“NEWES LATELY COME”: EUROPEAN NEWS BOOKS IN ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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Translation in Early Modern Europe could be about many things. It is now accepted that early modern Europeans had a wide variety of reading material from which to choose, yet we are only just beginning to understand how language choice factored into these decisions, as bibliographical projects allow for the observation of particular national and transnational trends in print history. Projects engaged in mapping early print have made the complexities of this world – the fluctuating tastes of the reading public, the steady hand of the commercially-minded book producer, and the contrasting fortunes of authors – increasingly discernible to scholars.\(^1\) One of the contributions of the *Renaissance Cultural Crossroads Online Catalogue of Translations* to this emerging scholarship has been a refocusing of how translation worked in Renaissance England, particularly the kind of material which was considered suitable and desirable to translate. Scholars of early modern literature and religion have long been aware of the strong cross-cultural forces at play in early modern culture, and the contemporary motivations for renderings of items of great spiritual or literary worth are usually easily found. But it is hard to account satisfactorily for the translation of less lofty printed material, of which a variety of genres appear in the *Renaissance Cultural Crossroads* catalogue.\(^2\) News pamphlets are a notable example of this kind of material, which has passed largely unnoticed by scholars of translation. Indeed, the vitality of historical international news networks has itself been somewhat overlooked and is only now receiving the attention which is its due.\(^3\)

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1. For example, the *Universal Short Title Catalogue*, led by Professor Andrew Pettegree at the University of St Andrews, consolidates data on the books printed in Europe before the end of the sixteenth century. www.ustc.ac.uk.
2. The content and scope of the *Renaissance Cultural Crossroads* catalogue is explored in the introduction. The catalogue itself can be found at http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/rcc.
3. This neglect is given some redress in the recent collection edited by Brendan Dooley, *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham & Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), which places great emphasis on the shared experiences of European news readers. See also the work of the *News Networks In Early Modern Europe* Project, based at the University of East Anglia and led by Professor Joad Raymond. www.newsnetworks.uea.ac.uk.
Yet printed translations of news pamphlets in the British Isles in the period before 1640 were plentiful. This study will show that printing translation was never a purely intellectual or spiritual endeavour – it was practical, pragmatic and popular.

News was an emerging concept in the early modern period, growing out of traditional oral and manuscript news networks. Information was exchanged between friends, colleagues and strangers upon meeting or exchanged in letters between interested personal or professional parties. Credibility was a key feature of written news exchange: the recipient knew who the letter had come from, and could judge the contents accordingly. Writers knew that their products would be shared and wrote with this in mind. From here, written news production took two interlinking paths. On the one hand, the handwritten letter system became increasingly professionalized. Networks of news gatherers collected stories across Europe, writing them into letters sent across the continent, where the contents could be extracted, written into other letters and sent on again. At the same time, the developing print industries impacted on the dispersal of news. Single item news pamphlets began to appear over the course of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries across Western Europe. Battles and sieges, speeches and processions all became likely to be rendered and reviewed in print, frequently presented to the reader as the direct product of the figures involved in the text, as a kind of surrogate author. Whereas the reach of a handwritten letter depended on the recipient’s immediate circle, and their aims in sharing the news, putting equivalents into print dramatically extended their reach. Although print reception could not be controlled in the same way as the reading of a manuscript letter, it was an effective means of sharing information. Over the next century, event-led publishing grew in competence, stature and importance across Europe, with the end result that by 1640, most countries had some form of regular

5 A fairly typical, if dramatically loaded, exchange of this sort can be seen in the opening lines of Act 3 Scene 1 of The Merchant of Venice.
7 This was in addition to the many thousands of items printed as reaction pieces in the wake of the significant events of the period. The flourishing of print in 1520s Germany or 1580s France, for example, has been well documented. Andrew Pettegree, Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 163–184.