

# GENDER IMBALANCES IN WORLDWIDE TRANSLATIONS OF THE *COMMEDIA*

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## Abstract

*This article is the first study to examine the global translation activity of Dante's *Commedia* by gender. I show how the overwhelming majority of translations are carried out by male translators, leading to dozens of target languages with exclusively male-translated *Commedie*. I provide a chronological history of Dante translations in many different traditions by gender, and present a number of female Dante translators. I conclude by examining the lack of impact of female translations, globally speaking, and speculate on future translation trends by gender.*

**Keywords:** Translation, *Divine Comedy*, Gender

In this essay I aim to show the enormous differences in translation activity between male and female translators of Dante's *Commedia*. While the history of translation has focused overwhelmingly on male translators, recent scholarship has begun shedding light on female translators, whether translators of literary texts (Anne Dacier, Margaret Tyler, Catherine Fowler Philips, and Aphra Behn) or non-literary texts (Julia E. Smith, Émilie du Châtelet, Clemence Royer), for example. Yet there been relatively little written on the publication trends of literary translation by gender, besides studies by Kalinowski (2002, 47 – 54), Fernandez (2014, 162 – 177), Schwartz (2018, 173 – 196, Baxter (2021, 691 – 705), and myself (Blakesley 2018). The common consensus is, as Robert Baxter (op. cit., 702) writes, that “women translators are still clearly under-represented in the prestigious field of literary translation.” As we will see, this is certainly the case with the *Commedia*.

As my data indicates, translators of Dante's *Commedia* have overwhelmingly been men. In fact, in the majority of the 71 languages<sup>1</sup> into which the *Commedia* has been wholly or partially translated over the past six centuries, the *only* translators have been men. This is the case with all translations of complete canticles into 52 languages:

**Table 1. Target languages with exclusively male-translated *Commedia* or canticles**

Afrikaans	Esperanto	Latvian	Southwestern
Albanian	Estonian	Lithuanian	Istrian
Amharic	Frisian	Macedonian	Swiss German
Arabic	Galician	Malayalam	Tagalog
Armenian	Georgian	Maltese	Tamil
Assamese	Greek	Mongolian	Ukrainian
Azerbaijani	Hebrew	Nepali	Urdu
Basque	Icelandic	Norwegian	Uzbek
Belarusian	Interlingua	Plattdeutsch	Vietnamese
Breton	Irish	Provençal	Vlach
Bulgarian	Japanese	Romani	Welsh
Catalan	Kannada	Slovakian	Yiddish
Czech	Kazakh	Slovene	
Danish	Latin		

This list is disappointing in its length and breadth, which extends across Europe, Asia, Africa, North and South America, and Oceania. Granted, there is a distinction to be made between languages where the *Commedia* has been rarely translated (more than half of the above languages have only one complete translation), and languages that have a long history of Dante translations without female representation. Indeed, in many of these latter languages, the translation history of the *Commedia* (as measured by complete

<sup>1</sup> These include only translations of complete canticles, or complete translations of the *Commedia*; therefore, this data excludes partial translations of canticles, and abridged translations of the *Commedia*.

canticles) stretches back a century or more: Catalan (1429), Latin (1728), Danish (1851), Hebrew (1869), Greek (1876), Slovene (1878), Czech (1879), Serbo-Croatian (1897), Armenian (1902), Welsh (1903), Maltese (1905), Bulgarian (1906), Japanese (1914), Latvian (1921), and Lithuanian (1926). So, there hasn't been a lack of time for female translators to translate the *Commedia* in such traditions<sup>2</sup>; other reasons must be found, which I will discuss later in this essay.

