

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Newman, Karen and Jane Tylus, eds. Early Modern Cultures of Translation

Goran Stanivukovic

Volume 40, Number 2, Spring 2017

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1086290ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v40i2.28527>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Stanivukovic, G. (2017). Review of [Newman, Karen and Jane Tylus, eds. Early Modern Cultures of Translation], *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 40(2), 214–216. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v40i2.28527>

© Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2017

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

emotional charge, and historical narrative, they nonetheless desired simplicity in subject matter.

JENNIFER STRTAK

Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies  
Victoria College, University of Toronto

**Newman, Karen and Jane Tylus, eds.**  
***Early Modern Cultures of Translation.***

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. Pp. vi, 358. ISBN 978-0-8122-4740-4 (hardcover) US\$55.

At the outset of their book, about the place and role of translation in the Renaissance, Karen Newman and Jane Tylus ask an obvious question: “Would there have been a Renaissance without translation?” (1). The answer is no, say the essays within. Translations gave the Renaissance its identity as an international, multilingual, and cross-ethnic period of multiple ways of “self-expression” (1). This collection brings together twelve essays and a coda, offering a wealth of new material and original re-interpretations of translation as both philological practice and a metaphorical transmission of cultural practices, as Peter Burke illustrates in his analysis of the circulation of the language of architecture and illustrations that enhance the reception of these texts across Renaissance Europe.

Taken together, the essays in this book analyze the concept of difference, treating it as a key to understanding translation as a revisionary narrative about early modernity—in contrast with the story about the “glorified individual” (1), which for a long time determined how scholars wrote about the Renaissance. The contrast is evident not just in approaches but also in the methodologies, places, and languages that extend the idea of translation as a cultural practice beyond Western Europe. The idea is not all that new, but the case studies collected in this volume emphasize comparativism as a productive angle from which to examine the role of translation in shaping differences and diversities within the early modern world. Yet even a volume that maps its thematic territory as broadly as this one does cannot be as comprehensive as one thinks. The idea of difference as a distinctive way to analyze the cultural work of translation

would have been even more expansive (or inclusive) if there were chapters on translations from Arabic, on translations (especially from Italian and across different fields of cultural expression) within the Ottoman Empire, on the abundant translation activities from southern-Slavic territories of the eastern Adriatic, and on the dynamic translation activities within the multicultural and multi-religious Mediterranean. Such studies would have complemented and extended Katharina N. Piechocki's incisive interpretation of the "rediscovery" of Ptolemy's *Geography* in Europe as a "linguistic and visual translation process" (77) in the construction of knowledge and the interpretation of the representation of eastern parts of Europe. Instead, the majority of the essays tilt towards Western Europe. Essays about those other philological and cultural practices would have extended the notion of difference as the guiding principle of analysis in this book, which is all about reconsidering the binaries, not only of words and significations in the Derridean sense, as the introduction points out lucidly, but also in terms of cultural crossovers and contacts, which is what translations encouraged and enabled as "languages mov[ed] across borders" (19) of the early modern world.

The book is not organized in specific thematic sections. Rather, it brings together individual case studies coherently linked only by the topic of translation. Gordon Braden's essay examines Ovid's poems of exile, focusing mostly on *Tristia*, providing a succinct overview of this poem's influence on early modern English poetry. The topic of A. E. B. Coldiron's essay is macaronic verse (the mixing of words and sometimes whole lines from different languages for comic or ironic effect) in English poetry, arguing correctly that macaronic verse, in spite of its frequent use at the time, remains "the least discussed" creative practice of all "plurilingual contact zones" (57) in the early modern period. Ann Rosalind Jones examines comparatively "love as an allegorical figure and a social force" (97) in Louise Labé's 1555 dialogue *Le Débat de Folie et d'Amour* and its 1584 English translation *The Debate betweene Follie and Loue*, by Robert Greene. Margaret Fergusson unpacks the politics of the "process of translation" (117) within the text of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, while Jacques Lezra offers a theoretical parsing of the terms and conceptual models that define the concept of translation, coming out of the main question about the cultural basis of translation—at the heart of this book as a whole—summarized as "how we conceptualize what we are doing when we talk about early modern translation" (157). Naomi Tadmor examines the

cultural milieu of seventeenth-century England in which translations of the Bible were undertaken. Focusing on the same century, Sarah Rivett's essay shifts attention to the practice of translation as an instrument of conversion of some of the indigenous communities in England's early Atlantic colonies in North America. Carla Nappi's beautifully written chapter revealing the philological, cultural, and embodied practices that took place at the imperial Translators' College (207) in China from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century represents a significant shift in the volume; a world outside Europe is considered in her examination of Chinese-Arabic-Persian translation miscellanies. Line Cottegnies's subject is the cultural and philological practice of translation, into English, focusing on Katherine Philips's translation of Corneille's play *La Mort de Pompée*. The book's last essay is László Kontler's examination of the complexities of cross-cultural, Scottish-German contact by way of translation, in an assessment of a Scottish historiography of eighteenth-century Germany. The coda is written by a translator from Spanish, Edith Grossman, revealing not only much that readers would like to know about "translation [as] a strange craft" (250) by an award-winning practitioner of that strangeness, but even more about the difficulties of rendering one language—with its unique philology and culture—into another.

The quality of argument, the extensive archive of generically different texts, and the breadth of methodological approaches, together with the lucidity of analysis, assure me that this book will have a long shelf life.

GORAN STANIVUKOVIC

Saint Mary's University, Halifax

**O'Brien, Emily.**

***The Commentaries of Pope Pius II (1458–1468) and the Crisis of the Fifteenth-Century Papacy.***

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015. Pp. xiii, 335. ISBN 978-1-4426-4763-3 (hardcover) \$65.

As a text, *The Commentaries* of Pope Pius II is one of the richest sources for studies on fifteenth-century intellectual culture. Written by Pope Pius II (born Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini) from 1462 until his death in 1464, *The*