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Translating Tempests and Tremblements: Natural Disasters, News, and the Nation in Early Modern England and France

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Article abstract

Early modern people lived at the mercy of their surroundings. In an uncertain world, floods, storms, fires, and earthquakes could affect all levels of society across Europe. But destruction can also lead to creation. Accounts of such disasters were printed as pamphlets and then translated, suggesting a shared experience of disaster that could cross confessional divides. However, a closer look shows that more complex ideas about nation and experience were a feature of these understudied publications. This article focuses on three cases in particular: the storm and lightning strike of 1561, which caused the roof and steeple of St. Paul's to catch fire; the 1580 English Channel earthquake, which wreaked devastation in both southern England and northern France; and the 1618 fire, which destroyed much of the Palais de Justice in Paris. It investigates how and why accounts of these particular disasters were made and translated. It also questions the role of the nation in how stories were (or were not) transmitted across linguistic, cultural, and national boundaries.

Translating Tempests and Tremblements: Natural Disasters, News, and the Nation in Early Modern England and France*

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Early modern people lived at the mercy of their surroundings. In an uncertain world, floods, storms, fires, and earthquakes could affect all levels of society across Europe. But destruction can also lead to creation. Accounts of such disasters were printed as pamphlets and then translated, suggesting a shared experience of disaster that could cross confessional divides. However, a closer look shows that more complex ideas about nation and experience were a feature of these understudied publications. This article focuses on three cases in particular: the storm and lightning strike of 1561, which caused the roof and steeple of St. Paul's to catch fire; the 1580 English Channel earthquake, which wreaked devastation in both southern England and northern France; and the 1618 fire, which destroyed much of the Palais de Justice in Paris. It investigates how and why accounts of these particular disasters were made and translated. It also questions the role of the nation in how stories were (or were not) transmitted across linguistic, cultural, and national boundaries.

La vie à la Renaissance était souvent marquée par les imprévus de la nature. Dans un monde incertain, inondations, orages, incendies et tremblements de terre ébranlaient tous les niveaux de la vie sociale européenne. Mais la désolation pouvait aussi mener à la création. On imprimait et traduisait des récits de ces catastrophes, et leur circulation semble suggérer une communauté d'expérience face aux désastres, transcendant même les frontières religieuses. Cependant, si on examine plus attentivement ces documents par ailleurs peu étudiés, on y voit se dessiner des représentations complexes de la nation et de l'expérience propres à chaque contexte. On s'attarde ici à trois cas particuliers : l'incendie provoqué par l'orage et la foudre de 1561, qui détruit la toiture et le clocher de la cathédrale Saint-Paul ; le tremblement de terre de 1580 qui ébranle sévèrement le sud de l'Angleterre et le nord de la France ; et l'incendie qui, en 1618, ravage une grande partie du Palais de Justice de Paris. L'article examine la manière dont ces récits se trament et se transmettent, ainsi que les causes de leur circulation. Il soulève aussi la question du rôle joué par l'identité nationale dans la transmission (ou non) de ces nouvelles au-delà des frontières linguistiques, culturelles ou étatiques.

* I have kept original spelling except to lengthen standard abbreviations. For French and German works, I have included Universal Short Title Catalogue (USTC; ustc.ac.uk) numbers where known for ease of reference for readers, and, for English works, Short-Title Catalogue (STC; estc.bl.uk) numbers for the same reason. I would like to thank the editors for their support and guidance through this process.

Introduction

Early modern Europe was a dangerous place to live, particularly if you resided in one of the growing number of towns and cities. Disasters were socially indiscriminate. No matter what your social standing, you lived at the mercy of a God who was vengeful and ready to strike at communities that did not live up to his expectations, either collectively or by turning a blind eye to individual sinners.¹ If you were not aware of this before a disaster happened, preachers and pamphlet writers would make sure that you were once it had. The early modern conceptual frameworks available for explaining disasters were in a state of evolution, not least in terms of who was held responsible for the occurrence of such disasters in the first place. Wolfgang Behringer has noted that the onset of the Little Ice Age saw a shift from particular groups of people, most notably Jewish communities, being held responsible for disastrous weather events to a culture in which all sins, no matter how slight, were understood to contribute to God's deserved wrath. As Behringer puts it, "The sin economics of the time produced the key link between nature and culture: it was the mechanism that helped a meteorological event to acquire its social significance."² Early modern communities questioned their own culpability in bringing down the wrath of God, as well as that of their neighbours and the outsider groups who lived among them.

We should not then be surprised that pamphlet accounts of natural disasters—devastating accidents involving wind, fire, and water—were a mainstay of the early news industry. These pamphlets told stories that everyone could imagine happening to them, and no doubt they could imagine the impact such an event might have on their lives and those of their friends, family, and

1. There is of course a contrast here to the approaches of modern environmental historians. As John Morgan has noted, "environmental history seeks to show how humans and their surroundings both play an active role in shaping history." John Morgan, "Environmental History," in *New Directions in Social and Cultural History*, ed. Sasha Handley, Rohan McWilliam, and Lucy Noakes (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 213–31. The links between environmental instability and human disquiet have been discussed many times for the early modern period, including in Geoffrey Parker's monumental *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013).

2. Wolfgang Behringer, *A Cultural History of Climate*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 133.

neighbours. It was important to stay informed about disasters, miraculous happenings, and other events out of the ordinary, whether these happened close to where one lived or a long way away.

In this article, I will introduce some of the range of English and French pamphlets that recounted disaster narratives from across Europe, establishing the local, national, and international levels of interest. I will then examine translated pamphlet accounts of three events to gain insight into why such translations were made, how texts were adapted for new readerships, what typographical and design adaptations were made, and what this suggests about emerging ideas about the nation. The selected events—two from England and Wales, one from France—happened within a sixty-year period when the news pamphlet was arguably at the height of its influence in both England and France.³ The decision to focus on England and France was led by the relatively close historical, social, cultural, and trading links that the two nations enjoyed. Both had been influenced by each other's stories long before printing became a feature of how those stories were shared. The 1561 storm and fire that damaged St. Paul's Cathedral, the 1607 floods that affected the Bristol Channel and other areas in the south of England, and the 1618 fire at the Palais in Paris were local or at least domestic events, but the presence of translated pamphlets, describing what had happened, demonstrates that these were events that clearly piqued international interest. As they crossed linguistic boundaries, so the material presentation of the pamphlets shifted to that of the recipient print culture—the news transforming linguistically and assimilating visually. I will then briefly contrast these episodes with an investigation into a disaster that struck at both nations. The 1580 earthquake in the English Channel saw devastation in

3. Given that scholarly interest in both early modern news and early modern translation has flourished over the last decade, it is intriguing that the translation of early modern news books remains so understudied. Periodicals are briefly discussed in Peter Burke and R. Po-chia Hsia, eds., *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 142–59, [dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511497193](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511497193). The relative neglect of translation in news scholarship is equally apparent, despite such studies becoming more comparative and transnational in recent years. Although translation features clearly in Joad Raymond and Noah Moxham, eds., *News Networks in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), [dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004277199](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004277199), it is much less obvious in Simon F. Davies and Puck Fletcher, eds., *News in Early Modern Europe: Currents and Connections* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), [dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004276864](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004276864), and Joop W. Koopmans, ed., *News and Politics in Early Modern Europe (1500–1800)* (Leuven, Paris, and Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2005). My own work, including my forthcoming monograph, brings these two vibrant areas of study together.

both southern England and northern France. A number of pamphlets about the event and its aftermath were produced by English and French printers. It would seem to have been a perfect opportunity for book producers to reuse material on an established topic and to provide a fuller account of the event via translation, but no cross-channel awareness of the potential sufferings of other communities appears to have been recorded extensively in print. From the examination of these events and the pamphlets produced about them, we will see that news pamphlets were highly complex cultural and material products, ones that simultaneously evidence cross-confessional concerns even at the height of religious tension within each country, national political concerns, and emerging domestic design preferences. Although we are given less information about the technical processes of translation than we are in other genres, and the translations themselves tend to show less obvious flair and authorial independence even when crossing religious boundaries, we do gain insight into how shared understandings of the world could be maintained in the post-Reformation world, even as foreign stories were being linguistically and visually transformed into a new news culture. As such, they warrant more sustained consideration by scholars of early modern translation and by historians of early modern news.

