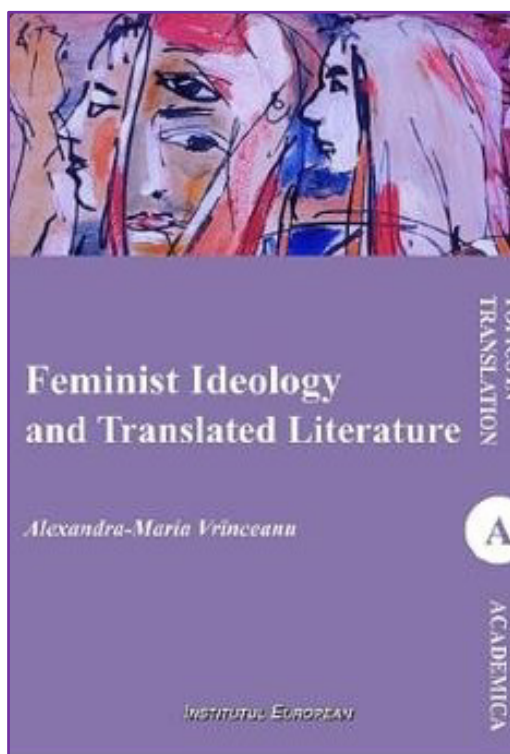


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Alexandra-Maria Vrînceanu, *Feminist Ideology and Translated Literature*, Iași: Institutul European, 2024, 244 p.



The young scholar Alexandra-Maria Vrînceanu has an extensive experience as a freelance interpreter and certified translator at Cartea Românească Publishing Press and Black Swan Publishing Press. Since 2019 Vrînceanu has been teaching seminars and practical courses on translation, discourse analysis, and English grammar at the Faculty of Letters of “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University in Iași, Romania.

The present study on feminist ideology and the process of translating literature was initially Vrînceanu’s doctoral thesis which she successfully defended in 2023. This piece of scholarship is extremely interesting from several points of view. Firstly, the connection between translation and gender has already been approached as a feminine or feminized activity. In other words, translation has been associated with stereotypes of women’s traditional condition. Translation is subordinated to the source text, it depends on the source text that has the authority

and the power of a husband in traditional matrimony, translation is always under the suspicion of treason and infidelity. If it is beautiful, it is unfaithful, and if it is faithful, it is bland and simple. On the other hand, historically, translation was an opportunity for the woman writer to confront the public space, to practise a sort of veiled authorship that was much more acceptable than overt authorship. Romanian literature is no exception, in this respect. George Călinescu, an illustrious Romanian literary historian who was in



no way a friend of women's literature, feels obliged to mention, in his famous *History of Romanian Literature*, several ladies from the Romanian aristocracy (Lady Samurçaș, Lady Șuțu) who translated from French or Italian at the turn of the nineteenth century. Their linguistic and cultural mediations marked the beginnings of modern Romanian literatures and also offered a space for women in the Romanian republic of letters.

Vrînceanu does not deal with the differences between translation as a feminine activity and translation as a feminist activity, she insists on the connection between feminist ideology and translation. There is little Romanian scholarship on this topic and Vrînceanu does fill a gap and offer an innovative monograph. One of the few Romanian contributions to this problem is Simona Necula and Mihaela Gabriela Stănică's article "Translations from the Feminist French Literature" ["Traduceri din literatura feministă franceză"] from volume II (pp. 741-745) of an ample *History of Translations into the Romanian*, coordinated by Muguraș Constantinescu, Daniel Dejica, and Titela Vilceanu and published in 2022 by Editura Academiei. Unfortunately, this article suffers from a certain documentary fragility¹.

Vrînceanu starts by building the theoretical frame of her study and then she applies the translation theory to several case studies. It is obvious that Vrînceanu is a well-read author, her bibliography includes Deborah Tannen, Robin Lakoff, Luise von Flotow, Françoise Massardier-Kenney, to which Sara Mills' *Feminist Stylistics* could have been added. I particularly appreciated Vrînceanu's insistence on the Canadian feminist school whose representatives (Nicole Brossard, Louky Bersianik, Louise Cotnoir, Daphne Marlatt, Erin Moure, Kathy Mezei, Gail Scott, or France Théoret, etc.) were very interested in the connection between language and gender.

