

**JOHN FISKE AND POPULAR CULTURE: A CRITICAL READING OF
MARGARET TYLER'S "EPISTLE TO THE READER"**

Merve AYDOĞDU ÇELİK¹

Abstract

This paper examines how Margaret Tyler overcomes literary inferiority in the "Epistle to the Reader" that precedes her translation *The Mirroure of Princely Deeds and Knighthood*. Tyler, as a woman and an author, is in a secondary position in the patriarchal Elizabethan society and print culture. Notwithstanding her disadvantaged status, she circumvents it through various tactics, and she defends both her act and women's right to write. Tyler does not overtly challenge the assumptions prevalent in print culture but manipulates them to her own end. The fact that she employs several strategies to earn a place in the system renders it possible to evaluate the preface within the framework of John Fiske's popular culture theory. As is evident from the "Epistle," Tyler resists the dominant culture, and she produces her oppositional stance out of the resources of the dominant. Thus, Tyler's preface functions as an element of popular culture.

Keywords: popular culture, resistance, romance, women's literature, Elizabethan age

**JOHN FISKE VE POPÜLER KÜLTÜR: MARGARET TYLER'İN
"OKUYUCUYA MEKTUP"UNUN ELEŞTİREL BİR OKUMASI**

Öz

Bu çalışma, John Fiske'in popüler kültür teorisi ışığında, Margaret Tyler'ın yazınsal alandaki mağduriyeti ne şekilde alt ettiğini çevirdiği eser *The Mirroure of Princely Deeds and Knighthood*'un önüne eklediği "Okuyucuya Mektup" bağlamında inceler. Tyler bir kadın ve bir yazar olarak ataerkil Elizabeth dönemi toplumunda ve dönemin yayıncılık kültüründe ikincil konumdadır. Tyler, dezavantajlı durumuna rağmen, çeşitli taktikler aracılığıyla bu konumu savuşturur ve hem kendi eylemini hem de kadınların yazma hakkını savunur. Tyler yayıncılık kültüründe hüküm süren varsayımlara açıkça meydan okumaz fakat bu varsayımları kendi amacına hizmet edecek şekilde işletir. Tyler'ın sistemde kendine bir yer edinmek için türlü stratejiler

¹ Öğr. Gör. Dr., Tekirdağ Namık Kemal Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu, maydogdu@nku.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0001-7354-9705

kullanması n szn Fiske’in popler kltr teorisi erevesinde deęerlendirilmesini mmkn kılar. “Okuyucuya Mektup” ortaya koyduęu zere, Tyler baskın kltre bařkaldırır ve muhalif duruşunu egemen sylemin kaynaklarından retilir; bylece Tyler’in n sz bir popler kltr gesi iřlevi grr.

Anahtar Szckler: popler kltr, direniř, kahramanlık romanı, kadın yazını, Elizabeth dnemi.

Introduction

Nearly five centuries ago, Elizabeth I ascended to the throne and reigned over the country for almost five decades (1558-1603). While the epoch marked the Golden Age of England with myriad economic and political victories, Queen Elizabeth I as a female monarch became the target of attack because her status as a woman was contradictory to the patriarchal order. In the year she succeeded to the throne, John Knox, a Scottish theologian and the founder of the Presbyterian Church, who rejected female rule as a deviation from the law of Nature, for instance, wrote a pamphlet entitled *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. Queen Elizabeth I was the female power in a man’s world and, in her famous speech “To the Troops at Tilbury in 1588,” when she separated her body politic from her body natural, she reinforced the cultural assumptions upon which the patriarchal culture was built. She employed this rhetoric of subjectivity because although she was the most powerful person in the social hierarchy, she was nonetheless a woman, and she was supposedly the weaker one in the gender hierarchy. She thus had to suppress her gender identity and present her status as an exceptional woman. As Glenn (1997) argues, Queen Elizabeth I “willingly played the gender game, publicly performing her ability to transcend the limitations of her ordinary woman’s body” (p. 131). Given the situation, there is no surprise that she was “often glorified as the feminist heroine, yet her reign actually did little to affect the opportunities for contemporary women” (Glenn, 1997, p. 131).

The Condition of Women in the Elizabethan Society and Print Culture

In the Renaissance period, the condition of women was based upon the interpretation of the Scripture. If Eve’s creation out of Adam’s rib asserted that woman was created for man and to serve him all throughout her life, her temptation to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, which caused their banishment from the Garden of Eden, labelled her - and her daughters - the eternal seductress who was morally and intellectually weak and who had to be silent, obedient, and subject to man. The hierarchical relationship on earth was modelled upon the one in the Garden of Eden represented in the Scripture. As Mendelson and Crawford (1998)

argue, “the Genesis narrative was understood not only as a symbolic representation of gender roles in marriage and the family, but as a concrete event in the past which accounted for women’s loss of power and independence in the secular world” (p. 33). The father or the husband was the head of the family whose role was analogous to the role of God accordingly, and women, regardless of their wealth or rank, were under the rule of men. Ideal femininity was established within the boundaries of domesticity which was immediately associated with chastity. The ideal woman was to be seldom seen and never heard in public. She was supposed to be engaged only in housework, giving birth to and rearing children. In the same vein, the conduct literature in the sixteenth century, which regulated women’s behaviour and instructed them to act in certain ways, was put to use to discourage women’s presence in the public space. In *Catechism* (1564), for example, Thomas Becon warned women to “be not full of tongue, and of much babbling, nor use many words, but as few as they may ... ever remembering this common proverb: a maid should be seen and not heard” (Aughterson, 1995, p. 26); Nicholas Breton (1542-1626) preached women “to be sober-minded; to love their husbands; to love their children; to be discreet, chaste, housewifely, good, obedient to their husbands” (Aughterson, 1995, p. 171); Thomas More (1478-1535), although he supported his daughter’s education, advised her not to “seek for the praise of public, nor value it overmuch” but to regard him and her husband “as a sufficiently large circle of readers” (Guy, 2009, p. 74). Juan Luis Vives in *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* (1523), which was reprinted more than forty times in the 16th century (Wall, 1993, p. 281), also emphasized ideals of femininity as silence, obedience, chastity, and abstention from public: “it is not fitting that a woman be in charge of schools or have dealings with or speak to men ... it is best that she stay at home and be unknown to others. In company, it is befitting that ... none will hear her” (Vives, 2000, p. 71). The ideal woman prescribed in the conduct manuals and adopted by the society was shaped by surveillance and oppression.

