
Deborah Uman’s book offers a new perspective on the place of women translators in the English literary Renaissance. It argues that translation gave women particular strategies to assume authorial roles, even when this possibility was legally and culturally limited for them. Uman situates translation at the intersection of different literary practices, including adaptation, imitation, and poetic, dramatic, and narrative forms of creative writing. She also sees it as a practice embedded in the social and political concerns regarding education, religion, and emerging articulations of nationalism that shaped the experiences of women. Above all, she assigns translation a central place in the development of early modern notions of authorship. In this context, we are invited to see translation as both a theoretical model and a form of writing that can broaden the way in which we think about literature. More specifically, Uman reads the works of early modern women translators, both the images they use in their prefatory reflections and the plots of the plays they choose to translate, as parallels to the position of women in the literary arena.

At the base of her argument is the claim that “translation reflects the limitations women faced while simultaneously giving them the opportunity to transcend these limitations” (3). Although, in their theoretical
reflections, the translators studied in this book embrace the widespread notion that translation is a feminine and secondary activity, they cleverly play with this figurative association to present translation as an activity suitable to women. Some of them take the game farther, destabilizing the gender hierarchies that structure the relationship between (male) author and (feminized) translator, using collaborative models to reformulate this relationship, and claiming authorial status for themselves. In practice, by reading and producing translations, women could actually have access to education and enter the literary arena.

After an introductory chapter, the book traces these conceptual and practical strategies in the work of seven early modern women. The second chapter looks at two key prefatory writings: Margaret Tyler’s dedication and preface to *The Mirrour of Princely Deeds and Knighthood*, her 1578 English version of the first book of Diego Ortúñez de Calahorra’s chivalric romance *Espejo de príncipes y cavalleros*, and Aphra Behn’s “Essay on Translated Prose,” published in 1688 as an introduction to her translation of Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle’s *Entretiens sur la Pluralité des Mondes*. Separated by more than a century, these reflections provide a frame to the period studied. In chapter three, Uman considers the Psalm paraphrases of Anne Vaughan Lock and Mary Sidney Herbert as well as Aemilia Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, which she reads as an imitative poem based on the work of these two women translators. This section focuses on the opportunity that verse translations and imitations offered women to display their poetic skills, and, in the cases of Mary Sidney and Aemilia Lanyer, even to occupy an authorial position. It also explores the tension between private and public voices generated by the translation and dissemination of religious works, a tension these translators reduce by assuming the position of teachers to other women.

The fourth chapter examines a different genre in the translations of three dramatic works that explore the role of women in the public arena: Jane Lumley’s translation of Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Mary Sidney’s translation of Robert Garnier’s *Antonius*, and Katherine Philips’s translations of Corneille’s *Pompey* and *Horace*. In these works, Uman finds a model for understanding translation as a form of ventriloquism, in which it becomes difficult to separate the voices of author and characters, as well
as those of author and translator. She proposes that the works of these early modern women translators could be considered as mirrors to their own complex social situation. The fact that their social positions and selves were defined in relation to their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons must have made it easier for them to identify with a form of writing that offers space for multiple voices and versions rather than with a univocal and direct form of self-expression. The fifth chapter returns to Aphra Behn, this time to look at representations of translation in her narrative, poetic, and dramatic works. Uman shows the complexity of these representations, in which Behn portrays translation as a means of establishing literary authority but also acknowledges that, once achieved, this authority does not necessarily imply complete freedom. It can work, for instance, to support nationalist and imperialist agendas, and it can even make it difficult for the translator to accommodate other female voices in her text.

As its title announces, the book engages with topics specific to early modern English women writers: closet drama, the position of women in religious controversies and in the private-public divide, the particular limitations imposed on their education, and the postulation of a tradition of women poets. The conceptual models for authorship and translation it proposes, however, can be productive tools in the fields of literary and translation history in general. Readers who are particularly interested in early modern translation strategies and practices may want to see more detailed explanations of the translators’ omissions, additions, and emphases, and of the strategies deployed by them to construct their authorial positions beyond the prefatory texts. At the same time — and this is crucial at the methodological level — the conceptual models proposed by Uman show us the theoretical advantages of rejecting clear-cut distinctions between the author’s and the translator’s contributions to the text. A reading that respects the ambivalence and dispersion of voices inherent in translation can be a useful tool in the field of translation studies, where more inclusive and flexible models are needed in order to account for texts and practices that, as Uman reminds us, combine multiple versions and meanings.

Belén Bistué
CONICET / Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, Argentina