

‘Overt, Covert and Collectible: Luther’s Works in England and English’

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Luther is now big business. Professor Walsham has mentioned ‘the Luther-themed memorabilia that spills out of the shops’ in connection with this special anniversary.¹ No doubt the surge of interest throughout 2017 has affected the high-end of the market too, in inflated prices. In March, for example, a two-page holograph Luther letter of 1543 was offered for sale at the New York Antiquarian Book Fair for about £381,000.² In July, in London, Sotheby’s auctioned an important early portrait of Luther by Lucas Cranach the Elder. ‘1517’ painted in the panel’s top left-hand corner is a later addition, but scholars generally agree on a date of around 1520 – the sitter still wears his Augustinian habit. The estimate was £1.5–2 million.³ It is therefore considerably cheaper for us briefly to analyse, on this occasion, the **manner** in which Luther first made an impact in England! This story is not as straightforward as one might imagine. I propose to continue a little further on the ‘collectible’ theme before turning to my other descriptors: ‘overt’ and ‘covert’.

Despite his fame today, Luther was not greatly memorialized in Tudor England, and largely for the reason Professor Walsham has indicated: under Edward VI and Elizabeth I our convoluted ‘official’ Reformation veered in a Swiss direction.⁴ Dr Matthew Parker was Elizabeth’s first Archbishop of Canterbury and chiefly responsible for re-founding the Protestant Church of England after the five years of successful re-Catholicization under Mary I.⁵ When Parker died in 1575, an inventory was taken of his property. He possessed portraits of (amongst others) Thomas Cromwell; Erasmus; Thomas Cranmer; Huldrych Zwingli (the Zurich reformer); Melancthon; John Jewel; and Peter Martyr Vermigli. He even found room for a picture purportedly showing John Wycliffe, the fourteenth-century Oxford heretic. But he did **not** own a portrait of Luther.⁶ Dr Susan Foister, an expert on early modern English picture collections, writes that ‘evidence for collecting portrait series goes back to the first half of the sixteenth century ... By Elizabeth’s reign the tradition apparently already established among the nobility had spread to the middle classes’. She gives two examples. Thomas Key in 1572 owned likenesses of Erasmus, Calvin and Beza – Beza was John Calvin’s immediate successor as the leading theologian in Geneva. Besides pictures of sundry monarchs, Edward Isaack in 1574 had portraits of Cranmer and Cromwell.⁷ Luther is again conspicuous by his absence. What emerged in the seventeenth century was a representational motif of Luther in two capacities: as progenitor of the international ‘family’ of evangelical reformers, many of whom did not, in fact, agree with him; and as the man who had been instrumental in shedding enduring light on a purified Gospel.⁸ He is shown seated at a table with the Bible open before him, the book illuminated by a candle which Luther (metaphorically, by his labours) can be taken to have lit. Surrounding him is a variable selection of reformers, though the core constituency is fixed. In the foreground are stereotypical Roman Catholic figures, all attempting to blow out Luther’s candle. The motif exists in an oil painting of *c.*1625–50, now in Berlin,⁹ yet must have gained far wider currency from an etching of *c.*1640¹⁰ and from a line-engraving postdating 1673.¹¹

To be sure, Luther portraits currently belong to several English collections, yet it is often unclear how and when they arrived. This circumstance is true of the early depiction of Luther disguised as an aristocrat (‘Junker Jörg’) which was painted after his friendly ‘kidnapping’ by the Elector of Saxony following the confrontation with the Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms in 1521. Queen Victoria’s Lutheran husband, Prince Albert, bought the portrait from an obscure source for the Royal Collection.¹² All we know about the provenance of the fine picture (dated 1525) hanging

in Bristol Art Gallery is that it had descended in the collection of the Dukes of Newcastle prior to sale in 1939.¹³ A portrait of the elderly Luther, dated 1546, the year of the reformer's death, survives at Burghley House in Lincolnshire, but when the Cecils acquired it is (as yet) a mystery.¹⁴

