

*Translation and Mountaineering, a First Case-Study. Nea Morin
and Janet Adam Smith Between Collaborative Translation and
Cordée Féminine*

Anna Saroldi, University of Oxford

Translation and Mountaineering

Abstract

This article argues for a dialogue between translation and mountaineering studies, and provides examples of how the two could successfully interact. It contributes to literary translator studies and translation history by bringing to the fore the careers of translators and mountaineers Janet Adam Smith and Nea Morin and by establishing links between their collaborative translation and *cordée féminine*, arguing that they played an active role as agents of both the literary and the mountaineering fields. Moreover, it provides instances of how the awareness of translation processes can expand and deepen the analysis of gendered dynamics in mountaineering non-fiction. Finally, it shows how mountaineering studies can benefit from translation studies in order to become more aware of its dissemination processes and international dynamics, and how translation studies can benefit from mountaineering studies to fully comprehend and capture the depth of its involvement, dependence, and interaction with the non-literary world.

Keywords

translation history, collaborative translation, translator studies, gender studies, mountaineering literature, women mountaineers, life-writing, Annapurna, *cordée féminine*, feminist translation studies.

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In 2011, *Madame Bovary* was translated into English for the twentieth time. The translator, Adam Thorpe, published a personal piece in the British newspaper *The Guardian*, commenting on his choice to translate the novel and defining it as “the Everest of translation”. Here, he adopted the image of mountaineering to describe his work, establishing a metaphorical parallel between his choice of vocabulary in the translation and the toughest climbing style: “Down at base camp I made a decision equivalent to climbing without oxygen in 19th-century gear: I would stick to period language”. In the article, he reported how many, on hearing that he was retranslating the novel, especially just after famous colleagues such as writer and translator Lydia Davis had done it, asked him: “What’s the point?”. The question might sound familiar to those acquainted with mountaineering anecdotes, and received a now-historic response by George Mallory, member of the three British Everest expeditions of the 1920s, who, when asked for the umpteenth time why he wanted to climb Everest, replied: “Because it’s there” (be it a bored dismissal or an honest reply). In her monograph on retranslation, Sharon Deane-Cox comments on Thorpe’s article picking up the translation-as-mountaineering metaphor and bringing into play the opposition between “true” alpinists and commercial expeditions, defended, among others, by John Krakauer, author of *Into the Wild*. Deane-Cox then compares Thorpe’s choices to those of other translators of *Madame Bovary*, such as Geoffrey Wall.

If Madame Bovary was indeed Thorpe's Everest, then the translator accordingly becomes the intrepid and conquering adventurer, staking a claim for his "great translation" at the summit. In contrast to Wall, the ascent was achieved without the assistance of previous translators, for in an act of differentiation and symbolic violence, these are stealthily brought into the analogy not as helpful Sherpas, but as "foolhardy expeditions" which crowd the slopes. (Deane-Cox 2014, 52)

Deane-Cox follows Thorpe's line of thinking, developing the idea of the translator as an explorer, with summit ambitions and a path to find. In this understanding, Thorpe is a "purist", who chose not to update the language of the work, like those mountaineers who choose to lead their climbs with as little extra help as possible (be it supplementary oxygen, a team, or various organised camps). Contemporary words are seen as technological tools, and both translators and mountaineers prefer to avoid them to stay close to the inception of their work or their sport.

Literary translation and mountaineering, however, as this article demonstrates, have more in common than being mere metaphors for one another. In order to show this, this article will follow four main strands of argumentation: firstly, it argues for a dialogue between translation and mountaineering studies and provides examples of how the two could successfully interact. Secondly, it contributes to literary translator studies and

translation history by bringing to the fore the careers of translators and mountaineers Janet Adam Smith and Nea Morin and by establishing links between their collaborative translation and *cordée féminine* practices (that is to say climbing in an all-female roped party). The article argues that Adam Smith and Morin played an active role as agents of both the literary and the mountaineering fields, reclaiming their belonging to a genealogy of female literary agents (Simon 1996) and mountaineers (Roche 2013). Thirdly, it provides instances of how the awareness of translation processes can expand and deepen the analysis of gendered dynamics in mountaineering non-fiction. Finally, my research shows how mountaineering studies can benefit from translation studies in order to become more aware of its dissemination processes and multilingual and international dynamics, and how translation studies can benefit from mountaineering studies to fully comprehend and capture the depth of its involvement, dependence, and interaction with the non-literary world. 2024 will mark the hundredth anniversary of the death of British mountaineers Sandy Irvine and George Mallory, who died together on Everest and could have been the first people to summit. The upcoming centenary invites us to reflect on mountaineering narratives and values, exploring how they have shaped social imaginary and debates in the past hundred years, and how translation studies can help us to assess their current situation.

