

34. Gender and Translation: Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* in French

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In 1993, a dispute arose in the French literary press concerning the respective qualities of the two French translations of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, a first translation by Marguerite Yourcenar (1937) and a second by Cécile Wajsbrot. Kathleen Shields (1995) explains that a critic (Viviane Forrester) had accused Wajsbrot –in an article published by the French daily *Le Monde*– of having rendered Woolf incomprehensible to the French speaking reader, as proves the following sentence:

Cécile Wajsbrot (...) supprime non seulement des adjectifs, voire des pans de phrases, mais élimine systématiquement les répétitions constantes voulues par Virginia Woolf et qui, incantatoires, fondent la dynamique de l'oeuvre (...). Éliminés aussi les pronoms, les adverbes qui apportaient liens et sens. (Forrester, in Shields 1995: 15)

The deletion –in translation– of significant elements of texts by woman writers, seems to highlight a fact that has already been highlighted by many feminist translation scholars, as for instance, Luise von Flotow (1997), an example of this being the infamous English translation of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* by Howard Parshley (1953). This motivated the idea of comparing the two French translations of *To the Lighthouse*, a key text by Virginia Woolf, a writer who has iconic status both within feminism and modernism. The comparative analysis was further justified by a series of reasons. First of all, it was supported by the direction taken by the field of translation studies since the 1980's, in that to clarify questions which presently worry the field of translation, and more precisely, scholars writing and translating in the name of feminism. Namely, who is being translated (i.e. who is being given a voice), what is being translated, for whom the translation is

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intended, who is translating, and why (specially in the case of a second translation of the same text) is another translation undertaken. The comparative analysis was further justified by the theorisation and putting into practice of a series of feminist translation strategies. These, though not all feminist in their origin, are employed in order to highlight and defend what is considered as feminine in a text, and it is in this sense that they have been categorised as “feminist translation strategies”. Perhaps the most innovative of all these strategies is the use, in the translation, of *linguistic innovation*, specially in the case of the translation of texts from French into English, a language where gender is less grammatically marked. In many cases, this is ensured by the fact that the translators work in close collaboration with the authors –with whom they share, among other things, the same political ideology, another strategy termed as “feminist”– and by the fact that linguistic innovation is justified by the very source texts which are highly experimental. Examples of how this works can be found in Barbara Godard's translations of Nicole Brossard's writings or in Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood's translations of Lise Gauvin's texts. By the use of footnotes or prefaces, or by *hijacking* the source text (that is, overtly subverting phallogentric texts in the name of feminist truths) the feminist translator, as Barbara Godard affirms (1990: 50), “seeks to flaunt her signature in italics, in footnotes and in prefaces, deliberately womanhandling the text and actively participating in the creation of meaning”. However, this begs the question of what happens when a translator cannot work in collaboration with the author because she is dead, or what occurs in the case of texts which do not take place in the context of a trend of a highly experimental type of writing as was the case of the literary production in Quebec since the 1970s.

Therefore, in order to analyse the translation strategies used in the French translations of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (*TTL*), an earlier translation by Maurice Lanoire, *La promenade au Phare* (*LPP*), published by Stock in 1929, and a more contemporary version by Françoise Pellan entitled *Vers le Phare* (*VLP*) which was published in 1996 by Gallimard, we took, as the basis for the analysis, the model proposed by Françoise Massardier-Kenney, who offers in “Towards a Redefinition of Feminist Translation Practice” (1997) a more universal or moderate set of feminist translation strategies.

Are any of the translation strategies as explained by Massardier-Kenney put into practice by the two French translators of Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*? If so, how does the use –whether deliberate or unconscious– of these strategies affect the outcome of the translation product? How effective are these in order to translate Virginia Woolf? Do they help in order to preserve or even emphasise the feminine of the author and of her text? It was also aimed at investigating why a second translation of this key text had been undertaken. As a consequence, I corresponded with the female translator, Françoise Pellan, to also gather further insight into her translation work.

