Stefania ARCARA
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Product Summary

Metadata

Research themes: Women's writing; early modern prose; literary translation; feminist literary criticism.

Short presentation

This article stems from my interest in early modern women's writing and the relation between gender, writing and translation. Starting from the "minor" figure of a Renaissance translator, it also offers an analysis of the idea of the "femininity" of romance, the myth of the "rise of the English novel" and a critical inquiry into the workings of canon formation.

Margaret Tyler's *The Mirrour of Knighthood*
Or how a Renaissance translator became 'the first English feminist'

By Stefania Arcara (Università di Catania, Italy)

Abstract & Keywords

English:

This article focuses on the Renaissance translator Margaret Tyler who in 1578 published *The Mirrour of Princely Deeds and Knighthood* from the Spanish of Diego Ortúñez de Calahorra's *Espejo de príncipes y cavalleros*, the first translation of an entire chivalric romance from the Spanish, the success of which started a long-lasting vogue for reading romance in England. In an "Epistle to the reader" which accompanies her book, Tyler writes from an openly gendered position, defending her role as a woman translator of a much stigmatised genre and makes a number of theoretical comments on the activity of translation. Margaret Tyler and her work were neglected and excluded from the canon for centuries, until she was recognised as a protofeminist by scholars of women's studies in the 1980's, yet in the field of translation studies and history her position remains relatively marginal even today. An analysis of Tyler's important "Epistle" and the reception of her work will be carried out in order to investigate the cultural practices that have determined Tyler's destiny and fame both as a woman translator and as a translator of romance. Margaret Tyler's case is thus relevant to three areas of study: translation history and theory; feminist literary criticism and women's/gender studies; the workings of canon formation, especially in relation to the shaping of English prose fiction, the idea of the "femininity of romance" and the myth of "the rise of the English novel". The study of this long forgotten Renaissance translator will therefore aim to shed light on the complex interconnections of translation, gender and genre.

English:

L'articolo è incentrato sulla figura della traduttrice inglese Margaret Tyler, che nel 1578 pubblicò *The Mirrour of Princely Deeds and Knighthood*, dallo spagnolo dell'*Espejo de príncipes y cavalleros* di Diego Ortúñez de Calahorra. Si tratta della prima traduzione completa di un romanzo cavalleresco fatta direttamente dallo spagnolo e il cui successo segnò l'inizio della voga inglese per i romanzi, destinata a durare a lungo. In un'energica epistola al lettore che accompagna l'opera, Tyler, con voce propria, apertamente femminile, difende il suo ruolo di donna traduttrice di un genere letterario stigmatizzato – il *romance* – e fa una serie di considerazioni teoriche sulla prassi traduttiva. Margaret Tyler e la sua opera sono state ignorate ed escluse dal canone per diversi secoli, fino a quando negli anni '80 Tyler è stata consacrata come autrice protofemminista dai *women's studies*, mentre la sua figura ancora oggi rimane relativamente marginale nell'ambito dei *translation studies* e della storia della traduzione. Prendendo in esame l'importante epistola di Tyler e ricostruendo la ricezione della sua opera, si tenterà di esplorare le pratiche culturali che hanno determinato il destino di Tyler sia come donna traduttrice che come traduttrice di *romance*. Il complesso caso letterario rappresentato da Margaret Tyler è quindi rilevante per tre interconnessi ambiti di studio: la storia e la teoria della traduzione; la critica letteraria femminista e i *women's/gender studies*; l'analisi critica del processo di formazione del canone, specialmente in rapporto all'evoluzione della prosa inglese, all'idea della "femminilità" del *romance* e al mito della nascita del *novel* inglese. Lo studio di questa traduttrice rinascimentale a lungo dimenticata mira dunque a illuminare il complesso rapporto tra traduzione, *gender* e genere letterario.

Keywords: literary translation, traduzione letteraria, history of translation, storia della traduzione, translation and gender

Introduction

This article explores the dynamics of canon formation, both in literary criticism and in translation studies, through the analysis of the work and reception of the Renaissance translator Margaret Tyler, who published the first English translation of a Spanish prose romance. She presented her translation in an exceptionally assertive Epistle to the reader, where she passionately defended her work as a woman appearing in print and as a translator of a much stigmatized genre, the chivalric romance. Tyler's case is complex and unique in many ways as it is placed at the intersection of translation, gender and genre. For this reason, the reception of Margaret Tyler's work has undergone many vicissitudes over the centuries, and her reputation has fluctuated from complete neglect to her elevation to the status of protofeminist.

My aim is to investigate the cultural practices that have determined Tyler's destiny and fame both as a woman translator and as a translator of romance. My starting point will be the cultural context of early modern England, with its dominant discourses on men's monopoly of knowledge and the limitations imposed on female authorship. Besides touching on the much discussed theoretical question of gender and writing in the Renaissance, I will provide a reading of Tyler's Epistle to demonstrate that it is a key document which not only exemplifies a woman writer's tactics of self-representation but, more generally, sheds important light on the relationship of translation, gender and genre. Tyler's defence of the genre of chivalric romance will be analysed in the literary context of Elizabethan England, where her successful book started a long-lasting vogue for romances. Her work and her theoretical comments provide a useful starting point for a reconsideration of the impact of translations in the development of English prose fiction, as well as for an interrogation on the marginal position of romance in the literary canon and its association with women. Tyler's translation and prefatory material are therefore relevant to three interconnected areas of study: translation history and theory; feminist literary criticism and gender studies; a critical inquiry into the workings of canon formation, especially in relation to the idea of the "femininity of romance" and the myth of "the rise of the English novel". By exploring the dynamics of genre and canon formation which gave birth to the binary opposition "romance/novel", I will attempt to sketch a history of the reception of Tyler's work, and demonstrate how her association with romance and her gendered voice determined her prolonged exclusion from the literary canon, as well as her later inclusion in the feminist canon, while her status in the history of translation remains uncertain.