- Mountaineering and literature

Mountaineering and literature have a remarkably strong connection. Some readers might have seen the inauguration of climbing as an Olympic sport at Tokyo 2021 and be familiar with the complex scoring system. If the two specialties of lead sport climbing and bouldering can, in some ways, be graded and results compared, the same is not true for mountaineering. Firstly, it is rare, although not impossible, that someone is there to watch the ascent (the Eiger being a notable exception). Secondly, it is difficult to give mountains an objective grade of difficulty. Chomolungma (named Everest by the British), might be the tallest mountain in the world, but its normal ascent route is easier than that of other eight-thousand metres peaks such as K2 (another British name). This, Bruce Barcott remarked, is a uniquely strong link when it comes to the connection between mountaineering sports and literary practices.

To this day mountain climbing remains the most literary of all sports. No other activity compels its participants, from the international star to the weekend scrambler, to turn each personal conquest into public tale. Contemporary alpine societies publish journals thick with memoirs of members' recent ascents. Mountaineering's greatest athletes are also the genre's best-selling authors. (1996)

There is a variety of reasons why mountaineers feel 'compelled' to write, as Barcott says. As remarked by Richard Mitchell, selling the rights for the book,

article, or film can be a way to fund an expedition (1983, 75). He calls this the “debriefing” phase of a climb and highlights also how the reports let the audience “join vicariously” in the climb, and include them in the debate. This aspect of debriefing, and part of the compelling reason to share the story of a climb, is related to a key point raised by Julie Rak, that: “alpine climbing and elite general mountaineering in particular remains nonquantifiable” (2021, 18). Therefore, in absence of an objective scale of difficulty, and having to deal with a “nonquantifiable” sport, alpinists rely on the narratives of their expeditions to build consensus. Mountaineering reports and memoirs hence play a pivotal role in assigning and maintaining prestige within the field: as Mitchell aptly summarises, “as a social phenomenon the climb is not over till the tale is told” (1983, 72). Whether written or reconstructed on screen, the mountaineering act is performed once more through its presentation to a waiting audience. Such reports (or lack thereof) form the bone of longstanding mountaineering debates: did Mallory and Irvine summit Everest? What happened to Reinhold and Günther Messner on Nanga Parbat? Most social studies on mountaineering and climbing are conducted through surveys and oral interviews (see for instance Robinson 2008, Wigglesworth 2021, Tulle 2022), and video interviews and recordings are also studied (for instance in Driscoll 2020). However, reports and mountaineering memoirs have been used as sources by anthropologists and sociologists, for studies on mountaineering (Montaldo) or more precisely on its gendered aspects and dynamics (Frohlick). While mountaineering studies have been developing for

quite some time, most notably in the social sciences and in Canada, its reach is still expanding. Often, this also goes in conjunction with an interest in gender and mountaineering. In the UK, the country of the selected case study, the last few years have seen the establishment of the AHRC network “Women in the Hills”, and the recent exhibitions on the hundredth anniversary of the all-female Pinnacle Club (titled “Women with Altitude”) and on Women Climbers in Scotland (“Petticoats and Pinnacles”). But studies on mountaineering memoirs and fiction as literature are rare. In 2021, Julie Rak, a scholar of auto/biography and life writing, published the pivotal *False Summit*, which has hugely influenced this article. In the monograph, she argues that “nonfiction about climbing shows that gender is one of the most important aspects of climbing identity [...] and that gender identity is foundational to how climbers write about themselves, even when it goes unmentioned” (2021, 19). The link between mountaineering literature and translation, however, is yet to be made. This should not necessarily surprise: mountains, often used as borders by different populations, are themselves places of translation and exchange, known by many names (as we have seen). If a peak can be interpreted as a place of clear demarcation, a glacier, mountain pass, or tunnel are spaces of transition, encounter, and exchange. Moreover, mountain populations and professionals deal with translation on a daily basis, be it to work on the other side, acquire goods, or, in the case of mountain guides (who almost always speak multiple languages) accompany clients from different backgrounds, in different countries or continents. In addition to the strands of research that can be explored by scholars of literary