Disaster pamphlets: approaches and norms

Disaster pamphlets were something of a mainstay within early modern European news culture. Not only did they provide gruesome entertainment, they also had an explanatory purpose. Remembering such events in print was an act of commemoration as well as of news gathering. The pamphlets had to record the incident itself, give accounts of the suffering caused, usually in terms of lives lost and property damaged, and remind readers that such events showed that God was still very active in the world. Even within a single country, one event's reach could be wide. On Wednesday 18 April 1579, at about ten in the evening, the Paris suburb of Saint Marcel was hit by a devastating flood. A combination of rain, snow melt, and "occult reasons" caused the Bièvre, a tributary of the Seine now hidden under Parisian streets, to burst its banks.⁴ Around twenty

4. The course of the Bièvre is marked by small plaques set into the pavement of streets in today's thirteenth and fifth arrondissements.

people died and the overall damage was put at between sixty and a hundred thousand écus.⁵ The causes and ramifications, both spiritual and practical, of this devastating event were catalogued in a series of pamphlets. The *Deluge et inondation d'eaux fort effroyable advenu es fauxbourgs S. Marcel à Paris*, first printed in Paris by Jean d'Ongoys, was subsequently reprinted in other towns; editions survive from the Orleans press of Gibier and Hotot and from Aimé Ménier's press in Poitiers.⁶ Although the version put out by Benoît Rigaud in Lyon failed to mention the d'Ongoys connection, it would not be surprising if the enterprising Rigaud had indeed copied his northern counterpart's work, as he was certainly a man with an eye for a business opportunity and he was known to reprint other people's works.⁷ Jean Pinart produced a different account, *Le desastre merueilleux et effroyable d'un deluge advenu es fauxbours S. Marcel*, and d'Ongoys published a further work detailing the miraculous escape of a local *maison de charité*. Clearly, these printers understood that the sufferings of the people of Saint Marcel would be of interest to all the people of France, not just Parisian readers.⁸

Each strange incident was an event from which to learn. It has been noted that many printed accounts of this nature were produced close to where the

5. The overview of the Saint Marcel flood is based on the accounts given in Nicolas Houel, *Ample discours de ce qui est nouvellement survenu es faulxbourgs s. Marcel lez Paris* (Paris: chez Jean d'Ongoys, 1579) USTC 62102 and *Le desastre merueilleux et effroyable d'un deluge advenu es faulxbourgs s. Marcel les Paris* (Paris: chez Jean Pinart) USTC 62136.

6. *Deluge et inondation d'eaux fort effroyable advenu és faulxbourgs s. Marcel à Paris* (Paris: Jean d'Ongoys, 1579) USTC 62137; *Deluge et inondation d'eaux fort effroyable advenu és faulxbourgs s. Marcel à Paris* (Orléans: Eloi Gibier et Saturnin Hotot, 1579) USTC 36929; *Discours du deluge et inondation d'eaux fort effroyable advenu és faulxbourgs s. Marcel de Paris* (Poitiers: Aimé Ménier, 1579) USTC 62138.

7. With the support of the British Academy, I am currently researching the complicated system of authorized and non-authorized copying, and particularly Rigaud's actions in this area: *Deluge et inondation d'eaux fort effroyable advenu és faulxbourgs s. Marcel à Paris* (Lyon: Benoît Rigaud, 1579) USTC 88024.

8. For whatever reason, this tale of terror and destruction did not appear to make it to England, at least not in print (it was not recorded in the register of the Stationers' Company). There is, however, a German pamphlet account: Johann Fischart, *Neue Wunderzeitungen aus Franckreich und den Niederlanden. I. Von dem schrecklichen hoh schaedlichen angeloffenem gewasser welchs zu Paris inn den vorstaetten s. Marcells den neunten Aprilis dises M.D. LXXIX. jars ist urploetzlich eingefallen aus den zu Paris getruckten Frantzoesischen Zeitungen verteutschet. II. Von der Ernsten Belaegerung der wehrhafften statt Mastricht: wassich bis auff den 9. Junii gegenwaertigens 79. jars zugetragen* (s.l.: s.n., 1579) USTC 676956.

original events had happened, and that the drive to publish accounts was often led by those in positions of authority.⁹ Yet these stories could and did cross international boundaries. The earthquake that shook the Holy Land in 1546 was the subject of pamphlet accounts produced in Paris and in Antwerp.¹⁰ The unstable geology of the Italian peninsula saw its towns frequently challenged by floods, earthquakes, and volcanos.¹¹ These incidents would be written up for French readers. Rome's great flood in October 1530 was recounted in at least two French pamphlets.¹² In 1557, pamphlets about the flooding in Palermo were produced in Lyon, by Rigaud and his collaborator Jean Saugrain, and in Rouen, by Georges Loyselet for a trio of local booksellers.¹³ In the same year, pamphlets about the floods in Rome and Florence appeared from presses in Paris and Rouen.¹⁴ When Mount Etna erupted in 1566, a pamphlet recording

9. Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 47.

10. *Le grand tremblement et espouvantable ruine qui est advenue en la cité de Jérusalem* (Paris: 1546) USTC 53989 (no known copy of this edition survives); *Vng merueilleusement grandt mouuement de terre / et merueilleux signes & dommages / maintenant de brief aduenues en la ville & toute la province de Jherusalem. ¶ Auecq labolissement et destruction de quatre belles villes/ et de tout le pays circonvoisin / et les fontaines qui ont icté feu et sang. ¶ Encore aussi ineffables & horribles ventz / en lisle de Cypre en la ville appellee Famagosta / et aultres places auecq insupportables dommaiges. Translate dytalien en Franchoyz/ et fut ladicté copie ytalienne / enuoyée en anuers de par le poste de Venise* (Antwerp: Jan van Ghelen, 1546) USTC 38188.

11. For information about seismic activity in Italy and beyond, see AHEAD, the European Archive of Historical EArthquake [sic] Data, accessed 25 May 2018, emidius.eu/AHEAD/, which collates information and resources about historical earthquakes between 1000 and 1899.

12. *Copie des lettres du terrible deluge advenu en la noble ville et cité de Romme* (s.l.: s.n., 1530) USTC 90051; *Copie des lettres du terrible deluge advenu en la noble ville et cité de Romme* ([Lyon]: s.l., 1530) USTC 55810; *Le terrible deluge advenu en la noble cite et ville de Romme* (s.l.: s.n., 1530) USTC 55811.

13. Valere Dorieu, *Auertissement nouveau du plus horrible & pitoyable deluge qui soit avenu de memoire d'homme au païs de Sicile, & principalement en la Cité de Palerme, le xxv. de Septembre, Mil cinq cens cinquante sept* (Lyon: Benoît Rigaud & Jean Saugrain, 1557) USTC 10476; Valere Dorieu, *Avertissement nouveau du plus horrible et pitoyable deluge qui soit avenu de memoire d'homme au païs de Sicile* (Rouen: Georges Loyselet pour Pierre Gontier, Jean Froger et Jacques Regnault, 1557) USTC 54034.

14. *DISCOVRS DE DEVX DELVGES ADVEnuz l'vn à Rome, l'autre à Florence, l'an mil cinq cens cinquantessept* (Paris: Vincent Sertenas et Guillaume Nyverd, 1557) USTC 54017; Angelo degli Oldradi, *TRAICTE DE DEVX DELVGES ADVEnuz l'vn à Rome, l'autre à Florence, l'an mil cinq cens cinquantessept* (Paris, Vincent Sertenas pour Guillaume Nyverd, 1557) USTC 56033; Angelo degli Oldradi, *TRAICTE DE DEVX DELVGES ADVEnuz l'vn à Rome, l'autre à Florence, l'an mil cinq cens*

this was produced by Rigaud in Lyon.¹⁵ When Venice suffered a terrible fire in 1574, Parisian printers shared the devastation and the subsequent public reckoning with their readers.¹⁶ Disaster news was among some of the most mobile and transnational material to travel out from the community affected throughout the country and the Continent, often crossing cultural, political, linguistic, and religious boundaries.¹⁷

The earthquake that devastated Ferrara in November 1570 was particularly well covered in France. Not only did the catastrophe affect a city described as a “ville fort celebre” but it was a city with a French connection, as the ruler, Alfonso II d’Este, was the son of a French princess, Renée de France.¹⁸ The first tremors hit at about three o’clock in the morning on Thursday 16 November 1570, with the aftershocks, characterized by their “vehemence & bruit,” lasting into the next day. One writer reflected on the misery and distress that the people of Ferrara must have felt, seeing buildings destroyed and people lost.¹⁹ Comparisons were made with damage sustained under cannon fire, a description that might well have struck close to home in war-torn, late-sixteenth-century France. By the weekend, many felt that flight was their only option, leaving behind all of their belongings. In an early modern world where war, dearth, and religious conflict

cinquantesept (Paris, André Roffet, 1557) USTC 66654; Angelo degli Oldradi, *TRAICTE DE DEVX DELVGES ADVEnuz, l’vn à Rome, l’autre à Florence, l’an mil cinq cens cinquante sept* (Rouen, Jaspard de Rémortier et Marguerin d’Orival, 1557) USTC 54018 (the title page imprint confirms that this version is an authorized copy of the Paris edition, although it does not note which one).

15. *Cas merueilleux A OYVR, ET ESPOVuentable à reciter, de certains fleuves de feu & fumée decoulant du Montgibello, pres la Cité de Randouza, adueni au mois de Novembre, Mil cinq cens soixante six. Ioinct vn aduertissement du desseing de la guerre que prent le Turcq contre l’Empereur* (Lyon: Benoît Rigaud, 1566) USTC 34869. A helpful list of Etna’s historic eruptions can be found on the website of the Etna Observatory, Catania Section, accessed 25 May 2018, ct.ingv.it/en/11-notizie/news/561-etna-eruptions-pre1900.html.

