



**Adriana ȘERBAN**

Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3

Review of:  
Sanson, Helena [ed.] (2022):  
*Women and Translation in the Italian  
Tradition*. Paris: Classiques Garnier.  
449 pp. ISBN: 978-2-406-13286-8.

**Hermeneutics,  
Specialized Communication,  
and Translation**

Miriam P. Leibbrand,  
Tinka Reichmann,  
Ursula Wienen  
[eds.]

**4/2024**

**Yearbook of Translational Hermeneutics  
Jahrbuch für Übersetzungshermeneutik**

Journal of the Research Center  
Zeitschrift des Forschungszentrums



Hermeneutics and Creativity, University of Leipzig  
Hermeneutik und Kreativität, Universität Leipzig

DOI: 10.52116/yth.vi1.96



**Cite this article:**

Șerban, Adriana (2024): „Review of: Sanson, Helena [ed.] (2022): *Women and Translation in the Italian Tradition*. Paris: Classiques Garnier. 449 pp. ISBN: 978-2-406-13286-8“. In: *Yearbook of Translational Hermeneutics 4: Hermeneutics, Specialized Communication, and Translation* (ed. by Miriam P. Leibbrand, Tinka Reichmann, Ursula Wienen), pp. 365–372. DOI: <10.52116/yth.vi1.96>.



Adriana ȘERBAN

Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3

**Review of: SANSON, Helena [ed.] (2022): *Women and Translation in the Italian Tradition*. Paris: Classiques Garnier. 449 pp. ISBN: 978-2-406-13286-8.**

The volume that Helena Sanson and the authors of the chapters offer to the translation studies community impresses by its weight, depth, and the tremendous scholarship and dedication it demonstrates. It was completed during the COVID-19 pandemic and it is the outcome of a research project on the subject of women and translation in Italy. In Sanson's words,

[t]he dignity and value of the translators' work come also from retracing and reconstructing the history of the discipline [...], to know that the women who translate today belong to a long line of other women for whom, throughout the centuries, translation has had many functions and meanings, not least that of being an irreplaceable means to express their scholarship and creativity, to bring solace and comfort, to connect with the world, and even to acquire some level of freedom. (Sanson, p. 50)

As Sanson points out, there is an emerging body of work on women's involvement in translation. Although this is mostly in the form of articles or chapters, there are also monographs:

Hannay (1985), for instance, is a study of Tudor women as translators but also patrons and writers of religious texts, and Krontiris (1992) investigates the role of women as writers and translators during the English Renaissance. These and many other useful references can be found in the generous bibliography (63 pages in total) appended to the volume, a landmark in the field being, of course, the collective volume *Portraits de traductrices*, edited by Jean Delisle (2002). One might also mention that Women Translators of Religious Texts, a special issue of *Parallèles* (cf. Șerban/Hassen 2022), was in preparation virtually at the same time as the present book under review, and came out in 2022. Where Italy is concerned, the current state of knowledge is “very fragmented” (Sanson, p. 9)—which it does not need to remain and, clearly, steps are being taken in that direction.

The volume as a whole is thus a contribution to translation history or translation archaeology in Pym’s sense (1998), engaging as it does with questions such as “who translated what, how, where, for whom and with what effect?” (Pym 1998: 5). One aspect especially worth highlighting is the simultaneous focus on the public or professional sphere and on the personal and even intimate sphere. Indeed, it is fascinating and at the same time moving to see the many things that translation meant to each of the women whose work is discussed in the case studies.

*Women and Translation in the Italian Tradition* contains a preface, a detailed introduction by the editor (43 pages, including a list of the authors whose works were translated into Italian by women between 1870–1930) and twelve chapters organised in three chronological sections: “From the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Century”, “From the Eighteenth Century to Unification”, “From Unification to the Present”, with four chapters in each. The bibliography, index of names and table of figures

complete the volume. Abstracts of the chapters and of the introduction are offered in three languages, namely English, Italian and French. This reader, at least, would have preferred the abstracts to appear in the beginning of chapters.

