

***Translating Slavery, Volume 1: Gender and Race in French Abolitionist Writing, 1780-1830* (2009) and *Translating Slavery Volume 2: Ourika and its Progeny* (2010), edited by Doris Kadish and Françoise Massardier-Kenney. Kent State University Press (2nd edition).**

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Translating Slavery is a two volume anthology combining translations of eighteenth and nineteenth century anti-slavery writings with reflective discussions of translation, race and gender. It was first published in 1994 as a single volume before being brought out in a revised and expanded second edition in 2009. Marilyn Gaddis Rose's review of the first edition was published in the very first issue of *The Translator* in 1995.

Gaddis Rose (1995, 93) singles out two features of *Translating Slavery* as particularly 'illuminating'. The first is the 14-page dialogue between Françoise Massardier-Kenney and Sharon Bell, two of the translators of pieces by the nineteenth century author, Germaine de Staël. Massardier-Kenney and Bell discuss their reactions to Staël's short story, *Mirza*, and in particular to the white male narrator's statement that Africans had not taken up the Senegalese governor's invitation to establish their own sugar cane plantations because 'Negroes.. do not think of providing for their own future'. Massardier-Kenny (Volume 1, 177), a Caucasian French woman, explains that she did not read this as a statement 'specifically about blacks' because 'this is a discourse that was used against the working class' and that was 'current among the middle class in the nineteenth century, at least in France'; Bell, an African American, read the comment as 'racial, pure and simple' (Volume 1, 180), explaining: 'this is the argument I have heard all my life, you know: "Blacks are shiftless, lazy, never serious; they're always happy, they don't plan for future; they squander"' (Volume 1, 177). Gaddis Rose (1995, 93) summarises: 'Massardier-Kenney... notes class prejudice. Sharon Bell... notes race prejudice'.

Reading *Translating Slavery* at a time when conversations about white privilege and structural racism in the UK have been sparked by Reni Eddo-Lodge's (2018) *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race* and the Black Lives Matter movement, I was struck by the fact that this is also one of the chapters that I would have chosen to highlight, had I been writing a review of *Translating Slavery* from scratch. Unlike many of the discussions that are going on in UK universities today, the dialogue between Massardier-Kenney and Bell arose not from any outside pressure but from reflection on their experiences as translators and researchers within the context of a collaborative research project that was deliberately diverse in its composition (Volume 1, 12). The two translators are not afraid to ask blunt questions; nor do they hold back from acknowledging the blind spots in their initial reactions to the story and linking those to their own lived experiences of racism, or lack thereof. Twenty-five years on, frank discussions of this kind – at least insofar as they reach publication within academic volumes – still feel rare, and urgent.

The second illuminating feature highlighted by Gaddis Rose concerns the circumstances and paratextual context of *Translating Slavery's* publication. She describes as 'remarkable' (93) the fact

that the book is 'Volume 2 of the *Translation Studies* series, edited by Albrecht Neubert, Gert Jäger, and Gregory M. Shreve, as a continuation of *Übersetzungswissenschaftliche Beiträge*, the German language series published in Leipzig since 1978' (93-4). Gaddis Rose (94) explains that while the series editors are closely associated with what she terms the 'systematic/systemic aspirations of European translation studies', *Translating Slavery*, in contrast, is anchored in the very different tradition 'deriv[ing] ultimately from continental philosophy', which was being developed by scholars situated within modern languages departments or departments of English. It is not clear whether Gaddis Rose's surprise owes itself to the fact that these two varieties of translation studies had found a meeting point, or whether it is the label of 'translation studies' being attributed to *Translating Slavery* at all that is remarkable. Insofar as my attempts at time-travel might have been successful, the latter – more radical – explanation is entirely possible: writing in 1999, Theo Hermans (2020, 8) was at pains to point out that 'translation studies' referred to the 'entire field of study' even though it had 'on occasion been taken to mean the specifically descriptive line of approach' (here he references Koller 1990); similarly, Neubert and Shreve (1997, vii), in their preface to Douglas Robinson's *What is Translation*, another volume anchored in what they term the "'American" school of humanist/literary translation theory' and published in the same series, explain that their desire was 'to quite deliberately push the envelope of translation studies as far as we can' and to 'open up our readers' minds to the different forms of scholarship than can emerge in translation studies'. These remarks indicate that the view of what constituted 'translation studies', amongst some of the traditional *Übersetzungswissenschaftliche Beiträge* readership at least, was at the time narrow enough to exclude work done by Robinson and those surveyed in his book, which include Lawrence Venuti, Suzanne Jill Levine, and André Lefevere.

Gaddis Rose's remarks thus provide us with a window into the process through which today's discipline of translation studies was constituted. In the mid- to late-1990s, it was by no means a given that the discipline would develop into what Shreve and Neubert (1994, xi) themselves in the preface to *Translating Slavery* reportedly term a 'house of many rooms' (their foreword, with this title, is omitted from the 2009 edition). That it has developed in this way is undeniable (witness, for example, the breadth of topics at the triennial IATIS conferences or in introductory textbooks such as Jeremy Munday's (2012)) and no doubt owes itself in part to the conscious efforts by Shreve, Neubert and others to facilitate this expansion; whether the level of genuine dialogue and debate between the various traditions is greater now than it was at the time of *Translating Slavery's* first publication may however be debatable.

