

(In)visibilised women translators: Recovery through the use of archives

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Notes on TRANSLATION

I allow myself time to read my translations, as if forgetting where they come from, and I have managed to stop them from grating on my ears [...]. I cherish them as if they were my own prose, but they surprise me more, because in my own writing, my ear rarely fails me.

Carmen Martín Gaité¹

1. Introduction

8 December 2025 marked the centenary of the birth of Spanish woman writer and translator Carmen Martín Gaité (1925-2000). The order in which she is described is not trivial: first writer, then translator. We do not know whether she first devoted herself to writing and then to translation or whether one led to the other. What is certain is that she is known for being an author and not so much for having been a translator, even though she translated well-known writers who published in different languages, such as Italian (Ignazio Silone, Italo Svevo, Primo Levi, Natalia Ginzburg), Portuguese (Eça de Queirós, Ramalho Ortigão, Fernando Pessoa), French (Charles Perrault, Gustave Flaubert), Romanian (Tudor Arghezi), English (Edgar Allan Poe, Williams Charles William, Eva Figes, Virginia Woolf, Emily Brontë), or even Galician. The same has happened with other Spanish women authors such as Isabel Oyarzábal (1878-1974), Rosa Chacel (1898-1994) or Clara Janés (1940), who were active as both writers and translators but are better known for their work as writers. In the case of Martín Gaité, we can discover her translations thanks to her notebooks and drafts, located in her archive, which was digitalised by the Biblioteca Digital de Castilla y León.

It is rare for a translator to decide to keep all their work material and subsequently deposit it in a dedicated archive. This often happens to writers –especially men– who also translate (e.g., Ángel Crespo, Francisco Ayala), highlighting the difference that still exists between the archives of writers and translators, as the activity of the former is considered more noble and legitimate than that of the latter (e.g., Dranenko & Kovalenko, 2024; Fourrel de Frettes, 2024)².

¹ The original, written in Spanish in 1993, is located in the Carmen Martín Gaité archive (https://bibliotecadigital.jcyl.es/archivo_gaite/es/micrositios/inicio.cmd): Collection VIBBCL – Catalogue number: ACMG, 26,1. All into-English translations are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

² For the writer Rosa Chacel, as well as for many other authors of the time exiled in Latin America, translation was a secondary activity that provided a means of earning some money and staying in touch with the publishing world, with a view to editing their own works (Behiels, 2018). To learn more about the translation work of Chacel and some of Spain's most prominent translators, it is essential to consult the Diccionario Histórico de la Traducción en España (<https://phte.upf.edu/dhte/>). The purpose of the “llegada” (“target”) section is, among other objectives, to “analyse the status of [Spanish] translators throughout history”. In Catalan, there is also the Diccionari de la traducció catalana, managed by Montserrat Bacardí and Pilar Godayol, which recovers Catalan translators (<https://www.visat.cat/diccionari>).

Even translators themselves often treat their pre-publication material as too insignificant to be stored and many are also reluctant to allow others to analyse the translation process for fear of being judged (Samoyault, 2014). At the same time, there continue to be more archives of male writers –generally regarded as more canonical– than of female writers, who are often considered, with few exceptions, to be of lesser importance (e.g., Marsay, 2022; Lecoq, 2023). In turn, the same situation occurs between male and female translators³. Within the translation profession, the work of female translators has been less valued than that of their male counterparts, resulting in their archives being less preserved and less present in institutions. For this reason, the aim of this special issue is to recover, through the study of archives, the work carried out by some women translators in order to give them visibility and grant them the place they deserve.

When we refer to the concept of “recovery”, we are meaning the act of rescuing the writings of women authors who have traditionally been undervalued. Massardier-Kenney (1997) already used this term as a translation strategy to make visible (the texts by) women writers who have been –or continue to be– excluded from the canon. The concept of invisibility, associated with the job of the translator, was first used by Lawrence Venuti (1986). Following the Cultural Turn in Translation Studies, initially put forward by Bassnett and Lefevere (1990), there began to be growing interest in raising awareness of the work of (women) translators. It was at this point that the practice and study of Feminist Translation Studies emerged, with scholars of the calibre of Suzanne de Lotbinière-Harwood (1991), Françoise Massardier-Kenney (1997), Sherry Simon (1996) or Luise von Flotow (1991; 1997). In her article (1997, p. 38), von Flotow rejected the traditional invisible role of translators and called for their recognition and individuality.

