

Women translators and paratextual authority: The frameworks of religious translation

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Abstract

This article examines the paratexts of religious works translated by women and considers how these can create frameworks which assert institutional authority. By analysing how authority is embedded in the multi-layered structure of paratexts of religious translations, the study considers the restraining role of paratexts and their ability to replicate hierarchical structures around translated works. A different typology of the function of paratext is thus illustrated, where spaces are employed to control the translated work rather than to allow greater female visibility or agency. To demonstrate this typology of the paratext, the article uses a sample of translations published by two of the most successful women translators of Catholic religious texts in the Anglophone world in the nineteenth century: Mary Anne Sadlier and Mary Austin Teresa Carroll. This study demonstrates that as women translators were gaining a foothold in the world of religious publishing in the nineteenth century, their work was embedded in an institutional structure of sameness, collective endeavour and regulation. The layers of authority to be found in the paratexts of the translations of women translators in this period emphasise the importance of examining translations in their totality, and not just the linguistic features of the source and target texts.

Keywords

Paratext, institutional framework, approbations, Mary Anne Sadlier, Mary Austin Teresa Carroll

1. Introduction

When examining the work of women translators, attention is often paid to paratexts, to the extent of the woman's visibility, to the presence of commentary on the translation and to the sociological and cultural trends that can be tracked in these spaces. It has been argued that paratexts can be used by female translators to create a space for their voice or assert their own identity (Batchelor 2018, p. 36). This article will examine paratexts in relation to women translators of religious texts and, rather than view these as spaces for female presence and expression, it will examine how paratexts can create regulated frameworks for religious translations. In so doing it will illustrate a different typology of the function of paratext where spaces are employed to control the translated work rather than to allow greater female visibility. By analysing how authority can be embedded in the multi-layered structure of paratexts of religious translations, this article will thus examine the restraining role of paratexts and their ability to replicate hierarchical structures around translated works. To demonstrate this typology of the paratext, the study will use a sample of translations published by two of the most successful women translators of Catholic religious texts in the Anglophone world in the nineteenth century: Mary Anne Sadlier and Mary Austin Teresa Carroll. These translators were at the forefront of rapidly expanding popular religious publications in this period but, despite their prominence as translators of religious texts, their works were nonetheless framed with paratextual elements which gave precedence to the institutional patriarchal and hierarchical structures.

2. Paratext: Definitions

Texts are often accompanied by a variety of paratextual material which may include introductions, prefaces, dedications, indexes, marginalia, glossaries, frontispieces and so forth. These paratexts can impact on the reception and the understanding of the text itself and have been the subject of much attention since Gérard Genette drew attention to their form and function in the 1980s. For Genette the paratext was a 'threshold' or 'vestibule' which transformed a text into a book. He divided the paratext into *peritext* and *epitext*, with the former relating closely to the book itself (e.g. cover, title, foreword, epilogue, etc.) and the latter consisting of statements about the book beyond the book itself such as reviews, interviews, letters, diaries, articles (Genette, 1997). In this article, I will be looking at both peritextual elements such as the prefatory material preceding translations and also epitexts such as advertisements, which provide a threshold for interpretative readings of the text and influence reception patterns. Although Genette's proposal that translations of texts are themselves paratexts has not been widely accepted, the overall theorising of paratext has been welcomed by scholars of translation who have embraced the notion that paratexts are 'thresholds' through which readers access texts (Batchelor, 2018)¹. Researchers have examined the significance of paratext in not merely understanding the cultural and historical significance of texts, but also in analysing the interventions in the text made by translators, publishers and, at times, readers. Early modernists who study translations have underlined the limitations of Genette's model and how early modern practices complicate a unidirectional understanding of paratext (Belle and Hosington, 2018, p. 9). In aiming to provide a more nuanced, translation-specific approach to paratext, scholars have studied dedications, title pages, footnotes, annotations and illustrations, together with prefaces, prologues, and epilogues, questioning how paratexts can reframe translations, with discursive and visual interventions (Belle and Hosington, 2018; Batchelor, 2018; Pellatt, 2014; Coldiron, 2015; Hosington, 2015). The shaping

¹ Batchelor (2018) deals extensively with the legacy of Genette and the use of paratexts in translation research; see also Tahir-Gürçağlar (2002).

and framing strategies evident in the paratext have revealed not only the variability of liminal printed spaces, but also the 'plasticity of the paratextual space' (Belle and Hosington, 2018, p. 4). Paratexts can thus be seen to refashion the material they are presenting and frame interactions with the text.