16. *BREF DISCOVRVS DV MERVEILLEVX ET terrible signes & accident adueni par deluge de feu en la ville de Venise, Auec vne exortation faicte au peuple par vn docteur en theologie d’icelle ville* (Paris, pour Gilles de Saint-Gilles, [1574]) USTC 61726.

17. See S. K. Barker, “Strange News: Translations of European Sensational News Pamphlets and Their Place in Early Modern English News Culture,” in *The Book Trade in Early Modern England: Practices, Perceptions, Connections*, ed. John Hinks and Victoria Gardner (New Castle, DE and London: Oak Knoll Press and the British Library, 2013), 161–86.

18. *Discours sur l’espouventable et merueilleux tremblement de terre adueni à Ferrare* (Lyon: Benoît Rigaud, 1570) USTC 11217, A3r.

19. *Discours sur l’espouventable et merueilleux tremblement de terre adueni à Ferrare*, A4r–v.

frequently drove people into exile, the emotional resonance of learning about people forced to flee their homes because of the force of the elements cannot be underestimated.²⁰ The reader would have been particularly struck by the revelation that the duke was affected alongside his subjects: “mesme Monsieur le Duc & Madame la Duchesse ne s’assurans plus en leur forteresse, & hors d’espoir de iamais y habiter, abandonnans leur ville & maisons, se retirèrent à la campagne avec leur train, & ce le plus vistement qu’il leur fut possible.”²¹ The seeming incredulity that even the duke had been forced to flee is reiterated within the pamphlet, underscoring how this disaster had affected all levels of society within this prosperous town: “Voir vne ville fort florissante, & vne des belles d’Italie, tant frequentée & celebrée autresfoise, sans dessus dessous perir si furieusement, les maisons d’entrebatre, les vnes fonder, les autres pancher: le Seigneur mesmes d’enfur avec le reste de son peuple, & ne trouuer lieu de seureté.”²²

As the buildings of Ferrara fell, so too did the certainties on which this city was built. Everyone had to start again, from the most grand to the most humble. The immense impact on this community would not have been lost on other communities learning about their misfortunes from afar. In almost a blink of an eye, an entire city could be brought low—and the reader would be aware that a similar fate could easily await their place of residence. Printers in several French towns brought out their own pamphlets recounting the disaster of Ferrara; as well as the Lyonnais copy cited above, there are surviving editions from Nyverd’s presses in Paris and Le Mégissier’s in Rouen.²³ The story stayed, or was kept, in the public eye over the months that followed. Rigaud reissued his pamphlet in 1571; a Parisian edition attributed to Guillaume Cavellat and

20. On the significance of exile in early modern Europe, see Nicholas Terpstra, *Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World: An Alternative History of the Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139170055.

21. *Discours sur l’espouventable et merueilleux tremblement de terre advenu à Ferrare*, B1r.

22. *Discours sur l’espouventable et merueilleux tremblement de terre advenu à Ferrare*, v1r.

23. *Le Discours sur l’espouventable, horrible, & merueilleux tremblement de terre advenu en la ville de Ferrare. Plvs, la copie d’une [sic] letttrre contenant les noms de plusieurs lieux de renom, & rues veüez en ruynes, depuis le xvj de Nouembre, iusques au xxviiij ensuyuant. M. D. LXX* (Paris: Guillaume Nyverd, [1570]) USTC 49698; *Horrible & espouventable tremblement de terre, aduenue en la ville de Ferrare. Copie d’une letttrre du vingt-quatriesme iour de Nouembre, mil cinq cens soixante & dix* (Rouen: Martin Le Mégissier pour Richard L’Allemand, [1570]) USTC 61313.

Jérôme de Marnef also appeared, as did one with no printer or location stated.²⁴ Further afield, accounts appeared in Antwerp and London.²⁵ People across western Europe would be very aware that even celebrated places like Rome, Venice, and Ferrara could be subject to sudden, elemental forces that could destroy people's livelihoods and lives in a matter of hours.

It is therefore striking that the transnational nature of early modern disaster coverage has not been discussed extensively. Alexandra Walsham's rich study of providence in early modern England uses pamphlets to show how providentialism affected all levels of English society and was used to create a sense of English nationhood, pulling communities together and allowing for pre-Reformation sensibilities to mesh with post-Reformation doctrines and realities. Walsham includes translations of stories about events in Europe within her study. However, there is little consideration of how—and crucially, why—stories about other places were framed to speak to English audiences outside of the admittedly pressing issue of anti-Catholicism. Could an event be both national and international?

Disaster recounted: the original pamphlets

Destruction of buildings by fire is brutal—and dramatically so, when the building in question has previously been a place of national attention.²⁶ On

24. *Discovrs svr l'espoventable et merveillevx tremblement de terre adueni à Ferrare, & sur l'inondation du Pau audit lieu: Avec un recit des miseres & calamitez qui y sont suruenues* (Lyon: Benoît Rigaud, 1571) USTC 5217; *Horrible et espoventable tremblement de terre, adueni en la ville de Ferrare. Copié d'une lettre du 24. iour de Novembre 1570* (Paris: [Guillaume Cavellat et Jérôme de Marnef], 1571) USTC 8604; *Choses Prodigieuses & admirables aduenues en la ville de Ferrare, Desquelles, lettres ont esté enuoyees par l'Ambassadeur de Monseigneur le Prince de Piedmont en Sauoye deuers son excellence* (s.l.; s.n., 1571) USTC 61403.

25. [Fleuron] *De l'orrible, espoventable et prodigieux movvement de terre, adueni en Lombardie, especialement a la ville de Ferrare & ses Faulbourgs* (Antwerp: chez Antoine Tilens, 1571) USTC 13107; *A coppie of the letter sent from Ferrara the xxii. of November. 1570* (London: Thomas Purfoot, [1571]) USTC 507238.

26. In the course of writing this article, several high profile cultural sites have been extensively damaged by fire, including the Glasgow School of Art, the Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro, and Notre Dame de Paris. The outpourings of grief and shock across the world in each of these cases were poignant given my focus on this topic, and reminded me of the enduring ferocity of fire—to say nothing of the horror felt when conflagration leads to loss of life, thinking particularly (but not exclusively) of the blazes at

Wednesday 4 June 1561, a great thunderstorm struck London. William Seres, a printer with close links to William Cecil, rushed out a pamphlet explaining this event in extensive detail, entering the details of the work into the Stationers' Register on 11 June.²⁷ In the early afternoon, the sky was filled with lightning and "a most terrible hydeous cracke of thunder, suche as seldom hath been heard."²⁸ Lightning struck the church of St. Martin within Ludgate, sending stones falling into the street, and a hole opened up in the church roof. Witnesses who were working in the nearby fields and on the river Thames then saw the neighbouring St. Paul's Cathedral catch fire, describing "a long and a speare-pointed flame of fire" catching the top of the broch steeple.²⁹ For bystanders, the atmosphere was clearly terrifying, with the account carefully evoking the most perilous associations of fire: "And some of the parish of saint Martins then being in the streate, dyd feele a marueylous strong ayre or whorlewylnd, with a smel lyke Brimstone, coming from Paules Church, and withal heard the rushe of [the] stones which fell from their steple into the church."³⁰ The fire burned for several hours, with witnesses keeping a close eye on its development:

Betwene iiii. and fiue of the clocke a smoke was espied by diuers to breake oute vnder the bowle of the said shaf of Paules, & namely by Peter Johnson principall Registrer to the Bishop of London, who immediatly brought worde to the Bishops house. But sodeinly after, as it wer in a momente, the flame brake furth in a circle like a garlande rounde about the broche, about two yards to the estimacion of light vnder the bowle of the said shaft, & increased in suche wise, that within a quarter of an howre, or litle more, the crosse & the Egle on the toppe fell downe vpon the south crosse.³¹

Grenfell Tower, North Kensington, London on 14 June 2017 and at the Tazreen Fashion Factory in Dhaka on 24 November 2012.

27. James Pilkington, *The true report of the burnyng of the steple and church of Poules in London* (London: William Seres, 1561) USTC 505897/STC 19930. The English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC) notes that the pamphlet is anonymous but attributes the authorship to Pilkington, Bishop of Durham. Like Walsham (232–33), I am somewhat skeptical about this attribution. On Seres, see Elizabeth Evenden, "Seres, William (d. 1578x80)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online, accessed 27 June 2018, doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/25094.