One can say much the same about manuscripts of Luther's works. An exception to the rule is his holograph letter to Cromwell of April 1536, which (along with the rest of Cromwell's archive) was presumably seized by the Crown upon the minister's fall in 1540, but somehow migrated to the Harleian Collection and thence to the British Library.¹⁵ The British Library also holds, having come from the Old Royal Library, an undated Latin translation (entitled '*De Purgatorio*') of Luther's 1530 German tract whose title may be rendered as 'A Recantation of Purgatory'. This translation was executed by one of Luther's closest associates, George Spalatin, and dedicated to Henry VIII, though it remains to be seen whether or not the original author is disclosed – probably not, since it seems unlikely that Spalatin could have been unaware of the king's continuing hostility towards Lutheran doctrine.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Luther's excoriating anti-papalism was a different kettle of fish, and so in 1538 – four years after England's Break with Rome – Cranmer took the risk of sending Henry VIII an anonymous translation of Luther's 1537 German tract against The Donation of Constantine, the key document deployed by successive popes to defend their assertion of temporal jurisdiction over western Christendom, which had been exposed as a forgery by brilliant Renaissance Humanist detective work in the fifteenth century. Interestingly, Luther's paternity of the original tract is acknowledged in the translation's heading, and Cranmer used a manicule (pointing hand) plus explanatory marginalia to draw the king's attention to a passage in which Luther had ridiculed the papal claim to the lordship of England.¹⁷ A few Luther items are preserved in the Parker Library at Corpus Christi College in Cambridge,¹⁸ yet only incidentally: they had belonged to Martin Bucer, the exiled Strasbourg reformer, who had died in Cambridge in 1551. Matthew Parker, his friend, preached the funeral sermon and acquired part of Bucer's library from his estate, of which he was an executor.¹⁹

We have seen, then, that very little material directly linked with Luther, in terms of portraits and manuscripts, seems to have existed in Tudor England. Most of what our repositories now have to offer in these categories – and it is still not much – reflects the collecting habits of later generations. To some extent, this paucity is unsurprising. Reference has been made to the shift away from Lutheranism and towards Swiss theology, a shift already underway amongst English evangelicals in Henry VIII's last years. However, it is important to recall that the medieval heresy law (invoked against early Lutherans) was repealed only in 1547, in the first Parliament of Edward VI.²⁰ Consequently, the 'window of opportunity' – that is to say the period within which Lutheranism could have enjoyed legitimate currency here – was in reality tiny. And that point brings us to the subject of printed books, for it was through the medium of print that Luther had a massive impact, albeit under the radar – hence the word 'covert' in my title.

This emphasis on print is by no means intended to deny the importance of other modes of communication in what Andrew Pettegree has called the 'Culture of Persuasion', especially preaching, song, drama and the visual image.²¹ He has built upon the ground-breaking work of the late Bob Scribner, one of whose essays stressed the centrality of the oral transmission of religious ideas in the early German Reformation.²² Historians know that an underworld of evangelical brethren developed in 1520s London, where 'night-schools' of devotees discussed the exciting new insights emerging from the continent.²³ But these secret gatherings must be understood in the context of a nationwide populace still by and large enthusiastically supportive of Roman Catholic doctrine and practice. Revisionists such as Professor Duffy have taught us to measure the health of late medieval religion by a variety of indices: lay donations towards the upkeep of church fabric and fittings; investment in intercessory institutions (monasteries, colleges, chantries and fraternities) all based on belief in Purgatory; clerical recruitment; the proliferation of traditional devotional literature; and the scarcity of complaint about the clergy.²⁴ Given this staunch orthodoxy, Henry