The position of women translators in relation to paratext has been studied by early modern scholars who have questioned how paratexts can be used to situate female translation activity within the print and publishing context in which their work was produced (Hosington, 2014). The impact of prologues, colophons, imagery, interventions by printers, and translator prefaces have been important points of consideration when analysing the first forays of women in the print world. That most of these early modern women were translating religious texts is not an insignificant point. Subsequent studies have examined the interaction between the woman translator and the paratextual apparatus with Hassen, for example, using online paratexts connected to women's translations of the Qur'an to analyse the translators' visibility. In the well-established discussions on translator visibility, paratexts have been identified as places of female visibility and Hassen argues that feminist translators have used paratextual elements such as prefaces, introductions and annotations to ensure their visibility (Hassen, 2012, p. 66). She further questions in her research whether the female voice is highlighted and used to challenge patriarchal discourse, or whether the female identity is concealed and the distinctive female voice effaced (Hassen, 2012).

In most studies on women and paratext, the central issue of concern has been the visibility of women in these spaces and, to a lesser degree, the agency displayed by the translator in paratexts². This article will expand the understanding of paratexts as expressions of female visibility/invisibility in the translated text, to also consider how the paratext can provide a controlling framework for the translation. To investigate the use of paratexts in religious translation, I will examine a selection of religious translations by Catholic women in the nineteenth-century Anglophone world. During this time, with the advent of new print technology, there was a large expansion of religious translations, and new cohorts of translators contributed to this expanding publication activity, particularly in the realm of popular religious texts. Women began to feature much more widely in Catholic religious publications and it is crucial to understand how their input was framed and controlled in the publication process. This is not to state that other cohorts of translators did not also find their work framed with similar structures; rather, it is to point out that even when women translators were gaining a foothold in the field of religious translations, their publications were embedded in an institutional structure of sameness, collective endeavour and regulation. In this context, traditional readings of the paratextual thresholds of their work in terms of visibility and agency are not adequate, and it is vital to acknowledge the controlling structures within which these emerging women translators had to work. The examination of a different typology of paratext, which highlights contextual authoritative mechanisms, demonstrates how, despite the expansion of print and increased interventions in the publishing world, female translators worked within a clearly-defined hierarchical structure.

3. Paratexts as controlling mechanisms

When faced with the increased circulation and translation of religious works on the back of the development of industrial print in the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church saw the need to establish rules to deal with the democratisation of access to texts, while at the same time continuing to propagate a centralised orthodox message. At the end of the nineteenth century, published regulations reflected these developments with clear statements of hierarchical

² See for example Simon (2000) and Henitiuk (2011).

structures and rules governing translational activity. In chapter 4 of the 1897 decrees issued by Leo XIII it is stated that:

44. Printers and publishers should remember that new editions of an approved work require a new approbation; and that an approbation granted to the original text does not suffice for a translation into another language.

45. Books condemned by the Apostolic See are to be considered as prohibited all over the world, and into whatever language they may be translated. (Leo XIII, 1897)

The decrees formalised the requirement for multiple types of religious publications (prayer or devotional books or booklets; catechisms and books of religious instruction; books and booklets of ethics, asceticism and mysticism) to receive permission from ecclesiastical authorities before publication. Translations of these works also had to be submitted to ecclesiastical authorities. These rules became part of Canon Law in 1917 under Title IV (Cann. 822-832) and the Church was careful to enumerate the position of translations as needing the approval of the local ordinary for publication. Canon 829 explicitly said that '[t]he approval or permission to publish some work is valid for the original text but not for new editions or translations of the same.' (Peters, 2001)