Translation, gender and genre

Margaret Tyler, whose biography is still obscure and controversial,[1] is one of the few examples of a woman translator in Elizabethan England, and the only woman translator of a prose romance. Published in 1578, *The Mirrour of Princely Deedes and Knighthood* from Diego Ortúñez de Calahorra's *Espejo de príncipes y cavalleros* (*El Caballero del Febo*, 1562) was the first translation of an entire chivalric romance from the Spanish and Portuguese tradition to appear in England, and the only one made directly from Spanish.

As has been noted by several critics, the activity of translation was more highly valued in the Renaissance than in later periods: writer and translator did not represent antithetical categories.[2] As Wendy Wall (1993:337) observes, "the opposition between original and secondary or imitative works is a categorical opposition largely absent in the Renaissance; the notion of original writing became valorized only later". This is a crucial aspect of Elizabethan culture which must be kept in mind when reading Tyler's work; in her Epistle she advocates a woman's right to "pen a story", that is, indifferently, to produce a translation as well as what we call today "original" writing; in fact, Tyler anticipates attacks by "ill willers" for what she *writes*.

One of the most influential Renaissance humanists, Juan Luis Vives, expressed his (relatively liberal) views on women and writing when he advocated the possibility of an education for girls, provided they did not dare to venture into the realm of authorship and creativity, implicitly posited as masculine prerogatives:

> Whan she shal be taught to rede, let those bokes be taken in hande that may teche good maners. And when she shall lerne to write, let nat her example be voyde verses, nor wanton or tryflyng songes, but some sad sentence, prudent and chaste, taken out of holy scripture, or the sayenges of the philosophers, whiche by often writyng she may fasten better in her memory (Vives: 1529; 2003:23).[3]

Read in this context, Tyler's Epistle, "M.T. to the Reader", preceding her translation of *The*

Mirrour of Knighthood, is a striking document because of its direct challenge to dominant discourses. The translator audaciously engages in a polemical dialogue with the humanist authorities:

> But to returne, whatsomever the truth is, whether that women may not at all discourse in learning, for men late in their claime to be sole possessioners of knowledge, or whether they may in some manner, 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 storie as for a man to addresse his storie to a woman. But among my ill willers, some I hope are not so straight that they would enforce me necessarily either not to write or to write of divinitie (Tyler 1578; 1996:A4r-A4v).**[4]**

With an assertiveness unprecedented in a woman writer of the Renaissance, in her reference to men's claim to be "sole possessioners of knowledge", Tyler questions not merely Vives's authority, but that of his followers, who at the time she was writing had published a number of prescriptive texts on women's education. A variety of normative texts by early modern educational theorists, such as Thomas Becon (1564) and Thomas Salter (1579),**[5]** insist in different degrees on limitations and prohibitions on women's behaviour and in particular on the activities of reading and writing/translating. The main concern of these authors is well encapsulated in the formula describing the ideal Renaissance woman – "chaste, silent and obedient";**[6]** educational texts and conduct books invariably link women's literary activity (both as readers and writers) with the jeopardizing of their principal virtue, chastity. Some areas of textuality, those of religion and domesticity, were considered by Vives and other male authorities as more appropriate to women, while others, those of secular and recreational literature, were deemed perilous territories that women should avoid. The connection between recreational literature (particularly romance) and the production of sexual desire is made explicit by the language of the educationalists themselves, especially Vives:

> (T)hose ungracious bokes, suche as be in my countre in Spayn, Amadise, Florisande, Tirante, Tristane, and Celestina the baude mother of noughtynes. In France Lancilot du Lake, Paris and Vienna, Ponthus and Sidonia, and Melucyne … whiche bokes but idell menne wrote unlerned, and sette all upon fylthe and vitiousness … Also there is no wytte in them, but a fewe wordes of wanton luste … A woman shuld beware of all these bokes, lykewise as of serpentes or snakes (Vives 1529; 2000:25; 27).

Even before the appearance of *The Mirrour* in England and its commercial success, anathemas were pronounced upon the reading of these and similar texts (ballads, "wonton songs"), on grounds of immorality and, simultaneously, on aesthetic grounds ("there is no wytte in them"). In Vives's biblical reference to reptiles, romance reading is linked with sexual temptation and sin. The Spanish humanist condemns chivalric romances because they encourage idleness in both male and female readers. However, for the latter readership, idleness is particularly dangerous and closely associated with voluptuousness and corruption.**[7]**

Notwithstanding the copious humanist censure which soon became formulaic, the genre enjoyed an increasing popularity as the century progressed. Spanish and Portuguese romances achieved their greatest success in England during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (Salzman 1985:98). What is more interesting, a growing number of romances in the last quarter of the sixteenth century were specifically addressed to women, following George Pettie's dedication to gentlewomen in the first edition of *A Petite Palace of Pettie His Pleasure* (1576) (Hull 1982:8; Lucas 1989:2). Increasingly, the genre was represented by (male) authors as especially congenial to a female readership. As Helen Hackett argues, however, this should not be taken as evidence for the actual existence of a large female reading public with a preference for romance in the sixteenth century.**[8]** At this early stage of the genre's popularity, the frequent dedications to women were more probably a marketing strategy on the part of authors to attract more readers, serving as "an announcement to readers of both sexes that the work [was] light and frivolous" (Hackett 1992:40). Besides, this early association of women and romance is complicated by a paradox:

> (I)n so far as women embodied sexual attractions for men, romance was identified with women as itself a form of eroticized pleasure; yet in so far as women's own sexuality was regarded as wayward and in need of restraint, romance was regarded as something to be kept from women (Hackett 2000:11).