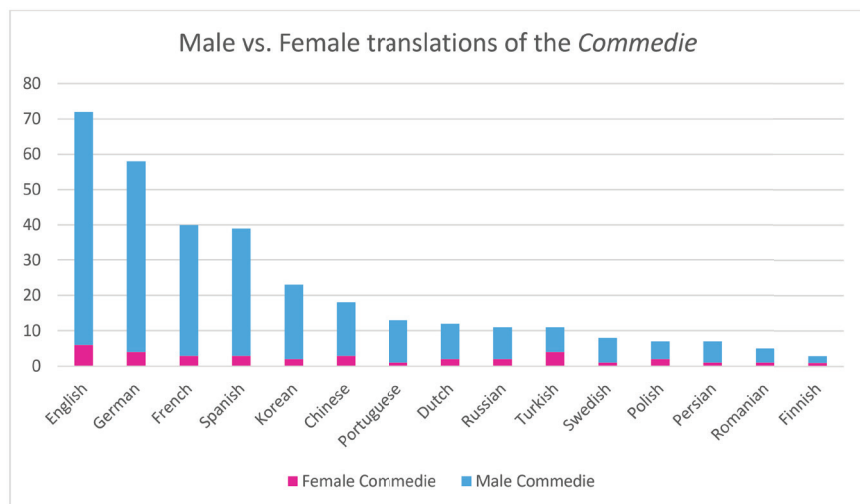
Catalan, for instance, is the vernacular language into which Dante's *Commedia* was first translated (in 1429), by Andreu Febrer. The three modern translations into Catalan of the entire work have also all been by men. Latin, the language into which Dante's *Commedia* was first translated worldwide, has had six complete translations and two separate canticles, none by female translators. Serbo-Croatian, with seven complete translations of the *Commedia* and seven other separate canticles, has featured exactly zero female translators in any of these renderings. Likewise Greek, a language with 17 Dante translators, all men, who have translated nine complete versions of the *Commedia* over the last 150 years. The same lack of women translators is seen in Japanese, with its 16 complete translations: the first translation stretching a hundred years ago, the 16th translation less than a decade ago. Danish, with three complete translations, has a history ranging over 170 years: here, as well, only male translators. Hebrew and Czech, with translations dating back to 1869 and 1879, similarly lack female translations, despite four complete translations each. Arabic, which had its first translation considerably later, in the early 1930s, also features only male translators, despite its more recent versions.

Indeed, female translators have translated the entire *Commedia* in fewer than a quarter of the 71 languages of Dante translations, as figure 1 shows.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> As mentioned earlier, I refer only to translators of entire canticles, or the entire *Commedia*. I do not take into account translators who have translated single or multiple *canti* or selections of the canticles or work as a whole.

<sup>3</sup> I have included here only those traditions with complete translations of the *Commedia* by female translators; so, Bengali and Hungarian, for example, are not on the chart.



This clearly demonstrates how few female-translated *Commedie* there are, compared with male-translated versions. Overall, in fact, 92% of the 467 total *Commedie* translated worldwide have been translated by male translators; only 8%, or 39 complete *Commedie*, have been translated solely by female translators.<sup>4</sup>

### Dante traditions with female translators

This next section looks at the traditions of female Dante translations, starting with the most prolific target languages overall for Dante's *Commedia*.

A complete canticle of the *Commedia* was first translated into English by a male translator in 1782, but the first female translation, by Claudia Hamilton Ramsay, was published only in 1863, after 7 male-translated *Commedie*. After Ramsay's translation, the next 16 complete English-language translations of the *Commedie* were all translated by male translators, until Edith Mary Shaw's 1914 translation. Then there would be 17 more translations by male translators until the next *Commedia* rendered by a female translator,

<sup>4</sup> There are 467 complete *Commedie* translated; and 235 separate canticles. This means overall 1636 total canticles have been translated, including complete *Commedie*.

in 1958, when Mary Little's complete translation was published (followed, over the next several years, by two separate complete translations by Dorothy Sayers – with the co-translatorship of Barbara Reynolds for *Paradiso* – and Clara Reed). However, since then, sixty years ago, 26 new single-authored male translations have been published in English, but only 1 new single-authored female translation.

The time lag in (standard) German between the first male and first female Dante translation was even longer than in English: about a century. The entire *Commedia* was first translated into German by Lebrecht Bachenschwanz in 1769; the first *Commedia* by a female German-language translator (Josefine von Hoffinger) occurred after nine further translations and nearly a century later, in 1865. Between Hoffinger and Sophie Hasenclever, the next female translator in 1889, were another 8 male translations.<sup>5</sup> Following Hasenclever, however, were 26 subsequent solo male-translated *Commedie*, until the third single-authored female translator – Nora Urban – in 1965. The very following year saw the fourth and final single-authored female translation by Christa Renate Köhler. But the last 55 years have seen 12 German new *Commedie* translated only by male translators. Moreover, not one of the single-authored German translations by female translators is still in print today.

The first complete Portuguese-language translation dates back to Barão da Villa da Barra's 1887 version. It would take another century – along with five new complete translations by male Portuguese-language translators – before the first and only complete Portuguese translation by the Brazilian female translator, Cordélia Dias d'Aguiar, was published in 1989. Another five new Portuguese *Commedie* have been published by male translators since d'Aguiar's version. The only female translators from Portugal to have translated Dante were Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen and Fernanda Botelho, who each translated a canticle during the early 1960s.

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<sup>5</sup> There were three *Commedie* translations published in 1865, one by Hoffinger and two by male translators. I have counted here the male translations as coming after Hoffinger for simplicity's sake; however, if we were to count them as preceding Hoffinger, then there would have been 12 complete *Commedie* translated by male translators before Hoffinger's 1865 rendering.

