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Overview

Margaret Tyler's translation of the Spanish Romance by Diego Ortúñez de Calahorra, *The Mirror of Princely Deeds and Knighthood*, published in 1578, coincided with, and helped fuel, the contemporary boom in romance fiction, such as John Lyly's *Euphues* (1579) and Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* (1580), and was her sole venture into print. Tyler's prefatory address to the reader, which follows her dedication to her patron Thomas Howard, is the first published defence by a woman in English of the ability and equality of women writers in the world of masculine patronage, judgement, and power. It is a spirited and witty defence of intellectual equality and liberty of action, along with refutations of many key contemporary arguments used against women writing, publishing, or translating.

The Mirror of Princely Deeds and Knighthood [introductory material] in Context

Margaret Tyler prefaces her translation of the Spanish Romance by Diego Ortúñez de Calahorra, *The Mirror of Princely Deeds and Knighthood*, with two dedications: one to Thomas Howard and one to the reader. The relationship between these two dedications is telling: she acknowledges a masculine patron as a necessary dedicatee for her work before directly addressing the reader with a defence both of women as translators and of the work they produce. She explains that the work was published by friends, "reserving to my selfe the order for the dedication, so as I should thinke best either for the defence of my worke, or for some particular merite towards me" (fo. A2r). Tyler thus asserts the dedication's status as a public defence of both work and translator. The dedication to the reader is written in a straight-forward style, establishing a personal voice in dialogue directly with the reader. Tyler gives a spirited account of her ability as a translator and of the kind of work she has chosen to translate; she places both within the mainstream literary traditions of her time. She thus effectively claims equality with male writers, translators, and publishers.

The whole dedication is carefully constructed in four parts. It begins with a description of the content of the translated work and an account of its place in Renaissance literary reception theory. The second part defends the work of women translators. The third part defends Tyler's choice of original text whilst the fourth part acts as a summary conclusion. The classical clarity of the structure of her argument allows her to articulate a logical rhetorical defence of women translators using traditional humanist oratory in which she assembles evidence to prove her points, incorporates potential objections and refutes them, and is able to wittily reverse the evidence often arrayed against women translators.



Portrait of English Renaissance poet Edmund

Spenser, c. 16th century. Public domain; Wikimedia Commons. In her opening sentence to the reader Tyler places her translation within the tradition of humanist poetic theory: “by me it is done into English for thy profit and delight.” The citation of this Horatian commonplace, that the purpose of literature is profit and delight, seems innocuous. Nevertheless no other contemporary woman was to use this defence of writing. Most male writers, including Sidney, Spenser, and Nashe, utilised and expanded upon this defence since it offered a counterweight to attacks on the perceived immorality of romance and chivalric fiction. Tyler's use of this defence is, therefore, a highly strategic and public appropriation: she claims the public role of poet and educator. The remainder of her opening argument relates her aims to those of the translated work: the author's end of encouraging gentlemen to famed public exploits was also to “profit and delight.” Her shifts between declarative assertions of individual agency and defensive retreats behind the original

words of her source is a typical strategy of the defences made by women translators: they are both without and within the patriarchal restrictions on speaking and action.

In the second part of her address to the reader, Tyler directly tackles the issue of the gendering of writing. She does so by setting forth five reasons in defence of women as translators and of their “labour.” The first is a critique of separate spheres of work and action for men and women. This is invoked in her opening, which is an oblique defence in which she invokes the conventional social courtesy extended to women as the weaker sex, but juxtaposes this with an assertion that her “matter” may be seen as “manlike.” The binary opposition set up here (manlike martial stories opposed to the femininity of the translator) is then deconstructed in a triple manner: first, she argues that women are involved in wars, even where they do not fight directly; and second, that both women and men learn virtue from such stories; and third, that some women have fought, such as the Amazons, and the heroine of the romance she is translating. These arguments then provide the matter for subsequent reasons in defence of women’s work. The second reason is directly about the question of the “manliness of the matter,” which is refuted by her account of women’s involvement in wars: “us women to whom the benefit in equal part apperteineth.” She thus opposes the view that genres are gendered. The third lies in her citation of women warriors, both historical (the Amazons) and fictional (Claridiana): a conventional move in the discourse of the *querelle des femmes* in which women could be defended as a sex by citation of great historical, mythical, or fictional exempla. The fourth reason in defence moves back to a conventional disclaimer about women as translators: her role has simply been one of neutral and invisible transmission. The final defence lies obliquely in her comment that society permits “a gentlewoman...honestly” to “employ her travaile” in talking about the content of translated works. By implication, the reader is led to ask about the difference between talking and writing.