Massardier-Kenney categorises feminist translation strategies as “author-centred” and “translator-centred”. Author-centred categories include *collaboration*, *commentary*, and *resistancy*. Translator-centred strategies include *recovery*, *commentary* and *parallel texts*. Neither Lanoire nor Pellan have made use of the technique of collaboration, whether between the translator and the author, or between translators. Parallel texts are “texts in the target language which have been produced in a situation similar to that in which the source text was produced” (Massardier-Kenney 1997: 64). An example of this is provided by Richard Philcox (1995), who found in Woolf's voice the most compatible parallel for the Guadeloupean author of epic fiction Marysè Conde, because of the importance of gender in both writers. The question of whether Lanoire might have thought of a parallel to that of Woolf remains unknown for obvious reasons. Pellan did not make use of this technique as we infer from the following statement included in the correspondence:

J'avoue ne pas avoir songé à un seul écrivain français dont l'écriture me paraîtrait proche par ses effets de V. Woolf. Mais je suis sans doute une admiratrice trop absolue de Woolf. Pour moi elle est incomparable dans sa propre langue, et donc, a fortiori, dans une autre!

The technique of *resistancy* is a notion introduced by Venuti (1992, 1995) and which can be used by translators working on texts whose syntax and lexis already challenge the conventions of the source language in order to render the labour of translation visible through linguistic means. Neither Pellan nor Lanoire seem to have made use of this strategy, since, as we already established, this strategy is more

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appropriate for highly experimental writings, which is not true in their cases.

Recovery is a strategy which involves the publishing and/or translating of women's writings that have been excluded from the literary canon. An example of this is to be found in the relatively recent publication by Doris Kadish and the afore mentioned Françoise Massardier-Kenney in the anthology *Translating Slavery: Gender and Race in French Women's Writing, 1783-1823*, where the authors introduce, translate and comment on three influential French writers from the late 18th and early 19th centuries: Germaine de Staël, Claire de Duras and Olimpe de Gouges, whose abolitionist texts remain hitherto unavailable and untranslated. As Massardier-Kenney points out, "because these writers have been published and translated, the outline of French literary history has shifted". However, Virginia Woolf is not a writer whose work has been left to one side. Since 1915, beginning with the *The Voyage Out*, Woolf's works have been successively published and have been translated into many languages, among them French. The first two French translations are Simone David's translation of *Mrs. Dalloway* in 1929 and Maurice Lanoire's translation of *To the Lighthouse* as *La Promenade au Phare* in the same year. Furthermore, Woolf has been translated into and commented on in French by a major 20th century French writer, Marguerite Yourcenar, whose translation of Woolf's *The Waves* (1931) was published by Stock in 1937 as *Les Vagues*. Therefore, and based on the definition of recovery, we can a priori state that when Françoise introduced the second version of *To the Lighthouse* in 1996 with the title *Vers le Phare*, she was not recovering a lost author and neither was she making available for the first time into French one of the major novels by the English writer.

Commentary is characterised as "using the metadiscourse accompanying the translation to make explicit the importance of the feminine or of woman/women (either in terms of structural constraints or in terms of women's agency) in the translated text" (Massardier-Kenney 1997: 60). It is a strategy that not only "reminds the reader that translating is an activity which creates authority for the writer translated" but also "that the translator is a critic responsible for introducing and marketing a specific image of that writer (Massardier-Kenney 1997: 60). One of the sections in which a translator may utilise this type of metadiscourse is in the preface to the translation. Therefore, the preface

can be a space where a translator can acknowledge his/her work, justify his/her reasons for choosing and introducing a particular text or author, and, more significantly, include his/her own reflections regarding the translation task. Lanoire, however, does not provide any discussion with regard to the significance of the writer and of the text he is introducing, for the first time, into the target language. The preface which accompanies *La promenade au Phare*, though only in the 1957 edition, is a rather short five-page introduction which was not written by the translator himself but by a literary critic, Monique Nathan. And though it introduces both the novel and its author, the preface does not appear to be the fruit of the translator's deliberate intention to explore Woolf but rather the result of a contingency adopted by the publishing house in the later edition. On the contrary, Pellán offers herself a long preface divided into four sections and which analyses, among other aspects, the biographical content of the novel, its symbols, the character's interplay as well as the author's narrative techniques. At the same time, it emphasises, with special sensitivity, the centrality of the female character in the novel, Mrs. Ramsay, focusing on her bipolar relation with her husband but also highlighting her particular bond with Lily Briscoe, another female character.