All these feminist scholars wanted to promote what is known as “Translator Studies”, which did not really come into its own until Andrew Chesterman proposed this new subdiscipline in 2009, focused on the study of the translators themselves (e.g., Kaindl, Kolb, & Schlager, 2021). More recently, this concept has been expanded to the so-called “Feminist Translator Studies” (Vassallo, 2023; Castellano-Ortolà, 2024). Both fall within the field of Genetic Translation Studies, which aims to gather information about the translation process, its chronological evolution in order to highlight the different stages that the translator goes through when interpreting the source text (Spezzatti, 2024, p. 139). Several journal special issues (e.g., Hersant, 2020; Cordingley & Hersant, 2021; Cordingley & Montini, 2015; Hersant, 2023; Montini & Sofo, 2023) and books (e.g., Anokhina & Pétilon, 2009; Nunes, Moura, & Pacheco Pinto, 2020) have been published on this topic, demonstrating the great interest in promoting and analysing translators’ archives in order to raise awareness of their work and obtain, for instance, information on why a book is translated (Mitchell, 2014), to better understand the progressive evolution of a particular translator’s strategies (Spezzatti, 2025), or to obtain information on the relationship between an author and their translator (e.g., Cordingley & Frigau Manning, 2017). Very recently, volumes have begun to be published about specific women translators and their archives (e.g., Hersant & Livak, 2024; Sardin, 2024), making this issue of *Parallèles* a highly relevant contribution to the field.

2. Outline of the special issue

This special issue consists of 10 articles that address the activity of several women translators who worked with different language combinations (French-Italian; Russian-Spanish; French-

³ In some instances, the archived documentation of female translators is even found in archives dedicated to their male partners, as in the case of Pilar Gómez Bedate, whose manuscripts and correspondence related to her translations are found in the archive of her husband Ángel Crespo, located in the fundación Jorge Guillén (<https://fundacionjorgeguillen.es/>).

English, etc.). The contributions are organised according to the following aspects: on the one hand, women translators with direct or indirect archives⁴ whose main job was different from translation. An example of this was the Sinsombrero (“Hatless”) group of Spanish women writers belonging to the Generation of ‘27, or the Italian Gennie Luccioni, better known as a feminist writer, literary critic and editorial reader. Other examples discussed are the journalist Georgette Camille, the writers Marguerite Yourcenar, Clara Malraux, Viviane Forrester or Marie Darrieussecq, or even the English teachers José Kamoun, Fabienne Durand-Bogaert and Claude Demanuelli. The poet Daria Menicanti is also a clear example of how translation was considered secondary and often more invisible and therefore less important for them. More recently, writer and activist Margaret Randall stands out. Although she did not consider herself as a professional translator, she devoted much of her life to cultural mediation between North and Latin America. On the other hand, part of this special issue centres on women whose main professional activity was literary translation. First, the personal archives of women translators that are not yet been preserved in institutions, such as those of Lise Chapuis, are examined. Next, the focus shifts to women translators such as Barbara Wright or Marie Franzos, whose personal archives have been deposited in institutions. Finally, emphasis is placed on women translators like Barbara Bray or Amaya Lacasa who lack personal or direct archives. However, we can obtain information about their profession from archives or documents belonging to male cultural actors (writers, editors, etc.).

In the first contribution, entitled “‘Descanso en el pensar’: redes y reflexiones de las traductoras Sinsombrero y sus coetáneas”, **María Luisa Rodríguez Muñoz** systematises the testimonies of fourteen writers born in the last quarter of the 19th century and belonging to the Sinsombrero group with the aim of understanding the role played by their translations and their theoretical vision. She also analyses the relationship between them to map their social networks using the GREPHI programme, already employed in the BIESES project. Thanks to Rodríguez Muñoz’s work, it has been confirmed that all the female writers analysed had common characteristics, such as feminist ideology and the pursuit of humanistic endeavours. In addition, a large number of them translated for economic reasons or for survival. Others, for instance, used translation to gain access to editors with whom they could publish their own originals. Finally, for other members of the group, translation was a form of therapy.