VIII's government swung into action as soon as it received reports of Luther's heresy sent by an agent at the Diet of Worms, for the agent urged steps to be taken to keep Luther's books out of England. The king swiftly decided to write a refutation, or rather to put his name to a treatise ghost-written by a team of learned commissioners: the *Assertio Septem Sacramentorum* ('Defence of the Seven Sacraments') for which Leo X famously rewarded him with the title 'Defender of the Faith'. The papal bull excommunicating Luther was published in England. That was the beginning of what may be designated the first wave of a vigorous English anti-Lutheran campaign. There were public bonfires of Luther's writings, notably one outside St Paul's Cathedral in May 1521. Oxford and Cambridge divines were mobilized to preach and write against him. John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, and Sir Thomas More became especially active in publishing attacks. This polemical programme was, indeed, at the forefront of the international counter-offensive.²⁵ Craig D'Alton has argued that a second wave of English anti-Lutheran activity started in February 1526, when there was another public book-burning at St Paul's orchestrated by Cardinal Wolsey, the king's chief minister. This event, he says, 'became the vehicle for ... Fisher to announce a new anti-heresy policy which emphasised secrecy and charity rather than publicity and the fire in the treatment of heretics ... It was felt that educated heretics were best dealt with "secretely", behind closed doors, and that their books were best confiscated and quietly destroyed. By thus downplaying the problem, Wolsey and his episcopal colleagues hoped to minimize its impact. On the whole, they were successful'.²⁶ By 1530–32 (if not before) details of works judged to be infected by the evangelical heresy had been added to official lists of proscribed books.²⁷

The crucial word in that quotation from D'Alton is 'educated' because educated people understood Latin, and it is almost certain that Luther's works were first known in England in the form of Latin publications. As early as March 1518, Erasmus sent one of Luther's Latin tracts to his friend Thomas More. Nearly a year later, John Froben, the Basel printer, told Luther that he had reprinted some of his books and exported them to England. At this stage, Luther's writings had not been deemed heretical, and therefore could be traded legally—with the German monk's name displayed prominently. We even have an insight into his sales. The daily ledger of John Dorne, an Oxford bookseller, reveals that, over a three-month span in early 1520, he sold four copies of *Luter de potestate pape* (two books vie for identification with this title) and that, in the autumn, he sold two copies of Luther's complete works: *opera Luteri ligata*. Altogether, Dorne achieved around a dozen sales of Luther publications in the ledger's twelve months.²⁸ Who was buying this Latin output? I cannot speak for Oxford, but the Cambridge vice-chancellor's court probate inventories edited by Dr Elisabeth Leedham-Green show that some dons assembled fairly sizeable collections of evangelical texts. Take, for example, the 1535/36 inventory of John Chekyn, Fellow of Pembroke College, which lists five of Luther's Latin works, amid books by Bucer, Bullinger, Oecolampadius and Zwingli. She highlights the distinct Lutheran bias (again Latin publications) to the library formed by Oliver Ainsworth, a Fellow of Jesus College, whose inventory is dated 1546.²⁹

So much for 'overt'. But those seeking to influence non-academic readers, and thus *via* English, knew that they had to be smart, especially once Lutheran titles began to appear on lists of proscribed books. Deception became the name of the game. There is no doubt that Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone was of primary importance in the incipient English Reformation. Yet (setting aside the Latin publications) that teaching did not come **directly** from Luther. It came from prolific vernacular Lutheran popularizers, the most significant of whom were patronized by Cromwell, such as William Marshall,³⁰ William Roy³¹ and Richard Taverner.³² In translating Luther's compositions, they readily adapted them as need be, concealing their sources in the process. This strategy was pioneered by William Tyndale. In 1528, Tyndale published a book entitled *That faith the mother of all good workes justifieth us*, which was re-titled *The parable of the wicked mammon* in about 1535. An exposition of Jesus's parable of the unjust steward, drawn from Luke 16, the text incorporates the free translation of a sermon by Luther that had been printed in 1522. Under its two titles, the book master-minded by Tyndale became the most popular of all