The technique of commentary can also function as a translator-centred strategy. In this case, a translator can make use of the metadiscourse accompanying the translation in order to stress his/her presence in the text by means of footnotes. Lanoire provides only ten throughout the entire text, inserted using the traditional noting system (N. de T.), and which are brief explanations of particular references or aspects of the source culture. In stark contrast to this, Pellán provides, at the end of her translation, a full section containing 118 comprehensive endnotes. For she uses endnotes not only as a way of clarifying source culture allusions with which the French reader may not be familiar, but also as a method of stressing information on historical and literary facts about women. Even in explanations concerning towns in the source text, she finds an opportunity to highlight women's presence. For example, in the explanation to an allusion to Marlow where Shelley wrote the long poem "La révolte de l'islam", Pellán asserts that at that same moment, his wife, Mary Wollstonecraft, was writing *Frankenstein*. In the endnotes, Pellán also focuses on the feminine intertext of the novel, the detailed explanations to the source text references to Jane Austen (VLP 1996: 352)

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and George Eliot and her novel, *Middlemarch* (VLP 1996: 350-351), of particular relevance in *To the Lighthouse*.

Other possible ways for the translator to assert her active presence in the translated text is to provide the reader with some reflections on the act of translating itself. According to Massardier-Kenney, this form of metadiscourse “should [...] describe the factors that affect the performance of the translator as well as the stakes that the translator has in making the translation” (1997: 63). Lanoire does not include in his translation any reflections on the undertaken task, nor any on the text he is introducing for the first time in the target culture. In contrast, Pellan devotes two pages in her preface to reflect on her translation labour. Her main concern is related to Woolf's use of the English past tense. Here she acknowledges one limitation of her translation: “la traduction qui suit ne saurait toujours rivaliser avec le texte original sur le plan de l'ambiguïté temporelle” (VLP 1996: 27), given the fact that the SL preterite tense can refer to the French “passé composé”, “imparfait”, “passé simple” or “plus-que-parfait”. Moreover, Pellan's concern with trying to reproduce as faithfully as possible what she sees as an essential aspect in Woolf's writing –namely its rhythm and musicality– would explain why she envisaged her translation task as an oral one, “lisant toujours à haute voix différents possibilités avant d'arrêter mon choix”, which she highlighted in our correspondence. She further draws a parallel between herself as a translator and the writer she is translating, stressing that the writer she is translating was herself a translator, namely of Tolstoy's and Dostoevsky's works. In conclusion, Pellan's explicit desire to include a preface accompanying her translation and Lanoire's omission, makes us think that the two translators are working, not simply in different contexts, but with different purposes and readerships in mind. On the one hand, Lanoire, working in 1927, is translating a contemporary writer for a French literary public. This would explain his lack of concern with regard to informing his audience about the most significant aspects both on the level of the narrative and on the author. Lanoire seems to assume that, as a translator, it is not his task to inform an already informed literary audience of the importance of the text or its author. On the other hand, Pellan is translating a canonical work by a major feminist writer for either a wider reading audience –namely a non-specialist readership, as she asserts in the correspondence– or a public of undergraduate students.

She is thus “recovering” the text by making it accessible to a wider readership.

As to textual choices, it seems obvious that numerous divergences were identified between the translations, some of them as a consequence of the time lapse between both versions. There are two possible ways of translating the English pronoun “you” into French. The first is using the more formal and polite “vous”, the second is the colloquial “tu”. This is particularly relevant with regards to the mother/son bond explored in the novel. When Mrs. Ramsay addresses her son James in the text, Pellan prefers the more familiar “tu” whereas Lanoire has consistently resorted to the more formal “vous”, thus creating a distancing effect which risks endangering the nature of their relationship. It is important to observe that this case of divergence might have been a consequence of a change in social attitudes given the years which separate the two versions. Moreover, as Su Reid (1991: 93) has pointed out, “it is the idiosyncracies of Woolf’s narrative voices which, more than anything else, distinguishes her novels”. Woolf combines differing discourse focalisations or points of view, which means that characters reveal themselves through different methods. This is mainly achieved through other characters’ thoughts or utterances or through their soliloquies. To create this plurality of discursive voices, Woolf often combines direct speech with free indirect discourse, as well as using interior monologues. Since this is an essential feature in Woolf’s writing, it should thus be an aspect to be preserved in translation. Let us consider the following:

“There’ll be no landing at the Lighthouse tomorrow”, said Charles Tansley, clapping his hands together as he stood at the window with her husband. (*TTL* 1927: 9)

“Il n’y aura pas moyen de débarquer au Phare demain”, dit en frappant des mains Charles Tansley qui se trouvait debout devant la fenêtre avec Mr. Ramsay. (*LPP* 1929: 20)