translation, there is a more sociological direction to be undertaken. Under this perspective, the role of mountain guides as translators and interpreters can be analysed, unravelling the complex balance of managing clients and languages in high-risk scenarios. Surveys could be presented, asking guides how many languages they speak, how that affects their job, and if those create preferences for their expeditions. For instance, do guides prefer to have clients who share the same first language depending on the risk of the climb, or vice-versa? This will also contribute to the reassessment of the role of local populations as local interpreters. As well as deepening our understanding of the practices of European guides, it will allow us to learn more about the habits and profession of indigenous mountain populations from all over the world, and in particular to study translation dynamics in postcolonial contexts such as the Himalayas. Here, however, I am interested in the link between mountaineering and *literary* translation, with a specific focus on gender. Future research will develop the analysis of other aspects such as the role of local guides in making women's climbing possible, and a more detailed examination of factors such as race and class.

- Collaborative Translation and *Cordée Féminine*

Translation, as argued by Anthony Cordingley and Céline Frigau-Manning, is inherently collaborative (2017, 23). Moreover, as added by Megan Berkobien, translation is also an “*embodied and many-bodied labour*” (2020, 7, italics in the original). I will here focus on collaborative translation in its

more restricted sense, of two translators working together. This has been defined by Sharon O'Brien as collaborative translation in its "narrow meaning" (2011, 17), and Cordingley and Frigau-Manning call it "co-translation", reminding us that it "also falls under the umbrella term collaborative translation" (2017, 24). Because of the targeted scope imposed by the limits of a journal article, it has not been possible to expand the current research beyond these figures of translators. This is the current limitation of this article, insofar as it does not explore the translators' links to authors or other agents (such as proof-readers, editors, copyeditors, publishers, literary agents, etc.), who are also involved in the translation process in the sense of multiple-translatorship as intended by Jansen and Wegener (2013).¹ The strength of my approach lies however in its more precise focus on the embodied nature of translation, which to this day has seen fewer analysis and studies than its "many-bodied" aspect (to phrase it like Berkobien).

The kind of collaboration that I will be exploring in relation to mountaineering is the *cordée féminine*. This social practice, of an all-female roped party, or "manless rope team" – consider the implied value judgment in these two English definitions – has not received much academic attention. In her overly optimistic "casual history" of women mountaineers (1973, 16), Cicely Williams dedicated a chapter to the topic, titled "Ladies Only", where she summarised and commented on the reports of the first all-female roped

¹ Further enquiry on the role of other agents in the translation of mountaineering literature will be developed in my upcoming project, tentatively titled: 'The Women Who Brought You the Mountains. Women as Editors and Translators of Twentieth-Century Mountaineering Literature'.

parties and talked about Morin and Adam Smith, among others. More recently, the *cordée féminine* has been explored by Cécile Ottogalli-Mazzacavallo and Eric Boutroy, who present a socio-technical history of the practice and analyse it as social innovation. This is the definition they provide: “In concrete terms, a manless rope team is defined as a socio-technical system of at least two women without men, joined or not by rope in order to climb such or such a mountain”, which “produces a practical, social, and symbolic detachment of male domination” (2020, 793). In the article, they explore how, through manless climbing, female mountaineers have been able to reduce their inequality with regards to access, treatment, and recognition, and on how the practice has developed until today, when organisations and sponsors are more interested in supporting it.

In this article, the practices of collaborative translation and *cordée féminine* will be linked and compared for two main reasons. Firstly, they provided an independent and protected space for Morin and Adam Smith to grow and develop as writers and climbers, supporting each other in otherwise heavily male-dominated environments. Secondly, as will be shown, the two activities were directly linked in their lives and nurtured each other. Moreover, establishing a parallel between the two helps us to frame and understand translation as an embodied practice, in its bodily, tiring, exhausting dimension, which helps us to appreciate the linguistic and literary dimension of mountaineering. This article operates a paradigm shift by placing at centre stage women’s physical and literary agency, in the outdoors and in their

narration of it. Rather than looking at women as afraid, vulnerable, and powerless in the outdoors, I focus on how Morin and Adam Smith were able to build and consolidate a thriving space of their own, as they did not only climb, but – even rarer – they wrote about it.