While it was a must for women to follow the maxim of chaste-silent-obedient, there also occurred some developments in their condition. As Knoppers (2000) states, “lack of formal educational institutions for girls did not prevent many early modern women from acquiring - and enhancing - their literacy” (p. 9). Even if they could not attend universities or they were not given the same opportunities for education with men, “the great increase in the writing activities of Englishwomen that took place during the Renaissance suggests the development of a new type of Renaissance Englishwoman” (Travitsky, 1981, p. 4). Women produced letters, diaries, feminist tracts, confessions, poems, dramas, romances; they participated in religious, secular and fictional literature. Still, there were limitations on female

authorship as men monopolized print culture. Juan Luis Vives, for example, advocated that women should not embark on authorship as it was a male prerogative. What remains to women was to rewrite his word: “when she learns to write, do not have her imitate idle verses or vain and frivolous ditties, but rather some grave saying or a wise and holy sentiment from the holy Scriptures or the writings of philosophers, which should be copied out many times” (Vives, 2000, p. 71) so that they remain in the memory. The *female author* as a phrase was an oxymoron and she was known only as “a docile user of the pen who follows men’s instructions and spends most of her writing time copying men’s (or the Bible’s) words” (Ferguson, 1996, p. 154). In other words, women’s engagement with literature was frowned upon once it transcended the boundaries allotted to them. As Glenn puts,

writing and femininity seemed incongruous ... if the educated woman was exceptional, the writing woman might be absurd. Regardless of their education, women were still, *by nature*, timid, passive, and tender of heart; those who were immodestly publishing their scholarly or political writings were simply unnatural. (Glenn, 1997, p. 131) [emphasis in the original]

On the one hand, women contributing to literature were thought to be unnatural because of their innate features. On the other hand, women’s making themselves visible in public by publishing their works carried implications regarding their sexual behaviour. Women, therefore, faced obstacles when they attempted to establish themselves as public literary figures. As Wall (1993) states, “constrained by the norms of acceptable feminine behaviour, women were specifically discouraged from tapping into the newly popular channel of print; to do so threatened the cornerstone of their moral and social well-being” (p. 281). As manuscript circulation and published works were directly associated with promiscuity, the female author could have also been “branded as a harlot and a member of the nonelite” (Wall, 1993, p. 281). Women not only had to fight their right to write, but they also had to defy accusations against their honour and chastity.

Englishwomen, however, managed to respond to the obstacles they encountered (Krontiris, 1992, p. 20) and translation, whether from religious or secular works, became “a popular form of literary expression” (Krontiris, 1992, p. 20) for women to assert their voice in the literary arena. By means of translations, women both proved their literary competence and refuted the misogynist attacks that consider them intellectually insufficient. Tyler’s example, in the same vein, “suggests that sixteenth-century humanist education for women may not have been as narrow as a stress on female instruction simply to participate in household duties” (Ortiz-Salamovich, 2014, p. 18). Margaret Tyler (c. 1540 – c. 1590), who was the earliest woman to publish a romance in the country, likewise, became a pioneering figure in

terms of women’s writing when she translated Diego Ortuñez de Calahorra’s *Espejo de principes y caballeros* (1555) into English as *The Mirrour of Princely Deeds and Knighthood* in 1578. While it was common to translate Spanish literature through French or Italian, Tyler was the first author to “translate an entire romance directly from Spanish, and thus the first to access an Iberian text without intermediating interferences from other linguistic-literary systems” (Boro, 2014, p. 4). As significant as the translation, Tyler’s Epistle was also a milestone in protofeminist literature since it boldly criticised the patriarchal ideology and justified women’s act of writing. Krontiris (1992), for example, qualifies it as “a kind of feminist manifesto” (p. 45) and Robinson (1995) reckons it “an openly and unapologetically feminist document” (p. 158).

Translation was commonly associated with women in the Renaissance (Ferguson, 1996, p. 158) and it was not thought to “threaten the male establishment as the expression of personal viewpoints might” (Lamb, 1985, p. 118). On the other hand, as Wall (1993) observes, there was no difference between an original and imitative work, and original writing gained importance later on (p. 337). Considering that original writing was not appreciated more than the secondary/imitative one, Tyler’s openly gendered position renders her act more significant as she embarks on a widespread practice to use it as a form of resistance. Along with its importance in terms of feminist literary history, Tyler’s decision to translate a chivalric romance is remarkable considering how the genre was seen in the sixteenth century because, almost unanimously, educationalists and theologians condemned it as a reading material especially for women. Romance, as both a secular and recreational genre, was thought to be a territory women should not trespass. Vives, for example, instructed women to read only religious works so that they “will elevate their minds to God ... and improve their morals” (p. 79); according to him, romances tempted women to sin and reading them meant “to be cast into the fire of hell with both eyes and both ears” (p. 74) as they were “filthy” and “pernicious books” (Vives, 2000, p. 74). In *The Christian State of Matrimony* (1541), Heinrich Bullinger advised women not to “read fables of fond and light love” (Aughterson, 1995, p. 106); in *A Touchstone for This Time Present* (1574), Edward Hake emphasized the importance of religious education as he feared that young ladies would be “nouseled in amorous bookes, vaine stories and fonde trifeling fancies” (Hackett, 2000, p. 43) if they were not instructed properly; in *A Mirrhoe Mete for All Mothers, Matrones and Maidens* (1578), Thomas Salter warned fathers not to let their daughters “learn by heart books, ballads, songes, sonnettes and dities of dalliance, exciting their memories thereby” (Krontiris, 1992, p. 15-16). Romance was considered to be an immoral, sensuous genre that incites sexual desire;