Control mechanisms are prominent in the paratexts of Catholic religious translations from this era through *nihil obstat*, *imprimatur*s and approbations, and they evidence how the Catholic Church applied structures to deal with the expansion of the cohort and profile of translators and publishers in the nineteenth century. It has been argued that 'holy texts positioned on the periphery of a culture's literary polysystem tend to be treated with more latitude than those centrally placed and receive correspondingly less attention in translation terms unless some specific reason arises' (Long, 2005, p. 6). However, the paratexts show us that, despite being geographically and linguistically on the periphery, the translation of religious devotional works was not allowed more latitude than liturgical and scriptural works. This is important because women were much more prominent in the translation of what might be considered peripheral religious works such as devotional texts but, despite this, they were still subject to the controlling central mechanisms of the institutional structures. They were not passing under the radar due to their distance from the institutional core; instead, they were firmly embedded in the institutional framework.

4. Approbations

One of the most striking paratextual features of nineteenth-century Anglophone Catholic translations consisted of approbations placed before published translations. Approbations were declarations which, as the word suggests, demonstrated approval of the translation and declarations of its quality. The apparatus of the approbation was used in the text to offer assurance to the reader as to the quality and utility of the work and the faithfulness of the translation. Let us examine in detail the approbations contained in one such work, *The Life of St. Alphonsus Liguori, Bishop, Confessor and Doctor of the Church, Founder of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer*, published in New York by P. O'Shea in 1874. The translation was by an Irish nun based in America, Mary Austin Teresa Carroll, who was referred to on the title page not by name, but as 'a member of the Order of Mercy'. The first approbation in this publication came from the translator's ordinary, the archbishop of the area in which she lived, and it stated:

Having submitted to a careful examination the work, original and translated, of a member of the Order of Mercy residing in our diocese, we cordially and earnestly recommend them to the faithful under our charge. Napoleon Joseph, Archbishop of New Orleans.

The approbation was endorsed within the book by a further thirteen bishops who stated that they 'cheerfully concurred' with the words of the most Rev. Archbishop of New Orleans (Bishops of Natchitoches, Natchez, Mobile, Galveston, Little Rock, Philadelphia, Columbus, Cleveland, New York, Burlington, Albany, Scranton, Brooklyn). An established system of patronage was drawn upon in order to achieve these endorsements, and in providing his approbation for the translation, the Bishop of Marysville (E. O'Connell) said:

Dear Sister in Christ: You honor me highly by asking my approbation of your forthcoming "Life of St. Alphonsus Liguori," the last, but not the least illustrious Doctor of the Catholic Church. Let me assure you, dear sister, that I hail your Life of St. Alphonsus as much as I do the admirable "Vindication" of his Theology by the Redemptorist Fathers; convinced as I am that both these works will put the great Doctor's sanctity and learning in a clearer light, and promote throughout this country the devotions which your favorite Saint had so much at heart, I remain, dear sister, your obliged servant in Christ. (Carroll, 1874, p.vii)

The translator had clearly asked members of the Catholic hierarchy in America to approve her work. This support, expressed through the approbation, highlighted certain elements. Firstly, it is stated that the work has been 'carefully examined by learned priests', which illustrates the monitoring of the translation and, even if the person who grants the approbation has not personally checked the work, they confirm that the book has been through a quality control process. These statements show how the paratextual material could provide reassurance to the religious reader that the work was an accurate translation conforming to expected norms. Secondly, the bishops assert the utility and value of the translation to members of the Catholic community. It is recommended as useful to both members of the clergy and to the wider Catholic faithful, with the Bishop of St. Augustine, Florida stating that it 'cannot fail to prove exceedingly interesting'. Thirdly, some of the approbations emphasise the network of patronage where the endorsement by one ordinary encourages endorsement by others. There is obviously a ripple effect of approval, as one bishop shows when he says:

I therefore take great pleasure in giving my approbation to the Life of the Saint, by a Member of the Order of Mercy, authoress of the "Life of Catharine McAuley" etc., relying on the recommendations it has received from the learned and most worthy Archbishop of New Orleans, and other high dignitaries. (p. vi)

A final element of the approbations is a reinforcement of the standing of the translator as seen, for example, in the approbation from John J. Hogan, Bishop of St. Joseph, who writes:

I could not hesitate to write my name in recommendation of anything coming from your pen; for you have already very much surprised and edified myself and many others by your successful labors, in which I am glad to learn that you are persevering. I have read all your books, and some of them several times over. (p. vii)

Approbations which preceded translated works were therefore a means of quality assurance, but also an opportunity to confer authority on a book. The prominent nature of the endorsements in the text spoke to the official and authorised nature of the translation and conferred an additional status to the text. The praise for the translator contained in approbations, even if expressed in formulaic terms, must be acknowledged as bolstering confidence in the competency of the person who had translated the work.