An expression of women warriors in “Kampf der Amazon” (“Battle of the Amazons”), c. 1900. Public domain; Wikimedia Commons.

In the third part of her argument, Tyler defends her choice of material: “so the question now ariseth of my choice, not of my labour.” Here she uses a remarkable rhetorical ploy. She invokes the conventional defence of many other women translators who published work in this period: that she was persuaded to undertake the work by friends or family against her own natural modesty and to avoid idleness. But Tyler refuses this defence: “And yet because the refusall was in my power, I must stand to answer for my easy yielding.” She equally refuses to use two other arguments that “matters of lesse worthynesse by as aged years have bene taken in hand,” and that “dayly new devises are published in songs, sonnets, enterludes...only to please the humour of

some men”: she will not accept the excuse of age nor publishing fashion. The vigour of her argument here animates what becomes her central assertion about women writers: I will not make that my defence which cannot help mee and doth hinder other men. But my defence is by example of the best, amongst which many have dedicated their labours, some stories, some of war, some phisick, some lawe, some as concerning government, some divine matters, unto divers ladies and gentlewomen. And if men may and do bestow such of their travailles upon gentlewomen, then may we women read such of their works as they dedicate unto us; and if we may read them, why not farther wade in them to the serch of a truth? And then much more why not deale by translation in such arguments, especially this kinde of exercise, being a matter of more heede than of deep invention or exquisite learning? All genres dedicated to women construe women as implied readers, and hence implied interpreters. Interpretation is itself a kind of translation, and, therefore, the cultural acknowledgement of women as readers should be equally applied to women as interpreters and translators. This is a bold argument, albeit one which she then appears to qualify by arguing that translation is a lesser work of “heede,” compared to one of invention or learning. She makes the argument more explicit: “But to return, whatsomever the truth is, whether that women may not at al discourse in learning (for men lay in their claim to be sole possessioners of knowledge) or whether they may in some maner (that is by limitation or appointment in some kinde of learning), my perswasion hath bene thus: that it is all one for a woman to pen a story as for a man to addresse his story to a woman.” Crucially, Tyler argues that the convention of dedications allows her to bypass both theoretical claims that men alone have access to knowledge, or that women should be restricted to only one kind of learning. Instead, the implicit dialogue set up by dedications makes explicit the fact that women should be able to speak publicly themselves. Her declaration, “It is all one,” proposes an end to double standards. This defence may seem like a diversion from her argument at this point: the choice of subject matter. But what she actually defends here is not the specific romance she has chosen, but her right to choose any subject matter. This is clarified in her subsequent sentence: “some I hope are not so strait that they would enforce me necessarily either not to write or to write of divinitie.” Women should not be confined or expected to translate only designated subjects, such as theology.

Having diverted her critics, Tyler returns to a specific defence of her chosen original: her aim has been “to make other partners of my liking...to sport thysself with this Spaniard,” in which, she claims, bravery and honesty are rewarded and malice punished. It is noticeable that this conventional moral defence of the content of the romance comes after she has defended her own role and work. The ethical defence was often used by women writers to account for publication. Tyler’s decision to address more fundamental issues of the double standard and women’s equal right to speak in the public sphere testifies to the strength of her views and refusal to compromise. Tyler concludes with a brief summary of her defence of women writers and a request that the reader will not continue to have a “wrong suspect of my boldness and rashness.” This is her

second explicit reference to contemporary prejudices about women writers, which linked publication of a woman's voice with an immodest sexual reputation. The first reference was a defence of her choice of a "light" text. Contemporary ideology about female publication was based on a misogynist elision between verbal and sexual excess, and on the double meaning of "public": a public woman was one open to the public and, hence, a whore. Tyler's explicit acknowledgement of this construction, combined with the defence she pens here, enables her to proffer to her readers an alternative and liberating definition of public and publishing women.



Connections with Other Works

Jane Anger, *Jane Anger Her Protection for Women*. Anne Dowriche, *The French History*. Isabella Whitney, *A Sweet Nosegay or Pleasant Posy*. Mary Wroth, *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*.

Note on the Text

The Mirror of Princely Deeds and Knighthood was published in 1578 by Thomas East, and re-published in this edition in 1580 and 1599. Five additional translations were published by the end of the sixteenth century, testifying to the continued popularity of the Spanish original.