“Pas question demain de débarquer au Phare”, dit Charles Tansley en claquant dans ses mains, immobile devant la fenêtre aux cotés de son mari. (*VLP* 1996: 42)

This example shows how in one sentence, four different voices are present: the narrator, who is giving the account of Charles Tansley’s movements; Charles Tansley, who is talking; Mr. Ramsay, the referent of

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husband; and Mrs. Ramsay, hidden behind “her”. The deliberate choice of the narrator to refer to Mr. Ramsay as “her husband” suggests the centrality of Mrs. Ramsay in the novel, around whom everything is organised, even the narrator’s impressions. Whereas Pellan has respected in her translation the source text’s use of “her”, Lanoire has opted for the less ambiguous “Mr. Ramsay”. This suggests that Lanoire, unlike Pellan, has given priority to grammatical correctness, namely by his refusal to break French grammatical antecedent rules, whereas his counterpart opts to remain faithful to the source text. In doing so she offers a version which, although to the detriment of grammatical correctness and rather ambiguous in nature, replicates the diversity of voices reflected in the source text. This example is also illustrative of a technique Lanoire has consistently employed, namely the use of attenuations, especially with regard to the patriarchal figure of the novel, as proves the rendering of the ST’s adjective “arid” in “the arid scimitar of the male” (*TTL* 1927: 44) by “froid” (*LPP* 1929: 59), “aride” in Pellan’s version (*VLP* 1996: 83). This extends to verb choice as proves the rendering of “he was a failure” (*TTL* 1927: 44) by a complicated paraphrase “il avait manqué sa vie” (*LPP* 1929: 59) as opposed to the more straightforward “il n’était qu’un raté” of the second version (*VLP* 1996: 83), or in specific lexical choices, as in the rendering of “boobies” (*TTL* 1927: 115) as “simples d’esprit” (*LPP* 1929: 136) which appears as “nigauds” (*VLP* 1996: 164) in the female translator’s version. A lack of respect for the use of pronouns in the source text is also evident in another example which is even more problematic, namely when Lanoire renders the ST’s “he loves dogs and his children” (*TTL* 1927: 30) as “il aime les chiens et les enfants” (*LPP* 1929: 43), shifting to the definite article and thus creating a distancing effect, whilst in Pellan’s version the possessive pronoun is preserved: “il aime les chiens et ses enfants” (*VLP* 1996: 66).

If aspects related to the patriarchal figure of the text are attenuated in Lanoire’s translation or even omitted –see in particular the rendering of “But his son hated him. He hated him for coming up to them, for stopping and looking down on them” (*TTL* 1927: 43) as “Mais son fils le haïssait. Il le haïssait parce qu’il venait à eux, parce qu’il s’arrêtait et les regardait” (*LPP* 1929: 57) or “Mais son fils le haïssait. Il haïssait cet homme qui leur tombait dessus, qui restait là à les regarder de tout son haut” in Pellan’s version (*VLP* 1996: 81) –making Mr. Ramsay less forceful than he appears in the source text, aspects related to the main

female character of the text are often mistranslated. An example of this can be observed in the rendering of “when they were older, then perhaps she would have time, when they were all at school” (*TTL* 1927: 67) as “[...] lorsqu’il seraient tous en pension” (*LPP* 1929: 84), which appears as “école” in Pellan’s text (*VLP* 1996: 109). In this case, whereas in *Vers le Phare* a more literal expression is preferred, “boarding school” is assumed in *La Promenade au Phare*. This is especially dangerous since it conveys the erroneous idea that Mrs. Ramsay’s desire is to get rid of her children in order to engage in her own concerns. This risks endangering the close and loving relationship existing between mother and son in the novel. This aspect is also illustrated by Lanoire’s choice of adjectives. One example of this is the rendering of “old” in “which an old woman could take from a young man without loss of dignity” (*TTL* 1927: 8) by a more general adjective (“vieille”), which, associated to “woman”, seems rather pejorative in Lanoire’s version (*LPP* 1929: 19) when the female translator shows a preference for a more specific term, “agée” (*VLP* 1996: 41), which further connotes respect while suggesting a possible empathy between author/character and translator.