Whereas English-language, German-language, and Portuguese-language female translators translated Dante for the first time about a century or so later than male translators, the time lag was larger in other languages with earlier traditions of Dante translations. In prolific and longstanding traditions of Dante translation like French and Spanish, male translators were the only ones to translate the *Commedia* for 300 or 400 years, counting from the date of the first published translated canticle. So, although French was the first vernacular language with a complete published translation of the *Commedia*, by Balthazar Grangier in 1597, the first single-authored French translation of the entire *Commedia* by a woman appeared only in the 1960s (Louise Espinasse-Mongenot, posthumous). In the same period of time – 368 years – 26 different complete translations into French were published by men. Meanwhile Spanish was the first vernacular language with a complete published translation of one of the canticles, with Pedro Fernández de Villegas's 1515 *Inferno*. While the first complete Spanish *Commedia* dates back to 1868, the first Spanish translation by a female translator, Montse Oromi, was published only in 2001. During these 486 years, male Spanish translators published 31 complete *Commedie*. Meanwhile, since Oromi, there have been 12 complete Spanish translations, but only three by female translators (Celia Akram, Violeta Diaz-Corrалеjo, and Claudia Fernández Speier).

The next three traditions – Dutch, Hungarian, and Swedish - also show the extremely minor role of female translators.

The first ten Dutch *Commedia*, from 1864 to 1924, were exclusively translated by male translators. The first translation by a Dutch female translator, Betsy van Oyen-Zeeman, was published only in 1932. However, van Oyen-Zeeman's translation was rather unfavourably reviewed, and seems to have sunk without trace.<sup>6</sup> Instead, the next Dutch *Commedia*, translated in 1941 by Frederica Bremer (whom we know even less about), circulated widely and was the “most read (and for many years the only available) in the middle part of the century” (Van Heck 2003, 89). Yet the last 80 years have seen three new *Commedie* and three independent canticles all translated by male translators, except for *Commedia* co-translated by a female translator (Ike Cialona).

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/\\_gul001193201\\_01/\\_gul001193201\\_01\\_0128.php](https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_gul001193201_01/_gul001193201_01_0128.php)

In Hungarian, a language with six complete translations of the *Commedia* and ten separate canticles, 14 male translators translated Dante, from 1878 to 2018. Only in 2019 did a female translator (Eszter Draskóczy) take part in a translation of a canticle (*Inferno*), but she was only one of seven translators of this edition, and translated merely five of the 34 *canti*.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, all 7 Swedish *Commedie* published in Sweden have been translated by men, starting in the mid-1850s through the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The only Swedish-language rendering translated by a female translator was Aline Pipping's 1924 *Commedia*, published, however, in Finland.

Likewise, in some other languages, with translation histories only dating back to the middle of the 20th century like Chinese, Korean, and Farsi, the overwhelming number of translators have been male. So, the first ten translations of the *Commedie* in both Chinese and Korean, ranging from 1938 to 2005 (Chinese) and from 1959 to 1986 (Korean), were all translated by male translators. While the next two Chinese *Commedie* were by female translators Linxia Shang and Mei Dong, they were quickly followed by five consecutive *Commedie* translated by male translators, until the third and final Chinese translation by a female translator, Xiuling Liu, in 2017. Since Liu, there have been an additional five new *Commedie* in Chinese, translated only by men. Likewise, in Korean, after the first female-translated *Commedia* in 1986 by Eunbin Maeng, there were 5 more male-translated renderings, until the second – and final – female-translated *Commedia* in 1992 by Seunghui Sin. The last thirty years have witnessed 7 new Korean *Commedie*, but all translated by men.

Meanwhile, in Farsi, after the first translation in 1957 by a male translator, the second complete rendering of the *Commedia*, in 1999, was by a female translator (Farideh Mahdavi Damghani). In the last twenty years, though, four of the five *Commedie* translations have been by male translators; the fifth, a co-translation between a male and female translator (Hoda Maleki).

In this desolate panorama in terms of lack of gender parity, however, several languages stand out in different ways: one with a balance of male and female translators (Finnish); two others showing a growing number of

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<sup>7</sup> Email from Eszter Draskóczy, 16 August 2021.

female translators (Polish and Turkish); and two languages which stand out with female translators as the first translators of Dante's work (Romanian and Russian).

In one and only one language is there an equal balance of male and female translators: Finnish. There is one complete translation by a male translator and one complete translation by a female translator. However, it should be noted that the male Finnish translator Eino Leino translated his complete version of the *Commedia* a half-century before poet Elina Vaara's later translation (1963). In other words, a male translator had preceded and, in a significant way, paved the way for a female translator. And Leino's translation has been far more popular than Vaara's out of print version, despite Leino's rendering dating back more than a century.