In any case, Renaissance romances were all written by men, with the two remarkable exceptions of Tyler's *Mirrour* translation and Lady Mary Wroth's *The Countess of Montgomeries Urania* (1621). Authorship remained a masculine prerogative and "publication was directly linked to aggressive sexuality" (Krontiris 1992:17). Since women's sexuality in the Renaissance was constructed as a

discursive site of excess, as Jonathan Goldberg (1997:12) illustrates, "female desire was described in the most stigmatized ways … as the excuse for institutionalized forms of control – including control over publication".[9] Significantly, when Wroth published *Urania* she was accused by one of her detractors of being a "hermaphrodite in show, in deed a monster"; she was urged to abandon "lascivious tales and amorous toyes" and redeem herself by producing instead religious works.[10]

This is the context in which Tyler's literary venture must be placed, with her choice to appear in print, and her decision to translate not a religious but a secular text. Read in this context, her authorship of a romance constitutes a radical act in itself. As will be shown, Tyler's Epistle incorporates a number of important theoretical considerations on the activity of translation/writing, discussed with an openly gendered voice strategically alternating boldness and humility. Radical statements are constantly intertwined with expressions of a humble and deferent voice which at first sight appears to endorse dominant assumptions about feminine roles. Indeed, what is most interesting in this text is precisely Tyler's ability to negotiate a position from which to speak not only as a woman appearing in print but also as a woman associated with the genre of romance. Her gendered voice is articulated in the text through a multiplicity of contradictions, and her authorial persona constantly oscillates between conventional humility, defensiveness, assertiveness, irony, and bitterness. Her voice throughout the text is characterized by a keen awareness of gender and the recognition that she was exposing herself to the severe scrutiny of the male educated public.

One of the strategies Tyler adopts in order to construct an acceptable representation of herself as translator of a romance is to project the image of an aged woman; she mentions her old age three times in the space of a few pages and emphasizes her "aged years" as if to assure her readers that she writes/translates from a sexually neuter position. She thus contrives both to tone down the implicit challenge of her public self-display as author and to represent herself as immune from the erotic allurement associated with the genre of romance.

Tyler also makes a number of considerations about the propriety of a woman's role as translator. She seems acutely aware of potential criticism, and repeatedly refers to "knowen enimies", "adversaries", and "ill willers", all clearly gendered male, from whose attacks she has to guard herself. Although the text of the Epistle is interspersed with exceptionally bold statements, the prevalent tone is one of defence. Early on in the Epistle, she restricts her authorial role to the 'mere' activity of translation which she describes through a gendered domestic metaphor, that of giving hospitality to a foreign guest:

> The invention, disposition, trimming, and what else in this storie, is wholy another mans, my part none therein but the translation, as it were onely in giving enterteinment to a straunger, before this time unacquainted with our countrie guise (A3v).

In order to defend her gendered position as translator of a secular text, she thus proceeds to devalue the activity of translation, about which she writes: "this kinde of exercise being a matter of more heede then of deep invention or exquisite learning" (A4r). This statement allows her to bring forth the paradoxical argument that women therefore can translate romances, since no creative skill, humanist erudition or theological knowledge are required – translation in this case being mainly a question of technical accuracy. Tyler here strategically endorses the dominant discourse of the masculine monopoly of learning only to exploit it fully for her own ends, to legitimize her own enterprise as translator of romance.[11]

However, in contrast with this initial defensive stance, towards the close of the Epistle Tyler openly asserts the importance of her role as translator in making the text of this romance available to a wider public. Before her translation, Spanish romances circulated in the original or in French versions which only educated male readers were able to appreciate. She directly attacks those educated men she imagines might criticize her translation and denounces their élitism:

> (B)ut I perceive some may be rather angrie to see their Spanish delight tourned to all English pastime: they could well allow the storie in Spanish, but they may not affoord it so cheape, or they would have it proper to themselves. What natures such men bee of, I list not greatly dispute, but my meaning hath bene to make other partners of my liking (A4v).

As has been argued (Hackett 2000:61), Tyler adopts here the positive humanist view of vernacular translation as a vehicle for the spreading of knowledge, and ingeniously applies it to the translation of a text which was instead ostracized by humanist culture. Her own appreciation of the *Espejo de príncipes* also emerges from this passage and her translation appears to spring directly from her personal "liking" of the original text. Tyler seems to experience her translation genuinely as a

passionate act of generosity, allowing others to share her pleasure in reading *The Mirrour*. This is confirmed by the only other reference she makes to her personal taste in reading, while modestly presenting her work to the reader: "I wold that I could so well impart thee that delight, which my selfe findeth in reading the Spanish: but seldome is the tale carried cleane from anothers mouth" (A3r).

At the same time, Tyler is well aware that her translation belongs to a universally condemned literary genre. She admits: "the question now ariseth of my choice… wherefore I preferred this storie before matter of more importance" (A3v). From her forceful defence of romances it is clear that her decision to translate the *Espejo* was conscious and deliberate. However, she partially declines responsibility for the choice with the commonplace justification of having surrendered to her friends' insistence ("so was this piece of work put upon me by others") (A3v).

In order to defend her treatment of a secular rather than a religious text she also emphasizes the moral virtues ("magnanimity and courage") she considers prominent in *The Mirrour*, hoping that through her "travell in Englishing this Author" she may inspire the emulation of martial heroism in male readers. It is interesting to note that Tyler here uses the same argument in defence of the genre that Sidney adopts in the *Defense of Poetry*. The author of the *Arcadia* praises another popular Spanish romance, the *Amadis*, because it could move the readers' hearts "to the exercise of courtesy, liberality, and especially courage", although he regards the book as aesthetically deficient ("wanteth much of a perfect poesie").**[12]** Tyler's emphasis on the morally improving qualities of her romance is a crucial argument in the Epistle, and it is on this ground that she strives to establish it as an appropriate reading for both a male and female public. This is also the reason why, in presenting *The Mirrour* to the reader "for thy profit and delight", the Epistle is conspicuously evasive about the role of love and sexual encounters in the story: "the chiefe matter therein contained, is of exploits of warres" (A3r). This is nothing but another of Tyler's astute strategies in presenting her translation: as has been observed (Hackett 2000:56-57; Krontiris 1988:38; 1992:61-62), not only is the love theme paramount in the Mirrour, but the plot also includes eroticized scenes and female characters such as the seductress-enchanter Lindaraza and the daughter of the Queen of the Amazons, Claridiana.