The second article, entitled “Gennie Luccioni, écrivaine, critique, lectrice et traductrice aux Éditions du Seuil, ou la naissance éditoriale du best-seller *Le Petit Monde de don Camilo*” and written by **Viviana Agostini-Ouafi**, addresses the work of the female writer Gennie Luccioni (1912-2005), who was also a translator. At the IMEC (Institut Mémoires de l’édition contemporaine), located near Caen (Normandy, France), her manuscripts and typed texts can be consulted in the collection dedicated to her, but there is hardly any documentation related to her translations, which demonstrates the under-evaluation of the translator’s activity, as Agostini-Ouafi points out. In turn, the fact that Luccioni signed her translations using a male pseudonym shows how little importance was given to women translators. One of the few translations she signed with her real name was precisely *Le Petit Monde de don Camilo* (1951), the book by Giovanni Guareschi discussed in this article. First, Agostini-Ouafi describes Luccioni’s work as a writer and literary critic for the Seuil publishing house, before turning to her task as an editorial reader and translator of Guareschi’s novel, which became a bestseller with over 800,000 copies sold.

⁴ We refer to direct or personal archives when there are archives belonging to the women translator. Conversely, indirect archives are the archives of other professionals (writers, editors, etc.) through which we receive information about the translator in question.

In contrast, in the third paper (“Quelques archives des traductrices françaises de Virginia Woolf : quelle invisibilité ?”), by **Anne-Laure Rigeade**, the archive of several women translators is examined rather than only one. As in the previous cases, the main activity of these women is not translation, but writing – or even language teaching. Rigeade explores the different forms of loss in relation to the archives of French women translators of Virginia Woolf. According to her, the first form of loss consists of archives that do not exist due to a lack of interest, both on the part of the institution and the translators themselves. The second form of loss is that of “débri” (“fragments”) or “trace inavouable” (“shameful trace”). An example of this are translations that were never published but were discussed as attempts or unfinished projects in the correspondence of the translators. Finally, the third form of loss is that of the organised trace, i.e., the translator decides which archives are visible thanks to a selection made by herself. To tackle these different forms of loss, Rigeade proposes to make the work of Georgette Camille (1900-1998) visible through her archives, located at the IMEC.

Adele D’Arcangelo & Chiara Elefante, for their part, analyse in their article (“The poetry writing and translation activity of Daria Menicanti (1914-1985): a translator-centred perspective”) the work of poet and translator Daria Menicanti, supported by male figures. Both researchers have managed to trace Menicanti’s career thanks to two archives: the Daria Menicanti collection and the archives of the Mondadori publishing house. Their research emphasises the network of contacts between Menicanti and other authors and publishers of the so-called Milan School. Menicanti, whose activity is visible thanks to footnotes, translated not only philosophical essays, but also poems and novels. D’Arcangelo and Elefante show how the translator first became visible in the 1960s –when she divorced her husband– enjoying a period of visibility lasting twenty years before falling back into obscurity in the 1980s. As the authors of the article point out, these phases of (in)visibility coincide with her popularity and recognition as a poet. Like the other women discussed previously, Margaret Randall’s (1936) work encompasses not only translation, but also photography, poetry and editing. That is probably why there are archives on her professional activity. In “Life as Archive: The Written Traces of Margaret Randall’s Path as Translator, Writer and Activist”, **María Constanza Guzmán** traces Randall’s professional career as a key figure in mediating between North and South America in the 1960s, with particular emphasis on her translations, editions, and contributions to the bilingual literary magazine *El corno emplumado / The Plumed Horn*. Thanks to both her own archives located in the United States – such as those at Princeton University Library and the New Mexico archives – and external archives related to her – such as those of Reese Elrich at Stanford University and Thomas Merton at Bellarmine University – we realise that it is impossible to separate her translations from other types of committed activities that were considered essential to her (writing, editing, activism).

On the other hand, the women studied in the last five contributions were –or are– exclusively committed to translation, or at least considered this profession to be their main occupation.