thus, it was immediately associated with unchastity. The fear that it would trigger improper/unacceptable feelings, which would lead the female sex to abandon patriarchal teachings and to deviate from their culturally sanctioned roles, caused its denigration by the society. As Krontiris (1988) also argues, considering the prohibitions on love literature in the early modern period, both the very act of reading romance and the narrative itself constituted disobedience as it challenged dominant ideologies (p. 28). Sir Thomas Overbury in *Characters* (1615) straightforwardly reflected the cultural anxiety by means of a chambermaid absorbed in reading romances: "Shee reads *Greenes* works over and over, but is so carried away with the *Myrrour of Knighthood*, she is many times resolv'd to run out of her selfe, and become a Ladie Errant" (Hackett, 1992, p. 41). Interestingly enough, although women were not allowed to read romances, the genre was feminized through dedicatory epistles, titles, prefaces, and addresses to female readers (Newcomb, 2004, p. 123-124). In their prefaces, the authors John Lyly in *Euphues* (1578) and Francis Quarles in *Argalus to Parthenia* (1629) imagined women who enjoyed reading their romances in their chambers. Based on its generic representation, "romance reading was configured as a sexualized female experience whereby men could spy on a private female sphere" (Boro, 2014, p. 26).

Women's intervention into genre as producers (such as Margaret Tyler, Lady Mary Wroth, Anna Weamys), who had hitherto been seen to be consumers only, indeed, demonstrates that the fear was not unfounded because, contrary to the patriarchal principles, the genre helped women rehabilitate their cultural position as it "provided female characters with greater options for independent speech and action than traditional sixteenth-century English definitions of chastity allowed" (Relihan and Stanivukovic, 2003, p. 2); as the genre foregrounded female experience, female voice, and female power by means of the adventures of several heroines, warrior women and Amazons, it offered "women a version of themselves as far more independent, powerful and significant than they would have experienced themselves in any other area of their lives" (Lucas, 1989, p. 2); and, the representation of courageous heroines heartened women to ignore social restrictions and to be critical of their position in the society they lived in (Krontiris, 1988, p. 27). As Hackett concludes, Renaissance romance urged women, either as readers or authors, to emancipate themselves with its transgressive content:

For one thing, the relative invisibility of women on the literary and historical scenes in the period makes it refreshing and heartening to come across apparent evidence of female activity ... For another, this model is attractive because of its connotations of female pleasure and subversiveness ... This suggests that women chose romances for their reading matter in the

face of strong disapproval, with their own enjoyment defiantly in view, in preference to the devotional texts, herbals and books of household management otherwise available to them. All of this indicates an encouraging female independence of spirit. (Hackett, 2000, p. 5)

This is the framework in which Tyler’s literary enterprise must be placed, which, taken collectively, ascertains that her authorship was a ground-breaking act. Margaret Tyler had a significant status in terms of Renaissance print culture because she was the first author to claim a place in a context heavily populated and dominated, or even monopolized, by men. Her oppositional stance in the literary culture renders it possible to evaluate her “Epistle to the Reader” within the framework of John Fiske’s popular culture theory. As Fiske (1991a) records, “the work of popular culture provides the means both for the generation of oppositional meanings and for their articulation with that dominant ideology to which they are opposed” (p. 91-92). In the same vein, Margaret Tyler becomes a figure of resistance. She overcomes women’s subordination in the Elizabethan print culture by employing “the art of the weak” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 38) Fiske puts forth.

John Fiske’s Popular Culture Theory

Margaret Tyler, as the spokesperson for the subordinate section of the society, tries to establish a popular culture which is “the culture of the subordinated and disempowered” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 4). As Fiske (1991b) proposes, popular culture always bears the traces of power relations and of forces of domination and subordination (p. 5), but it simultaneously “shows signs of resisting or evading these forces” (p. 5). He accordingly underlines the contradiction embedded in popular culture because popular culture “can entail the expression of both domination and subordination, of both power and resistance” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 5). As he states, popular culture “is made by various formations of subordinated or disempowered people out of the resources, both discursive and material, that are provided by the social system that disempowers them” (Fiske, 1991a, p. 1-2). In other words, he argues that popular culture is constituted by the struggle between the powerful and the subordinate, and the material and discursive practices that produce them, which inevitably brings out polysemy because it entails “a resource bank of potential meanings” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 5).

While Fiske accepts the prevalence of a mass culture which has been imposed upon the powerless by the culture industry and which produces “a quiescent, passive mass of people ... totally disempowered and helpless” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 20), he also argues that individuals, whom he defines as “socially interested agents negotiating their particular trajectories through the historical conditions into which they were born” (Fiske, 1992, p. 173),

play a significant role in making their own culture. In this sense, he regards popular culture as “a site of struggle” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 20) which “is made from within and below, not imposed from without or above” (Fiske, 1991a, p. 2) and in which dominant forces “are coped with, are evaded or are resisted” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 20) by the individuals who can shape their social milieu. He thinks that popular culture is liberating as individuals make their own meanings. He adds that there cannot be “popular dominant culture, for popular culture is formed always in reaction to, and never as part of, the forces of domination” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 43). Popular culture is always produced “under conditions of subordination” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 46). There is always conflict in popular culture because “it always involves the struggle to make social meanings that are in the interests of the subordinate and that are not those preferred by the dominant ideology” (Fiske, 1991a, p. 2). In this process of making meanings, the subordinate “make their own culture out of the resources and commodities provided by the dominant system ... that subordinates them” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 15). The subordinate benefit from the dominant to resist them.