After applying her defensive strategies, Tyler does admit the exceptionality of her achievement, that of a woman trespassing on the masculine domain of secular literature, and she appeals to the reader in humble terms:

> Such deliverie as I have made I hope thou wilt friendly accept, the rather for that it is a womans worke, though in a storye profane, and a matter more manlike than becometh my sexe (A3r).

Tyler was aware that her secular translation was potentially subversive, and that "divinitie" could be seen as a more fitting subject for a woman translator. However, translating religious texts in early modern England, where political and religious controversies were inextricably intertwined, was not a safe activity for anyone, male or female: as Bassnett (1980:56) and Lefevere (1990:16) remind us, religious translators were burned at the stake.**[13]** The humanistic prescription that women read or write only of "divinitie" did clash with the necessary, even if unwitting, involvement of any woman writing of religion in the public debates of Reformed England, a paradox admirably exposed by Tyler. She refuses religion as a dangerous subject and, exploiting to her advantage the topos of feminine modesty, she explains to her "ill willers" that, being a woman, she is not confident enough to deal with the theological and doctrinal questions which would certainly arise in the translation of a religious text:

> Whereas neither durst I trust mine own judgment sufficiently, if matter of controversie were handled, nor yet could I finde any booke in any tongue, which would not breed offence to some (A3r).

Thus, Tyler's Epistle sheds light on the role of women translators in Renaissance culture: the notion that in the early modern period translation was seen as a feminine activity is endorsed by many critics and literary historians, who refer to John Florio's frequently quoted assertion that "all translations are reputed femall".**[14]** This has led many scholars to reiterate that, being considered an inferior, secondary and degraded activity, translation in the Renaissance was a socially acceptable feminine genre.**[15]** However, this simplistic assumption has been questioned by several critics: above all, Goldberg's reading of Florio (1997:78) admirably demonstrates that "the translation may be gendered female, but the translator is not". Suzanne Trill (1996:145) observes that the vast majority of Elizabethan translations were male authored; the same critic also questions another

commonplace of Renaissance scholarship regarding the acceptability of religious translation for a woman. As seen above, religious texts were indeed prescribed by humanist authorities as more appropriate for women. Among the thirteen translations produced by women in the Elizabethan age, nine were of specifically religious texts.[16] However, this does not confirm that religious translation was accepted as a literary performance for a woman: indeed, the production of religious translation in the Elizabethan cultural context could prove hazardous for a woman as well as for a man, as will become apparent from Tyler's astute remarks about translating "divinitie" in the Epistle.

Many other passages are worth quoting from Tyler's Epistle, but several detailed analyses of this extraordinary text have already been carried out by (mainly) feminist scholars (Krontiris 1988; 1992:44-62; Trill 1997:5-6; Walker 1996:48-49; Robinson 1995; Hackett 1992:44-45; 2000:60-62). As regards the question of translation, what emerges from this document confirms that in the Renaissance, as Kim Walker (1996:48) argues, "translation could operate as a form of appropriation that made a space for the woman writer even as it veiled her literary skill". Tyler's text is a unique example of the tactics of a woman writer/translator in the Renaissance, and it simultaneously testifies to the problematic association of women and romance which was to play a crucial role in the history of the novel and in the process of canon formation.

Tyler's *Mirrour*, the vogue for romances, and the shaping of English prose fiction

The text of *The Mirrour* itself occupies a significant position in the Elizabethan cultural context and its unstable fortune in later periods illuminates the dynamics of the historical development of English prose fiction. As has been noted (Krontiris 1988:20), Tyler's book "set a vogue which lasted almost to the end of the seventeenth century": while before *The Mirrour* was published "the chivalric romance had not been widely read in England … following the publication of Tyler's translation, chivalresque romances became a vogue and were rapidly translated into English".[17]

The genre of romance represents a substantial part of Elizabethan cultural production and a source of material well exploited by dramatists: Greene's *Pandosto*, for instance, was the main source for Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and Lodge's *Rosalynde* for *As You Like It* (Lucas 1989:x).[18] The widely read French version of *Amadis* and its later English translations had a considerable influence on authors such as Sidney and Spencer (O'Connor 1970).[19] The vogue for Spanish romance in particular continued in the early seventeenth century with the translations of *Palmerin of England*, *Palmerin de Oliva*, *Primaleon of Greece*, *Gerileon of England*, *Palladine of England* and *Amadis de Gaule*, many of which were still in print as late as the 1660s (Moore 2000:320).

As John O'Connor shows, the English translations of chivalric romances had an impact on the prose style of Elizabethan and later writers of fiction. The translations of The Mirrour of Knighthood and Palmerin, being entirely devoid of euphuistic turns, were responsible for an increased simplification in English prose, which gradually became less ornate and decorative, paving the way to the decline of the euphuistic fashion. As has been argued (O'Connor 1970:220-22), chivalric romances contributed to establish in England the idea of style as an element subordinate to matter and they were also responsible for the Elizabethan emphasis on pastoralism in prose fiction. In O'Connor's words (1970:224), "chivalric romances from Spain and France (...) exerted upon Elizabethan fiction a pressure that goes beyond the mere use of plot motifs".

The Mirrour and the vogue for romances that it originated are thus revealed as influential in the shaping of English prose, of the taste of Elizabethan and seventeenth-century public, and on the growing book market. Why then have this and similar translations received so little attention? If *The Mirrour* was one of the most successful books in prose of the late sixteenth century and enjoyed widespread popularity in the following century, why is it not mentioned in literary histories or critical studies on English prose?[19] Finally, has any acknowledgement of Tyler as translator, woman writer, and initiator of the vogue for romances in England been made by the academic community? In order to answer these questions, I will attempt to trace the vicissitudes of Tyler's translation through the centuries, from the book's immediate reception, to an investigation of the lower status of *The Mirrour* and analogous romances in the earliest literary criticism, their negative role or total neglect in the course of the institutionalization of the English novel, to arrive finally at the rehabilitation of Tyler's work and literary personality – together with that of the once marginal genre of romance – brought about by feminist criticism.

