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Three feminist classics in Catalan, Galician and Spanish: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Virginia Woolf and Betty Friedan[☆]



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SYNOPSIS

This article is a preliminary step in the examination of the reception of three classic Anglo-Saxon feminist authors whose work was translated in Spain during and after the Francoist dictatorship and has continued to be translated up to the present day. By following the process of publication of the translations into Catalan, Galician and Spanish of three of their most outstanding works (*The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf and *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman), the aim is to demonstrate their importance in a social and cultural context which was in great need of such feminist writings. In the hope of stimulating further research in the field of feminist historiography in Translation Studies, this study shows how three “symbolic mothers” of Western feminist thinking reached these three cultures of the Iberian Peninsula.

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For Woolf reaching new readers in Europe was a source of anxiety and delight — ‘Two books on Virginia Woolf have just appeared in France and Germany. This is a danger signal. I must not settle into a figure’, she notes in 1932 (*Diary* 4, 85). Her delight at the thought of her texts made new by their passage into another language is tempered by the fear that a hardening into one sort of profile (that of the canonical writer) would impede her flexibility towards the world and the writing.

[Luckhurst, 2002, p. 1–2]

Far from being the object of homogenizing mimesis, paralyzing idolatry or sterile envy, the female ‘authority’ becomes a central point of reference, of invaluable meditation, an efficient leverage for aspiration.

[Marçal, 2004, p. 169; translated by Sheila Waldeck]

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Introduction

On 10 November, 1991, on the death of the writer Montserrat Roig, the Catalan poet Maria-Mercè Marçal wrote an article for *Regio 7* entitled “Helena, Maria Aurèlia, Montserrat...” in reference to the three most important feminist writers on the Catalan literary scene during the second half of the 20th century, Maria Aurèlia Capmany, Helena Valentí and Montserrat Roig. Marçal declared that the three, whose death had occurred in 1990 and 1991 within a few months of each other and as a consequence of the same illness, were part of that field of the imagination from which she had extracted “a considerable amount” time and again over the years (Marçal, 2004, p. 117).

It was the “authority” of Capmany that was highlighted by Marçal, her role as “unquestionable, but questioned, mother” who created both security and contradiction. Of Valentí and Roig, it was their “complicity and company” that was outstanding, that feeling Anglo-American critics call *sisterhood* and was translated by Marçal as *sororitat*, a feeling that, despite life’s differences, it is so comforting to live with. These three writers together form an excellent combination of two dimensions: the verticality of the first, who opens up the way for those to come, and the horizontality of the

companions with whom personal and professional parallels can be shared. The words of Marçal illustrate the need to build a strong and compact feminine genealogy with these two dimensions – the vertical and the horizontal.

One of the essential themes of Marçal's feminist essays is the insistence on the need to build a "feminine lineage", given that, as the poet states, "la genealogia de la Cultura és una genealogia masculina, dins de la qual algunes dones hi han estat 'cooptades', 'adoptades', 'legitimades', sempre d'una en una, sense aparent relació entre unes i altres i sempre en nom del Pare" ["the genealogy of culture is a masculine genealogy, within which certain women have been 'co-opted', 'adopted', 'legitimized', always one by one with no apparent connection between them and always in the name of the Father"] (2004, p. 139; translated by Sheila Waldeck). Marçal issues a call to women writers not to renounce their own history and not to accept the cultural invisibility imposed by the patriarchy over the centuries. She urges us to carry out archaeological work and provide ourselves with "symbolic mothers". In order to overcome a chronic 'maternal' orphanhood, it is important to recognise the "feminine authority", her teaching, her influence, and her leadership. It is essential to recognise the greatness of another woman in order to see mirrored one's own possibilities.