In contrast to the previous languages, we can notice a growing importance in female translators in Polish translations. The first four Polish *Commedie* were translated by male translators, dating from 1860 to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. However, in 1947, Alina Świdarska's translation was published, followed by the next complete *Commedia*, in 2004, translated by another woman, Agnieszka Kuciak. Both translations were well-received; and the only other *Commedia*, since Kuciak's, has been a little-known translation by a male translator.

Turkish presents a similar increase in female translators. There have been 14 Turkish translators of the *Commedia*, among which 5 female translators. However, the first Turkish translation of Dante's *Commedia*, in 1938, was carried out by a male translator (Hamdi Varoğlu), as well as the other two complete translations into Turkish published in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Feridun Timur and Rekin Teksoy). It was only at the turn of the century, in 2000, that a female translator translated Dante's magnum opus into Turkish for the first time (Zeynep Doğruer). The last two decades have subsequently seen a mix of male and female translators (Selin Ceyhan Gülsay, Nurseren Yurtman, Göksu Birol, and Gülnur Eren).

Meanwhile, Romanian and Russian are significantly the only languages where the first (complete) translation of a canticle was published by a female translator. In 1883, Romanian translator Maria Chitiu's prose translation of *Inferno* was published (and subsequently her *Purgatorio*). While her version



was used widely in schools, mainly because of the bilingual nature of the edition, it would stop being read once other translations were published in the 1930s and 1940s. However, one of the most critically-acclaimed translations into Romanian is the *terza rima* version by the female translator Eta Boeriu, carried out in the 1960s.

As with Romania, in Russia the first canticle published was by a female translator. In the early 1840s, the writer Elizaveta Kologrivova published her version of *Inferno*, under the masculine pseudonym Fan Dim. It would take nearly 60 years until a female translator, Olga Chyumina, translated the entire *Commedia* into Russian: during this time, there would be four complete translations by male translators. Chyumina (1858-1909) was well-known for her poetry, and she also wrote for the stage (she was on friendly terms with Chekhov). Her translation still is reprinted today. Yet after Chyumina it would take more than another century – and 7 new translations by male translators – until Dante's *Commedia* was translated again by a single-authored female translator, Iryna Yevsa, in 2009. Yet, as explained below, Yevsa did not translate Dante from scratch, relying on a previous Russian translation, and her version was highly criticized for this.

### **Biographies of female Dante translators**

In this section, I'll present short biographies of a number of female translators of Dante belonging to different linguistic traditions. Some of the most prominent female translators I discuss elsewhere in my forthcoming monograph – particularly Aline Pipping and Elina Vaara (chapter 2); Jacqueline Risset and Dorothy Sayers (chapter 3); Eta Boeriu, Maria Chitiu, Agnieszka Kuciak, and Alina Świdorska (chapter 4); Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen (chapter 5); and Alpana Ghosh and Faridah Mahdavi Damghani (chapter 7), and are thus omitted here. For the information in what follows, I've drawn on previous scholarship as well as original research where noted.

#### **Dutch**

Betsy van Oyen-Zeeman (1864-1943) was born in Rotterdam, married a railwayman, lived in Haarlem, and had two children. Her complete translation of the *Commedia* was published in 1932 by a local publisher, in *terza*

*rima*, with an introduction by the Dominican Professor, Bernardus Constant Molkenboer. One of the only things we know about her life is that she was a member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. She didn't publish anything else, although she left manuscripts of a memoir of her son, and a collection of quotes from famous writers like Goethe and Hugo.<sup>8</sup>

## English

Claudia Hamilton Garden (1825-1902) was born in Scotland. After marrying Robert Ramsay, she lived for a period in Italy, and became fluent in Italian. Later on she would publish a book about her travels in Spain. She returned to Rome in later life, where she died and was buried in the Protestant Cemetery.<sup>9</sup>

The 19<sup>th</sup> century British translator Agnes Money (1842-1910) was very religious, having written booklets on this topic (e.g., *Thoughts on Confirmation*), as well as writing the history of the Girls' Friendly Society, a charitable organization loosely affiliated with the Church of England. In her preface to the *Purgatorio*, she says no special knowledge is required to read it, only the "knowledge of the weakness and the strength, the conflicts and the victories, the despairs and the hopes of the human heart, when the will is being surrendered to God, and the feet have been set steadfastly upon the 'narrow way.'" We know that she was working on her *Purgatorio* literally to her dying day, as it was published in the same year she passed away, and her niece remembers how she was working on the translation, "often sitting up in bed while she was confined by illness." (Cunningham 1966, 63).

Clara Stillman Reed (1879-1976) was born in Germany, since her father was studying theology in Bonn; she returned to the US and graduated from Vassar. Her 1962 prose translation of the *Commedia* was privately published.