28. Pilkington, A2r.

29. Pilkington, A2v.

30. Pilkington, A2v.

31. Pilkington, A2v–3r.

The lord mayor arrived on the scene very quickly to consult with the bishop, as well as the lord keeper of the great seale and the lord treasurer, about the best way to proceed. The options were recounted for the reader. One, counselled by those “pretending some experiences in warres,” was to shoot the steeple down with cannons, although some were worried this would lead to the loss of local houses (and possibly local residents). Another course of action was to use ladders to get up on to the roof, and to create a firebreak with axes, taking down part of the roof to stop the fire spreading. It was decided this was the most promising idea, but before the plan could be enacted, most of the roof was ablaze. The progressive destruction of the roof was recounted, and the lord mayor was advised to start planning how to save the bishop’s palace, found at the northwestern end of the church. The fears for neighbouring buildings were very real, and so part of the roof at the northern end of the church was removed to prevent any further spread. Luckily, divine intervention came at the same time: “It pleased god also at the same tyme bothe to turne & calme the winde, which afore was vehement, and continued stil high & great in other partes without [the] citie.”³² Care was taken to note the hard work of the “aboue.v.C. persons” who had tried to stem the fire’s advance by bringing water to the site, including “Diuers substantial Citizens toke paynes as if thei had bene leaborers, so did also diuers & sondrye gentlemen, whose names wer not knownen to the writer hereof.”³³ Despite the potential danger to their own lives, the people of London pulled together, including social elites. The queen herself was seen to react:

In the euening came the Lord Clinton, Lord Admiral from the court a Grenewich, whom the Queenes maiesty assone as the rage of the fier was espied by her maiesty and others in the court, of the pitifull inclinacion & loue that her gracious highnesse dyd beare both to the said church & the citie, sente to assyst my Lorde Mayor for the suppressyng of the fyre, who with his wysdome, authority & diligent trauayl did very much good therin.³⁴

32. Pilkington, A4v–5r.

33. Pilkington, A5r.

34. Pilkington, A5r–v.

By ten in the evening, the fire seemed to be dying down. It was considered extremely fortunate that the church had mainly suffered the loss of its timber and the melting of the lead roof. It was noted that

it pleased the merciful god in his wrath to remembre his mercie, and to enclose the harme of this most fyerce and terrible fyre, within the walles of thys one church, not extending any part of his wrath in this fyre vppon the rest of the Citie, whiche to all reason and sence of man was subiect to vtter distruction. For in the hole city without the churche no stycke was kindled surelye.³⁵

Nevertheless, the surrounding areas as far as Fleet Street and Newgate Market were affected by burning debris.

The near destruction of St. Paul's was a distressing moment for the people of London and England. There were, of course, practical explanations. It could have been caused by negligent workmen, although no work on the church was said to have taken place for six months before the fire. Others thought it could have been due to "som wicked practise of wildfyre or gunpouder" but again, there was no direct evidence to support that explanation.³⁶ Really, the only legitimate explanation could be that the storm, with all of its consequences, was the work of God:

The true cause as it semeth, was the tempest by Gods suffrance: for it cannot be otherwise gathered, but that at the said great & terrible thunderclap, when sainte Martins steple was torne, the lighting which by natural order smiteth the highest, did first smite the top of Paules steple, and entring in at the small holes which haue always remained open for building skaffoldes to the works, & finding the timber very olde & drie, did kindle the same, & so any fire increasing grew to a flame & wrought the effecte which folowed then to behold & now most lamentable to looke on.³⁷

The incident could be interpreted as evidence of God's displeasure with the slow pace of the Reformation in England: on Sunday 8 June, the bishop of Durham,

35. Pilkington, A5v–6r.

36. Pilkington, A6v.

37. Pilkington, A6v–7r.

James Pilkington, preached a rousing sermon at the open air pulpit at St Paul's Cross, admonishing people to mend their ways and embrace the Elizabethan church; what had happened to London could easily happen elsewhere in the land. Fires had been known to devour churches in the reigns of King Stephen and King Henry VI. The sermon also noted that

Many other suche like common calamities [...] whiche had happened in other countreis, both nigh to this realme & far of, where the church of Rome hath most aucthority, & thereby concluded the surest way to be, that euery man should iudge, examin, & amend himselfe, & embrace, beleue, and truly folow the word of god.³⁸

For this English congregation, and for the English readers of the pamphlet account, the events in London in June 1561 had to be understood as part of a wider geographical and chronological plan. News about disasters happening in other countries was therefore vital knowledge, as it contextualized the event experienced locally.

Tuesday 20 January 1607 started like any other day for the people of Gloucestershire, Somerset, Monmouthshire, Glamorgan, Carmarthan, and the rest of South Wales: "many of the Inhabitanes of those Countreys before mencioned, prepared themselues to their affayres, some to one bussness, some to an other: euery man according to his calling."³⁹ The rural ideal continued, with ploughmen engaging their oxen and shepherds feeding their flocks. At about nine a.m., "huge and mighty hills of water, tumbling one ouer another, in such sort as if the greatest mountaynes in the world, had ouerwhelmed the lowe Valleys or Marshey groundes."⁴⁰ The effect was overwhelming:

Sometimes it so dazzled the eyes of many of the Spectators, that they imagined it had bin some fogge or miste, coming with great swiftnesse

38. Pilkington, A8v.

39. William Jones, *Gods vvarning to his people of England. By the great overflowing of the waters or floudes lately hapned in South-wales [sic], and many other places. VVherein is declared the great losses, and wonderfull damages, that hapned thereby: by the drowning of many townes and villages, to the vtter vndooing of many thousandes of people* (London: [Ralph Blower for] W. Barley & John Bayly, 1607) STC 10011.4, A2v.

40. Jones, A2v.

towards them, and with such a smoke, as if Mountaines were all on fire: and to the view of some it seems as if Myllions of thousands of Arrowes had bin short foorth all at one time, which came in such swiftnesse, as it was verily thought, that the Fowles of the Ayre could scarce fly so fast, such was the threatning furies thereof.⁴¹

Understanding that the threat came from the water, people fled for their lives, yet in under five hours, many hundreds of people were lost. Even those who escaped with their lives would find their lives irreparably changed. As in Ferrara, the losses took no account of social station:

Many Gentlemen, Yeoman and others, had great losses, of cattle, as Oxen, Kine, Bullockes, Horses, Colts, Sheepe, Swine, Say not so much as their poultry about their houses, but all were ouerwhelmed and drownd, by these merciles waters. Many men that were rich when they rose out of their beds, were made poore before noone the same day: such are the Judgements of the Almighty God.⁴²

The losses were not just individual, with corn and grains stores being destroyed as well as hay and straw for animals. Modern scientists have debated the causes of the 1607 floods, speculating that it might have been a tsunami or a storm surge.⁴³ While contemporaries were clear that the cause was evidently God's judgment, a disaster that touched so many people across such a wide area understandably provoked a lot of soul searching, much of which played out in print. Over half-a-dozen pamphlets were produced about the floods, many being reissues and expanded versions of previous works.⁴⁴

41. Jones, A3r.

42. Jones, A3v.

43. For an overview of modern explanations, see Kevin Horsburgh and Matt Horritt, "The Bristol Channel Floods of 1607: Reconstruction and Analysis," *Weather* 61.10 (2006): 272–77.

44. William Jones, *Gods vvarning to his people of England. Wherein is related his most vvonderfull, and miraculous workes, by the late ouerflowing of the waters, in the countryes of Sommerset, and Glovcester, the counties of Mvnmoth, Glamorgan, Carmarthen, and Cardigan, with diuers other places in South-wales [sic]. Wherein is described the great losses, and wonderfull damages, that hapned thereby: by the drowning of many townes and villages, to the vtter vndoing of many thousandes of people* (London: [Ralph Blower] for W. Barley & Io. Bayly, 1607) not in STC, ESTC S505250; William Jones, *Gods vvarning to his people*

In the very early morning of Wednesday 7 March 1618, a fire broke out in the Palais at the heart of the Ile de la Cité in Paris. Although later commentators would try to find a terrestrial cause, the pamphlet produced at the time blamed “vne grosse estoille flamboyante de la grosseur d’une coudee de longueur & vn pied de large.”⁴⁵ The Grande Salle was the most affected location, with the chapel being “tout consommee, tous les Roys qui estoient en statue de pierre de taille sont du tout consummez.”⁴⁶ The blaze not only destroyed the roof of

of England. By the great over-flowing of the vvaters or floudes lately hapned in South-wales [sic] and many other places. Wherein is described the great losses, and wonderfull damages, that hapned thereby: by the drowning of many townes and villages, to the vtter vndooing of many thousandes of people (London: [Ralph Blower] for W. Barley & Io. Bayly, 1607.) STC 10011.2; William Jones, *Gods vvarning to his people of England. By the great overflowing of the waters or floudes lately hapned in South-wales [sic], and many other places. VVherein is declared the great losses, and wonderfull damages, that hapned thereby: by the drowning of many townes and villages, to the vtter vndooing of many thousandes of people* (London: [Ralph Blower] for W. Barley & John Bayly, 1607) STC 10011.4; William Jones, *Gods vvarning to his people of England. By the great over-flowing of the vvaters or floudes lately hapned in South-wales [sic] and many other places. Wherein is described the great losses, and wonderfull damages, that hapned thereby: by the drowning of many townes and villages, to the vtter vndooing of many thousandes of people* (London; [Ralph Blower] for W. Barley & Io. Bayly, 1607.) STC 10011; 1607. *A true report of certaine wonderfull ouerflow[ings] of waters, now lately in Summerset-shire, Norfolke, and [other] places of England: destroying many thousands of men, wome[n,] and children, ouerthrowing and bearing downe whole townes and villages, and drowning infinite numbers of sheepe and other cattle* (London: W[illiam]. I[aggard]. for Edward White, 1607) STC 22915.5; 1607. *A true report of certaine wonderfull ouerflow[ings] of waters, now lately in Summerset-shire, Norfolke, and [other] places of England: destroying many thousands of men, wome[n,] and children, ouerthrowing and bearing downe whole townes and villages, and drowning infinite numbers of sheepe and other cattle* (London: W[illiam]. I[aggard]. for Edward White, [1607]) STC 22915; 1607 *Lamentable newes out of Monmouthshire in VVales. Contayning, the wonderfull and most fearefull accidents of the great ouerflowing of waters in the saide countye, drowning infinite numbers of cattell of all kinds, as sheepe, oxen, kine and horses, with others: together with the losse of many men, women and children, and the subuersion of xxvi parishes in Ianuary last 1607* (London: [Edward Alldel] for W[illiam] W[elby], 1607) STC 18021; *More strange nevves: of wonderfull accidents hapning by the late ouerflowings of waters, in Summerset-shire, Gloucestershire, Norfolke, and other places of England: with a true relation of the townes names that are lost, and the number of persons drowned, with other report of accidents that were not before discovered: happening about Bristow and Barstable* (London: W[illiam] I[aggard] for Edward White, [1607]) STC 22916.