Even though when building a feminine genealogy of culture there is a need both for the leadership of vertical figures and the company of those who are horizontal, in this article I will concentrate on "symbolic mothers" and leave "symbolic sisters" for another occasion. This study will more specifically contemplate "foreign symbolic mothers", even though, according to the well-known lines that Marçal dedicated to her daughter, Heura, a foreign woman may be as much, or more, a sister: "Heura, victòria marçal, germane/estrangera, de cop feta present" ["Heura, a marçal victory, sister/foreigner, suddenly made present"] (1989, p. 338; translated by Sheila Waldeck). Betty Friedan, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Virginia Woolf were some of the first "foreign symbolic mothers" of Western feminism to be translated into Catalan, Galician and Spanish during and after Francisco Franco's dictatorship.

This article is a preliminary step in the examination of the reception of these three classic authors of Anglo-Saxon feminism and, by following the process of publication of the translations into Catalan, Galician and Spanish of three of their most outstanding works (*The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf and *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman), aims to demonstrate their importance in a social and cultural context which was in great need of such feminist writings. In the nineteen sixties and seventies these translations, along with other original texts, helped to provide the reading public with the basic ideas of the feminist discourse which had been silenced for the previous three decades. In the eighties and nineties, they helped to establish normality and, in more recent years, to consolidate it. In the hope of stimulating further research in the field of feminist historiography in Translation Studies, this study shows how three "symbolic mothers" of Western feminist thinking reached these three cultures of the Iberian peninsula.

From the dictatorship to the present day

For decades the censorship of the Francoist regime obstructed the work of the Spanish publishing companies.

In the nineteen forties and fifties the only publications allowed were books and translations in Spanish of authors in tune with the conservative ideology of the regime and it was extremely difficult to obtain permits for the publication of books in Catalan or Galician. As for translations into Catalan or Galician, it was practically impossible. In both these cases, not only were similar ideological limitations imposed but there were obvious restrictions on contents referring to a national identity. The result was that during the first decades under Franco the censors' prohibitions in Catalunya and Galicia meant that the only publications were of a minority and cryptic nature, such as religious books, poetry or monographs of local interest.

The great change came in 1962 with the appointment of Manuel Fraga Iribarne as Minister of Information and Tourism. His liberalizing measures led to years of expansion for the publishing sector, especially that of Catalunya. Fraga's promulgation of the press and printing law of 18 March 1966 invalidated the previous law of 29 April 1938. This meant a change from previous compulsory censorship to voluntary consultation. Whether it was for political or economic reasons or to show the West that the Spanish dictatorial regime was moving towards a certain opening up of its ideology, from 1962 onwards the Francoist authorities permitted translations into Catalan and Galician, which up till then had been considered to be modernizing and were therefore prohibited. It was then that more ideological texts began to be translated into Catalan, Spanish and Galician, though obviously under the suspicious eye of the censors, who, up till 1978, required all publishing houses to apply for written approval from the Dirección General de Información of the Ministry of Information and Tourism.

The translations of feminist texts in the sixties and seventies resulted therefore from those political, social and economic circumstances of expansion and widening of perspectives. After three decades of repression and silence, publishers launched into the production of translations of clearly ideological works, amongst which were some classic feminist texts. This is when translations appeared into Spanish (1965c) and Catalan (1965a,b) of *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan and the Spanish translation (1967) of *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf. It should be said that this legendary essay by Virginia Woolf had already been translated into Argentinian Spanish by Jorge Luis Borges, with the title *Un cuarto propio* (1936), and that this version had been circulating amongst certain literary elites during the Francoist period. The publishers of all three translations, Edicions 62, Sagitario and Seix Barral, were obliged, nevertheless, to apply for authorization from the Ministry of Information and Tourism. To round off this period, it is important to insist on how these translations, along with original works by authors such as Carmen Alcalde, Anna Balletbò, Maria Aurèlia Capmany, María Laffitte, Magda Oranich, Teresa Pàmies or Isabel Clara Simó, penetrated the society of the time to the point where they became the basis of the militant and committed feminist discourse which burst onto the scene after the death of General Franco on 20 November 1975.¹

With Francoist censorship and bureaucracy a thing of the past, in the eighties and nineties publishing returned to normality, with an evident wish to divulge more feminist texts. The period of the transition to democracy was a time of

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