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HANDBOOK OF RESEARCH ON TRANSLATING MYTH AND REALITY IN WOMEN IMAGERY ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Eds. Roxana Ciolăneanu (University of Lisbon, Portugal), Roxana-Elisabeta Marinescu (Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania). 403 pp., a volume in the *Advances in Linguistics and Communication Studies (ALCS)* Book Series, IGI Global, Hershey, PA, 2021.

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The editors of this joint research study, Roxana Ciolăneanu (University of Lisbon, Portugal) and Roxana-Elisabeta Marinescu (Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania) have embraced a multidisciplinary approach to what may appear as an otherwise “old” topic, namely gender roles, narratives and women imagery in culture. The relevance of the project is stated in the Preface (xvii-xxiv), when the chronology of the topic is mentioned: from Mary Wollstonecraft’s 1792 *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* to recent international policies, such as the 2030 *Agenda for Sustainable Development*, one of the sustainable goals mentioned being the elimination or reduction of women exclusion and marginalization, the challenges seem to have remained the same since the 18th century. However, the more recent advances in the field include gender-sensitive legislation and more inclusive financial mechanisms, as well as a concern, in the academia, with theoretical approaches scrutinizing women imagery and gender identity as performativity, understood more as a construct and less as naturally born identity.

The word *translation* has been excellently chosen by the editors of the handbook to use in the title to bring forward “hidden aspects of well-known and widely accepted ideas related to women” (xvii-xxiv), to deconstruct old assumptions and offer new interpretations to the feminine ideology. The volume proposes case studies from different cultural, social, linguistic, ethnic backgrounds, uniting various cultural spaces, Romania, Italy, Portugal, India, Britain, Ireland and Brittany, and investigating materials and corpora through lenses, such as gender studies, cultural studies, literary studies, linguistics, discourse analysis, semiotics and many others. The *Handbook of Research on Translating Myth and Reality in Women Imagery Across Disciplines* has been shaped by the editors in 6 sections and 17 chapters. The chapters tackle: women’s narratives and their symbolic value (“Women Imagery between Reality and Fiction”), the language that describes women in use and dictionaries (“Women’s Language”), maternal experience, its diversity and constraints (“Motherhood and Mothering”), women’s representations (“Women:

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Perception and Reception in Film and Media Studies”), feminine figures in literature in different ages and genres (“Representations of Women in Literature”) and women writers, their life experience and fiction (“Being a Female Writer: Challenges across Time”).

Section 1 “Women Imagery between Reality and Fiction” is opened by Laura Roxana Grünberg (University of Bucharest) with the chapter “In Need for More Tailored Feminist Stories in a Time of Crisis” (1-23), pointing out the need for cooperation between academic feminism, with sophisticate approaches and in danger of gender fatigue and activist feminism, usually perceived as confrontational. The author invites improved feminist storytellers to address wider audiences, considering intersectionality and transversal feminism as more efficient tools to share experiences, learn and adapt lesson about, by and targeting women. The next two chapters in the section offer case studies for the analysis of women imagery. Roxana Magdalena Bârlea (Bucharest University of Economic Studies) looks at Romanian women imagery in “Representative Figures Outlining the Romanian Women Imagery: Synthesis Study on the ‘Romanian Culture and Civilization’ Courses for Foreign Students” (24-43). Real personalities and historic characters (the charismatic Queen Marie of Romania, the dictator female figure Elena Ceaușescu and the contemporary poet and social activist Ana Blandiana) and fictional examples (the shepherd’s mother in *Miorița* as prototype of *Mater Dolorosa*, Manole’s Ana as the devoted, ready-to-sacrifice wife, Ileana Cosânzeana as the feminine ideal of perfection and Vitoria Lipan as the vigilante, vengeful wife) reveal key cultural elements as a guide for non-native learners of Romanian. In chapter 3, “Translating Muslim Women’s Bodies: The Semantic Battle of the Hijab”, Alina Isac Alak (University of Bucharest) first proposes an investigation of the meanings of the *hijab* given by Muslims: a local social convention, a symbol for protecting women’s bodies, a religious practice, a feminist practice, a political statement, a cultural tradition, a subversive strategy for autonomy and an artistic expression. Conversely, for non-Muslims, the *hijab* has acquired other interpretations: a religious symbolic object, a symbol of alterity a sexist cultural manifestation and a reminder of terrorism. Thus, the invitation here is to bridge the contrasting views and open dialogue for women’s benefit.