sixteenth-century Luther translations into English: seven editions rolled off the press between 1528 and 1561. However, Luther's name features nowhere on any of them – until modern times, the work has been attributed exclusively to Tyndale. June 1529 saw the anonymous publication of a very curious book, now regarded as the fruit of Roy's efforts. The first part, as advertised on the title-page, is a translation of something written by Erasmus. Anyone glancing at the description given there of the second part – an exposition of I Corinthians 7 – might easily fall into the trap of assuming that that too had been penned by Erasmus. And, indeed, standard bibliographies have long listed the entire book under Erasmus's name. But the second item is, in fact, Roy's translation of Luther's immensely successful 1523 German tract on marriage as a Christian vocation and a spiritual estate. By omitting the original prefaces, Roy completely effaced Luther's authorship. Using a pseudonym and (like Roy) a false colophon, John Frith in July 1529 published a tripartite work, the middle portion of which, entitled 'The Revelation of Antichrist', turns out to be a translation of Luther's 1521 Latin commentary on Daniel 8. Frith simply dropped Luther's address and valediction. Not once is his authorship divulged.³³ Two more examples must suffice. When an English devotional manual called the *Primer*, also known as *Marshall's Primer*, emerged sometime before December 1531, and bearing the statement that it was printed 'cum privilegio regali', who could have supposed that it incorporated a free translation of one of Luther's sermons originally published in German in 1519? As Constantin Hopf observed, in revealing his discovery in 1942, the true provenance of this text 'escaped the attention of Henry VIII and of his bishops[,] who so vigorously condemned everything which tended to be Lutheran as heresy'.³⁴ Similar discoveries are still being made. William Underwood demonstrated in 2004 that Marshall's *The images of a verye chrysten byssshop, and of a counterfayte byssshop* (conjecturally of 1536) is really 'a largely faithful translation' of a tract by Luther that had been published (in German) in 1522. To quote Underwood: 'Various passages are elaborated, especially those dealing with clerical pomp and venality, and Marshall uses periphrasis when rendering passages with ... bodily references. He removes all of Luther's references to himself, and to the German language. In one of Luther's similes, he substitutes the River Thames for the River Rhine'.³⁵ Once again, Luther has tactfully been airbrushed out of the picture!

These and other instances of evangelical subterfuge have been discussed by Carrie Euler,³⁶ from whose essay we may conclude that Luther had a substantial **hidden** influence upon English readers, in the sense that many could not then have known that they were reading the words of the German 'heretic'. Perhaps they never knew. Yet Euler's research goes further. She considers the selection of **what** to translate. After all, there was a huge choice: Luther published hundreds of works. Her most intriguing argument is that the focus shifted. The reformer's compositions chosen for English translation in the early Reformation were not chiefly concerned with his doctrine of justification by faith alone. Their most prominent themes were anti-Catholicism and spiritual comfort and devotion. In that phase, she insists, those themes were most useful to the project of evangelization. Only four works by Luther seem to have been published in English during the pivotal reign of Edward VI, underlining the move towards Reformed theology. On the other hand, an English Lutheran revival occurred in the 1570s, a phenomenon attributed by Euler to John Foxe, 'The Martyrologist'. Strikingly, these Elizabethan translations **do** concentrate on Luther's core doctrine of justification by faith alone. A good example is his commentary on Galatians, published in English in 1575 with a long preface supplied by Foxe. Moreover, Luther's great book *On Christian liberty*, first published in 1520, only saw print in English as late as 1579. Euler gives no adequate explanation for this delayed interest. But the answer is surely connected to what some historians call confessionalization, that is to say to parallel processes of confessional identity formation and social disciplining that were to reach a peak around 1600.³⁷ In that atmosphere of intense Europe-wide confessional rivalry, English Protestants (by now of the second or third generation) became anxious to trace their doctrinal antecedents. While English theology had moved on, Luther was appreciated as a great man, if a flawed one. He had lit that candle illuminating God's Word. In the preface to the translation of Luther's commentary on Galatians, Foxe said this of its author:

Though his doctrine as touching a litle circumstance of the sacrament can not be thoroughlye defended, yet neither is that any greate marvell in him, who being occupied in weightier pointes of religion, had not leisure to travell in the searching out of this matter, neither ought it to be any prejudice to all the rest which he taught so soundly of the weightier principles and groundes of Christes Gospell and our justification onely by faith in Christ.³⁸

And yet Foxe shouldn't have the last word. Professor Walsham rightly alerts us to the 'danger that the anniversary is serving to perpetuate a Luther-centric version of Reformation history ... Elevating the charismatic ... figure of Martin Luther onto a pedestal once more, it is overshadowing other agents, actors and aspects of the multiple and competing movements for religious reform that germinated, sprouted, and grew over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries'.³⁹ Accordingly, by way of reaction, we remember Luther, but we also remember those men – Coverdale, Frith, Marshall, Roy, Tyndale and persons unknown – who in the 1520s and 1530s courageously brought several of Luther's works to English readers of English, by stealth.

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- 1 A. Walsham, 'Remembering Reformation and Forgetting Luther', paper delivered to this symposium.
 - 2 Website: Antiquariat Inlibris Gilhofer Nfg.
 - 3 Website: Sotheby's, Old Masters Evening Sale, 5 July 2017 (Lot 6). See also the Corpus Cranach catalogue raisonné available at Cranach.ub.uni-heidelberg.de (Werkverzeichnis Nr CC-POR-510-003).
 - 4 A. Ryrie, 'The Strange Death of Lutheran England', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 53 (2002), pp. 64–92. See also D. S. Gehring, 'From the Strange Death to the Odd Afterlife of Lutheran England', *The Historical Journal*, 57 (2014), pp. 825–44.
 - 5 D. J. Crankshaw and A. Gillespie, 'Parker, Matthew (1504–1575)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [hereafter *ODNB*] (2004): www.oxforddnb.com. See also D. J. Crankshaw, 'Ecclesiastical Statesmanship in England in the Age of the Reformation', in D. Wendebourg (ed.), *Sister Reformations: The Reformation in Germany and in England* (Tübingen, 2010), pp. 271–303.
 - 6 W. Sandys (ed.), 'Copy of the Inventory of Archbishop Parker's Goods at the time of his Death', *Archaeologia*, XXX (1844), pp. 1–30.
 - 7 S. Foister, 'Paintings and Other Works of Art in Sixteenth-Century English Inventories', *The Burlington Magazine*, CXXIII (1981), pp. 273–82.
 - 8 The motif is discussed (and illustrated) in A. Walsham, 'History, Memory and the English Reformation', *The Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), pp. 899–938. See also P. Tudor-Craig, 'Group Portraits of the Protestant Reformers', in T. Hamling and R. L. Williams (eds), *Art Re-Formed: Re-Assessing the Impact of the Reformation on the Visual Arts* (Newcastle, 2007), pp. 87–104.
 - 9 Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, Reference Gm 97/24.
 - 10 British Museum, London, Reference PPA91446.
 - 11 National Portrait Gallery, London, Reference D24005.
 - 12 The Royal Collection, RCIN Reference 402656. Prince Albert died in 1861. See also the Corpus Cranach catalogue raisonné available at Cranach.ub.uni-heidelberg.de (Werkverzeichnis Nr CC-POR-510-015).
 - 13 Bristol Art Gallery, Inventory Number K1650. See also J. B. Trapp and H. S. Herbrüggen, *The King's Good Servant: Sir Thomas More 1477/8–1535* (London, 1977), pp. 62 (illustration), 63 (catalogue entry) and the Corpus Cranach catalogue raisonné available at Cranach.ub.uni-heidelberg.de (Werkverzeichnis Nr CC-POR-510-033).
 - 14 Website: Burghley House, Lincolnshire. See also the Corpus Cranach catalogue raisonné available at Cranach.ub.uni-heidelberg.de (Werkverzeichnis Nr CC-POR-510-118).
 - 15 British Library, London, Harleian MS 6989, fol. 56 (*LP*, X item 644).
 - 16 British Library, London, Royal MS 7 D XI, which I have not had an opportunity to examine. See J. P. Carley, *The Books of King Henry VIII and his Wives* (London, 2004), p. 57.
 - 17 British Library, London, Royal MS 17 C XI. See J. P. Carley, *The Books of King Henry VIII and his Wives* (London, 2004), p. 60 (illustrated).
 - 18 Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, Parker Library MSS 102, 105, 119.
 - 19 See N. Scott Amos, 'Bucer, Martin (1491–1551)', in *ODNB* (2004): www.oxforddnb.com.
 - 20 1 Edward VI c. 12.
 - 21 A. Pettegree, *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion* (Cambridge, 2005).
 - 22 R. W. Scribner, 'Oral Culture and the Diffusion of Reformation Ideas', *History of European Ideas*, 5 (1984), pp. 237–56, reprinted in R. W. Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London, 1987), pp. 49–69.
 - 23 S. Brigden, *London and the Reformation* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 106–28.