[the subordinate] align themselves with the forces of domination, for by ignoring the complexity and creativity by which the subordinate cope with the commodity system and its ideology in their everyday lives, the dominant underestimate and thus devalue the conflict and struggle entailed in constructing popular culture. (Fiske, 1991b, p. 18-19)

In the relationship between the dominant and the subordinate, the more the dominant underestimate and undervalue the struggle of the latter, the easier the subordinate construct popular culture. As Fiske relates, while the dominant have control over the commodities, they do not have complete control over the meanings reproduced out of them. In this sense, it is the resistance of the subordinate or the oppressed that makes popular culture. Popular culture, rather than focusing on the “omnipresent, insidious practices of the dominant ideology” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 20), seeks to understand “the everyday resistances and evasions” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 21) because “the dominant cannot control totally the meanings that the people may construct” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 45). Such an ability to generate meanings beyond the control of the dominant explains why popular culture is a form of resistance. Individuals continually scan the sources produced by culture industry to find resources to use for their own purposes. For this reason, reckoning that people are not “the helpless subjects of an irresistible ideology” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 45), Fiske regards popular culture both potentially and actually progressive, if not radical, because “it finds in the vigour and vitality of the people evidence both of the possibility of social change and of the motivation to drive it” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 21).

Fiske believes that people can destabilize power relations. He emphasizes the power of everyday practices in which the subordinate make meaning in their struggle with the dominant. Benefiting from Michel de Certeau who employs a military metaphor to explain this struggle as *guerrilla tactics*, which are “the tactics of the subordinate in making do within and against the system, rather than of opposing it directly ... concerned with improving the lot of the subordinate rather than with changing the system that subordinates them” (Fiske, 1991a, p. 11), Fiske argues that people’s everyday practices can serve to discuss, negotiate, and contest the dominant. He contends that these tactics “are the art of the weak: they never challenge the powerful in open warfare ... but maintain their opposition within and against the social order dominated by the powerful” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 19).

Fiske employs Certeau’s metaphors of conflict that he uses to explain the culture and practices of everyday life, namely “strategy, tactic, guerrilla warfare, poaching, guileful ruses and tricks” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 32). He believes that Certeau’s formulation is based on the assumption that “the powerful are cumbersome ... whereas the weak are creative, nimble and flexible. So the weak use guerrilla tactics against the strategies of the powerful, make poaching raids upon their texts or structures” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 32). In other words, the weak or the subordinate generate myriad of subtle and covert methods within the dominant structure to challenge its dominance. The dominant construct places where they can exercise power, but the weak have to carve out their own spaces within those places so that they can make them theirs albeit temporarily, and to occupy them when they need for their own purpose (Fiske, 1991b, p. 32). Certeau argues that the culture of everyday life is traceable in “adaptation” or “ways of using imposed systems” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 33). As he elaborates,

Innumerable ways of playing and foiling the other’s game ... characterise the subtle, the stubborn resistant activity of groups which, since they lack their own space, have to get along in a network of already established forces and representations. People have to make do with what they have. In these combatants’ stratagems, there is a certain art in placing one’s blows, a pleasure in getting around the rules of a constraining space. (Fiske, 1991b, p. 33)

Certeau calls this method popular resistance, and in his opinion, individuals can create popular resistance when they generate their own meanings by making use of various stratagems and manoeuvres while still being in the network of the dominant and using the resources they supply. These everyday manoeuvres and tactics, according to Fiske (1991b), enable the subordinate to “construct *our* space within and against *their* place” and “speak *our* meanings with *their* language” (p. 36) [emphasis in the original]. He argues that everyday life is constituted by the popular culture practices and characterized by the creative resistance of

the weak, which is best described through metaphors of struggle and antagonism: "strategies opposed by tactics ... hegemony met resistance, ideology countered or evaded; top-down power opposed by bottom-up power" (Fiske, 1991b, p. 47). The weak thereby produce their own meaning of social experience and they can avoid social discipline.

Tyler's Epistle within the framework of Fiske's Popular Culture Theory

While "the strategy of the powerful attempts to control the places and the commodities that constitute the parameters of everyday life" (Fiske, 1991b, p. 33), Margaret Tyler, subordinated in the Elizabethan print culture as a female author, produces her own dissident meaning. She generates her own space within and against this dominant male print culture adapting and exploiting its resources. She makes use of several strategies a woman author-translator could employ in the Renaissance. They can be summarized as follows: 1) She adopts the topos of modesty by choosing a man from a respectable family as a dedicatee and by trivializing her translation, 2) She declines responsibility by arguing that the work belongs to someone else and she has been forced to write by others, 3) She claims to have translated the romance to avoid idleness, 4) She utilizes the rhetoric of old age, 5) She embarks on the role of an educator basing her defence upon the humanist poetic theory, 6) She benefits from the tradition that represents women as implied readers by male authors, 7) She employs the "rhetoric of normalization" (Gallagher, 2000, p. 310). Margaret Tyler utilizes these strategies for her own purpose, which subsequently empowers her. Although she cannot completely renounce the dominant structure, by means of these stratagems, she refashions her position within Elizabethan print culture. In Fiske's words, she produces semiotic resistance as it "results from the desire of the subordinate to exert control over the meanings of their lives, a control that is typically denied them in their material social conditions" (Fiske, 1991a, p. 10).

Margaret Tyler dedicates her work to Lord Thomas Howard, Earl of Suffolk. The dedicatory letter shows that she is aware of her anomalous position as a woman author in Elizabethan print culture. She accepts that she has trespassed into a masculine domain: "[s]uch deliverie as I have made I hope thou wilt friendly accept, the rather for that it is a womans worke, though in a storye prophane, and a matter more manlike than becometh my sexe" (Tyler, 1985, p. 54). She, however, although she knows that what she does is extraordinary and traditionally practiced by men, does not prefer "either not to write or to write of divinitie" (Tyler, 1985, p. 56). She believes that, contrary to the subjects designated for women, she has the right to write whatever she wants to. She speculates that there might be "adversaries," "knownen enimies" (Tyler, 1985, p. 55) and "ill willers" (Tyler, 1985, p. 56)

who would attack her enterprise, yet she does not give up what she aims at. Fiske proposes that conventions have a regulatory function and thus they bear social power; “so departing from them is a means of symbolizing a resistance to, or negotiation with, this power or, at the very least, an assertion of subordinate power” (Fiske, 1991a, p. 121-122). Tyler also protests conventions because she acknowledges that she chooses a material non-religious and more suitable for male authorship. This recognition renders her a figure of resistance determined to reject patriarchal impositions.