The sixth article (“Approfondir la critique des traductions par la génétique : étude des suppressions dans la traduction du *Petit Navire*”), is the only one in this special issue in which, instead of an institutional archive, the research was carried out using the private archive of a translator. **Lucie Spezzatti** analyses the genetic dossier of Lise Chapuis’ French translation of Antonio Tabucchi’s *Il piccolo naviglio* (1978). Thanks to Chapuis’ personal archive, the researcher analyses this translation by observing the traces of the translation process with the help of Hewson’s conceptual framework (2011). In her analysis, Spezzatti carries out a three-stage study: the first two stages cover microtextual and mesotextual aspects, and the last stage is devoted to macrotextual analysis. Spezzatti’s paper shows that the French translation was revised several times by the translator, simplifying passages related to irony and style and

removing repetitions present in the author's original text. Despite these modifications, her translations were well received by French critics.

Marie Franzos is one of the women translators studied in this special issue who has her own archive and whose main work was translation. As **Giada Brighi** explains in "Marie Franzos' (1870-1941) extratextual translatorship. Archives and *biographies croisées*", this is an unusual situation, as there are normally few archives of professionals who are exclusively dedicated to translation, and even fewer in the case of female translators. In her paper, Brighi aims to analyse the correspondence that Franzos exchanged with authors and other agents in the publishing world in order to gain a deeper understanding of Franzos' work as a translator, which enabled her to introduce Swedish writers to a German-speaking audience. Using the so-called *biographies croisées*, the researcher presents the results of a thematic analysis of letters to and from Franzos from 1894 to 1932, employing Kremmel's categories (2021) and using NVivo software. This study demonstrates that Franzos treated her clients consistently and that her connections with renowned newspapers and magazines helped her to gain more clients and earn the respect of the Swedish literary world.

The following article features the well-known translator Barbara Wright (1915-2009). In his contribution entitled "Barbara Wright, le plaisir de la traduction", **Patrick Hersant** analyses Wright's correspondence with French writer Raymond Queneau, as well as the translator's drafts when translating Queneau's *Exercices de style* (1947) into English. To do so, Hersant had access not only to Wright's archives, but also to those of the Bibliothèque Jacques Doucet (Paris). The aim was to show how the analysis of this material allows us to better define the working method of a translator of Wright's calibre. An example of this is the way she approached the translation of Queneau's book: first she made an annotated first reading, then she consulted the so-called "dictionnaires vivants", i.e., experts in the field, and finally she noted down important information in notebooks.

In addition to Barbara Wright, **Pascale Sardin** also studies Barbara Bray (1924-2010) in her paper, entitled "Femmes de lettres : des correspondances de traductrices". In it, Sardin analyses letters from the writer Samuel Beckett, located at the Trinity College in Dublin, and those from the publisher André Schiffrin, at Columbia University Library in New York, in order to recreate the professional career of the translator Bray, as she does not have her own correspondence deposited in any institution. These male figures from the publishing world, whose preserved correspondence in various institutions allows us to reconstruct their exchanges, make it possible to shed light on Bray's work. She is known above all as Samuel Beckett's lover and as the translator of *The Lover* by Marguerite Duras. Sardin also refers to the archive of translator Barbara Wright, preserved at the Lilly Library (Bloomington, Indiana, USA), and examines her correspondence with French female author Nathalie Sarraute. According to Sardin, all these letters help us to better understand Bray and Wright's position as translators, as well as their translation projects and their relationships with their respective correspondents.

Indeed, like Barbara Bray, Amaya Lacasa (1943) also lacks personal archives, although we can trace her professional career thanks to the analysis of other archives, all of which belong to male figures. Thus, the last contribution, entitled "La reconstrucción de la mediación cultural en ausencia de archivos personales: el caso de Amaya Lacasa", concentrates on the translations of Lacasa, who was born in Russia and began translating upon her arrival in Spain, first for the publishing house Alianza and Salvat and later for Alfaguara. In his article, **Álvaro Marín García** reconstructs Lacasa's professional life through interviews, correspondence and institutionalised archives of other Spanish cultural figures (Claudio Guillén, Jaime Salinas, Luis Goytisolo, Miguel Sáenz, Javier Marías) who at some point collaborated or had a professional relationship with her.