No claim to exhaustivity is or can be made. Helena Sanson and the authors of the chapters set out to recover names, titles, dates, and to outline themes. Some of the many threads linking the contributions and making the volume coherent are: translation as a means for educated or even erudite women to participate in intellectual and cultural life and contribute to it; the role translation played in the education of women; the representation of women through translation; the circulation of women's writings through translation; the role of women as readers in the shaping of the book market. The list could continue.

Some of the women lived and worked within convent walls while others resided in the world, and came from different social milieux. Several of them wrote literary works of their own. Some published under their own name, others anonymously, or under a pseudonym. They translated from and into the classical languages, modern languages (especially French, English and German), or between dialects. It is worth pointing out that, even at the moment of the political Unification in 1861, Italian was not everyone's mother tongue in the country and that, for centuries prior to that, it had been, above all, a written language. One implication of this is that the translators whose work is studied in the volume, as well as other translators, had to learn it from grammars, dictionaries, and books in general. Some women translators offered partial translations and some complete translations of the works they tackled, or produced texts which might more accurately be called 'adaptations' or 'free translations'. Some worked alone, others in collaboration. They translated literature (poetry, novels, theatre,

biography), religious or devotional texts, but also political, economic, legal, philosophical and scientific writings. Some were prolific translators, while the names of others are associated with only one known translation. The reasons for translating are diverse: as a literary pastime, to make a living, political activism, to complement a professional activity as a journalist or editor, to make knowledge available to others, or to support one's own development as writer.

LUCA ZIPOLI's chapter "Translation as Transformation: Gender and Religion in Antonia Pulci's *Rappresentazione di Santa Domitilla*", which opens the section entitled "From the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Century", makes it possible for the reader to get acquainted with Antonia Tanini Pulci who, while not the first Italian woman to translate, was perhaps the first to have her translation printed, in late 15th-century Florence. SUSANNA BRAUND, in collaboration with CATERINA MINNITI, discuss the role of women from the elite in the translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* by male translators: the title of this contribution is "Female Networks and Virgil Translation in Sixteenth-Century Siena". The third chapter in the volume, authored by ELEONORA CARINCI, brings to light the figure of Chiara Matraini, a translator who was also an author in her own right. Matraini published in Florence, in 1556, *Oratione d'Isocrate a Demonico*, her translation from Latin of a text originally in Greek (today considered to be spurious). This chapter is written in Italian. The section ends with a contribution by the editor, HELENA SANSON, which takes the form of a case study of two nuns who translated in 17th-century Italy: Angelica Baitelli and Maria Stella Scutellari. Sanson reveals that both Scutellari and Baitelli translated for the less learned, and for other women, and that they were by no means the only ones who targeted that readership. The peculiar linguistic context of the peninsula is also discussed in this chapter.

The section “From the Eighteenth Century to Unification” starts with ALESSANDRO CABIATTI’s essay “Gioseffa Cornoldi Caminer: Fashion Editor, Radical Translator in Late Eighteenth-Century Venice”. The author points out that little is known about this woman, who is usually mentioned within the context of studies on her family. She carried out editorial work for *La donna galante ed erudite* (published between 1786 and 1788) and translated pro-women and egalitarian works later on, during the 1796–1797 revolutionary period in Venice. Her socio-political commitment and interest in the field of education are highlighted. In her contribution, written in Italian, “Lingue e traduzioni nella prima direzione del *Corriere delle Dame* (1804–1818)”, ELISA BACCINI explores the presence of French texts with translations into Italian and *vice versa* in the first season of *Corriere delle Dame*, which targeted a French and Italian readership in Napoleonic Milan. Themes such as education, gender, and the study of languages are central to this chapter, which is followed by another contribution in Italian in which MARTA RICCOBONO focuses on three Sicilian women known for their support of the Risorgimento: Giuseppina Turrisi Colonna, Rosina Muzio Salvo, and Concettina Ramondetta Fileti. They wrote poetry and used literary translation (from Greek and Latin, but also from English) to protect themselves in a context in which erudition and writing were not considered suitable for women. The fourth and last chapter in this section is MARTINA PIPERNO’s “‘Mon propre travail’. Cristina Trivulzio Belgiojoso traduttrice e interprete di Giambattista Vico”. Trivulzio Belgiojoso published in 1844 a French translation of Vico’s *Scienza nuova* and wrote an introduction to her own translation; this paratext is the focus of Piperno’s study.

