche Chandieu, *Ecclesiastes*, the *Psalms*, and the *Quatrains* of Guy de Faur. Inglis often re-presents her source text in its original language or in an existing translation, though always in a highly decorated form. Despite the ostensible fact that Inglis was a copyist (in fact she is most often referred to as a calligrapher), I suggest that we can profitably approach her manuscripts from the perspective of translation. Her elaborate visual repackaging of the source texts is itself an act of translation and I consider the ways in which Inglis, working in calligraphy, in miniature, in textile and embroidered bindings, and in painting, succeeds in presenting an inter-semiotic translation that takes her source texts from the printed page into the realm of visual arts. Chapter 4 focuses on *Cinquant Emblemes Chrestienes*, the emblem book that Inglis dedicated to Prince Charles in 1624. The book reproduces forty-nine of the hundred emblems from Georgette de Montenay's *Emblemes ou devises Chrestiennes*; Inglis reassigns the forty-nine emblems to members of the English court and nobility and I argue that the striking politicality of the associations Inglis creates between each emblem and courtier is the clearest example of her work as a translator.

This particular set of translations has not previously been considered as a related group and even though the chapters are relatively self-contained case studies, as a whole this project offers a critical lens through which to read Renaissance translations in relation to the materiality of Renaissance gift culture. I conclude the study by discussing the coming shift in translational practice in the mid-seventeenth century and reflecting on the ways in which this shift affects the practices and implications of gift translations for later writers.

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