Women’s language is the focus of the second section of the handbook. Roxana Ciolăneanu (University of Lisbon), the author of the fourth chapter, interrogates “How Language Use ‘Translates Women’: A Cognitive Account of Women Imagery in Romanian Society” (64-85). Starting from the claim that language conveys stereotyped ideas and metaphors, she inspects Romanian proverbs in terms of speaking about women, using the filter of cognitive linguistics and critical discourse. A relevant series of 8 cognitive metaphors has been explored: man is direction; woman is (home) direction; women is a hidden resource; woman is man’s accessory; man is woman’s mirror; woman is man’s servant; woman is household foundation and woman is danger. Similar findings, not surprising at all, have been offered by

the fifth chapter, “What Do Portuguese Proverbs Say about Women?” by Esperança Cardeira (University of Lisbon). By examining proverbs and sayings, one could outline a cultural portrait of one’s nation. The result of the analysis of Portuguese proverbs about women present in dictionaries from the 17th to the 21st century is that women have been mostly portrayed negatively and that the negative portrait has not changed much up to the present. The Portuguese cultural space is under scrutiny in the last chapter of the section as well, “Talking about Women” (108-131), by Alina Villalva (University of Lisbon). The study relies of Portuguese language data to interrogate: the relationship between grammatical gender and referential values, grammatical gender contrasts and the lexicographic history of words referring to female entities for the last three hundred years and in contemporary sources. The findings help in the understanding of the social burden on feminine nouns participating in gender contrasts. Most nouns that refer to girls and women have a steady pejorative connotation, related to sexual activity, which does not happen in the case of those referring to boys and men.

The third section, “Motherhood and Mothering”, begins with the chapter on “The Myth of Motherhood in Communist and Postcommunist Romania: From Pro-Natalist Policies to Neoliberal Views” (133-152) by Roxana-Elisabeta Marinescu (Bucharest University of Economic Studies). In both communist and postcommunist Romania the ways in which motherhood has been translated has reached myth-like dimensions: “being a mother is an ideal, an induced happiness and necessary personal development, a woman is not complete if she is not a mother” (133). The myth-construction mechanism is similar in both periods, through the appeal to women’s duty and the construction of motherhood as an innate quality, whether they were seen as heroine mothers/ mothers of the nation (by the state), or through “intensive mothering” in the neoliberal period experienced by postcomunism Romania. The corpus for analysis contains legislative initiatives, media sources, educational materials, which verify the enduring stereotypes and women imagery. In conclusion, the author suggests alternative ways of mothering: “feminist mothering”, “other mothering”, “community mothering” or “radical mothering”. The next chapter, “Enshrining Motherhood, Entombing the Mother: The Crises of the Urban Indian Professional” (152-173) by Preeti Sharatchandra Shirodkar (Kohinoor Business School) raises awareness regarding ways in which women in India might be liberated from both the “enshrining” and “entombing” experiences. Conversely, for Indian working professional women, motherhood should only be another role to help them reach fulfillment on a personal level. Motherhood construction in drama is scrutinized in the last chapter of the section. Işıl Şahin Güler (Firat University) proposes an investigation of “The Legacy of the Terrible Mother Archetype in Post-War British Drama: Ann Jellicoe’s *The Sport of My Mad Mother*” (174-192). The play considered reconstructs, in the opinion of the author, the concept of the woman-related myth of the Terrible Mother as the female creative power and well as the potential for destruction.

Section 4 brings forth the popularity of women imagery in film and media studies. Lucia-Mihaela Rădulescu (Bucharest University of Economic Studies) introduces “The Magician, the Saviour and the Cyborg: Exploring Girlhood in Young Adult Film” (194-212), by scrutinizing young female characters in three well-known cinema productions based on young adult texts: Hermione in the *Harry Potter* series, Lyra in *His Dark Materials*, season 1, and Alita in *Battle Angel*. Using the lenses of techno feminism and behavioral psychology, the analysis reveals gender-specific roles attributed to the heroines: the magician (Hermione), the savior (Lyra) and the cyborg (Alita). The purpose is to decipher the relationship between fantasy and real-life behavior in performing gender, the conclusion being that this channel of communication with teenagers (via media culture) is to be taken into account as an extremely important one. A similar conclusion is drawn by the co-authors of the next chapter, “Fifty Shades of Pretty and Thin: Psychological Research on Gender Stereotypes in Media and Advertizing” (213-233), Andrea Carta (University of Pavia), Elena Carraro (Middlesex University), Siomona Adelaide Martini (Rocca-Stendoro Institute of Clinical Psychology) and Giulia Perasso (University of Pavia). The study inspects advertizing and media stereotypes leading to a distorted perception of gender roles, with negative effects on women’s psychological and social well-being. Sexual objectification of women, cyberbullying, sexual aggressive behavior and revenge porn are discussed to point out to female images as fragile, condescending, available and always dominated by men. Like the previous chapter, the one written by Debora Ricci (University of Lisbon), “(Desperate) Housewives, Domestic Angels, or Femmes Fatales: Stereotyped Categories of Female Representations on the Italian Semiotic Landscape” (233-260), considers advertizing language in connection to the construction and preservation of sexual identity and gender stereotypes, this time in the Italian space. The author applies a visual socio-semiotic approach from a gender-oriented perspective and analyses the propaganda of gender technologies, with a view to expose the misogyny and voyeurism of the Italian advertizing production.