45. *Accident merueilleux et espouventable du desastre arriué le 7. iour de Mars de ceste presente année 1618 d’un feu inremediable lequel a bruslé & consommé tout le Palais de Paris. Ensemble la perte & la ruine de plusieurs Marchands lesquels ont esté ruynez & tous leurs biens perdus. Avec l’arrest de la Cour de Parlement sur le diuertissement fait au Palais* (Paris: la veuve Jean de Carroy, 1618), 3.

46. *Accident merueilleux et espouventable*, 3.

the Grande Salle, it also ripped through the stalls of the various merchants who traded there. The pamphlet took great care to note these losses: “toutes les boutiques des marchands, tant de l’entrée que dans la sale ont esté toutes bruslees, & consommées, si bien que la perte faicte par ce feu est cause de la ruyne de beaucoup de pauvres marchands, lesquels auoient tous leurs moyens dans leurs boutiques.”⁴⁷ Given the number of booksellers who had stalls in the Palais, this disaster no doubt hit very close to home. The fire also threatened the Conciergerie prison, at risk because of both the prevailing winds and the dryness of the wood. Between the hours of five and eight a.m., the fire was visible from a league away, and it continued to burn for the rest of the day. The manpower needed to extinguish the blaze was brought up more than once; it was thought that it would be beyond the power of twenty thousand men, and the author noted that “des hommes milliers à milliers, ne l’ont sçeu estaindre” before, eventually, the fire was put out with “vn grand trauail de coups de plus de deux milles personnes.”⁴⁸ The Sainte Chapelle was miraculously saved, but much of the archival materials stored in the Palais were lost, not least because people removed items from the building during the fire. The parlement of Paris issued a decree on 8 March, ordering everyone who had removed material from the building during the fire to restore it and forbidding paper merchants and the like to deal in items suspected of having been removed at this time. The widow of Jean du Carroy in Paris printed two pamphlet accounts of the fire. One included the text of the parlement’s decree and one did not, suggesting that an initial work rushed out to provide an account of the fire was then expanded to include the update of the decree.⁴⁹

These three disasters caused immediate physical and emotional damage on a large scale. In the case of the two fires, the buildings destroyed were local

47. *Accident merueilleux et espouventable*, 4.

48. *Accident merueilleux et espouventable*, 4–6.

49. *Accident merueilleux et espouventable dv desastre arriué le 7. iour de Mars de ceste presente année 1618 d’un feu inremediable lequel a bruslé & consommé tout le Palais de Paris. Ensemble la perte & la ruyne de plusieurs Marchands lesquels ont esté ruynez & tous leurs biens perdus* (Paris: la veufé Jean de Carroy, 1618); *Accident merueilleux et espouventable dv desastre arriué le 7. iour de Mars 1618 d’un feu inremediable lequel a bruslé & consommé tout le Palais de Paris. Ensemble la perte & la ruyne de plusieurs Marchands lesquels ont esté ruynez & tous leurs biens perdus. Avec l’arrest de la Cour de Parlement sur le diuertissement fait au Palais* (Paris: la veufé Jean de Carroy, 1618). It is not clear which USTC numbers apply to each of these separate works.

and national landmarks, places of administrative and devotional significance. The 1607 floods were quite unlike anything that had been seen in this part of the world before, and the devastation was immense. We can understand why these events would need to be recorded for their communities, but why would they be of interest to international audiences?

Disasters in translation

Each of the disasters discussed above was soon the subject of a translated news pamphlet. The fate of the 1561 St. Paul's fire account is perhaps the most complicated. It was translated into French and printed in Paris by Guillaume Nyverd, and in Lyon by Jean Saugrain.⁵⁰ The main text of the translation in the Paris and Lyon pamphlets is largely the same, with the vocabulary differences being relatively minor.⁵¹ However, the titles are somewhat different; the supporting liminary verses are placed at different points; the punctuation and paragraph layout changes between the two (and in the case of the paragraph structure, neither follows the London pamphlet); and the Lyon edition's address to the reader is dated Rouen, 27 June 1561—just three weeks after the fire—whereas the Paris address is undated. These discrepancies suggest that the two French editions were made from different manuscript copies of a single translation, which was then adapted as seen best by the different print workshops. I suspect of the two, the Lyon edition was made first, as it included the date in the paratext, and also because of the title page similarities to the

50. *Brief discovrs de la tempeste, et fouldre aduenue en la cité de Londres en Angleterre, sur le grand temple & clocher nômé de saint Paul, le quatriesme Iuin, M. D. LXI.* (Paris: Guillaume Nyverd, [1561]) USTC 16234. *Recit Veritable du grand Temple et Clocher de la Cité de Londres, en Angleterre, nommé saint Paul, ruiné & destruit par la foudre du Tonnerre.* (Lyon: Jean Saugrain, 1561) USTC 37109.

51. There is some variant spelling (Paris, "feste" on A2r, Lyon "faiste" on A3r; Paris "comptes" on D4r, Lyon "contes" on B1v); the Paris text uses "Mais auant" on B1r, the Lyon text uses "Mais premier" on A4r. In the same section, the Paris text includes "& ce pendant" before "la plus grande & meilleure partie" which the Lyon text does not, and when discussing the sermon at Paul's Cross, the Lyon text describes it as "lieu qui estoit accoustme pour y prescher" (B2r), where for the Paris text it is simply "lieu accoustumé pour prescher" (C1r). The most extensive difference comes when the text discusses the impact on the surrounding area: the Paris text notes "hors la Cité, comme grandz monceaux de neige, sans qu'aucun en ait esté blesse, Dieu mercy, ny aucune maison gastée," where the Lyon version uses "hors la Cité, comme grandes feuilles de Neige, au loin, & sans qu'aucun en ait esté blesse Dieu mercy, ny persone, ny maison."

English original discussed below. The other two translations are simpler to trace. In 1607, the presses of Fleury Bourriquant produced a work identified on the title page as a French translation of a London original: it is based on an account of the flooding in Somerset.⁵² And the English translation of the Paris Palais fire account, by William Jones for Nathaniel Browne, includes the text of the parlement's edict, making the identification of the source edition somewhat more certain.⁵³ All were produced soon after the events they described, but the reasons for making these translations need a bit of unpacking.

The French translations of accounts of the 1561 fire and the 1607 flood both contain addresses to the reader. In many respects, both are highly conventional in terms of how they explain these recent happenings. They remind the reader that God demonstrates his power through his actions in the natural world, which can of course also show his mercy. The 1561 St. Paul's fire translation opens by reminding the reader "que le Seigneur DIEV, amateur & conseruateur des choses qu'il a créées [sic], donne souuent en seignes, & manifeste sa diuine puissance par signes, prodigies, & choses plus que naturelles," as seen in the Bible as well as in the reminders sent by Him to goad sinners into recognizing their faults and being penitent.⁵⁴ The 1607 flood translation describes the events reported as "vn coup de la main de ce grand Dieu de merueilles" and reminds the reader of the potentially destructive power of water. The elements' potential to be used for divine punishment also comes across strongly in the translator's address in the 1561 St Paul's fire translation, which describes "le feu bruslant,

52. *Discours veritable et tres-piteux, de l'inondation et debordement de Mer, suruenue en six diuerses Prouinces d'Angleterre, sur la fin de Ianuier passe, 1607. Où plusieurs cilles, hommes, femmes & enfans sont peris, avec degast & dommage irreperable de tout le pays. Pris sur la copie imprimée à Londres, & mis en François par A.F. Lyonnois.* (Paris: Fleury Bourriquant, 1607) USTC 6024474: 1607. *A true report of certaine wonderfull ouerflow[ings] of waters*, A1r. I have used STC 22915 as the source text, as it is unclear if Bourriquant used this or STC 22915.5.