<sup>8</sup> All information in this paragraph comes from [https://athenaeumcollecties.nl/scans/detail/cdf88d8f-b7d3-51c9-a1ff-8890b360f875/media/2c6f1db3-5bfd-71cf-2f34-e6a32a89098c?mode=detail&view=horizontal&rows=1&page=1&fq%5B%5D=search\\_s\\_object:%220bea7f14-3487-11e6-a3ab-ef655155ac5%22&sort=order\\_s\\_ordering%20asc&filterAction](https://athenaeumcollecties.nl/scans/detail/cdf88d8f-b7d3-51c9-a1ff-8890b360f875/media/2c6f1db3-5bfd-71cf-2f34-e6a32a89098c?mode=detail&view=horizontal&rows=1&page=1&fq%5B%5D=search_s_object:%220bea7f14-3487-11e6-a3ab-ef655155ac5%22&sort=order_s_ordering%20asc&filterAction).

<sup>9</sup> Information about her life is drawn from <https://www.cataloniatoday.cat/article/912022-an-eye-for-detail.html>.

However, she wasn't the sole author of this version. In fact, the title page of her "typed copy" reads, "Dante's Pilgrimage into the Light, His Divine Comedy, translated freely into English by Jeannette Starr." Jeannette Starr would "read" the *Commedia* in Italian to Clara Reed, proceed to "translate [it] freely into English," and then they'd "go through each canto line by line over a period of years in order to arrive at the most sympathetic and intelligible translation, which I would then write down... I felt I must preserve her words, trying to express their spirit in as simple English as possible. Now as I undertake this private printing, Mrs Starr is no longer here to correct my effort and thus it does not seem fair to burden her name with the insufficiencies that may appear" (ibidem 177). Reed discovered the *Commedia* for the first time in 1927, but Mrs Starr apparently told her not learn Italian, and that she herself "will be your language" (178). The reason Reed published her translation, she explained, is because she had "friends, who... wanted a copy of the English version to take with them," since they were leaving Reed's city (ibidem). For Reed, the *Commedia* was "a beautiful medium for the Gospel and the Life of the Spirit" (ibidem) a perspective certainly informed by her father, who had founded a School for Christian Workers.

Kathryn Lindskoog (1934–2003) was an American author and teacher, with a special interest in C. S. Lewis. She translated the *Commedia* into prose during the 1990s, a period when she had become paraplegic and required 24 hour care.<sup>10</sup> Her description for *Purgatorio* that "Most of us want exactly what Dante's story promises: improvement" is all the more resonant in this context. It makes sense, then, that she chose to subtitle the *Commedia* "Journey to Joy." Like some other Anglophone translators, she was religiously devout, and wrote a book called *Up from Eden: an uncommonly candid look at the complex choices facing Christian women today*.

## French

It is indicative of the disparity in male and female French translators of Dante that the nationality of the first French-language female translator of Dante was actually American. Mary Hooper was born in Cincinnati (1866-1948),

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<sup>10</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20030603225827/http://www.lindentree.org/vita.html>

but her parents moved to France when she was young, where she was raised in a convent. She married the Italian Marquis Paolo D'Adda Salvaterra in 1888, in a wedding full of dukes and duchesses, generals, and ministers, but was widowed the year after. She belonged to the social elite of Paris, and was considerably wealthy, thanks to the inheritance of her parents.<sup>11</sup> She remarried Count Horace Antoine de Choiseul-Praslin in 1906, a politician, diplomat, and uncle of her late husband (Allen 2012, 515). Her versions of *Purgatorio* (1911) and *Paradiso* (1915) were into prose, and received the Prix Montyon by the l'Académie française.

Louise Espinasse-Mongenet (1871-1956), a novelist, was the first woman to translate the complete *Commedia* into French. She was also the first French translator of Dante to use free verse (Svolacchia 2018, 386). Her 1912 *Enfer* and 1932 *Purgatoire* both received the Prix Langlois by the Academie Française for best translation. Her *Enfer* was published by the publishing house run by the reactionary Action française, the Nouvelle Librairie Nationale, and came with an introduction by the chief ideologue of this movement, Charles Maurras.

Lucienne Portier (1894-1996), who taught at the University of Grenoble and then the Sorbonne, was an Italianist and historian of Christianity (Van Geertruijden 2011, 205): she also translated Caterina da Siena and Jacopone da Todi. Her translation of the *Commedia*, published by the religious publishing house Cerf Editions, was the culmination of a long series of studies on the Italian poet.