The analytical section of Vrînceanu's book puts under scrutiny translations and re-translations of five books with important feminist messages: *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* by Muriel Spark translated into Romanian under the title *Domnișoara Brodie în floarea vârstei* by Livia Deac (1975), re-translated into Romanian as *Cei mai frumoși ani* by Ioana Patrichi (2006), and as *Domnișoara Brodie în floarea vârstei* by Gigi Mihăiță (2007); Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* translated into Romanian as *Teamă de zbor* by Marian Brătescu (1996) and re-translated under the same title *Teama de zbor* by Monica Vlad (2010, reprinted in 2016); *Le Rire de la Méduse* by Hélène Cixoux, translated into English as *The Laugh of the Medusa* by Paula and Keith Cohen (1976) and into Romanian by Magda Cârnelci and titled *Râsul Medusei* (2021); Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, translated by Monica

¹ Necula and Stănică mention in their article the French suffragette Germaine Malaterre-Sellier who visited Romania in 1933 and gave a talk on the French women's situation after World War I. The two authors refer to Malaterre-Sellier's booklet on the situation of women's suffrage all over the world which *may have been* (my emphasis) translated into Romanian by Elena General Stângaci and Calliope G. Dimescu. The vagueness of Necula and Stănică's reference is difficult to understand as this Romanian translation can be found at the Library of the Romanian Academy in Bucharest, under the title *Situația actuală a sufragiului feminin în lumea întreagă* [*The Present-day Situation of Women's Suffrage Worldwide*]. Also Necula and Stănică affirm that in interwar Romania there *seemed* (my emphasis) to be efforts to consolidate peace in Central and Oriental Europe through "women's influence". In my opinion, Alexandrina Cantacuzino's contribution to build a women's Little Entente certainly deserves more than being considered only the result of a woman's influence.

Bottez, in 1995 and entitled *Galaad 2195*, re-translated by Monica Bottez, in 2006, under the title *Povestea cameristei*, and re-translated in 2017 by Diana Marin-Caea under the title *Povestea slujitoarei*; and finally *FEM* by Magda Cârnelci, translated under the same title, into French, by Florica Courriol (2018), and into English by Sean Cotter (2021).

The minute examination of translations was completed by the study of the meta-texts that accompany these translations or comment on them. Vrînceanu's diligence goes as far as interpreting the translators' prefaces, introductions, or postfaces, the reviews of these translations, the internet comments, and even the book covers of the translations which she comments on. Her aim is to research to what extent the translator succeeded in rendering the writer's message as well as the translator's position in connection to his/her own work. In this way, Vrînceanu implicitly draws her readers' attention upon a very important problem in Romanian culture: the assessment of translations. Unfortunately, Romanian culture has bad tradition, in this respect. The reviews of the translations become, almost always, short comparative literature essays where the reader is only informed about the writer's background and activity, the plot and/or the main ideas of the book under perusal. There is no mention of the translator's effort as if the book had crossed the gap between cultures and languages by itself, without the translator's help. At best, at the end of the review one or two impressionistic sentences rather pay a kind of aestheticized lip service to the translator's toil. Even if the review is authored by distinguished translators, this neglect does not disappear. Or an important merit of Vrînceanu's work is that she also offers a highly competent and, therefore, most welcome critique of the translators' work.

Vrînceanu's writing does not lack polemical notes, which is a sign of competence and authentic scholarship. For instance, she polemicizes with Antoine Berman, the author of the well-known re-translation hypothesis. According to Berman, initial translations' focus is on the target language and culture. These first variants are meant to familiarize the target readership with a certain writer, a certain literary writing. The focus of the re-translations turns back to the source text and author, and they offer the reader a linguistic and cultural "bath" in the source. Vrînceanu convincingly demonstrates that the context of the translation act is also very important. Re-translations may also have political implications especially if censorship harnessed the writer, or the translator, or both. In case of feminist texts, the aim of translation is extremely important as these texts focus on the female Other and translation clearly points out to the heteronormative character of language – what Judith Butler calls the "heterosexual matrix" of language – and its forms of manifestation. Vrînceanu's convincingly proven conclusion is that translation is a rhizome or, as Eleonora Federici says, the result of heteroglossic practices where ideology and politics are extremely important.

Alexandra Maria Vrînceanu impresses the reader by the rich and well-chosen bibliography she builds her conclusions on. The bibliographical information is carefully and accurately recorded, which demonstrates her professionalism. Two minor errors should be, however, corrected upon a second edition of this study. Olympe de Gouges should appear at letter G and not D, namely "Gouges, Olympe de". It is also to be remembered that the famous African American scholar and activist bell hooks writes her name in small letters in order to protest against women's marginalization and secundarization. In this case, spelling becomes ideology.

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Without any doubt, these minor observations do not diminish the value of Vrîncianu's writing and they are a token of appreciation for her perfectionism. Without any doubt, *Feminist Ideology and Translated Literature* is a valuable monograph that tackles a very interesting problem and can be of great interest both to the Romanian and the international readerships.

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