53. *Nevves from France. Or A relation of a maruellous and fearfull accident of a disaster, which happened at Paris the seuenth day of March, this present year 1618. where by meanes of a terrible fire, all the Pallace was burnt and consumed. Together with a narration of the losse and ruine of many Tradesmen, who had all their goods consumed by the said fire. As also an Iniunction of the Court of Parliament concerning the restoring backe and deliuering of all bags of papers, Processes, peeces and Records which were taken vp being cast out of the pallace during the said fire* (London: William Jones for Nathaniell Browne, 1618) STC 11281.

54. *Brief discovrs de la tempeste, et fouldre aduenue en la cité de Londres en Angleterre*, A2r.

minister & executeur de de sa iustice & vengeance.”⁵⁵ The underlying aim is in both instances, as in other similar paratexts, to call readers to repent of their sins. We get more insight into how these pleas fitted into the wider news landscape, however. The French 1607 flood pamphlet opens with the translator A. F. noting that he has found “ceste curiosité digne de ton occupation.” He goes on to compare the story of the flood to other kinds of news he expects people to be interested in: “Ce sont des nouuelles, non de la guerre de Flandres, ny du different de Venise, ny des terres Neuues, ny de l’armée du Turc, ains de la guerre entre Dieu & les hommes, ou (pour mieux dire) leurs pechez.”⁵⁶ The flood is situated alongside the ongoing unrest in the Netherlands, the Venetian Interdict, the exciting discovery of new worlds and the threat of the Turk on the borders of Christendom, all subjects that the translator anticipates will be of interest to the imagined reader.⁵⁷ But the flood is not simply a flood; it is evidence of the struggle between God and our readiness to sin. No early modern reader would have missed the link to biblical precedents and the significance of flooding as evidence of God’s propensity to both punish and save humankind. Furthermore, the reader is reminded that when the forces of judgment are unleashed, they will be too powerful for anyone to consider resisting. The translator also gives a brief insight into his reasons for putting the work into French: “T’ay voulu communiquer à la France les particularitez de ceste tant prodigieuse inondation, m’estant tombé en main vne copie & description d’icelle imprimée à Londres en langue Angloise, laquelle i’ay tasché de render en François, voyant qu’autre ne tenoit compte d’vne chose si remarquable.”⁵⁸

Although the conceit that the source pamphlet just happened to find its way into the hands of the translator is a common one, the emphasis on the need to translate—because otherwise this story might not become known, because it is news that is not being told—is somewhat unusual. The translator of the 1561 Fire pamphlet is more typical in simply drawing attention to the instructive value of this event and the spiritual service that his translation offers:

55. *Brief discovrs*, A2r.

56. *Discours veritable et tres-piteux, de l’inondation et debordement de Mer*, A2r.

57. On the Venetian Interdict of 1606–07 and its impact on communications in Venice, see Filippo De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), chapter 5: “The System Challenged: The Interdict of 1606–7,” 157–99.

58. *Discours veritable et tres-piteux, de l’inondation et debordement de Mer*, A2v.

Je t'ay bien voulu metre en nostre vulgaire François, ce petit recit veritable, faict en langue Angloise, du feu terrible, & supernatural tombé par fouldre du Ciel sur le grand tempt de Saint Paul de Londres, ville metropolitaine d'Angleterre. [...] Duquel tu pourras (à mon aduis) recueillir quelque fruit, à la cognoissance de la grande, & inenarrable puissance de nostre bon DIEV, & de son secret iugement.⁵⁹

Both prefaces demonstrate that the physical locations of disasters were less important than the lessons that needed to be drawn from them. Suffering and the call to repentance did not respect national boundaries: the flood translator also makes reference to “le theatre mobile des eaux” which could refer just as easily to their ability to damage French lands as to the devastation already wrought on English and Welsh soil. God’s judgment could land anywhere, but the lessons it taught were universal.

Translating presentation and design

Other compositional and design details give us more insight into the transmission process. Most pamphlet translations reproduce fairly faithfully the original title of the work from which they derive.⁶⁰ If we compare transcriptions of the title pages of the 1618 pamphlets, we see that the English mirrors the French original quite closely:

ACCIDENT || MERVEILLEUX ET ESPOVVENTABLE DV || desastre
arriué le 7. iour de Mars 1618 || d'un feu inremediable lequel a bruslé
& || consommé tout le Palais de Paris. || *Ensemble la perte & la ruine*
de plusieurs Mar- || *chands lesquels ont esté ruynez & tous* || *leurs biens*
perdus. || Avec l'arrest de la Cour de Parlement sur || le diuertissement fait
au Palais. || [Typographical ornament] || A PARIS, || CHEZ la vefue Iean
du Carroy rue S. Iean || de Beauuais au Cadran. || M. DC. XVIII.

59. *Brief discovrs de la tempeste, et fouldre aduenue en la cité de Londres en Angleterre*, A2r–v.

60. For a recent examination of the much neglected issue of translating early modern titles, see Brenda M. Hosington, “Textual Standard-Bearers: Translated Titles and Early Modern English Print,” in *Thresholds of Translation: Paratexts, Print, and Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Britain (1473–1660)*, ed. Marie-Alice Belle and Brenda M. Hosington (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 75–100, [dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72772-1_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72772-1_4).

Nevves from France. || OR || A relation of a meruellous and fear- || full
 accident of a disaster, which happened at || PARIS the seuenth day of
 March, this present yeare || 1618. where by means of a terrible fire, all
 the || *Pallace was burnt and consumed.* || Together with a narration of the
 losse and ruine || of many Tradesmen, who had all their goods || *consumed*
by the said fire. || As also an Iniunction of the Court of Parliament con-
 || cerning the restoring backe and deliuering of all bags of pa- || pers,
 Processes, peeces and Records which were taken vp || being cast out
 of the Pallace during || the said fire. || *Truly translated according to the*
French Copie: || *and set forth by authoritie.* || [typographical ornament] ||
 LONDON, || Printed by *William Iones*, for *Nathaniell Browne*, and || are
 to be solde, at the next shoppe to the great North || *doore of saint Paules*
Church. 1618.

There is a small yet important addition introducing the topic as “News from France,” and the ante has been somewhat upped by making the event both an accident and a disaster. The inclusion of “this present yeare” on the fifth line might indicate some familiarity with the other du Carroy edition, which also used this construction, although that was a common phrase in news publications. The losses of the tradesmen are now described as a “narration” and the remit of the parlement’s decree is indicated.

The other examples under consideration show more variation. The English pamphlet about the St. Paul’s fire is focused and to the point:

THE TRVE REPORT || of the burnyng of the Steple || and Church of
 Poules || in London. || ¶ *Jeremy.* [x] *iii.* || I wyll speake suddenlye agaynst a
 nati- || on, or agaynste a kyngedome, to plucke || it vp, and to roote ir out,
 and distroye || it. But yf that nation, agaynste || whome I have pronounced,
 turne || from their wickednes, I wyll re- || pent of the plage that I thought ||
 to bryne vppon || them. Imprynted at London, at || the west ende of Paules
 Church, || at the synge of the hedghogge || by Wylyyam || Serres. || *Cum*
priuilegio ad imprimendum || solum. || Anno. 1561. *The x. of Iune.*

The focus is initially on the veracity of the account, then on the kind of incident and what has been affected and where. At first glance, the Lyon pamphlet reproduces the English title fairly closely:

RECIT || Veritable du grad || TEMPLE ET CLOCHER DE || la Cité
de Londres, en Angleterre, || nômé saint Paul, ruiné & de- || struit par
la foudre du || Tonnerre. || Iheremie. 18. à Verset. 7. & 8. || Je parleray
soudainement à l'encontre de la || nation. Et cõtre la Royaume, pour
l'arracher, || despecer, & destruire: Mais si ceste nation se || retourne de
son mal, contre lequel i'ay || parlé, Je me repentiray aussi du || mal que
i'auoye pensé de || luy faire. || A LYON, || PAR IEAN SAVGRAIN. || - ||
1561

The initial focus on the truth of the account is maintained, as are the details about what building was affected. Intriguingly, the Bible verse from the book of Jeremiah is translated, perhaps because of the dual focus of the verse in question: while it starts by discussing the destruction of a sinful nation, it ends by underscoring God's willingness to forgive the penitent. A Catholic audience could focus on the first half of the citation, identifying Protestant England's state of sin, whereas Protestant readers could take comfort from the chance to be forgiven. There are noticeable differences between the title pages, too. English readers do not need to be told that London is in England. The Lyon copy clarifies what St. Paul's is, rather than assuming that a French audience will know that it was a church of considerable significance. It is underscored from the outset here that the building was destroyed by thunder and lightning. The weather conditions are also prominent in the Parisian edition:

BRIEF || DISCOVERS || DE LA TEMPESTE, ET || fouldre aduenue en
la cité de Lon- || dres en Angleterre, sur le grand tem- || ple & clocher
nommé de saint Paul, || le quatriesme Iuin, M. D. LXI. || [Crowned rose]
|| A PARIS, || Par Guillaume Nyuerd, Imprimeur & Librarie, tenant ||
sa boutique ioignant le pont aux Muniers, || vers le Chastellet : au bon
Pasteur. || AVEC PRIVILEGE.