The immediate reception of *The Mirrour* was very favourable and the book enjoyed a considerable commercial success. Tyler's translation went through several editions and was immediately followed by the translations (by men) of the remaining three parts of the Spanish text, published by the

same printer, Thomas East. The entire Spanish work finally appeared in English in a single eight-volume edition in 1601. There exist scattered documents of *The Mirrour*'s reception: shortly after its publication, an allusion is made by John Lyly in *Euphues and his England* (1580) to Artemidorus and Lisimandro (both characters from *The Mirrour*) which indicates that the public was familiar with these names (Hackett 2000:65). In *Eastward Hoe* (1605), Ben Jonson has Gertrude mention "the Knight of the Sun", one of the main characters of Tyler's romance, whose subtitle is in fact, *El Caballero del Febo* (Lucas 1989:24).

One derogatory mention of *The Mirrour* appears in Francis Meres's Palladis Tamia (1598; 1931:267-68) where Tyler's translation is listed together with other books deemed "hurtfull to youth", among which feature "the works of Machiauell" and many chivalric romances, both Continental and English.[22] These references demonstrate that the book was well known and in circulation at the turn of the century. In the seventeenth century, a satirical tone emerges when *The Mirrour* and similar romances are mentioned: Thomas Overbury, in one of his Characters (1614), writes of a chambermaid who "is so carried away with the *Mirrour of Knighthood*, she is many times resolv'd to runne out of her selfe, and become a lady errant".[23] As has been pointed out (Schleiner 1994:21; Lucas 1989:24), the portrayal of the chambermaid who was fond of *The Mirrour* is misogynistic and satirical. Similarly, in Philip Massinger's *The Guardian* (1633) the confidante, addressing her mistress, proclaims her attraction to romances and her belief in their truthfulness:

> In all the books of *Amadis de Gaul*,
> *The Palmerins*, and that true Spanish story
> *The Mirror of Knighthood*, which I have read often,
> Read feelingly, nay more, I do believe in't,
> My lady has no parallel.[24]

As has been noted (Moore 2000:321), "the reading of romance... became a favourite topic in English comedies, witnessing to the continuing popularity of romance... at the same time parodying it". The parody was based on gender and/or class: in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1613) Francis Beaumont ridicules both the popular chivalric romance and its readership, especially the artisan and merchant classes; the playwright demonstrates an accurate knowledge of the object of his parody, especially of *The Mirrour of Knighthood*, to which he refers in detail (O'Connor 1970:156).[25] Increasingly, romances were identified as the favourite reading of the female public, a public frequently represented as constituted by maids and women of the lower social orders (Lucas 1989:15). As Hackett (2000:67) notes, "the association of the romances with women is part of their progressive decline in cultural status, deploying the familiar connection between women and trash".

The rise of the romance/novel divide: Tyler's invisibility

While, during the Renaissance, romances were deemed immoral reading for both men and women (though more harshly prohibited to women for their erotic connotation), with the early seventeenth-century emergence of what was later called the "realistic novel", an increasingly clear cut gender divide was enforced, with a system of binary oppositions, the yoking of "women" and "romance", and the identification of "men" and "novels". This will prove to be a crucial factor in the process of canon formation which brought about the complete neglect of Tyler's translation and the marginalization of one of the most successful sixteenth-century literary genres, the prose romance.

In the process of canon formation, the status of the literary category called "romance" underwent a progressive deterioration. Elizabethan and chivalric romance, with its supposed special appeal to female readership, came to be placed in the same derogative category and linked with women writers of fiction from the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. In an effort to defend women's fondness of the edifying Richardson, Clara Reeve in *The Progress of Romance* (1785) castigates with some contempt women readers of the earlier generation, those "reading Ladies of the last age, (…) for their studies were the French and Spanish Romances, and the writing of Mrs. Behn, Mrs. Manly, and Mrs. Heywood [sic]" (in Warner 1994:7). Similarly, another early literary historian, John Colin Dunlop in *The History of Fiction* (1814) condemns the moral faults of Eliza Haywood, whom he considers Behn's follower, because: "her male characters are in the highest degree licentious, and her females are as impassioned as the Saracen princesses in the Spanish romances of chivalry" (in Warner 1994:13).

Thus, early literary criticism constructed a negative tradition linking the Continental romances

introduced in England by Tyler and other translators, and English women writers of fiction from Behn to Haywood: all these texts came to be defined as "romances", in opposition to "novels", even if there is abundant evidence that in the eighteenth century the terms "romance" and "novel" were not always distinguished from each other.[26] Along with Renaissance romance, the prose fiction produced by women between 1660 and 1730 became a body of "feminized" fiction which was pushed to the margins of the literary canon to make room for the newly born "elevated" serious prose form, later called the novel.[27] This was associated with the achievements of masculine realism, those of Ian Watt's canonical "fathers of the novel" (Richardson, Defoe, Fielding).

The marginalization of the eighteenth-century "mothers of the novel"[27] was denounced by feminist criticism in the 1980s, with a successful operation which opened up an entirely new perspective on the origins of the novel, and helped to discover or rehabilitate the talents of many women authors. Conversely, Renaissance romance remained in a marginal position. Drawing attention to the degree to which Elizabethan romance has been neglected, dismissed or treated with disdain by literary historians in the twentieth century, Constance Relihan (1996:2) remarks: "Because Elizabethan fiction resisted [the] Darwinian/Romantic model that held realism as fiction's desired goal (see for instance Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel*), it was typically excluded from strenuous literary inquiry".