A significant case of divergence between the two French translations is observed in the interpretation of culture-specific terminology, for translating culture-specific terms entails a substantial level of difficulty for the translator. The translator has normally three options in order to interpret culture-specific terms: the first is to choose a phrase in the target culture which has a higher level of lexical generality. The second consists in providing a target language approximate equivalent. The third is to explain, in an endnote, the allusion to the culture-specific term. Examples such as the rendering of “luncheon” (*TTL* 1927: 64), “pudding” (*TTL* 1927: 81), “roastbeef” (*TTL* 1927: 81-82) and “breakfast” (*TTL* 1927: 171) by “lunch” (*LPP* 1929: 80), “pudding” (*LPP* 1929: 99), “roastbeef” (*LPP* 1929: 99) and “breakfast” (*LPP* 1929: 204) in Lanoire’s version as opposed to “déjeuner” (*VLP* 1996: 106), “dessert” (*VLP* 1996: 126), “rôti” (*VLP* 1996: 126) and “petit déjeuner” (*VLP* 1996: 234) in Pellan’s, point clearly to the fact that Lanoire has consistently transplanted all the terminology related to meals and gastronomy, even though these have similar equivalents in the target culture. Furthermore these appear in the text as they are, without any use of italics. Pellan has opted to translate these terms by using their approximate equivalents in the target culture. The same phenomenon has been observed with regard

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to the two French translations of Woolf's *The Waves*. Whereas in the earliest version of *Les Vagues*, Yourcenar –like Pellan– translates the terms by choosing an equivalent in the target system, Wajsbrot –like Lanoire– transplants them. This is of special importance since, in Woolf's novels, culture-specific terms contribute, in Kathleen Shields' words “à constituer la grisaille quotidienne” (1995: 20). Lanoire, by transplanting the English terms produces a rather exotic translation, which denotes the presence of the source culture rather than contributing to the daily nature of the terms. The alternative choices suggest a divergence between the translators in terms of the readership they are aiming at. Lanoire's use of anglicisms may be motivated by the assumption that his largely *haute bourgeoisie* readership will be either familiar with them or perhaps even be anglophiles. Pellan, who seems to aim at a more popular audience, makes no such assumption about her readers.

Finally, an aspect significant of Woolf's writing is its rhythm, whether this is achieved by deliberate repetitions, pauses (to materialise silences typographically) or the use of square brackets. However, these are not respected in Lanoire's version, who always resorts to synonyms in order to avoid repetitions, hence giving priority to his polished literary style. However, these aspects are systematically reproduced in Pellan's version, who shows, once again, that her translation task was an oral one in parallel to the characteristics of Woolf's style.

To conclude, the first French version of *To the Lighthouse* (*La Promenade au Phare*) revealed itself to be highly receptor oriented. Lanoire's literary style, his vastly sophisticated syntax, his careful observation of French grammatical rules (especially his avoidance of repetitions) suggest that his version was aimed at a highly literary public, who might have been largely upper middle class and had firmly established expectations about literary style. This would explain why Lanoire gave priority in his translation to grammatical and syntactical correctness, rather than highlighting those elements inherent to the specific and unique characteristics of Woolf's writing. This is a clearly evident consequence of his intended readership, to whom such faithfulness may have seemed awkward. However, the second version (*Vers le Phare*) was rather more source text oriented, since the translator showed a concern to remain as faithful as possible to the source text prose and especially to Woolf's particular use of stylistic and emphatic narrative strategies. Pellan's translation appeared to be aimed at a wider

readership, not necessarily an academic one, but a more popular audience with the main purpose of –as she confirms in her correspondence– allowing those not familiar with the English language to have an impression of the beauty present in Woolf’s writing. Moreover, Lanoire by leaving behind him only a few footnotes on particular source text culture-specific references, appeared to be a rather invisible translator. Conversely Pellán, by including –and adorning with her signature– a comprehensive preface highlighting the magnitude of the work and the significance and peculiarity of Virginia Woolf’s style and life, affirmed her visible and engaged labour on the text. Her intention was to orientate the non-specialist reader through specifically important and symbolical moments of the narrative. Furthermore, she reflected on her translation task which contributed to manifesting and consolidating the importance of the role the translator assumes, as responsible for introducing in the target culture a specific image of the writer s/he is translating. Her long and detailed endnotes highlighting the importance of the feminine –both in terms of the narrative and of the author– revealed that her version was a rather “thick-translation” (Appiah 1993) which aimed at *recovering* and expanding certain aspects of special significance in Woolf, something which was neglected in the first version.