The result of these two practices, however, is quite clearly different. In climbing (at least when repeating rather than setting a route), the outcome is the climb itself, as a lived and experienced activity, while when translating a book, beyond the process, there is a final, material product that did not exist before, which, if approved, will be printed and released. In generic terms, a translation is made to be shared beyond its creators, for an intended audience, while a climb only directly involves its participants. And with this definition under our belt, we can move forward to a brief presentation of our two climbers and translators.

- Introducing Nea Morin and Janet Adam Smith

Janet Adam Smith was born in Glasgow in 1905 to an intellectual family. She studied at Somerville College, Oxford, in the 1920s, and married Michael Roberts in 1935. She is known primarily as a writer and editor; she worked for the BBC in the 1920s and 30s, and for the *New Statesman* in the 1950s. Her private library later established the basis for Oxford's Mountaineering Library (now at the Social Sciences Library). Her memoir, *Mountain Holidays*, was written during the war and published in 1946, before the start of her collaboration (both alpine and traductorial) with Morin. The book

follows her mountaineering career from its very beginning and just up to the Second World War: from her childhood adventures in Arran, to the solo excursions in Scotland, and trips to the Alps with her first husband Michael Roberts and their guide Othon Bron. She died in 1999.

Nea Barnard Morin was also born in 1905. Her family lived in Surrey, where her father, a member of the Alpine club, ran a bookselling business. As she recounts in her memoir *A Woman's Reach. Mountaineering Memoirs* (1968), an important aspect of her mountaineering is that she was an active proponent of the *cordée féminine*. She gained access to this practice through Micheline Morin (1900–1972), and she would later marry Morin's brother Jean. The Morins were among the members of the Groupe de Haute Montagne (GHM), established in Chamonix in 1919 to support guideless climbing, and still operating today. As described in the *Oxford Dictionary National Bibliography*, she became “a valuable link between British and continental schools of climbing”. Later, she was the only woman member of the British team attempting the ascent of Ama Damblam (Nepal) in 1959. She died in 1986.

In her memoir, Morin often addresses – as the title itself indicates – questions at the intersection of gender and mountaineering. Despite stating that her feminist principles were “never very strong” (123), she does remark that, in the case of women climbers, “their many disadvantages include problems of marriage and motherhood, which cut right across a woman's climbing ambitions” (201). Moreover, she dedicates an entire chapter to the *cordée*

féminine, as well as another to climbing as a woman (‘Les Malheureuses Dames de Pic!’), and adds in the appendices a survey of ‘notable feminine ascents’ (including hers, 253-278). Adam Smith and Morin’s memoirs are important as they constitute two rare examples of mountaineering non-fiction written by women. As pointed out by Moraldo (2013) and *Alpinist Magazine* editor Katie Ives (2017, quoted in Rak 2021, 86),² adventure writing still lacks diversity, and these examples, openly addressing gender differences, are among the few exceptions. Even if Morin is not mentioned in Adam Smith’s *Mountain Holidays* (because the two met afterwards), in the 1996 second edition of the book their collaboration is brought to the attention of the reader in the biography of the author on the inside cover, copied below.

Janet Adam Smith’s other books include *Life Among the Scots*, biographies of R. L. Stevenson and John Buchan, and translations (with Nea Morin) of Maurice Herzog’s *Annapurna* and *Gervasutti’s Climbs*. [...] After Michael Roberts’ death in 1948, she continued to climb, and introduced her sons to the Alps, with a start in the familiar Vanoise. In the 1950s, with Nea Morin, she climbed the Schalligrat of the Weisshorn and the Mer de Glace face of the Grépon, and traversed La Meije. (1996)

² Katie Ives stepped down from her role as Editor-in-Chief of *Alpinist Magazine* in Autumn 2022.

This biography is remarkable for a few reasons. Firstly, Adam Smith is acknowledged as a translator, a surprising remark, considering the traditional lack of prestige of the occupation. Moreover, their climbs are also reported, which signals to the reader that they were of a certain importance: Ernest Press is a mountaineering publisher – plausibly they assumed that Morin was known to their audience. Morin’s memoir *A Woman’s Reach*, published in 1968, has a larger scope, as it also talks about the post-war years. In the book, she talks about her friendship and relationship with Janet Adam Smith (although she could be hard to spot as she is referred to with the names of her husbands, ergo as Mrs Michael Roberts, and later as Mrs John Carleton – see the “key to married names” at the end of the book).