The otherwise pervasive influence of gender scholarship has reached the area of Elizabethan prose quite late in the day: only relatively recently have feminist and gender critics initiated the study and revaluation of this genre which has so long inhabited the shadowy places of English literary history. Elizabethan prose romances have been analysed in a number of critical studies,[29] the traditional opposition romance/novel has been questioned, and the gender divide deconstructed: the marginal position of romance thus emerges as that of "the novel's other" (Langbauer 1990:3), as "an abject trace or degraded 'other' needed to secure the identity of the 'real' (i.e., legitimate) novel" (Warner 1994:15).

There is also another way in which Tyler's marginalization goes hand in hand with the unfolding of an authoritative critical narrative about "the origins of the novel" (i.e. the English novel). When the myth of the sudden and autochthonous birth of the English novel was established, with its emphasis on the national specificity of realism and individualism, all traces of Continental predecessors and foreign influences from previous centuries were erased: *The Mirrour* and similar romances which had been imported into England from Spain, Portugal and France through the fervid activity of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century translators were mostly ignored by literary historians, despite the popularity and prominent position they enjoyed in the early modern cultural context. The origins of the English novel had to be English and distinctly modern. As Warner (1994:19) demonstrates, from the late nineteenth century onwards, "a nationalist British literary history produces a new object of cultural value now dubbed 'the English novel'". This position is notably maintained in the twentieth century by Ian Watt, with his stress on the idea of the novel's nationalism and realism, which excluded all possible Continental influences, especially those of Spanish, Portuguese and French romance of which The Mirrour was one of the first examples in the English language.

Concomitantly, Margaret Tyler and other Elizabethan translators of romances have suffered a long exclusion from academic inquiry in the field of translation history and theory. Although Tyler's Epistle, as seen above, is rich with comments on the practice of translation and constitutes an invaluable source of material regarding a Renaissance woman's translating strategies, it has to this day received little attention by translation scholars. Early experts of Elizabethan translation entirely ignore Tyler and disregard the genre: in his 1960 *Elizabethan Prose Translation*, James Winny refers only once to prose romance.[30] His predecessor, F. O. Matthiessen, in *Translation, An Elizabethan Art* (1931) makes no mention at all of romance. Considering that Tyler's Epistle is one of the very few existing documents, and certainly the most extensive one, in which the voice of a Renaissance woman translator can be heard, the neglect her work and personality have suffered is striking. A notable exception to this general lack of interest on the part of translation scholars is the 1995 article by Douglas Robinson, "Theorising Translation in a Woman's Voice", where Tyler is analysed together with three seventeenth-century authors.[30] In the section on Renaissance translators of *Translation and Gender*, Luise von Flotow (1997:69) appears to summarize Robison's article and fails to note the importance of Tyler's Epistle for the study of translation and gender in the Renaissance; yet, Tyler's text has been widely available in modern editions for over a decade. The relative obscurity of one of the most interesting Renassaince women who not only translated a long and controversial secular text from a language little known in England at the time such as

Spanish, but also significantly theorized on the activity of translation from a gendered position, suggests that even in the field of translation studies an old-fashioned, crystallized concept of the canon persists today.

From oblivion to consecration: Tyler's feminist counter-canonization

The modern availability of Tyler's text is a result of the work of another field of scholarly inquiry – feminist literary criticism – which, within its own confines, has effected nothing less than a canonization of this Renaissance translator. Since the 1980s, feminist scholarship has brought about a striking rediscovery of Margaret Tyler's literary personality and the Epistle has been reprinted in at least four collections of early modern women's writing, while a facsimile edition of Tyler's *Mirrour* appeared in The *Early Modern Englishwoman* series.[32] It is in this context that *The Mirrour*'s translator has been elevated not only to historical visibility, but to the honour and celebrity of being "the first true English feminist"(Todd 1989:681). She is also remembered as "the first Englishwoman to publish a prose romance". Her Epistle is "a kind of feminist manifesto" (Krontiris 1988:21), "constitutes a landmark in feminist literary history" (Krontiris 1992:45) and "the earliest known defence by an Englishwoman of a woman's right to take up the pen" (Todd 1989:680).

In its early phase, British and Anglo-American feminist criticism sought to trace a diachronic tradition of women's writing, and consciously laboured to "counterbalance the canon", to establish an alternative tradition of forgotten or neglected "women worthy of praise",[33] often employing the very rhetoric and values of the traditional humanistic Western canon.[34] During a subsequent stage of this cultural operation of "recovery", the English Renaissance played a crucial role, as demonstrated by the copious academic research on women in the early modern period which has been produced at least since the early 1980s. A great deal of literary activity by early modern women has been unveiled, republished and anthologized while critical studies from a gender perspective continue to appear steadily today.[35] Thanks to many feminist and gender scholars as well as new historicists and deconstructivists, a much needed problematization and reassessment of the Renaissance literary canon has taken place in the past few decades.[36]

Tyler's rescue from oblivion is only one example of the inestimable work of recovery of women-authored texts from the early modern period now given their deserved visibility. However, if on the one hand this enterprise of feminist literary historians and critics has successfully challenged "the sacredness of the gentlemanly canon" (Rich 1980:33), on the other hand it has too often been accompanied, especially in Renaissance studies, by a marked propensity to force feminist evaluative criteria onto the cultural production of a very distant historical period. The tendency to search for evidence of feminist consciousness in each woman-authored text from the early modern period (attempts which are often frustrated) is well exposed in Danielle Clarke's *caveat* (2000:7): "if these texts refuse to yield up to feminism, it may also be the case that feminism, as it has been applied, does not yield up to the texts".