Tyler adopts humility to be able to carve her own space within the literary culture. The first tactic she employs to circumvent the impositions of the dominant is the topos of modesty. She uses it in two ways: first, she chooses a man of power as a dedicatee; second, she trivializes her translation. It is understood from the dedication that Tyler was a servant in the Howard household, and because of the untimely deaths of the lady and the lord of the house, she decides to dedicate her work to their son Thomas Howard. While she also has the option to dedicate her work to a female patron, she chooses a prominent masculine figure from a respectable family. She acknowledges the benevolence of the Howard family and explains the reason why she has chosen Thomas Howard as follows:

And herein I tooke no long leasure to finde out a sufficient personage. For the manifold benefites I received from your honourable parents, my good Lord and Ladie, quickly eased me of that doubt, and presented your honour unto my view: whome by good right I ought to love and honour in especiall, as being of them begotten, at whose hands I have reaped especiall benefit ... In the meane time this my travaile I commend unto your Lordship, beseeching the same to accept thereof ... Under your honors protection I shall lesse feare the assault of the envious. (Tyler, 1985, p. 53)

Tyler openly seeks protection from her dedicatee because she is sure that she will be attacked owing to her trespass into a male domain. The fact that she emphasizes her loyalty to the late Howards and the benefits she received concretizes her position as a vulnerable woman. She embodies the damsel-in-distress and she praises her protector’s valour. She thereby maintains gendered hierarchy when she deliberately reveals that she has entered into a realm that she supposedly has not the right to. Her subversive position as the translator of a secular fiction, however, contrasts with the one as a woman who looks for patronage. She, indeed, poaches upon the restrictions with rhetoric of modesty. Her adopting the modesty topos, a feature attributed to women as a sign of ideal womanhood, serves to underestimate her enterprise. In other words, Tyler consciously decreases her authority and autonomy as a female author so that she can avoid criticism. Representing her translation activity as humbly

as possible is the only means she can construct her place within print culture. Knowing that her intellectual competence would be thought to be inferior to men’s, Tyler exploits the expectation to the fullest when she undervalues her ability as a translator-author. She deliberately employs this rhetorical strategy of submission because this is the only means she can express her voice. That is, the strategy transforms into a “surreptitiously empowering channel of expression” (Robinson, 1995, p. 154). Adapting the discursive practice imposed from above enables her to generate her own meaning in the struggle with the dominant. As she seems to have internalized the rules of the dominant, she resembles a guerrilla fighter and modesty topos functions as a guerrilla tactic because Tyler does not directly oppose/criticise the system that restricts her, but she tries to carve out her place within print culture to rehabilitate her current situation. To relate in Fiske’s words, with the topos of modesty, she “denies or mocks a masculine reading of patriarchy’s conventions for representing women” (Fiske, 1991a, p. 99) and offers a challenge to the dominant definitions of femininity.

Just as she diminishes her authority as an author, she undervalues the deed she fulfils. Tyler qualifies her work as merely an “exercise of translation” (Tyler, 1985, p. 52). In other words, she manages to evade the accusations she will receive owing to having participated in print culture with an unwelcome product. She deliberately does not take full responsibility over what she produced and limits her function as an author only with the activity of translation. She contends that she does not produce an original work but translates one already produced by a foreign man: “[t]he invention, disposition, trimming, and what else in this stories, is wholly 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” (Tyler, 1985, p. 55). She does not hold herself accountable for what she does. In this way, she not only trivializes both the activity of translation and her role as a translator, but she also distances herself from the text she wrote. Furthermore, “the process of collaboration between a male author and a female translator would seem to reinscribe the hierarchy of male dominance over women and the superiority of originality over translation” (Uman and Bistu e, 2007, p. 302), and Tyler again maintains the hierarchy that pushes women to the secondary place. Soon, however, she states that “especially this kinde of exercise being a matter of more heede then of deepe invention or exquisite learning” (Tyler, 1985, p. 56). It is understood that her act proves no more than false modesty. With a clever manoeuvre, she argues that translation is the most suitable activity a woman can practice because it neither requires the creative skills nor the humanist knowledge necessary to create an original work. As Arcara (2007) puts, Tyler at this point “strategically endorses the dominant discourse of the

masculine monopoly of learning only to exploit it fully for her own ends” (no page). She justifies her venture as a translator claiming that it is the only means she can contribute to the literary production. While she seems to reinforce the hierarchical relationship between women and men on the surface, she indeed implicitly reveals the restrictions placed on woman authors. The material conditions that prevent women from humanist knowledge, and thus restrict them in terms of education, justify the reason why she chooses translation.

Fiske (1991a) contends that “evasion is the foundation of resistance; avoiding capture, either ideological or physical, is the first duty of the guerrilla” (p. 9). In the same vein, Tyler employs a rhetorical trick when she does not assume responsibility for her act. In the very first sentence of her dedicatory letter, she explains the reason why she translated a romance, and confesses that she was forced to write, against her nature but “upon hope to please them” (Tyler, 1985, p. 53) by her friends: “[n]ot beeing greatly forward of mine owne inclination (right Honourable) but forced by the importunitie of my friends to make some triall of my selfe in this exercise of translation” (Tyler, 1985, p. 52). She also repeats in the Epistle that she was convinced by others: “the truth is, that as the first notion to this kind of labour came not from my selfe, so was this peece of worke put upon me by others” (Tyler, 1985, p. 55). She seems to decline responsibility for what she chose to translate claiming that she submitted to the behest of people around her. More importantly, she also notes that she was instructed by her friends to write “least I should be idle” (Tyler, 1985, p. 55). She guilefully builds her argument against the backdrop of an issue - idleness - commonly discussed in conduct manuals. In the early modern age, idleness was seen to be a threat to chastity for women, and even the source of all evils. Thomas Becon, for example, argued in *Catechism* that idleness should be avoided because “so soon as idleness occupieth the mind of any person, vain and evil thoughts brast in straightways, out of the which springeth all mischief, as pride, slothfulness, banqueting, drunkenship, whoredom, adultery, vain communication” (Aughterson, 1995, p. 26) and Juan Luis Vives, in his effort to denigrate romances, states that the genre appeals to idle people and kindles desire in them:

A custom has grown up ... that books in the vernacular - written in that tongue so that they may be read by idle men and women - treat no subjects but love and war ... How can I describe what a pestilence this is, since it is to place straw and dry kindling wood on the fire? But these books are written for those who have nothing to do, as if idleness itself were not a strong enough aliment of all vices without laying on a torch that will set a person on fire and devour him in its flames. (Vives, 2000, p. 73)

It is ironic that while Vives considers romance as a source of idleness and promiscuity, Tyler employs it subversively as a medium to save herself from idleness. Contrary to the dictates in the conduct manuals that restrict and disempower women to obey certain patterns of behaviour, Tyler uses the very same reason to assert a position of authority. In Fiskean terms, she establishes resistance out of the resources provided by the dominant culture (Fiske, 1991b, p. 15) which indeed subordinate her initially. The very system that impoverishes women and hinders their interaction with literary activities turns out to be a discursive resource that empowers Tyler and becomes an element of popular culture.

Tyler also employs old age as an evasion tactic to counter patriarchal discourse. In the Epistle, she emphasizes four times that she is an old woman. Tyler again exploits the patriarchal presumptions to her own end. While romance is frowned upon in conduct manuals as it would incite desire, Tyler (1985) notes that her “aged yeares” (p. 55) ensure her safe from such an aberration per se. That is, she notes that, as an aged woman, she would no longer be influenced by the sensual allurements the genre supposedly provokes. In the same vein, her “staied age” (Tyler, 1985, p. 56) nullifies her position as an attractive public figure. The old age immediately disconnects the relationship between publication and public self-display and supposed promiscuity because, as an old woman, she no longer embodies erotic attractions for men, and neither her body nor her work connotes voyeuristic impulses. The old age both “assure[s] her readers that she writes/translates from a sexually neuter position” (Arcara, 2007, no page) and glosses over the sexual connotations of her position as the author of a *published romance*. She warns the readers for the same reason: “of these two poynts gentle Reader I thought to give thee warning, least perhaps understanding of my name and yeares, those mightest be carried into a wrong suspect of my boldnesse and rashnesse, from which I wold gladly free my selfe by this plaine excuse” (Tyler, 1985, p. 56). She indicates that her publication in an unwelcome genre might be a courageous act, yet as a woman of age, such an action should be seen less bold and rash than a younger person would do. She implements the old age as a strategy/excuse to circumvent attacks. Cleverly enough, the moment she asserts her authority as an old-aged woman and evades accusations regarding its erotic appeal to young readers, she states that she has translated the work “to acquaint my selfe with mine olde reading” (Tyler, 1985, p. 53). The implication that she has had lengthy practice as a reader of romances covertly opposes the preachers that denigrate the genre. In other words, she does not directly oppose the prescriptions, but she maintains opposition to them when she records a prior experience.

As Tyler knows that romance is unbecoming to women, she also defends her decision by basing her argument on humanist poetic principles. She states that the translation

is done into English for thy profit and delight ... thou shalt finde in [it] the just reward of mallice and cowardise, with the good speede of honestie and courage, beeing able to furnish thee with sufficient store of foreine example ... which could season such delights with some profitable reading: so that thou shalt have [it] when need serveth, and at other times either a good companion to drive out a wearie night, or a merrie jest at thy boord. (Tyler, 1985, p. 56)

The Horatian catchphrase, which Horace argued that the aim of literature should be to teach a moral lesson and to delight the addressee simultaneously, was also employed by Sir Philip Sidney in *An Apology for Poetry* (1595) to emphasize the benefits romances provide. He, for example, underlined that poetry “is an art of imitation ... a speaking picture - with this end, to teach and delight” (Sidney, 1890, p. 9) and similarly regarded romance an instructional genre: “truly, I have known men, that even with reading Amadis de Gaule, which, God knoweth wanteth much of a perfect poesy, have found their hearts moved to the exercise of courtesy, liberality, and especially courage” (Sidney, 1890, p. 24). Despite their perceived immorality in the conduct manuals written in the 16th century, romance was thought to be a positive genre in the medieval era. It was substantially thought to be an instructional material which includes exemplary passages of courage, faithfulness, courtesy, and instruction for princes and commoners (Cooper, 2004, p. 6). Tyler, likewise, establishes her defence upon the humanist tradition endorsed by Horace, Aristotle, and Sir Philip Sidney. She embarks on the role of an educator and legitimates her enterprise by reiterating that the romance is a vehicle for moral growth, which the reader would enjoy while learning. She thereby promotes her production as a morally improving reading material suitable for readers regardless of their sex and age. It is noteworthy that Tyler appropriates the humanist tradition to her own purpose. She exploits the resources of the dominant to establish an authorial position. Popular culture always involves the struggle to make meanings that serve to the interests of the weak and that are not adopted by the dominant ideology (Fiske, 1991a, p. 2) and the subordinate construct subtle ways to speak their meanings (Fiske, 1991b, p. 36). Tyler also employs the art of the weak (Fiske, 1991b, p. 38): she does not openly oppose the moralists who do not regard the genre as a pedagogical source nor does she challenge the social meanings produced by the print industry that blames women for moral impropriety, but her emphasis on the instructional value romance provides puts the dominant discourse under scrutiny. Tyler’s statement, which merely imitates the humanist tradition on the surface, functions as a guerrilla tactic in which she does not contest the dominant at all, but that which empowers her position as a female

author. Fiske (1991a) states that “those who dominate social relations also dominate the production of the meanings that underpin them” (p. 132). Challenging the meanings they produce and the dominant social group is a crucial attempt for women to resist subjection within and by patriarchy (Fiske, 1991a, p. 132). Tyler’s embarking on the role of a public educator and her deliberate attempt built upon humanist poetic theory to rehabilitate cultural understanding of romance in favour of women show her resistance against the dominant culture in an attempt to constructing herself a place within the society.