The brevity of the account is highlighted, rather than its credibility. The scene of the action is given first as London as an urban space, before coming to specify the exact location of St. Paul's. Furthermore, the date of the event is stated prominently at the end of the main title, presumably as an indication of the pamphlet's original timeliness. No mention is made of the work's status as a

translation on either the Lyon or the Parisian title page; that is revealed only when one has opened the book and turned to the address to the reader.

The French 1607 flood pamphlet draws attention to the fact that it is a translation of a work produced in London:

DISCOVERS || VERITABLE ET || TRES-PITEVX, DE || L'INNONDATION
ET DEBOR- || dement de Mer, suruenu en six diuerses || Prouinces
d'Angleterre, sur la fin de Ian- || uier passé, 1607. || *Où plusieurs villes,
hommes, femmes, & enfans || sont peris, avec degast & dommage irre- ||
perable de tout le pays. ||* Prins sur la copie imprimée à Londres, & mis
en || François par A.F. LYONNOIS. || *Nisi signa & prodigia videritis non
credetis.* || [[Printer's device] || A PARIS, || Par FLEVRY BOVRRIVANT,
au mont. || S. Hilaire, pres le puits Certain. || [-] || M. DCVII.

It is adapted from the pamphlets that focus on Somerset:

1607. || A true report of certaine wonderfull ouerflowings || of Waters,
now lately in Summerset-shire, Norfolke, and other || places of
England: destroying many thousands of men, women, || and children,
ouerthrowing and bearing downe || whole townes and villages, and
drowning || infinite numbers of sheepe and || other cattle. [woodcut of a
flooded landscape] || Printed at London by W. I. for Edward White and
are to be solde || at the signe of the Gunne at the north doore of Paules.⁶¹

The “True report” aspect of the original title is preserved, but an emotional element is added, as the event is now “tres-piteux.” The geographical range is broader, taking in “six diuerses provinces d’Angleterre.” Both mention that men, women, and children were affected, but where the English original makes specific reference to the loss of livestock, the translation makes a more general point about “degast & dommage irreparable de tout le pays.” Effect is prioritized over precision.

61. 1607. *A true report of certaine wonderfull ouerflow[ings] of waters*, A1r. I have used STC 22915 as the source text; it is unclear if Bourriquant used this or STC 22915.5.

Textual modifications

The translation of the main texts follows the originals relatively closely. In a few places, extra clarification needs to be added for points to make sense, or formulaic expressions are rendered more suitable; where the English account of the 1561 fire gives Queen Elizabeth's titles in full, the French pamphlet merely names her, an editing decision that reflects contemporary French support for Elizabeth's rival, Mary Queen of Scots, and that helpfully glosses over English claims to the French throne.⁶² In the 1618 Paris fire publications, a slight alteration modifies the tone, rather than the sense: the English version addresses itself to "the worthy reader," a shift from the French "Messieurs." This may be a tacit acknowledgement that whereas all French readers would be expected to find the destruction of a key national building to be significant, the English audience for such a text would be narrower, and hence their decision to read the text needed some acknowledgement. The worthy reader could also, of course, be female.⁶³

Throughout these works, strategic textual cuts and additions were made and inventive formatting came into play, driven at least in part by the different expectations of what this kind of material should look like. Thanks to scholars like Anne Coldiron and Guyda Armstrong, among others, we now expect to consider the material book as part of the process of translation.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, news translation was markedly different to other kinds of translation, as there was very little effort to maintain any kind of link to the original formatting. Indeed, to have done so would have prevented the translated work from fitting in as a domesticated pamphlet product. Partly this came down to practical

62. A fuller exploration of the tensions at play between England and France in 1561 is given in Alexander S. Wilkinson, *Mary Queen of Scots and French Public Opinion, 1542–1600* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 53–61, [dx.doi.org/10.1057/9780230286153](https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230286153).

63. The text in both the original French and the English translation opens with an extended explanation of the Palais' historical role in French cultural life, as the place where justice was served, and its association with the monarchy. There is also a glaring error in the translation: where both French editions note that the fire burned brightly from five a.m. to eight a.m., the English version extends this period to begin at four a.m.

64. Anne E. B. Coldiron, *Printers without Borders: Translation and Textuality in the Renaissance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), [dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139681056](https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139681056); Guyda Armstrong, *The English Boccaccio: A History in Books* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), [dx.doi.org/10.3138/9781442664234](https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442664234).

reasons. English news pamphlets tended to be in quarto, French ones in octavo. The resultant discrepancy in physical page size impacted on the overall look and design of news pamphlets.⁶⁵ Throughout, local formatting preferences predominated. Blackletter was still common for English texts, as seen in the 1561 St. Paul's fire original. The English account of the 1618 fire italicizes key terms and names, just as would happen in a domestic text; this was, however, far less usual in French news pamphlets. Moreover, two images were added to the English text, one a generic fire scene on A4r, the other of a doleful-looking man sitting outside a town on B1r. Although images were not unknown in French news pamphlets, they were not as prevalent as they were in English prints. English readers seem to have expected their disasters to be illustrated, and the precision of the image was secondary to the emotional engagement it was designed to prompt.⁶⁶

The 1607 flood translation takes the most textual liberties. Printed marginalia explaining terms in the text appear at key points. A long introduction from the English account of the Somerset floods was removed. This section stressed the iniquity in which most people lived, and the inability of people to avoid falling back into sin, even when they had been warned of the consequences. The French text starts directly with the account of what happened in Somerset. Where the English original notes losses in various places including Grantham, Kenhouse, and Kingston, the French text passes over these with a dismissive “Je ne m'arreste en particulier sur les hameaux, maisons champastres, & logettes villageoises fondues semblablement dans la mer.”⁶⁷ The translator might have decided that French audiences would not be particularly interested in the fate of distant villages. Nevertheless, there is an

65. Based on a survey of news book, edicts, and ordinance formats as recorded in the USTC, accessed 27 May 2018. This enquiry showed that whereas the common format for these publications in England, the Low Countries, and the Holy Roman Empire was the quarto, France preferred the octavo for news. A further investigation into the chronological spread showed that this preference was already established by the 1520s.

66. In discussion at the 2017 “Early Modern ‘Transformissions’” conference, Randall McLeod suggested that the B1r image served to fill in blank space at the end of the main text, locking the type into the frame more securely. This explanation has a great deal of merit, and I am indebted to his interest in the design of this pamphlet. The differing uses of images in French and English news pamphlets nonetheless still warrants further consideration.

67. *Discours veritable et tres-piteux, de l'inondation et debordement de Mer*, A3v.

acknowledgement of further tales of devastation that the reader might seek out if so inclined. A number of set pieces do cross from the English to the French: lost livestock, a father desperately trying to save both his children and his worldly goods with which he provided for his family, and managing to save neither; another child saved because of the sturdiness of a cradle. After the tale of a shepherd forced to abandon his rescue of his flock, who then had to watch them suffer before his own rescue from a tree, the French pamphlet sneaks in an account not found in the English pamphlet: the story of a Protestant man and his wife who were saved by climbing into a handy tree. The relevance for French audiences comes part way through:

Vn Gentil-homme Protestant, surprise de ceste tempeste se retira sur vn arbre, avec sa femme, & vn lacquay, qui estoit de Troyes en Champagne & Catholique. Ce Gentilhomme ayant peu d'assurance en cest arbre s'azarda à la nage, d'aller querir cn bestiau qui flotloit sur l'eau : lors ce pauvre garçon ayant son seul & dernier recours en Dieu, s'adressant à sa maitresse. Or priez maintenant Dieu (luy dit-il) à vostre mode, & en quelle langue que vous voudrez, ie le prieray à la mienne : & commença à faire le signe de la croix, & prier à la façon de l'Eglise Catholique : Son maistre cependant arriue avec le batteau, où ils furent sauuez.⁶⁸

Clearly, as in modern news accounts of overseas disasters, the experiences of a native son needed to be included. The example of practical religious co-existence acknowledges the different spiritual norms in the two countries, with each praying in their preferred fashion and language. On the one hand, the universality of these stories is underscored, as exemplars for a world in which the Almighty was quick to anger and quick to punish. But French readers would also likely take heart that it was the Catholic prayers that apparently prompted the rescue.

68. *Discours veritable et tres-piteux, de l'inondation et debordement de Mer*, B1v.

Shared experiences, separate reactions⁶⁹

What happened when an event affected both England and France? On 6 April 1580, a large earthquake centred on the Straights of Dover hit communities in northern France, the Low Countries, and southern England. The devastation was significant on both sides of the channel. In London, two people were killed by falling masonry. Churches were badly damaged in places like Sandwich and Broadstairs. In France, Calais saw its watchtower collapse, and a number of people killed. Churches as far away as Rouen and Pontoise saw damage.⁷⁰

Unsurprisingly, there was a rush to record and explain this disaster in print. At least eight French and six English pamphlets dealt with what would become known in England as “the Great Earthquake.”⁷¹ It is striking that none

69. For a wonderful exploration of the identity of the English Channel, and its role as a shared space between the two nations, albeit primarily focused on a slightly later period, see Renaud Morieux, *The Channel: England, France and the Construction of a Maritime Border in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139600385.