The historical blindness of the essentialist position in women's studies is evident in some critical readings of *The Mirrour* carried out by feminists. Tina Krontiris, one of the earliest scholars specializing on Tyler, has the merit of having analysed in depth both Tyler's prefatory material and the text of the translation itself. Although the Renaissance scholar concedes that *The Mirrour* is "not a radical text" (Krontiris 1992:49), she proceeds to praise the romance, for instance, for treating the issue of "violence against women" (Krontiris 1992:59), thus making a sixteenth-century chivalric romance improbably serve feminist interests. A similar imposition of feminist political categories on texts from a distant historical and cultural context emerges in the study by Caroline Lucas (1989:2), when she affirms that "women can (…) revalue [Elizabethan] romances as important domains of women's independence and power". A warning about this reading of Renaissance romance is given by Hackett (2000:6), who points out that "the assertion that romances foreground positive female characterisations (…) depends upon highly subjective and possibly anachronistic, definitions of what is 'positive'".[37] A similar perplexity is expressed by Goldberg (1997:194), who criticizes the tendency of certain strands of feminism to seek the "properly feminine" in Renaissance romance, an operation which, he argues convincingly, obscures the presence in the texts of other, often ambiguous gender dynamics. Feminist scholarship has undoubtedly the great merit of having rescued Margaret Tyler and many other women writers from obscurity and marginalization; a new turn in recent critical approaches to gender will also hopefully contribute to a more effective reading of these writers in context.

Conclusions

Margaret Tyler has found herself, as an object of study in contemporary criticism, in a complex position at the intersection of translation, gender and genre. Today this Renaissance writer is not included in the traditional English literary canon, or in university curricula; however, her Epistle is readily available in modern editions and she does hold the illustrious title of "first English feminist" and Renaissance "foremother" in the alternative canon of anglophone academic feminism. On the other hand, her fame is not as high as a translator, and she is only just starting to be rescued from obscurity in that capacity also. In any case, Tyler's vicissitudes of exclusion from and inclusion in the canon(s), contribute to illuminate the elaborate dynamics of canon formation, especially with regard to translation, gender and genre in English literature.

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Footnotes

[1] No certain fact is known about Tyler's life except what she herself states in the prefatory material in *The Mirrour*: she was middle-aged at the time she was writing and she had worked in the household of Lord Thomas Howard. She is one of the rare examples of non-aristocratic women writers in the early modern period. On Tyler's life see Ferguson (1985:51-52) and especially Schleiner (1992).

[2] See for instance, Bassnett (1980:58): "Translation [in the Renaissance] was by no means a secondary activity, but a primary one, exerting a shaping force on the intellectual life of the age". See also Cattaneo (1996:379-401) and Goldberg (1997:81-83).

[3] Written by the Spaniard Juan Luis Vives, *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae* (1524) was dedicated to Queen Catherine of England. It had been commissioned by the monarch as a guide for the education of her daughter Mary, and was translated in 1529 by Richard Hyrde as *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*. It became the founding text for the education of Renaissance gentlewomen and ran through eight editions before 1600.

[4] Margaret Tyler, 'M.T. to the Reader', in *The First Part of the Mirrour of Princely Deedes and Knighthood*, London: Thomas East, 1578. I quote from the first edition reprinted as volume 8 of *The Early Modern Englishwoman: A Facsimile Library of Essential Works – Printed Writings, 1500-1640,* Series I, Part One (Travitsky and Cullen, 1996). All subsequent quotations are from this edition. While this text is referred to as a "Preface" by some critics, I adopt the more accurate convention of those scholars referring to 'M.T. to the Reader' as an "Epistle".

[5] Richard Mulcaster's *Positions* (1581), dedicated to Elizabeth I, also has one chapter on girls' education. On women's literacy and education in the Renaissance see, among others, Aughterson (1995) and Eales (1998).

[6] See the title of Susan Hull's groundbreaking study *Chaste, Silent and Obedient: English Books for Women, 1475-1640* (1982). The formula recurs in the title page of Robert Greene's *Penelope's Web* (1587) where are mentioned "three especiall vertues, necessary to be incident in every verteous woman … namely Obedience, Chastitie, and Sylence".

[7] See also Woodbridge (1984).

[8] Hackett (2000:6-9) suggests that there is no evidence that in the sixteenth century romances were women's favourite readings (a commonplace largely endorsed by scholarship), and demonstrates that "ideas of a large Elizabethan female readership for romance are exaggerated". A growth in the female romance-readership must have taken place by the mid-seventeenth century.

[9] On the issue of authorship in the Renaissance see also Wall (1993).

[10] Krontiris (1992:18); Hackett (1992:47). Wroth was apostrophized by one of her personal enemies, Edward Denny, who exposed the impropriety of a woman writing a romance and praised instead Wroth's virtuous aunt, the Countess of Pembroke, famous for her religious translations.

[11] In a strikingly similar way, a century later Aphra Behn will use precisely the same argument to

defend her role of woman writing for the theatre. Like Tyler, she also addresses the reader in an Epistle: "plays have no great room for that which is men's advantage over women, that is, learning" (Behn, *The Dutch Lover*, 1673, in Todd 1992-1996, vol. 5:162).

[12] Philip Sidney, *Defence of Poetry*, in O'Connor (1970:82;183). See also Salzman (1985:98-99) and Hackett (1992:45).

[13] As Lefevere (1990:16) explains, "translators do not get burned at the stake because they do not know Greek when translating the Bible. They get burned at the stake because the way they translated the Bible could be said to be a threat to those in authority".

[14] John Florio, dedicatory epistle in Montaigne (1603:A2r). The quotation can be found, among others, in Trill (1996:145), Goldberg (1997:75), and Stewart (2000:90).

[15] This commonplace idea appears in works by scholars of Renaissance women's writing (for instance, Martin 1997:5), as well as in studies dealing specifically with translation and gender: in the section devoted to Renaissance translators, Luise von Flotow (1997:66) reiterates the view of earlier scholars such as Hannay and Krontiris, and notes "how religious texts offered … women the only escape from [a] restrictive situation".

[16] Trill (1997:5) notes that there were eight women translators in the period 1521-1600: Anne Cooke-Bacon, Elizabeth I, Anne Locke, Joanna [Jane] Lumley, Dorcas Martin, Margaret More-Roper, Mary Sidney and Margaret Tyler, who collectively produced thirteen translations; she also observes that "while many of the texts produced by women in the late sixteenth century were religious translations, this did not necessarily mean it was an acceptable mode of expression for women". Also Stewart (2000:90) questions the acceptability of women-authored translations in his discussion of the problematic gendering of Anne Cooke-Bacon's translations of Reformist texts.