The most recent translator of Dante into French is Danièle Robert. Robert, a professional translator, started out her career translating books of American literature and culture: Paul Auster's poetry and Billie Holliday's autobiography, and later a book about the jazz musician Bill Evans. She then went on to translate Latin classics, such as Ovid, Catullus, Cicero, and Seneca. An editorial commission to translate Cavalcanti's poetry, which she completed in 2012, piqued her interest in translating Dante, whom she had

<sup>11</sup> See John Hooper, *former Excise Officer in Crediton: A convicted criminal and self-styled surgeon whose son became a millionaire in Cincinnati, and whose granddaughter married into French aristocracy*. Online: <http://medicalgentlemen.co.uk/patients-and-diseases/john-hooper>

never anticipated she would put into French. But after rendering into French a book on translating poetry by Italian scholar Antonio Prete, she came to the idea that translating Dante into terza rima would be possible (Robert 2017).

### **German**

Josefine von Hoffinger (1820-1868), an Austrian writer, was born in Vienna, and deputy director at the Woman's Teacher's College in Austria for a decade before forced to retire because of ill health.<sup>12</sup> Her translation of the *Commedia* was the culmination of two decades of study, written in Schlegel *terzine*.<sup>13</sup> She also published translations of Leopardi and other Italian poetry, along with literary and philosophical essays, and original poetry. She was a member of the newly-founded Deutsche Dante-Gesellschaft, and her translation achieved acclaim.

Sophie Hasenclever (1823-1892), German poet and translator, was born in Berlin.<sup>14</sup> She grew up in an artistic household, with her father a painter, and she learned Italian as she travelled to Italy during her youth. She and her husband ran an artistic salon in Dusseldorf.<sup>15</sup> While not publishing during the first decades of her marriage, later on, she achieved recognition for her original poetry, and translated Michelangelo's verse. She belonged to the Old Catholic Church.<sup>16</sup>

### **Korean**

Eunbin Maeng, the first female translator of Dante into Korean, was a professor of Russian at Dongyang university in Yeongju, South Korea, as well

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<sup>12</sup> See *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Dante-gesellschaft*. Online: [https://books.google.it/books?id=u0ITAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.it/books?id=u0ITAAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=it&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false).

<sup>13</sup> [https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/BLKÖ:Hoffinger,\\_Josepha\\_Edle\\_von](https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/BLKÖ:Hoffinger,_Josepha_Edle_von) [cit. 18-10-2021]

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.phil-fak.uni-duesseldorf.de/frauenarchiv/ddorf/wohnrte/hasenclever.html> [cit. 24-10-2021]

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.schadow-gesellschaft.org/html/die\\_kunstler.html](http://www.schadow-gesellschaft.org/html/die_kunstler.html) [cit.08-10-2021]

<sup>16</sup> [https://web.archive.org/web/20101104011043/www.alt-katholisch.de/fileadmin/red\\_ak/CH-Archiv/6-4-05.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20101104011043/www.alt-katholisch.de/fileadmin/red_ak/CH-Archiv/6-4-05.html) [cit. 24-10-2021].

as a published poet. She translated many works of Russian – and English – fiction into Korean. However, Dante was her only translation of an Italian author.

### Russian

Iryna Yevsa (1956-) was born and lives in Ukraine, but she writes in Russian. An accomplished poet, she has won several poetry prizes,<sup>17</sup> and has translated extensively: *Faust*, *Paradise Lost*, Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat*, Sappho, many plays by Shakespeare, and Dante, of course. What's significant is that most of these translations, including her version of Dante's *Commedia*, are re-workings of classic Russian translations. Her translation of the *Commedia*, whose subtitle is "Современная поэтическая версия Ирины Евсы" (modern poetry translation by Iryna Yevsa) is based on D. D. Minyaev's earlier 1870s translation (*ibidem*). For what we might call these translations of translations, including Dante, she received the 'worst translation' award from a state-owned book journal.<sup>18</sup>

### Spanish

In 2012, the first translation by a female Spanish professor was published, translated by Violeta Diaz-Corralejо. Diaz-Corralejо, a philologist and French professor at the Complutense University of Madrid, translated the *Commedia* into prose, which, thanks to the abundant commentary, amounted to a massive volume of over 1,000 pages (Díaz Corralejo).<sup>19</sup> She was one of the founders of the Dante journal *Tenzone*, has published numerous essays (including a monograph) on Dante's work, and also has had her own creative work published (*ibidem*).