Tyler employs the tactics adopted by the weak thus far to establish and to gradually reinforce her argument, and although she *mildly* maintains opposition, she does not openly contest the dominant. Through the end of the Epistle, however, she makes bolder statements. The “rhetoric of normalization” (Gallagher, 2000, p. 310) she employs, for instance, suggests that there is “nothing strange or untoward in her behaviour” (Gallagher, 2000, p. 309). She, first of all, admits to have chosen the Spanish romance intentionally. While she accepts that “the refusall was in [her] power” (Tyler, 1985, p. 55), she explains the reason for her “easie yeelding” (Tyler, 1985, p. 55) immediately after. It is seen that Tyler sometimes retreats humbly as expected of her sex but sometimes openly asserts agency. The oscillations between power/resistance and modesty resemble the guerrilla tactics in which the subordinate do not openly threaten the opponent but contest them to improve the former’s condition. Tyler first does not directly oppose the dominant culture when she finds excuses for her translation either, but she soon elaborates on her decision:

But my defence is by example of the best, amongst which, many have dedicated their labours, some stories, some of warre, some Phisicke, some Lawe, some as concerning government, some divine matters, unto diverse Ladyes and Gentlewoman. And if men may and do bestow such of their travailes upon Gentlewomen, then may we women read such of their workes as they dedicate unto us, and if wee may read them, why not farther wade in them to the search of a truth. And then much more why not deale by translation in such arguments. (Tyler, 1985, p. 55-56)

This is the first bold statement in which Tyler justifies her translation. As she reasons, now that male authors dedicate their works in myriad genres to women and regard them as their implied readers, women should equally have the right to read their works and meditate upon them. Accordingly, it is as ordinary for a woman to translate a work as it is for a man to dedicate his work to a woman. The Epistle serves as “an argument for women to be allowed to read romances as well as to emulate her in translating them” (Hackett, 2000, p. 61). Tyler questions the validity of preconceived notions of acceptable female behaviour when she asks

why women could be consumers of romances but not their producers. Questioning concrete restrictions on women’s role, she invites her addressee to reconsider fixed gender expectations. Thus, Tyler’s resistance enables her to “speak [women’s] meanings with [men’s] language” (Fiske, 1991b, p. 36) and to establish her place within the network of power relations. Her argument embodies popular culture because she advises departure from conventions and to construct meanings and action other than those imposed or allowed by the patriarchy. She deliberately poses rhetorical questions rather than directly stating that women should write. The questions “may we” and “why not” alleviate the harshness of her criticism. She thereby seems to be an author who is not concerned with the running of the system but with her position in it and possible rehabilitations she could implement for female authors. In the meantime, however, she directly challenges the patriarchal discourse that represents women merely as consumers of romances. Such a representation pushes them into a subject position while male authors become the agents. Fiske (1991a) relates that “the assertion of women’s right to control their own representation is a challenge to the way that women are constructed as subjects in patriarchy” (p. 132). Tyler, likewise, challenges women’s representation as passive consumers of romance and asserts their right to write by which they can thwart assumptions and expectations construed by patriarchy.

Tyler’s questioning women’s roles in print culture is an act of resistance. As Fiske (1991b) relates in another context, “it is a refusal of commodification and an assertion of one’s right to make one’s own culture out of the resources provided by the commodity system” (p. 15). Moreover, in the remainder of her argument, she not only overtly opposes the humanist authorities who reckon that knowledge is a male privilege, but she also concludes that romance reading could very well legitimate romance writing:

But to returne whatsoever 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, it is all one for a woman to pen a storie, as for a man to addresse his storie to a woman. (Tyler, 1985, p. 56)

Tyler challenges the patriarchal discourse built by the authors of prescriptive texts such as Vives, Bullinger, Hake, and Salter who restrict women’s education to the religious field. She criticizes them for having monopolized knowledge and for putting limitations on women’s literary activities. She, in other words, claims equality with male authors. She, yet again, benefits from the resources of the dominant and exploits them to her own purpose when she alludes to the gendered position of romance. As she contends, now that men address their

stories to women, there should be no problem when women start to write similar stories themselves. She underlines the ambivalence at the core of print culture because female readers are apparently supported as it is made evident through titles, prefaces, and dedications. The contradiction prevalent in the print culture that rests on female readership on the one hand, but that prohibits their participation in the literary arena on the other efficiently justifies Tyler’s act. Fiske believes (1991a) that “semiotic resistance that not only refuses the dominant meanings but constructs oppositional ones that serve the interests of the subordinate is as vital a base for the redistribution of power” (p. 9-10). Tyler similarly relocates power in women. By interrogating the validity of imposed social conventions that restrict, silence, immobilize, and subordinate women, her “Epistle to the Reader” embodies popular culture and Tyler becomes a figure of resistance.

Conclusion

Although Tyler seems to be in a disadvantaged status in Elizabethan print culture owing to her sex, the very fact that she poses a critique of its assumptions bestows her a certain amount of power. True it is that she does not have control over the social system, yet she is adept at employing the resources to her own end over which she has some control. She is involved in the power struggle between the subordinate and the dominant as Fiske defines, and by means of various strategies, she manages to evade subordination and subvert the meanings employed by the dominant to subjugate her (and her sex). Adopting the topos of modesty, declining responsibility over her work, claiming to write to avoid idleness, employing the rhetoric of old age and normalization, embarking on the role of an educator, and manipulating the tradition that presents women as implied readers, Tyler defies the assumptions and expectations of print culture that restrict women and their agency as authors. The tactics she uses bestow her authority as a female author, and they partially liberate her from the impositions of the dominant. In this sense, Tyler generates her own culture in which she constructs her own meanings.