[17] See also Hackett (1992:44).

[18] As Hackett (2000:140) argues, "the continuing currency and popularity of romances of the 1580s into the late 1590s and early 1600s is shown by Shakespeare's regular recourse to them as sources".

[19] The pervasive influence of this chivalric romance can be traced also in John Donne's 'The Ecstasy' (O'Connor 1970:150-153).

[20] Two exceptions to the twentieth-century general neglect of Tyler's work before the advent of feminist scholarship are Perott (1913) and Mackerness (1946).

[21] *The Mirrour* is divided into four parts. In 1578 Tyler translated the First Part by Calahorra, in three books (1562); the Second Part by Pedro de la Sierra, in two books (1581) was translated by R. P. [Robert Parry? or Richard Parre?] in 1583; the Third Part, in two books, and Fourth Part, in two books, both by Marcos Martínez (1589) were translated by one L. A. in 1601. After the 1578 edition, Tyler's translation of the First Part appeared in 1580, 1585, 1599, and in the entire series in 1601. See Underhill (1899); Krontiris (1988:20); Coad, "Introductory Note" in Tyler (1996:x).

[22] Some of the romances censured by Meres (1598; 1931:167-68) along with *The Mirrour* are *"Amadis de Gaule, Beuis of Hampton, Guy of Warwicke, Arthur of the round table, Palmerin de Oliua"*.

[23] Quoted in Krontiris (1988:27); also quoted in Lucas (1989:24), and Hackett (2000:66). Charlotte Lennox will later centre her parodic novel *The Female Quixote* (1752) around the question of women's susceptibility to the antirealism of chivalric romances. See Langbauer, "Diverting the Romance: Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote*" in her *Women and Romance* (1990: 62-92).

[24] Quoted in Lucas (1989:16) and in Hackett (2000:67).

[25] One of Beaumont's characters refers to the army of "fourteen or fifteen hundred thousand men… that the Prince of Portigo brought against Rosicleer" (in O'Connor 1970:260). This is unmistakably a reference to a war in Book III of *The Mirrour*. See also Salzman (1985:99).

[26] As Jane Spencer (1986:182) points out, in the eighteenth century "critics often mentioning 'romances' sometimes referred to fiction in general – often signalled by their putting 'novels and romances' together as sharing the same faults – and sometimes to an older form of writing like the medieval romance or the seventeenth-century French romance".

[27] See the illuminating introduction in Backscheider and Richetti (1996:xi). Even today, as

Langbauer (1990:1) notes, "romance is thought somehow proper to women and usually derided accordingly".

[28] The definition is Dale Spender's, from *Mothers of the Novel* (1986), one of the earliest feminist studies which told a different story about the birth of the English novel, questioning the supremacy of its canonical "fathers". See also Spender (1992) and the equally pioneering study by Spencer (1986).

[29] After the efforts of critics such as Salzman (1985) and Logan (1989), the first feminist study was that by Lucas (1989), followed more recently by Relihan (1996), Maslen (1997), Hackett (2000) and Clarke (2001). In her work on Tyler, Krontiris (1988; 1992) also partly dealt with Elizabethan romance as a genre.

[30] The only reference to romance in Winny (1960:xi) is: "The translators who introduced Continental fiction to English readers made an important contribution to the immediate background of Elizabethan drama".

[31] To my knowledge, no translation scholar has yet produced a textual and linguistic analysis of *The Mirrour* in relation to the *Espejo*, which could tell us a great deal about the strategies of Tyler's translating practice and the degree of textual manipulation she may have employed. This may shed light on the extent of her feminist consciousness more than thematic analyses of the text of *The Mirrour* have done so far (see note below).

[32] Before the facsimile reprint of *The Mirrour* (1996), brief excerpts from the Epistle were included in Travitsky's anthology (1981); the unabridged text of 'M.T. to the Reader' appeared in Ferguson (1985:51-57), with the original spelling; in Aughterson (1995:233-236) and Martin (1997:18-24), both with modernized spelling. Suzanne Trill's *Lay by Your Needles* (1997) is the only anthology to my knowledge which includes part of the text (the first three chapters) of the romance. Critical analyses of the plot and themes of *The Mirrour* have been carried out by Krontiris (1992:49-62) and Hackett (2000:57-60).

[33] Gilbert and Gubar, 'Foreword' in Schleiner (1994:ix). See also the significant title of the anthology *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print: Counterbalancing the Canon* (Haselkorn and Travitsky 1990). Gilbert and Gubar are representative of the aspiration to identify a "female literary community" extending as far back as the Middle Ages and the early modern period; they praise "feminist critics [who have] established thematic and stylistic links between women from very different places and periods" (in Schleiner 1994:ix).

[34] See the earliest critique of this kind of Anglo-American feminism, Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual Politics* (1985). In the field of Renaissance and gender studies, Danielle Clarke (2000:7-8) has recently remarked that "the notion of difference, used gynocritically as opposed to deconstructively… leaves the very binarism it is designed to displace or unsettle wholly intact".

[35] It would be impossible to cite the innumerable academic publications with historical, sociological, literary and cultural approaches to women in the Renaissance and early modern period. One of the most significant efforts of feminist scholarship is undoubtedly the monumental collection *The Early Modern Englishwoman* (Series I and II, 1996-2007) which shows the variety and amplitude of women's writing.

[36] See for instance, Ferguson et al (1986); Goldberg (1986); Barker et al (1991); Harvey (1992); Kegl (1994); Traub et al (1996); Clarke (2000; 2001); McMullan (2001). See also the groundbreaking work of queer theorists such as Goldberg (1992; 1994; 1997) and Traub (2002).

[37] As Hackett (2000:30) also observes, "Renaissance texts of all kinds voiced an incessant preoccupation with feminine silence, chastity and obedience, and texts written by Renaissance women often declared their allegiance to these ideals".