



Alexandra-Maria VRÎNCEANU

## FEMINIST IDEOLOGY AND TRANSLATED LITERATURE

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### Reviewed by Sorina CIOBANU

Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi

*Feminist Ideology and Translated Literature* by Alexandra-Maria Vrînceanu is an answer to the call for “more research on other ‘feminist translation’ theories and practices”, launched a few years ago by Castro and Ergun (125), and a much-needed contribution to the less developed field of gender-oriented Translation Studies in Romania. Based on its author’s doctoral research under the supervision of an esteemed Romanian translation scholar, Professor Rodica Dimitriu, the book sets out to “bridge the gap between theoretical acquisitions and the practice of translation” (10), presenting both an overview of feminist thought and achievements – in the (Western) world and in Romania – and a series of applied analyses of (re)translated feminist texts.

The volume adopts a top-down approach, from the general to the specific, starting with a chapter on feminist ideology that highlights the main turning points and waves of the movement and continues with an outline of its current positioning and hot topics. Fundamental texts and statements, like Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman...*, Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, or Adichie’s ‘We should all be feminists’, are discussed. An important section is devoted to feminist issues today in relation to matters such as power, difference, equality, sexuality, dominance, norm, and, especially, language. The

last section in the first chapter focuses on feminism and literature from a twofold perspective: the rise of female/ feminist writers – from Austen and Charlotte Brontë to Woolf and newer voices, like Elena Ferrante – and the ‘male-gaze’ in the depiction of female characters.

The second chapter, “Feminism and gender-related issues in translation studies”, begins with an overview of gender-oriented approaches to translation, which, among others, considers the notions of ‘fidelity’ and ‘faithfulness’, Godard’s ‘womanhandling’, or Mason’s ‘deliberate skewing’ of the source text. The next section is devoted to the Canadian group of feminist translators publishing their work in the journal *Tessera* and their “open-book” translation agenda that rejected the concept of ‘gender-neutrality’. Feminist approaches to translator ‘(in)visibility’ and ‘voice’ are discussed at length in the third section in this chapter, in relation to other fundamental notions in the field, like ‘authorship/ownership’, ‘domestication/foreignisation’, ‘style’ or ‘stance’. The strategies used by feminist translators in their attempt to rebel “against the constraints imposed on them by phallogentric language” (61) are highlighted in the last section in this chapter. They include von Flotow’s intervention-based ‘supplementing, prefacing and footnoting’, and her extreme solution of ‘hijacking’ the source text, as well as Massardier-Kenney’s author-centered and translator-centered strategies.

Titled “Feminist works in (re)translation”, the third chapter is an occasion for the author to explain her methodological approach to the analysis of her case studies. Her model incorporates elements from Antoine Berman’s translation criticism, the concepts of ‘emancipatory discourse’ and ‘emancipatory translation’ theorized by Janks and Ivanič and Chesterman, respectively, Lefevere’s constraints, as well as the general translation strategies proposed by Vinay and Darbelnet, Chesterman and Aixelá. It is here that Vrînceanu introduces the distinction between female translators and “translators”, i.e., a term which “alludes to a feminist translator wishing to veer away from the typical suffixes which tend to refer to males” (72). The final section in this chapter considers the many facets of retranslation and shows that Berman’s theory, which stated that any translation can only achieve completion through retranslation, does not always hold in practice.

The last and longest chapter in *Feminist Ideology and Translated Literature* includes detailed comparative analyses of four novels and an essay in (re)translation. If we are to refer to the feminist translation research areas outlined by Castro and Ergun, Vrînceanu's choice of texts represents both women writers and feminist texts in translation (131-132). The first case study is Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and its three Romanian renditions: by Livia Deac in 1975 – during the communist regime, by Ioana Patrichi in 2006, and by Gigi Mihăiță în 2007. The model of analysis, the same for the five texts at hand, uses “concentric contextualization”, as Rodica Dimitriu puts it, starting with some contextual preliminaries, continuing with information about the author and the book, and ending with a “confrontation” of the target texts that considers both translator- and text-related factors (formal, situational, cultural, and linguistic aspects), as well as the reception of the texts in the target culture – by considering official reviews and reader blogs and forums. The second case study is another well-known feminist novel, Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying*, translated into Romanian by a male translator, Marian Brătescu (1995), and a female one, Monica Vlad (2010 and 2016). One of the findings of Vrînceanu's analysis is that the male-made translation “displays a tendency to employ attenuation, using euphemisms to lessen the impact of the ‘lewd’ language, as well as shifts of register, toward a more formal, even scientific language” (144). Hélène Cixous' seminal essay *Le rire de la Méduse* and its translations into Romanian – by Magda Cârnecki, a feminist novelist herself, in 2021 – and into English, by Keith and Paula Cohen, in 1976 are the object of the third case study in the book. A key difference between the two versions is the number of translator notes, 22 in the Romanian version and only 3 in the English one. This makes Vrînceanu state that “the Romanian translator closely observes the communication norm with a view to optimizing communication” (160). Two different translations, published under three different titles, are the object of the fourth case study in the book, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. The novel was first translated into Romanian by Monica Bottez and published in 1995 under the title *Galaad 2195 (The Handmaid's Tale)*. A revised version of this first translation was published by another publishing house in 2006 under the title *Povestirea cameristei* ‘The Chambermaid's Story’. A retranslation by Diana Marin-Caea appeared in 2016 under the new title of *Povestea slujitoarei* ‘The Servant/Handmaid/Housemaid's Tale’. Vrînceanu comments on and explains the differences between the three titles, and her

analyses suggest that the latest translation “feels less ‘daring’ with respect to the translation solutions employed” (196). The last case study in the book changes direction, as it deals with a Romanian feminist novel, *FEM* (2011) by Magda Cârneli, and its translations into French, by Florica Couriol (2018), and English, by Sean Cotter (2021). Appreciating the creativity and resourcefulness of both translators while acknowledging that the linguistic asymmetries between the languages involved made it impossible for the English translator to capture all the nuances of the Romanian source text – e.g., grammatical gender in Romanian versus no grammatical gender in English, Vrînceanu concludes that “the main difference between the two texts is the presence of the explanatory footnotes in the French one, displaying a greater degree of target-orientedness on the part of the translator” (217).

The book’s conclusions highlight valuable insights into the translation of feminist texts, among which the tendency to soften harsh language and taboo words in late 20<sup>th</sup>-century Romanian translations (regardless of the translator’s gender) – which, in Vrînceanu’s opinion, might be explained by the readers’ different expectations at the time, during or immediately after the fall of the very prudish and repressive communist regime – or the English translators’ inclination “to take their average target readers to be more versed insofar as feminist tenets and references are concerned” (223).

Shedding light on female-centred perspectives and women’s voices in the ‘written world’ – to use Calvino’s expression – and their handling across linguistic and (socio-)cultural boundaries, *Feminist Ideology and Translated Literature* is a well-documented and valuable contribution to the burgeoning field of Feminist Translation Studies, recently marked by the 2024 launching of a new journal with the same name at Routledge/Taylor & Francis<sup>1</sup> or volumes such as Vassallo’s *Towards a Feminist Translator Studies: Intersectional Activism in Translation and Publishing* (2022). Alexandra-Maria Vrînceanu’s poised and insightful analyses of translations involving Romanian as the target or the source language also highlight the specificity of Romanian contexts within the broader currents of feminist thought and literature, laying a foundation for further comparative inquiry and theoretical questioning in these research areas.

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<sup>1</sup> *Feminist Translation Studies*, available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/rftr20>.

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