The endorsements contained in the approbations can be considered as testimonials, a mixture of standardised statements of admiration and declarations of quality. Here it is important to remember that the use of approbations was not restricted to women translators: the practice

was firmly embedded in Catholic publications in the Anglophone world from 1850s as evidenced in Catholic Almanacs, Directories and Catalogues. What becomes clear from a consideration of approbations is that women translators who wished to publish Catholic works in nineteenth-century America, needed to participate in the system of patronage and recommendation which would ensure official sanction of a book. Therefore when women translators found space in the publishing world of religious translations in nineteenth-century Catholicism, it was very much a controlled space where the patriarchal and hierarchical structures of the Catholic Church were maintained. The completion of a translation at a geographical distance from the Vatican, forced the Church to adapt in order to accommodate this individual endeavour within an institutional context and approbations were a means of placing the translation back into a collaborative framework. Although the translation was completed far from the institutional centre of Rome, it was firmly reconnected into the Catholic network through the multi-layered paratextual commentary and endorsement. It was once again part of the collective, with the translators conforming to a regularised and agreed ethos. Therefore, despite the geographical and linguistic expansion of the Church in the nineteenth century, it maintained this centralised control and collective endeavour in its multilingual publishing outputs.

For Mary Austin Teresa Carroll, the translation and publication of the *Life of St. Alphonsus Liguori*, with its commendations and declarations of support, placed it firmly within a religious community and sanctioned its use for that group. The levels of concurrence and consent evidenced in the approbations highlight the structures in place which framed the work of an Irish nun translating in New Orleans in the nineteenth century. The translator certainly saw her activities as part of her community involvement:

This work, undertaken through obedience, has been for us a labor of love and devotion. It is hoped that it will become, if we may so speak, a popular life of the great Doctor, the size and price of which will place it within the reach of the multitude. (Carroll, 1874, p.x)

The approbations that Carroll obtained gave the work sanction but also a marketing opportunity. Approbations were not just a feature of printed translations, they were also used as part of the advertising structures and appeared regularly as endorsements of the book which was for sale. One of the most prolific female translators of religious texts in the Anglophone world in the nineteenth century was Mary Anne Sadlier. An Irish woman by birth, she moved to Canada and then to the United States and was deeply involved in the family publishing business D&J Sadlier³. In contrast to many other female religious translators in the nineteenth century, her name was widely featured in the frontispiece and title pages of her translations, and her privileged connection to the publishing firm run by her husband certainly gave her an advantage in gaining recognition. When her religious translations were advertised in the Catholic press in America, they invariably featured notice of the approbations that the work had obtained. So, for example, when the translation *The history of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ* from the French by Mrs. Sadlier was advertised in *The Catholic Telegraph*, 16 April 1853, the blurb for the book said that it was published 'with the approbation of the Most Rev John Hughes, D. D., Archbishop of New York'. This was a regularly used endorsement for Sadlier's translation as the below advertisement demonstrates:

³ For more on Sadlier, see Hernadi (2001) and Milan (2018).



Figure 1. Sadliers' *Catholic Directory, Almanac and Ordo* (1864, p. 72)

The prominence of approbations in the religious translations of both Carroll and Sadlier draws attention to the need to view the paratextual material accompanying their translations not just in terms of visibility and agency, but in terms of structures and institutional practices. The framing apparatus of approbations illustrates the embedding of the female translator within a structured Catholic publishing space. Approbations were not exclusively used by women translators but, as we see in the case of Carroll and Sadlier, when prominent and successful women translators published their work within this framework, they became part of the regulated and hierarchical systems of Catholicism's publication enterprise. The paratext provides indications on the nature of these structures and the processes that accompanied the publication of religious texts in the nineteenth century. Carroll was ambitious for her work; she wanted it to be placed within the reach of the multitudes. In order for this to happen, she needed to work within the institutional framework and collaborate with the hierarchical structures which would sanction and promote her work. The paratextual evidence shows how these women engaged with the realities of the marketplace and how their religious translations contained traces of this publishing context.