3. Final remarks

As indicated by von Flotow (1997) and Castro (2011), it is essential to create a historiography of women who have devoted themselves to translation in order to rewrite the history of translation and recover forgotten female translators. We agree with the latter when she explains that they should not be studied separately from their male counterparts (2011, p. 109) and thus considered as a separate ghetto. An example of this is the Spanish initiative by the universities of Barcelona and Pompeu Fabra entitled “Portal Histórico de la Traducción en España”, the latest version of which dates from 2024. However, of the 123 Spanish-language translators from the 20th and 21st centuries recovered in this digital portal⁵, only 22 are women. As explained above, this may be because male translators often also engaged in writing, while most women focused exclusively in rewriting, which was considered inferior, less legitimate and therefore more invisible (Sardin, 2009). Hence, recovering the documentation of some women translators, whether through personal or external archives, is another way of giving visibility to their professional activity.

However, there are other ways to bring the work of women translators to light, such as the publication of volumes (e.g., Delisle, 2002; Romero & Atalaya, 2026) and special issues (e.g., Şerban & Hassen, 2022) related to their lives, or even organising cultural events, such as the 2006 exhibition “Catalanes del segle XX: exposicions” (“Catalan women of the 20th Century: exhibitions”), which featured 12 Catalan female translators⁶, or even the very recent exhibition “Embajadoras de las letras hispánicas. Traductoras y la proyección de la cultura en español durante el siglo XX” (“Female ambassadors of Hispanic literature. Women translators and the projection of Spanish culture during the 20th century”), which took place at the University of Granada from March 9 to April 10, 2026 (<https://www.ucm.es/diplin/embajadoras>)⁷. 23 women female translators from 12 different countries who (have) translated literature from Spanish into other languages were selected for the exhibition.

At the same time, in recent years there have been initiatives outside academia that contribute to putting female translators in the spotlight and giving them the importance they deserve. Interesting examples include an article featured on *The Guardian* on August 31 2017 highlighting a number of female translators in the wake of Women in Translation month⁸, or recent radio programmes, such as the Spanish broadcast on February 3, 2026, entitled “Traductoras literarias: la voz invisible de los libros” (“Literary women translators: the invisible voice of books”) on Radio Nacional de España’s “El último tren” programme⁹.

Public institutions can also encourage greater visibility for female translators. In Spain, institutional events such as the tribute on December 10, 2025 to the translator Esther Benítez (1937-2001) at the Caja de las Letras¹⁰ of the Instituto Cervantes help to recognise the decisive

⁵ URL: <https://phte.upf.edu/dhte/castellano-siglos-xx-xxi/>

⁶ URL: <https://udivulga.uvic.cat/catalanes-del-segle-xx-exposicions>

⁷ Exhibition held as part of the Spanish project DIPLIN (“Diplomacia Lingüística. La Lengua Española y la Proyección Internacional de España: Del Centro de Estudios Históricos al Instituto Cervantes, 1910-1991”) [Ref. PID2023-149545OA-I00], funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities and co-funded by the EU.

⁸ URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/aug/31/female-translators-women-in-translation-jull-costaberenofsky>

⁹ URL: <https://www.rtve.es/play/audios/el-ultimo-tren/ultimo-tren-traductoras-literarias-voz-invisible-libros/16920956/>

¹⁰ According to the Instituto Cervantes website, La Caja de las Letras, located in the Instituto’s headquarters building in Madrid, holds in its security deposit boxes a large number of legacies that have been donated by Spanish cultural figures since 2007. More information about the event dedicated to Benítez can be found at the following link: <https://cultura.cervantes.es/espanya/es/CajadelasLetras:LegadodeEstherBen%C3%ADtez/185419>

work of this professional in enriching the cultural heritage of Spain.

Another Spanish cultural institution that began to recognise the importance of women translators is the Real Academia Española (Royal Spanish Academy), which in 2015 elected translator and writer Clara Janés as a full member, who currently occupies the “u” chair.

Likewise, translation awards such as the Spanish Ministry of Culture’s National Prize for Best Translation allow us to put names to these book professionals, most of whom have been women and have often remained in the shadows¹¹. This recognition helps society not only to increasingly value their work, but also the women themselves to value their activity more, to the extent that they see fit to preserve their documentation in public or private cultural institutions. For this reason, it is not only important to analyse and study existing archives of women translators, but also to encourage the creation of archives of women translators so that future researchers can continue to make visible what is now invisible.

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¹¹ In 2025, the award was given to Marian Ochoa de Eribe for her translation of *Theodoros* by Mircea Cărtărescu.

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