With its intersectional focus on gender, race and class, *Translating Slavery's* impact has been felt across a range of research areas. Appearing after the first papers connecting translation and feminism but before the 'pioneering monographs' (Godayol 2015, 175) by Sherry Simon (1996) and Luise von Flotow (1997), *Translating Slavery's* impact was particularly significant within the field of translation and gender. There is broad acknowledgement that this field has played a strong role in shaping translation studies more broadly, 'bringing "ideology" to the centre of translation debates and contributing to the "cultural turn" that the discipline went through in the 1980s and 1990s' (Castro and Ergun 2017, 1). As a historical study which sought to 'unearth a tradition of some radicalness, of resistance' (Volume 1, 178) among women writers in the face of a canonical white male tradition that overlooked their contribution, *Translating Slavery* belongs to a body of revisionist historical scholarship that is widely acknowledged to have been exceptionally productive (von Flotow 2007, 97), both within and beyond translation studies. Such studies play a vital role in challenging historical narratives and are often a catalyst for entirely new domains of research. The impact of *Translating Slavery* on French slavery studies was significant, and contributed to a wave of interest in the three women writers whose works it translated and critiqued.

While *Translating Slavery* is generally grouped together with other studies considered part of the 'first paradigm' (von Flotow 2007, 97) in gender and translation research, in its intersectionality it was well ahead of its time. Arguments around the importance of considering gender in conjunction with other attributes have been made more recently and are often presented as representing a novel departure from previous approaches (see e.g. von Flotow 2009; Castro and Olgun 2017, 2; von Flotow 2020, 183-4), yet these are precisely the arguments that are developed in the first two chapters of *Translating Slavery* and kept in focus throughout: 'translating a text.. puts into play not only gender and race, but the issues of social class and nationality as well, and it is the very complexity of translation that the translators and critics of these volumes foreground' (Volume 1, 6); 'translation, gender, and race are inextricably linked in ways that translators and translation critics need to recognize' (Volume 1, 50).

Another innovation of *Translating Slavery* that has perhaps not been recognised to the extent that it deserves is its approach to connecting translation and history, notably the way in which it uses translation to deepen readers' understanding of a primary text through historical contextualisation. The first edition of *Translating Slavery* includes a translation of *Ourika* by Claire de Duras, together with critical essays by the editors. In the second edition, following the 'proliferation of works devoted to *Ourika* since 1994' (Volume 2, vii) and the difficulties for interpreters of Duras's novel in 'pinning down its position regarding slavery' (Volume 2, x), the editors decided to expand the material on *Ourika*, creating a separate second volume focussing on that work. What is of particular interest are the choices made by the editors when working out how this should be done: rather than increasing the number of critical essays on *Ourika* as might be more standard practice, Massardier-Kenney and Kadish opt to include translations of what they term *Ourika's* 'progeny'. These are nineteenth-century writings which were inspired by Duras's story, and include poems and plays by Mme Dudon, Gaspard de Pons, and Jean-Toussaint Merle and Frédéric de Courcy, amongst others. Some of these other materials adopt a discourse that is shockingly racist and sexist, and might thus seem odd choices for an anthology that seeks to bring to light a liberationist, anti-misogynist tradition. Kadish argues that it is precisely by setting Duras's *Ourika* against the backdrop of other works of its time that its liberatory qualities emerge. Translation is thus used in this second volume to enable readers to 'situate [*Ourika*] in the spectrum of social and political attitudes regarding race at the time of its publication' (Volume 2, xv).

Translating for historical contextualisation is a valuable but to my knowledge infrequently used means of connecting translation and other fields of enquiry, be they historical, literary, or sociological. If this kind of contribution has been relatively rare in translation studies – compared, for example, with edited collections of critical essays – it almost certainly has less to do with the value of translations for intellectual enquiry than with the institutional structures within which many academics work and survive. In both the US and the UK, there are widely recognised institutional factors which result in 'many academics in Modern Languages 'hesitat[ing] to spend any "research time" working on a translation' (Harrison 2015, 2). These include uncertainty around whether translation activity can or should be included in Research Excellence Framework assessments in the UK, or in applications for tenure in the US (Porter 2009a). Whilst there have been focussed efforts on the part of modern languages advocates to argue that translation constitutes a form of scholarship and should be formally recognised as such (Porter 2009b, Diverse Signatories 2015), the overall higher education research environment, at least in the US and the UK, means that projects that combine translation and critical reflection like *Translating Slavery* are likely to remain something of a rarity. This is regrettable, not only because of translation's benefits for other fields of enquiry, as noted above, but also because the process of translating, particularly in a collaborative context, has

considerable power to help us recognise and address the power structures within which both higher education and we ourselves are embedded.

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