5. Institutional frameworks

The presence of hierarchical structures of the Catholic Church in the paratexts reminds us of the importance of the institutional context on discursive strategies, social functions and effects of translations (Koskinen, 2008 and 2014). For Venuti, this contextual situation is crucial and he argues that institutions, 'whether academic or religious, commercial or political show a preference for a translation ethics of sameness, translation that enables and ratifies existing discourse and canon, interpretations and pedagogies' (Venuti, 1998, p. 82). Institutional translation can generally be characterised as collective, anonymous and driven by an underlying aspiration for sameness (Schäffner, Tcaciuc & Tesseur, 2014; Koskinen 2011), and the paratexts of religious translations by women in the nineteenth century reveal that this institutional ethos permeated their work and left visible traces in their publications. The women who translated Catholic religious works in the nineteenth century were subject to the institutional desire for 'sameness' and their practice reflects this in the continued declarations of the faithfulness of their approach. In the case of Carroll, repeated declarations of the fidelity of her translation belied the fact that the text she published was in fact an amalgamation and not necessarily a clear copy of an original. This deviation did not detract, however, from the

ethos of sameness as the publication complied with the tenets of the institutional core and thus remained faithful to its origins. This adherence to sameness and fidelity is evidenced in the layers of approbations and the statements of approval inserted before the translations, confirming the ideological and institutional alignment of the work. The approbations which endorsed translations drew attention to the accuracy, conformity and faithfulness of the work, and invariably praised fidelity, both textual and spiritual⁴.

The central importance of the institutional structures in the translated religious work by women can be further gleaned in the paratext from the attribution of the translated work on the title page. In this paratextual space, the women who translated the works were generally referred to not by their names, but instead in anonymous or pseudonymous form. A common attribution of translation was, for example to 'A Catholic Nun' or 'A member of the Order of Mercy'⁵. This anonymity and self-effacement of the individual revealed the dominance of the institution rather than the person. The gender of the translator was not hidden when the translators signed themselves 'An Ursuline Nun' or 'A Sister of Mercy', but the form of anonymity was an indication of the supremacy of the collective religious identity. The topos of the woman translator who is modest and reluctant for fame stretches back to the early modern period (Hosington, 2014) and was still remarkably enduring in the nineteenth century. Only in rare cases is the female translator named (as for example in the case of Mary Anne Sadlier). The dynamics of the anonymity can be analysed at the level of invisibility of the translator but it also must be seen as a moment of institutional dominance, where the adherence to the collective effaces the individual visibility⁶.

The female translator thus mediated between languages in her translations but was also a mediator of the powerful structures of institutional religion⁷. The paratext is crucial in understanding how the translation creates meaning, and the culture of the institutional framework of these translations is as much part of the text as the linguistic elements. The Catholic Church has a long history of team translation, of collective work, especially for Biblical texts, with strong hierarchical co-ordination. The completion of a religious translation by a single author was re-inserted into this collective framework through the paratext, where the support and endorsement of the religious institution was evident. Within the context of Qur'an translation, Hassen has discussed the paratext of a religious translation which shows no Islamic religious institution supporting or endorsing the female translator's work (Hassen, 2012, p. 71). This independence from the institution of the Catholic Church would have been unthinkable for a female translator in the nineteenth century, who relied on the support and approval structures of the institution in order to publish a work. The paratext clearly shows both the ideological alignment with the translated text and the institutional structures which allowed the female translator to access the publishing market.

6. Authority

As Lynne Long has argued, the translation of sacred texts by female voices raises fundamental issues of authority (Long, 2011, p.48) and the paratexts of these translations reveal multiple

⁴ For a more detailed discussion of notions of faithfulness in nineteenth-century Catholic religious translation, see O'Connor (2019).

⁵ On religious translation and the use of pseudonyms by women in Ireland in the nineteenth century, see Milan (2015) and O'Connor (2017).

