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ELEANOR MARX: TRANSLATOR, INTERPRETER AND UNCONVENTIONAL VICTORIAN WOMAN

Eleanor Marx, the youngest daughter of Karl Marx, was the first English translator of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1886), a novel which has since undergone more than a dozen English retranslations. Her translation can still be found on bookstore shelves, and Paul de Man based his version (1965) on it. She also translated Hippolyte Lissagary's *History of the Commune of 1871*, edited several of her father's essays and promulgated the Marx-Engels correspondence. An accomplished interpreter of French, German and Yiddish, she interpreted for delegates at the International Conference of Socialist Workers in Paris in 1889.

From early on, she was a supporter of the political underdog and, along with her unsavoury partner Edward Aveling, actively supported the socialist cause. Although Aveling never married Eleanor, he secretly married a mistress after his invalid wife finally died; he also took advantage of Eleanor financially, profiting from the sizeable inheritance left to her by Engels. They travelled twice to America, the first trip immediately following the *Madame Bovary* translation, and once to Norway, after Eleanor had translated two of Ibsen's plays. In 1887, the year following her Flaubert translation, Eleanor attempted suicide with an overdose of opium.

Cultural, Political and Literary Context

In 1867 a twelve-year-old Eleanor rewrote the English royal anthem, in favour of the Irish "when the Fenians lead an insurrection in Ireland" (Florence 1975: 17). She came of age in the era of the *New Woman* and grew up in an unconventional household. She fell in love with Hippolyte Lissagaray, a French Basque twice her age. Karl Marx relinquished his opposition to Eleanor's going on stage provided she stop seeing Lissagaray. Flaunting her right to live life as she saw fit, she lived openly with Aveling. An avid public speaker, she pleaded causes and went on to act semi-professionally. At the London opening of the revolutionary Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1884), Eleanor was drawn to the character of Nora, who, after years of subjugation, leaves her conventional husband, banging the door behind her. The following year, in a reading, she played Nora to Aveling's Helmer and playwright George Bernard Shaw's Krogstad. Inspired to learn Norwegian, she translated two of Ibsen's plays: *An Enemy of Society* (today called *An Enemy of the People*) and *The Lady from the Sea*.

Her Work as Translator and her Concept of Translation

In her introduction to her *Madame Bovary* translation, Eleanor writes that "Flaubert is still so little known in England, his work so completely misunderstood" (Marx Aveling in Flaubert 1915?: iii). She mentions three possible methods of translation: the genius who recreates a work in his own language (Schlegel recreating Shakespeare); the "hack translator" and the conscientious worker. Eleanor herself claims to fall into the last category: "Certainly no critic can be more painfully aware than I am of the weaknesses [. . .] of my work; but at least the translation is faithful. I have neither suppressed nor added a line, a word" (Flaubert 1915?: xx). The critic for *The Academy* acknowledged how difficult it is to adequately reproduce Flaubert's style: "We must be content with translation that is at once faithful and entirely natural. Mrs. Aveling deserves credit for the way she has accomplished her task" (Kapp I, 1976: 98). However, he then drew attention to certain lapses.

Paul de Man speaks of Marx's "relatively high degree of fidelity in rendering the cadence of Flaubert's sentence" (de Man in Flaubert 1965: xvi). De Man has modernized the Victorian diction and had to rewrite entire passages. Brief samples of their work follow:

Flaubert (1857): La lune, toute ronde et couleur de pourpre se levait à ras de terre, au fond de la prairie. Elle montait vite entre les branches des peupliers, qui la cachaient de palce en place, comme un rideau noir, troué. Puis elle parut, éclatante de blancheur, dans le ciel vide qu'elle éclairait; (Flaubert 1966: 225)

Marx (1886): The moon, full and purple-coloured, was rising right out of the earth at the end of the meadow. She rose quickly between the branches of the poplars, that hid her here and there like a black curtain pierced with holes. Then she appeared dazzling with whiteness in the empty heavens that she lit up. (Flaubert 1944: 164)

de Man (1965): The moon, full and purple-coloured, was rising right out of the earth at the end of the meadow. It rose quickly between the branches of the poplar trees, partly hidden as by a tattered black curtain. Then it appeared dazzling white, lighting up the empty sky; (Flaubert 1965: 143)

The Marx version is somewhat old-fashioned, calling the moon "she" and referring to "ciel", somewhat poetically as "the heavens". De Man's changes to the Marx version are fairly minor: poplars (Marx) / poplar trees (de Man); curtain pierced with holes / tattered black curtain; his "lighting up the empty sky" is probably more elegant than "the empty heavens that she lit up". Yet

overall, the Marx version holds up admirably well against more recent versions.

Nevertheless, her translation at times fall short. Here Emma and Léon are ensconced in a Rouen hotel room:

"D'ailleurs n'état-ce pas une *femme du monde*, et une femme mariée! Une vraie maîtresse enfin?

Par la diversité de son humeur..." (Flaubert 1966: 289)

Besides, was she not 'a lady' and a married woman - a real mistress, in fine? By the diversity of her humour..." (Flaubert 1944: 221)

"In fine" is simply a mistake, and "by the diversity of her humour" is a calque. De Man, with the advantage of the Marx translation in hand, amends:

"Besides, was she not a 'woman of the world', and a married woman! in short a real mistress!

According to her changing moods..." (Flaubert 1965: 192)

"Woman of the world" seems to more accurately reflect the sophistication conveyed by "une femme du monde" than does "a lady".

Conclusion

Eleanor Marx threw herself into her projects with whole-heartedly; Michelle Perrot describes Eleanor as "une abeille dans un bocal" (Perrot in Meier 1979: 41). Committed to the socialist cause, she devotedly fought at the sides of the workers themselves. Her strong sense of justice undoubtedly played a role in her choosing to translate *Madame Bovary*, considering the much-publicized trial surrounding the novel.

Yet tragedy surrounded the first translator of *Madame Bovary*. Finding out that Aveling had remarried, Eleanor succeeded in poisoning herself by taking prussic acid and chloroform; Flaubert's protagonist had ingested arsenic. In a cryptic epilogue, thirteen years after she took her life, her surviving sister Lara Lafargue and her husband committed suicide at their home in Draveil, outside Paris.

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