There have been two translations by female Latin American translators, including the 2006 rendering of *Inferno* by Marisa Vannini. Vannini (1928-2016) was born and raised in Central Italy. During the war, her family was threatened inasmuch as they were anti-fascists, and their house was ransacked,

<sup>17</sup> [https://ru.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Евса,\\_Ирина\\_Александровна&stable](https://ru.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Евса,_Ирина_Александровна&stable) [cit. 02-10-2021]

<sup>18</sup> <https://iz.ru/news/546597> [cit. 24-10-2021]

<sup>19</sup> See <https://sialpigmalion.es/book-author/diaz-corralejо-violeta/> [cit. 02-10-2021]

and her grandmother's country house burned to the ground. Her family then chose to emigrate to Venezuela in 1948. Vannini, with two PhDs, one gained in Caracas, one at Bologna, taught Italian and Latin at the Universidad Central de Venezuela and published widely on not only the history of the Italian community in Venezuela, but also the Indios. She was a professor in Italian and Latin at the University of Caracas. The Venezuelan newspaper and publisher Nacional commissioned her to translate the *Inferno* into more contemporary language than Edoardo Crema's previous Venezuelan Spanish translation (Bacilieri 2012).

### **Turkish**

Nurseren Yurtman (1929-2019) worked in the book section of the Turkish American Women's Association, but was not a professional academic or translator. She began painting in her fifties, but had to stop when she was diagnosed with macular degeneration. At that point, she started learning Italian, and a couple of years later, she made an initial translation of the *Commedia* from Italian into Turkish. Then she translated it from Turkish into English.<sup>20</sup> Her translation, then, is an amateur effort, which reflects her passionate engagement with Dante, but isn't rooted in any critical tradition.

These brief portraits of female translators show a remarkable variety of different backgrounds. There are professors and teachers, including *Dantiste* like Violeta Diaz-Corrado, Kathryn Lindskoog, Eunbin Maeng, Lucienne Portier, and Marisa Vannini (along with other female *Dantiste* not treated here like Jacqueline Risset, Dorothy Sayers, and Claudia Fernandez Speier). There are writer-translators, like Louise Espinasse-Mongenot, Sophie Hasenclever, and Iryna Yevsa (along with those discussed elsewhere in my monograph, like Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen, Fernanda Botelho, Agnieszka Kuciak, Dorothy Sayers, and Elina Varra). There are aristocrats like Mary Hooper, and those from quite modest backgrounds, like Betsy van Oyen-Zeeman. There are amateurs, like Claudia Hamilton Ramsay and Nurseren Yurtman. There are devoutly-inspired translators like Kathryn Lindskoog, Agnes Money and Clara Stillman Reed.

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<sup>20</sup> This paragraph draws on the information from her website: <http://www.nurserenyurtman.com/>.

## Impact of female translations

There are many ways to demonstrate the lamentably small overall impact of female translators in the worldwide translation history of Dante's *Commedia*. First and foremost, in an overwhelming 75% of languages, the *Commedia* is translated exclusively by male translators. In languages with the most prolific translation histories of Dante – Chinese, Dutch, English, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Turkish – there are far more male-authored translations than female-authored translators.

<i>Target language</i>	Female-translated <i>Commedia</i>	Male-translated <i>Commedia</i>
English	6	72
German	4	54
French	4	37
Spanish	5	41
Korean	2	20
Chinese	3	15
Japanese	0	15
Dutch	2	12
Portuguese	1	11
Russian	2	9
Turkish	5	9

Furthermore, in no language are there more *Commedia* translations by female translators than male translators.

Secondly, in most languages only male translations are currently in print. A consequence of this is that the majority of single-authored female translations are out of print<sup>21</sup>. The only languages in which female translations

<sup>21</sup> I'm not considering on this point, then, the translations done in collaboration by male and female translators: Jean and Robert Hollander, David G. Leoni and Josefina Tereza P. Pujó, Ida and Walther von Wartburg, Mohammad Reza Rasouli and Hoda Maleki, Simone & Louis Martin-Chauffier, Konrad zu Putlitz & Emmi Schweitzer.



of Dante currently circulate in the editorial market are a handful<sup>22</sup>: Bengali (Alpana Ghosh's *Inferno*); Chinese (Linxia Shang's, Mei Dong's, and Xiuling Liu's *Commedia*); English (Dorothy Sayers' *Commedia*; Mary Jo Bang's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*); French (Lucienne Portier, Jacqueline Risset, and Danièle Robert's respective *Commedia*); Korean (Sin Seunghui's *Commedia*); Persian (Farideh Mahdavi Damghani's *Commedia*); Polish (Agnieszka Kuciak's *Commedia*); Russian (Olga Chyumina's *Commedia*); and Spanish (Violeta Diaz-Corralejo's and Claudia Fernandez Speier's *Commedia*). However, in the other languages with female translators, namely Dutch, Finnish, German, Portuguese, Romanian, Swedish, and Turkish all the female translations of Dante's work are out of print. So, female translations of Dante can be currently bought in merely 9 languages.