⁶ In the nineteenth century translators could often be anonymous, but the dynamic behind this anonymity was not uniform, and differences exist, for example, between anonymity in genres such as religious or literary translation, and also between formats such as book or periodical publishing.

⁷ On the issue of translation as mediation, see Liddicoat (2016).

authoritative inputs in these translations, from translators, publishers, editors and religious institutions. I wish now to turn to a final element of the paratext, the translator's preface, where the female translator establishes her authority and positions her work in relation to the contextual situation and previous translations. Not all religious translations contain a preface from the translator, but those prefaces written by women translators reveal much about the positioning of their work.

These prefaces can be a mixture of confidence and authoritative declarations combined with self-deprecation and humility. The confidence is clearly displayed if the woman's work is a retranslation, and if the previous translation had been carried out by a man. It is a significant statement of intent and purpose to re-translate a work completed by a man, and involves a value judgement of the previous translation. When Mary Anne Sadlier published her *History of the life of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1853), a translation of a French work by François de Ligny, in the preface she addressed the shortcomings of the previous translation by Brian Arthur Molloy in 1846, stating that 'the translation was not approved of by American readers' (Milan, 2018, p. 373). The willingness to question other translations provides evidence of the confidence of the female translator who puts forward an alternative translation and publication.

In such prefaces, expressions of confidence can also sit beside statements communicating humility. For example Mary Anne Sadlier introduced a translation, saying that she has 'hastily thrown it into an English form' but at the same time she underlines its utility and importance, asserting that the work is for the benefit of 'our own people, both parents and children' and that the whole world is awaking to the vital importance of a religious education for the rising generation (Sadlier, 1904, p. 4). Therefore, despite describing it as a 'simple volume', she nonetheless announces that it will provide most useful lessons. In her address to the reader in another translation, Sadlier similarly both praises and downplays her contribution, stating that the work comes with high recommendations, even allowing for what it loses in the translation (Sadlier, 1854).

This combination of on the one hand downplaying the translated work produced by the female translator, while at the same time emphasising its utility and importance, speaks to the difficult intermediary positions that women translating religious text experienced. They could express their ambition for their works, as did Carroll in her preface to her *Life of Liguori*, where she hoped that her work would become popular and would reach the 'multitude' (Carroll, 1874, p. x). At the same time however, the work is presented as a dutiful act and it is humbly placed before the reader: 'This work, undertaken through obedience, has been for us a labor of love and devotion'. Another translation by Sadlier of a religious work by Collot was accompanied with the approbation of the ecclesiastical authorities of Montreal and also a translator's preface highlighting the utility of the work (Sadlier, 1853). The sentiments expressed in the prefaces capture the difficult balancing act required of women translators in the nineteenth century, combining confidence and humility, ambition and subservience.

7. Conclusion

The layers of authority to be found in the paratexts of the translations of women translators in the nineteenth century highlight the importance of examining translations in their totality, and not just the linguistic features of the source and target texts. The paratextual apparatus of translation impacts on the perception and reception of a text and, through the many components that make up the paratext, a new level of meaning is created which is not just explanatory in nature. At a time of rapid changes in the world of print in the nineteenth century, women translators gained a small but expanding foothold in the realm of Catholic publications. Their activities were transnational and translingual but, as the paratexts from

their works suggest, the control structures shared similar characteristics. The paratextual material captures the multiple thresholds of these works in the nineteenth century: the encasing of the work in approbations, the protestations of humility and faithfulness, and the insertion of the publication into the institutional system, all of which reveal the structured framework within which these women translators operated. Women may have experienced greater visibility as translators of religious texts in the nineteenth century, but their growing presence was not disruptive to the world of Catholic publishing; rather, as the paratexts show, it was firmly embedded in the hierarchical structures of the institutional centre.

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Biography: Anne O'Connor is Personal Professor and co-director of the Emily Anderson Centre for Translation Research and Practice in the National University of Ireland, Galway. She is the author of *Translation and language in nineteenth-century Ireland: A European perspective* (Palgrave, 2017) and is Principal Investigator on the ERC-funded project "Pietra: Religious Translation, the Catholic Church and Global Media: a study of the products and processes of multilingual dissemination". Her research interests include translation history, nineteenth-century literature and culture, religious translation and material culture.



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