In 1952 [...] I was busy, in collaboration with Janet Adam Smith, with the translation of Maurice Herzog’s *Annapurna*, the account of the successful French expedition to this mountain in 1950, the first climbed of the fourteen Himalayan peaks of over 8,000 metres. Many years before I had translated the account of the first French Himalayan Expedition, an attempt on Hidden Peak (Gasherbrum I), led by Henri de Ségogne. Published as *Himalayan Assault*, it was my first translation. In 1947 John Barford recommended me for the translation

of André Roch's *Montagnes de ma jeunesse*. I greatly enjoyed doing this, and I think *Climbs of my Youth* showed an improvement.³

It was through the Ladies' Alpine Club that I had the good fortune to meet Janet Adam Smith, wife of Michael Roberts the poet and critic. Janet, herself a literary critic, had already written *Mountain Holidays*, a delightful book which has now become a mountaineering classic [...].

In 1948 Janet asked me, since I know the Mont Blanc district well, to read the proofs of *First on the Rope*, her translation of Frison-Roche's *Premier de Cordée*. Later, when she was asked to translate the sequel, *La Grande Crevasse*, she invited me to collaborate with her, as she no longer had time to do this on her own. With the untimely and tragic death of Michael Roberts in 1948, Janet had to shoulder the responsibility of a family of four children, the youngest of whom was barely a year old. She became Literary Editor of the *New Statesman*, and with her family commitments as well had little time for extra work.

In 1952 Jonathan Cape approached me for the translation of *Annapurna* and having once worked with Janet I knew I could not

³ Morin was however not acknowledged in the printed edition of the book. In the review for the *Alpine Journal*, B. R. Goodfellow writes: 'The book appears to be written in English and not to be a translation, and some of the author's familiar phrases perhaps confirm this. If so, it is a remarkable achievement and M. Roch's English, although a little limited in vocabulary, is most readable in style', *AJ* 1949, 270. Adam Smith's translation *First on the Rope* was reviewed in the same issue.

produce anything really first class without her collaboration. We greatly enjoyed the work and had the satisfaction of seeing our translation become a best seller – a rather wry satisfaction since we were working for a fee and not a royalty.

In 1953, with the spoils of Annapurna, I determined to make up for having missed the previous season. (1968, 130-131)

This passage presents many features that will sound familiar to any translator studies scholar. Firstly, we can see the very common complaint related to the disappointment of working for a fee and not having extra benefits related to the success of a translation. From the perspective of the history of women translators, we can see that here the collaborative network is established also to support each other with more “homely” tasks such as taking care of children and dealing with widowhood: translation was an occupation that women trained in modern languages could embark on when needing to support themselves independently. Moreover, considering the specificity of translators of mountaineering fiction, we can see how the money from the translation was used to subsidise the alpine trip, as confirmed by Nea’s daughter, Denise, in an interview with Jeff Connor (2019). Morin could not always afford to spend the summer in the Alps (see also Adam Smith 1987, 291), and translation secures at least some money to do so. Translation and mountaineering respectively feed each other: we can assume that Morin and Adam Smith had been chosen for their role as translators of mountaineering

literature because of their experience in the mountains and language skills,⁴ and later we can see how the profit coming from these very translations made them able to tackle more mountaineering pursuits. At the same time, translating mountain books informs their climbing: when doing the Grépon in 1951, Morin already knew the difficulties of the sections thanks to the description of the route from Roch's book, which she had translated two years prior (1968, 125). After presenting their translatorial partnership, Morin moves to describe their alpine one, which, interestingly, is financially made possible by the first: "To celebrate our collaboration over *Annapurna* Janet and I decided to treat ourselves to a first-class climb with a guide" (136). In more than one passage, Morin states her admiration and respect for Adam Smith's climbing skills (145-147), and it is thus not surprising that she chose Adam Smith as her climbing partner.

After the dolomites [...] Micheline and I joined Janet Roberts [Adam Smith] in the Dauphiné. The three of us and Guy [...] decided to try for the traverse of the Meije which neither Janet nor Guy had done. Guy would climb with Micheline, and Janet and I would make a *cordée féminine* – probably the first British women's party to traverse

⁴ On this note, it should also be remarked that Janet Adam Smith used to laugh at mountaineering books translated by non-climbers, and made sure to include a glossary to help her readers with technical vocabulary. A glossary is also included in Morin's *A Woman's Reach*, and in all their collaborative translations.

this peak – twenty-five years almost to the day after the original *cordée féminine*. (1968, 194)

Adam Smith would later have the opportunity to contribute her part of the story, writing the obituary for Morin in the *Alpine Journal*, where she confessed that “it was a privilege to climb with Nea” (1987, 292), and recalled their “very happy partnership”.