Third, frequently we don't have much or any information about female translators. This lack of critical information reflects the lack of prestige of these translators, and stands in clear contrast to the many male translators about whom we have abundant details. This is also visible in a relative lack of Wikipedia pages dedicated to female translators of Dante compared to those treating male translators. While I've been able to find some additional information or clarify names and geographical provenance, this merely scratches the surface. For example, Eleanor Vinton Murray's 1920 *Inferno* was the first *terza rima* rendering of a complete canticle by an American translator. She was born in 1867 in Boston and died in 1958 in Pomfret (Connecticut).<sup>23</sup> She came from a wealthy family, which had achieved its wealth through investments in copper mines. She also translated some poems by Petrarch. But, as with the next translators, no more details have been found. As regards Edith Mary Shaw's 1914 translation, we only know her name and date of birth (1846), but almost nothing about her life, other than she wrote the translator's preface from Hotel Victoria in Tenerife, and responded to a bad review from Andover House in Alderney (Channel Islands) (Cunningham, op. cit., 66). According to what I have found, she is the same Edith Mary

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<sup>22</sup> I've searched for the translations on at least two different online bookstores selling books in the respective language.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/59719305/eleanor-vinton-murray> [cit. 02-10-2021]

Shaw born in 1846 in Cambridgeshire, son of a British reverend, who died in California in 1922.<sup>24</sup> The 1904 translation signed by “Caroline C. Potter” we can now identify with Caroline Conrad Potter (1840-1911), who grew up in Pennsylvania and died in New York. She married a banker, who was an “Empire state notable.”<sup>25</sup> In the case of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Dutch female translator, M. C. Loman, however, we do not know anything, except that the translator was most likely a woman (Cunningham, op. cit., 26).

Fourth, some female translators had to publish their Dante translations privately, a far greater percentage than male translators. This is the case, for example, with the *Inferno* translated by the American Eleanor Murray in 1920, and the *Commedie* translated by the American translators Mary Little in 1958 and Clara Reed in 1962. The fact that these three female translators resorted to basically the equivalent of vanity publishing reflects the lack of publishing opportunities for women. In other cases, women had to resort to pseudonyms, as I already mentioned with regard to the Russian translator Elizaveta Kologrivova.

There are several reasons for the lack of female translators of Dante in general. In primis, the lack of female literacy, owing to laws and customs. Opportunities for female education were (and are) less available than for male students worldwide. Furthermore, Italian wasn't often a language studied at universities, and so learning the language in this context meant you had to have both the leisure and money to either spend time in Italy to learn it, or to hire a private tutor, or to study it on your own. Dante's text in itself requires a great deal of background knowledge that often you would get at a university (or post-graduate) level. Most importantly, the act of translation (as well as language learning) requires a significant amount of time, which isn't always available to women who are unfairly burdened with household

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.geni.com/people/Edith-Shaw/6000000112069088063> [cit. 03-09-2021]

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.alamy.com/empire-state-notables-1914-charles-mason-stead-retired-banker-one-of-the-founders-of-open-board-of-brokers-vice-president-new-york-stock-exchange-1877-1881-new-york-city-luther-wright-mott-banker-representative-in-congress-28thdistrict-new-yorls-image338158778.html> [cit. 02-10-2021]

chores and child rearing. Last and not least, even if female translators did have the opportunity to translate Dante, this in no way meant that a publisher would accept to publish such a translation, and thus the reason for private publications. So, when translations were co-translated between male and female translators, it was generally the case that the male translators had more symbolic capital than their co-translators. A case in point, for example, is the 1930 French edition of *Inferno*, co-translated by Simone Duval and Louis Martin-Chauffier. We know that Martin-Chauffier had won two prizes from the Académie Française in the 1920s for his work, and published four novels during this decade, besides directing the oldest library in France, the bibliothèque Mazarine. Simone Duval, his wife, in contrast, had only translated a novel by an experimental British woman writer (Hope Mirrlees).

So a final question remains. Does the future look promising for a more gender balanced activity of Dante translations? There has certainly been an increase over the past generations in terms of female translations of the complete *Commedia*. While there were only 3 translations by female translators in the 1800s, there were 6 in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 15 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the century, and already 15 in the first twenty years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This rate is thus clearly growing. The gains in female education and decreasing sexism across much of the world are promising as regards future translators of Dante. Whereas a significant reason for male translation of the classics in previous centuries was that only men were accorded the prestige to translate the classics, perceived as necessary for nation building (Ferrari 2021), now in many more countries this is no longer the case. However, this doesn't mean that we will soon see a balance in terms of the number of male and female translations, since there is so much ground to make up in highly prolific traditions of exclusively or predominantly male Dante translations.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> There is then the category of co-translation, which also illuminates the power differences at play, especially when they deal with married couples.

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