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- ²⁴ E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven, Connecticut, and London, 1992).
- ²⁵ R. Rex, 'The English Campaign Against Luther in the 1520s', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fifth Series, 39 (1989), pp. 85–106, which manages to ignore C. S. Meyer, 'Henry VIII Burns Luther's Books, 12 May 1521', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 9 (1958), pp. 173–87.
- ²⁶ C. W. D'Alton, 'The Suppression of Lutheran Heretics in England, 1526–1529', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 54 (2003), pp. 228–53.
- ²⁷ Four are cited in W. A. Clebsch, 'The Earliest Translations of Luther into English', *The Harvard Theological Review*, LVI (1963), p. 86.
- ²⁸ Details from C. S. Meyer, 'Henry VIII Burns Luther's Books, 12 May 1521', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 9 (1958), pp. 176–7.
- ²⁹ E. S. Leedham-Green (ed.), *Books in Cambridge Inventories: Book-Lists from Vice-Chancellor's Court Probate Inventories in the Tudor and Stuart Periods*, 2 volumes (Cambridge, 1986), I pp. 1–3 (Chekyn), 81–6 (Ainsworth).
- ³⁰ See A. Ryrie, 'Marshall, William (d. 1540?)', in *ODNB* (2004): www.oxforddnb.com.
- ³¹ See D. Daniell, 'Roy, William (d. in or before 1531)', in *ODNB* (2004): www.oxforddnb.com.
- ³² See A. W. Taylor, 'Taverner, Richard (1505?–1575)', in *ODNB* (2004): www.oxforddnb.com.
- ³³ Unless otherwise indicated, the foregoing part of this paragraph rests upon W. A. Clebsch, 'The Earliest Translations of Luther into English', *The Harvard Theological Review*, LVI (1963), pp. 75–86.
- ³⁴ C. Hopf, 'A Sermon of Martin Luther in the English Primer', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 43 (1942), pp. 194–200.
- ³⁵ W. Underwood, 'Thomas Cromwell and William Marshall's Protestant Books', *The Historical Journal*, 47 (2004), pp. 517–39.
- ³⁶ C. Euler, 'Does Faith Translate? Tudor Translations of Martin Luther and the Doctrine of Justification by Faith', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 101 (2010), pp. 80–113. See also C. R. Trueman and C. Euler, 'The Reception of Martin Luther in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England', in P. Ha and P. Collinson (eds), 'The Reception of Continental Reformation in Britain', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 164 (2010), pp. 63–81.
- ³⁷ U. Lotz-Heumann, 'Confessionalization', in D. M. Whitford (ed.), *Reformation and Early Modern Europe: A Guide to Research* (Kirksville, Missouri, 2008), pp. 136–57.
- ³⁸ Quoted in C. Euler, 'Does Faith Translate? Tudor Translations of Martin Luther and the Doctrine of Justification by Faith', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 101 (2010), p. 81.
- ³⁹ A. Walsham, 'Remembering Reformation and Forgetting Luther', paper delivered to this symposium.