70. Scientists have been unable to locate the precise coordinates and magnitude of the earthquake. See R. M. W. Musson and P. W. Burton, “The ‘London’ Earthquake of 1580, April 6,” *Engineering Geology* 20.1–2 (1984): 113–41; Jean Roger and Yanni Gunnel, “Vulnerability of the Dover Strait to Coseismic Tsunami Hazards: Insights from Numerical Modelling,” *Geophysical International Journal* 188.2 (2012): 680–86.

71. *Discours merueilleux et effroyable du grand tremblement de terre advenu és villes de Rouen, Beauvais, Pontoise, Mantes, Poicy, Saint Germain en Laye, Calais et autres endroicts* (Troyes, Denis de Villerval, 1580) UTC 15355; *Horrible tremblement de Terre, aduenu en plusieurs endroits de ce Royaume, le sixiesme iour du moys d'Auril, dernier, 1580. Auec une briefue narration de ce qui s'est fait & passé puis n'aguières en la ville de Calais* (Paris, Pierre Chevillot, 1580) UTC 6900; *Discovrs d'une merueilleuse et veritable copie du grand deluge & debordement de la mer, avec le nom des lieux & place qui ont esté submergez & le nombre des nauires qui ont esté peris entre Douure & Calais, & autres lieux, le vi. & vij. iour d'Auril, 1580* (Paris, pour Jean Coqueret, 1580) UTC 7554; *Discovrs Sur le tremblement de terre aduenu en la ville de Rouen, ville capitale du pays & duché de Normendie & lieux cirouoisins le 6. Apuril 1580* (Rouen, Robert Mallard, 1580) UTC 10108; *Les Espovventables trablemans de terre, & Feux, miraculeusement tombez du Ciel: dont six villes ont esté ruynées, tombées & foudroyées, tant par le feu du Ciel, que par le trablement. Auec les pitoyables lamentations & gémissemens des habitans, femmes, filles & enfens[sic]* (Lyon, Antoine du Prat, 1580) UTC 62243; *Discovrs merueilleux et effroyable du grand tremblement de terre* (Lyon, Michel Jove et Jean Pillehotte, 1580) UTC 62244; *Discovrs merueilleux et effroyable dv grand tremblement de terre, aduenu és villes de Rouen, Beauvais, Pontoise, Mantes, Poicy, Saint Germain en Laye, Calais & autres endroicts de ce Royaume. Auec le traicté des Processions, & prières publiques qui ont esté faictes le vi. iour d'Auril. 1580.* (s.l., s.n., 1580) UTC 66841; Golding, Arthur, *A discourse upon the earthquake that hapned throughe this realme of Englande, and other places*

of these is a translation: they all refer primarily to the country in which they were produced. In France, this focus was somewhat complicated by the extent of the area affected. Some accounts focus first and foremost on Rouen, others on Calais. One French pamphlet did recognize that this incident went beyond national boundaries, noting on the title page that ships were affected between Dover and Calais. The bulk of the text is a philosophical consideration of how God restores order in the world. When it finally comes to deal with the events of 1580 directly, it addresses the effects in Calais first, explaining how many of the houses fell down and the sea flooded the town. There is a fairly extended discussion of the effects of the earthquake on the ships out in the English Channel. The discussion of the devastation in England focuses mainly on what happened in Oxford:

Où il s'est debordé vne petite riuiere qui a gasté plusieurs maisons & colleges, & autres bastimens de remarque, mesme que le clocher de l'Eglise nommee Toussaincts est cheu sur vn college nommé Chricerce, auquel a esté tué plusieurs escoliers & autres personnes qui estoient dedans, quand au peuple de la ville il n'est point faict mention qu'il y eu personne de peri, sinon en ce colege, mais du bestial il y en a eu grand nombre, comme

of Christendom, the first of Aprill. 1580. betwene the houres of five and six in the evening (London, Henry Bynnemann, 1580), STC 11987; Thomas Twyne, *A shorte and pithie discourse, concerning the engendring, tokens, and effects of all earthquakes in generall: particularly applyed and conferred with that most strange and terrible worke of the Lord in shaking the earth, not only within the citie of London, but also in most partes of all Englande: vvhich hapned vpon VVensday in Easter weeke last past, which was the sixt day of April, almost at sixe a clocke in the euening, in the yeare of our Lord God. 1580.* (London: [John Charlewood for] Richarde Iohnes, 1580) STC 24413; Edmund Spener and Gabriel Harvey, *Three proper, and wittie, familiar letters: lately passed betwene tvvo vniuersitie men: touching the earthquake in Aprill last, and our English reformed versifying* (London: H. Bynneman, 1580) STC 23095; Anthony Munday, *A viewv of sundry examples. Reporting many straunge murthers, sundry persons periured, signes and tokens of Gods anger towards vs. What straunge and monstrous children haue of late bene borne: and all memorable murthers since the murder of Maister Saunders by George Brovvne, to this present and bloody murder of Abell Bourne Hosyer, who dwelled in Newgate Market. 1580. Also a short discourse of the late earthquake the sixt of Aprill* (London: [J. Charlewood] for William Wright, [sold by J. Alde], 1580), STC 18281; Thomas Churchyard, *A warning for the wise, a feare to the fond, a bridle to the lewde, and a glasse to the good. Written of the late earthquake chanced in London and other places, the. 6. of April 1580. for the glorie of God, and benefite of men that warely can walke, and wisely can iudge* (London: Iohn Alde, and Nicholas Lyng [and Henry Bynneman?]; sold by Nicholas Ling, 1580) STC 5259.

Cheuaux, Iumens, bœufs, vaches, moutons, pourceaux, & autre baistes
qui estoient aux prairies en vn autre village qui est proche de la ville.⁷²

Arthur Golding's *A Discourse upon the Earthquake that happened through this realm of England and other places in Christendom* appears to provide a more holistic overview; the pamphlet itself, however, is mainly an exhortation to repentance, and when it does get round to recounting events, it only notes what happened in London—the Kingdom of England is short-changed, never mind the rest of Christendom—which is intriguing, given Golding's own status as a translator of note.

It is something of a fool's errand to try to explain why something was not translated. We cannot say for sure that news did not get through, as print was only one strand of the early modern international news world. Perhaps it was felt that audiences already had enough material about this event, or perhaps international politics gave printers pause for thought; a few months after the earthquake, the Jesuit mission to England was launched, so direct translation of Catholic material might have been too risky at a time when God was seen to be speaking directly to his people and calling them to him. Or perhaps we are conditioned always to prioritize the local over the international.

Conclusions

This enquiry has started to tease out the complex national and international strands that underpinned the production of pamphlets about disasters in early modern England and France. Given that there was so much local tragedy on which early modern pamphleteers could draw, it is striking when they choose to look overseas. Events were never entirely independent: they took place within a providential framework that linked current disasters back to antiquity and biblical times, but they also happened within a more confined chronological framework in which they were compared with and linked to events that had happened within living memory. We might expect the confessional differences that had emerged in the sixteenth century to lead to a very hard and fast interpretation of what another country's disaster might mean, to be bombastic

72. *Discovrs d'une merueilleuse et veritable copie du grand deluge & debordement de la mer, avec le nom des lieux & place qui ont esté submergez & le nombre des nauires qui ont esté peris entre Douure & Calais*, B1v–2r. The text also mentions that "vne grande montaigne" collapsed nearby, which seems unlikely.

in their critiques of what other religions “deserved,” but in most cases the judgments were far subtler than that. Where there was not space to judge overtly in the translated text, there might be ways to work this in via paratexts and design—but these elements still had to fit what was expected in terms of how pamphlets should visually present news.

Translated news pamphlets could therefore be both foreign and domestic—foreign in their subject matter and domestic in their material composition. It is worth remembering at this point that they sat alongside other forms of news transmission, not least oral discussion. Nonetheless, there appears to have been a shared understanding of the working of God in the world and humanity’s repeated inability to live up to divine expectations. Walsham argues that post-Reformation ideas about providence probably had closer ties to pre-Reformation understandings of God’s actions than has hitherto been acknowledged. Therefore, we should perhaps not be surprised that cross-confessional sharing of providential events was possible, and the translation of these accounts relatively simple on a linguistic level, although a producer might wish to engage in extensive and sophisticated editing and reshaping if they so wished.

Scholars of translation accept that ideas and emotions could cross linguistic boundaries with relative ease. We need to examine if events could travel as freely. Images, layout, and formatting choices all served to make the texts in question recognizable and therefore accessible to domestic audiences, as much as directions given in paratexts and linguistic choices. Translation never just happens, but rather there has to be a reason for a translation to be made. News translations offers us the opportunity to investigate a series of decisions made by writers, translators, printers, book sellers, and audiences. Translation is, as we know, never simply about the words we find on the page in front of us. It is about how and why those words came to be there, and the decisions made along the way. In the case of news, perhaps more than any other genre, it is about the decision to translate or not in the first place.