The first chapter of the section “From Unification to the Present” is IULIA COSMA’s “Italian Women Writers in Translation: An Overlooked Chapter in the Cultural History of

Nineteenth-Century Romania”. This essay differs from the other contributions in the volume in that its focus is not on translators into Italian, but on the translation into Romanian of Italian women writers, among which Neera, Matilde Serao, Carolina Invernizio, and Ada Negri. From the pages of CATERINA PAOLI’s “Translating Virgil at Age Sixteen: Giovanna Bemporad’s *Bucolics*” emerges the figure of a particularly talented woman of Jewish origin, a poet and translator who was still a teenager when she tackled Virgil. Paoli reveals that translation was for Bemporad a lifelong commitment, a way of being rather than merely something she did, and that the dialogue with Virgil was, for this translator, a process that supported her own work as a poet. In her contribution to the volume, “A Voice for the Partisans: Natalia Ginzburg, Translator and Writer in the Post-War Years”, TERESA FRANCO writes about Ginzburg, a prolific writer and chronicler during the fascist period in Italy and the post-war years. But Ginzburg, Franco explains, was also a talented translator. The author of this chapter explores the role translation played in the early stages of Ginzburg’s career and discusses the way in which translating a short war chronicle by Igor Markevitch influenced her writing, especially her narrative voice, and the impact it had on the genesis of Ginzburg’s novel *Tutti i nostri ieri* (1952). The chapter that concludes the volume, authored by ANDREA ROMANZI, is entitled “Fernanda Pivano the *Americanista*: The Gatekeeper of American Literature in the Italian Post-War Publishing Market” and focuses on Pivano, a scholar whose contribution to the dissemination of American literature in post-war Italy can hardly be overstated. Fernanda Pivano translated Hemingway (e.g., *A Farewell to Arms*) and was friends with the author. She promoted Beat Generation authors. Romanzi outlines Pivano’s activities against an institutional backdrop and calls her a

“gatekeeper” (p. 335, title of the chapter) and a “cultural broker” (p. 341).

If there was an increase in the number of women translators in Italy in the second half of the 19th century thanks to better access to schooling, including university education in the last quarter of the 19th century, and perhaps the presence of larger numbers of women teachers, and if the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw an intensification of publishing initiatives involving translation into Italian, Sanson (p. 49) points out that the percentage of books in translation has been decreasing steadily in recent years and that professional translators—of which three out of four are women—work in precarious conditions.

A thread that runs through *Women and Translation in the Italian Tradition* is the question of visibility and its twin, invisibility. The author of this review will not discuss this here but would like to refer the reader to the considerable literature on the subject and to the volume *The Translator's Visibility* (2025) edited by Larisa Cercel and Alice Leal. The book that is the subject of the present review, in any case, is rich in information and insights, and it constitutes a world in itself, populated by figures one can only wish to know even more about. It is to be hoped that the editor and contributors will continue to share with the wider scholarly community the outcome of their research and this and related themes.

## References

- CERCEL, Larisa / LEAL, Alice [eds.]: *The Translator's Visibility. New Debates and Epistemologies*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- DELISLE, Jean [ed.] (2002): *Portraits de traductrices*. Ottawa: Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa.



- HANNAY, Margaret P. [ed.] (1985): *Silent but for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators and Writers of Religious Works*. Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press.
- KRONTRIS, Tina (1992): *Oppositional Voices: Women as Writers and Translators in the English Renaissance*. London / New York: Routledge.
- PYM, Anthony (1998): *Method in Translation History*. Manchester: St Jerome.
- ŞERBAN, Adriana / HASSEN, Rim [eds.] (2022): *Women Translators of Religious Texts*. Special issue of *Paralleles* 34/1.