Even though print culture and writing were monopolized by men and women were allowed to deal only with religious material, Tyler, by subtly asserting that translation is the only means she can produce a literary work as it does not require humanist knowledge and that she is immune to its allurements as an old woman, contests her subordination in print industry and protests it using its own resources. While women were thought to be “docile users” of pen, Tyler carves her own space and creates an oppositional meaning establishing her arguments one after another. She oscillates between resistance and modesty that resembles

a guerrilla fight in which she reacts against the dominant to improve her place within the society. Although she cannot be totally free from the dominant power, her evasion from the dominant and her subversive use of its resources considerably provide her with escape from its impositions, which, ultimately, enables her to openly express her opinion. When Fiske evaluates Madonna’s position in popular culture, he argues that Madonna “adopts an oppositional political stance that challenges two of the critical areas of patriarchal power - its control of language/representation and its control of gender meanings and gender differences” (Fiske, 1991a, p. 131). As he states, her assertion of her right to an independent feminine experience manifested by insistence on feminine control over representation is a direct response to the dominant ideology (Fiske, 1991a, p. 131). Four hundred years earlier than Madonna, Margaret Tyler vigorously - yet restrainedly - asserts women’s right to control their own representation in print culture - and patriarchy - that construct them as subjects, and resolutely insists on women’s right to write. As Fiske concludes,

Despite many more centuries of patriarchy, women have produced and maintained a feminist movement, and individual women, in their everyday lives, constantly make guerrilla raids upon patriarchy, win small, fleeting victories, keep the enemy constantly on the alert, and gain, and sometimes hold, pieces of territory (however small) for themselves. And gradually, reluctantly, patriarchy has to change in response. (Fiske, 1991b, p. 19-20)

One could see that Margaret Tyler was one of those individual women who, in her everyday life, made a guerrilla raid upon patriarchy, won a small victory and held a tiny piece of territory. Even if hers was a small step for her, it was one giant leap for womankind.

References

- Arcara, S. (2007). Margaret Tyler’s the mirrour of knighthood: or how a Renaissance translator became ‘the first English feminist.’ *Intralinea: Online Translation Journal*, 9. 20 August 2020, <http://www.intralinea.org/archive/article/1639>
- Aughterson, K. (Ed.). (1995). *Renaissance woman: a sourcebook*. London: Routledge.
- Boro, J. (2014). Introduction. In J. Boro (Ed.). *Margaret Tyler, Mirror of Princely Deeds and Knighthood*. (pp. 1-36). Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Association.
- Cooper, H. (2004). *The English romance in time: transforming motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the death of Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gallagher, C. (2000). A history of the precedent: Rhetorics of legitimation in women’s writing. *Critical Inquiry*, 26(2), 309-327.
- Glenn, C. (1997). *Rhetoric retold: Regendering the tradition from Antiquity through the Renaissance*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Guy, J. (2009). *A daughter’s love: Thomas More and his dearest Meg*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Ferguson, M. W. (1996). Renaissance concepts of the ‘women writer.’ In H. Wilcox (Ed.). *Women and literature in Britain, 1500-1700*. (pp. 143-168). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fiske, J. (1991a). *Reading the popular*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Fiske, J. (1991b). *Understanding popular culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Fiske, J. Cultural studies and the culture of everyday life. In L. Grossberg, C. Nelson and P. A. Treichler (Eds.). *Cultural studies*. (pp. 154-173). London and New York: Routledge.
- Hackett, H. (1992). ‘Yet tell me some such fiction’: Lady Mary Wroth’s *Urania* and the ‘femininity’ of romance. In C. Brant and D. Purkiss (Eds.). *Women, texts and histories 1575-1760*. (pp. 39-68). London: Routledge.
- Hackett, H. (2000). *Women and romance fiction in the English Renaissance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Knoppers, L. L. (Ed.). (2009). *The Cambridge companion to early modern women’s writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Aydođdu elik, M. (2021). John Fiske and popular culture: a critical reading of Margaret Tyler’s “Epistle to the Reader”. *Humanitas*, 9(17), 101-122
- Krontiris, T. (1988). Breaking barriers of genre and gender: Margaret Tyler’s translation of the mirrour of knighthood. *English Literary Renaissance*, 18(1), 19-39.
- Krontiris, T. (1992). *Oppositional voices: Women as writers and translators of literature in the English Renaissance*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Lamb, M. E. (1985). The Cooke sisters: Attitudes towards learned women in the Renaissance. In M. Hannay (Ed.). *Silent but for the word: Tudor women as patrons, translators, and writers of religious works*. (pp. 107-125). Ohio: Kent University Press.
- Lucas, C. (1989). *Writing for women: The example of woman as reader in Elizabethan romance*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Mendelson, S. and Crawford, P. (1998). *Women in early modern England 1550-1720*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Newcomb, L. H. (2004). Gendering prose romance in Renaissance England. In C. Saunders (Ed.). *A companion to romance from classical to contemporary*. (pp. 121-139). Malden: Blackwell.
- Ortiz-Salamovich, A. A. (2014). *Translation practice in early modern Europe: Spanish chivalric romance in England* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Leeds, Leeds.
- Relihan, C. C. and Stanivukovic, G. V. (2003). Introduction. In C. C. Relihan and G. V. Stanivukovic (Eds.). *Prose fiction and early modern sexualities in England, 1570-1640*. (pp. 1-12). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Robinson, D. (1995). Theorizing translation in a woman’s voice: Subverting the rhetoric of patronage, courtly love and morality. *The Translator*, 1(2), 153-175.
- Sidney, P. (1890). *The defence of poesy, otherwise known as an apology for poetry*. Boston: Ginn & Company.
- Travitsky, B. (1981). *The paradise of women: Writings by Englishwomen of the Renaissance*. London: Greenwood Press.
- Tyler, M. (1985). From the translation of the first part of the mirrour of princely deedes and knyghthood: Dedication to the right honourable Lord Thomas Howard and epistle to the reader. In M. Ferguson (Ed.). *First feminists: British women writers 1578-1799*. (pp. 52-57). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Aydođdu elik, M. (2021). John Fiske and popular culture: a critical reading of Margaret Tyler’s “Epistle to the Reader”. *Humanitas*, 9(17), 101-122

Uman, D. and Bistué, B. (2007). Translation as collaborative authorship: Margaret Tyler’s the mirroure of princely deeds and knighthood. *Comparative Literature Studies*, 44(3), 298-323.

Vives, J. L. (2000). *The instruction of a Christian woman: A sixteenth century manual*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Wall, W. (1993). *The imprint of gender: Authorship and publication in the English Renaissance*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.