Literary studies offer a variety of challenging possibilities for women imagery investigation and they are used in an excellent way in the fifth section of the handbook, “Representations of Women in Literature”. Madalina Armie (University of Almería) authors the introductory chapter of this section, “Deconstructing Stereotypes in the Discourse of the Irish Republic: The Irish Women through the Lens of the Celtic Tiger and the Post-Celtic Tiger Short Story” (262-284). The thesis put forward by the author is that in contemporary Ireland a new generation of women writers has emerged, a generation that has offered different constructions of female imagery than the traditional ones (through religiosity, passivity and motherhood only). Examples of short stories published at the turn of the 21st century are used, investigating perceptions of the Celtic Tiger and post-Celtic Tiger types and exploring past and recent dominant narratives, discourse and stereotypes in the writings of Evelyn Conlon, Mary Costello, Anne Enright, Claire Keegan and Éilís Ní Dhuibhne. The analysis has a twofold aim: to show contemporary women’s

concerns as universally valid (marriage, illegitimate birth, single motherhood, infidelity, contraception, female immigration, abuse, divorce, social oppression) and prove that no matter how globalized, gender-challenging and inclusive Irish contemporary society might appear, the discourse still tends to be patriarchal and stereotypical. Another Celtic-oriented perspective is offered by Emilia Ivancu (Institute for Romanian Language) in the next chapter, “The Raven and the Dove: (Un)Customary Representations of Women in Traditional Folk Breton Ballads” (285-300). Representations of women in traditional Breton ballads include witches, such as Janik Kokard’s leprotic lover, sinners, such as Mari Kelen or saints like Bertet, Virgin Mary’s midwife, all connected to the male gaze and the Christian lens as investigative tools. French literature also offers “Images of the Female Body in Émile Zola’s Novels: Views of Womanhood in 19th Century French Society” (301-317). Irina David (Bucharest University of Economic Studies) focuses on the female body as a construct in Émile Zola’s literary works as an indicator of dominating perceptions in 19th century patriarchal French society. The conclusion of the chapter points out the inmate status of woman, imprisoned in her own body, subject to emotions and sensations, which make her unreliable as she only a pleasurable target of men that she has to attract.

Section 6, “Being a Female Writer: Challenges across Time”, adequately concludes this complex “feminine” journey and also provides the liberating touch which comes with the writing profession so urgently desired by generations of women. An early examples of female author is given by Maria Helena Marques Antunes (University of Lisbon) in the chapter titled “Christine de Pizan: Myths and Processes of Humanizing and Valuing Women” (319-340). In the two texts suggested for evaluation, *Cité des dames* and *Epistre*, both revisitations of legendary and historical characters, Christine de Pizan defends the feminine gender and gains recognition of her status as a writer. Christine de Pizan is unique in the context of late 14th and early 15th century, being considered the 1st woman to have made a living by her pen. Taking an imaginary leap across time and space, the last chapter of the handbook, “East and West, or the Creolization of Cultural Spaces: An Exploration of Domnica Rădulescu’s *Black Sea Twilight*” by Anca-Teodora Șerban-Oprescu (Bucharest University of Economic Studies) analyses the novel mentioned in the title as representative of women fiction produced in the Romanian diaspora after 1989. The concepts of cultural and spatial creolization are employed for the interpretation of the novel from the perspective of a Romanian woman and a refugee writer imaginatively bridging the Eastern and Western spaces.

In conclusion, the frame chosen by the editors for *Handbook of Research on Translating Myth and Reality in Women Imagery Across Disciplines* for each chapter: introduction, main body, future research directions, conclusion, references, additional reading, key terms and definitions, provides the studies both the solidity of in-depth research in the areas tackled and the openings necessary to a creative project generously inviting further investigation. The volume edited by Roxana

Ciolăneanu and Roxana-Elisabeta Marinescu is an excellent work instrument for researchers, students engaged in women's studies and other fields, such as cultural studies, literature, linguistics, education, social sciences, political studies and many others. Both the editors and the contributors to the handbook are to be appreciate for the high level of their research, in terms of the case studies provided and the creative and innovative use of concepts such as gender identity, intersectionality, representation, alterity, stereotyping, objectification, circular creolization, empowerment, to mention only a few of those explained at the end of each chapter