Nea had already translated two French climbing books when she was asked to undertake Maurice Herzog’s *Annapurna*. She invited me to collaborate – and for me that was the beginning of a very happy partnership in further translations (Bernard Pierre’s *Nun Kun* book, and *Gervasutti’s Climbs*) and on the hills. With some of our *Annapurna* fee we took Bernard Perren for the Schalligrat of the Weisshorn (1953), the most entirely enjoyable *grande course* I have ever made. [...] And in 1958 she led me over the Meije – the first British feminine party – 25 years after the *cordée féminine* of 1933. (1987, 292)

According to Ottogalli-Mazzocavallo and Boutroy’s classification of the history of *cordée féminine* into three phases, Morin and Adam Smith should be located in the initial phase (1921-1959), relying on networks: “Driven by

only a few female mountaineers and ascents, the innovation mainly rested on a local network of friends with strong links on the inside but weak external ones, given their isolation within a mountaineering environment that was predominantly hostile to their actions” (795).⁵ It is important however to highlight that these innovators still gained access to mountaineering through men: their fathers, brothers, and then their husbands (see also Moraldo 2020, 729) and, additionally, their guides. Despite significant progress, the lack of meaningful, widespread, and established female mountaineering networks is still felt today. As highlighted by Hilary Brown, when studying women translators, we should also consider, in addition to their gender, other aspects of their biographies that contribute to the complexities of their experience (2018, 41). In this case, class is an important consideration (as is race), which allowed the pair to access mountaineering; as remarked by Williams (1973, 106) and Moraldo (2013, 3), women climbers belonged to upper classes in the 1800s and mid-1900s, and often still do.

The importance of the intersection between mountaineering and translation practices is significant as, in both fields, gendered collaboration acquires a special weight. In literature, as Bland and Brown summarise, “it seems that translation has often been regarded as a second-rate literary activity and therefore more suitable for women than, for example, “‘original’ writing” (Bland, Brown 2013, 112). Even if, in her most recent work (2022), Brown

⁵ This is not the only way in which they can be considered innovators within the British climbing community. Nea and Denise were also among the first climbers in Britain to wear “P.A.s”, the new rubber-soled climbing shoes invented by Pierre Allain in Paris. See Morin, 141 and Denise Evans 2023, 18.

herself tried to redress the extent to which gender was actually significant in translation history, she has previously acknowledged how there is still a need to take part in the recovery of information to expand the source base of available studies on women translators of the past (2018, 41). My effort in this article is equally historical, as by bringing to the fore the careers of Morin and Adam Smith I intend to contribute to the developing fields of translator studies (Kaindl, Kolb, Schlager, 2021) and the growing discipline of translation history. Moreover, in regard to their gender as climbers and mountaineers, we must consider that, as summarised by Moraldo: “excellence in mountaineering has always been understood, conceived, and perceived as male” (2020, 727-728). This is particularly true for high-altitude mountaineering (the kind usually recounted in memoirs and reports), as analysed by Sherry Ortern (1999) and Sue Frohlick (1999-2000), who define it as an “hypermasculine environment”. The two activities, as we have seen, are also intertwined, and they reciprocally make each other possible: chosen as translators of mountaineering literature because of their alpine experience (the question of the implication of gender in their selection remains open, as there would have been many more available male translators to consider), they can in turn afford their alpine seasons thanks to their translator fees. Text and mountain nurture and sustain each other, and prove once again the interconnectedness of mountain and literary efforts.

- The *Annapurna* example

And yet, immersed in such a sexist environment, how did Adam Smith and Morin treat its texts? Ottogalli-Mazzocavallo and Boutroy state that the “this social innovation [*cordée féminine*] sheds light on the dual process of domination and emancipation, within the tension between suffering and subverting” (793). In order to discuss how suffering and subverting function in the context of their translations, I take as point of reference Rak’s *False Summit*, and in particular her study of the gender dynamics in the mountaineering memoir *Annapurna* by Maurice Herzog.⁶ Having made a list of those passages and sentences analysed in Rak’s study, based on the 1952 English version by Adam Smith and Morin, I looked for their French counterpart in Herzog 1951.

In most cases the translation preserves the gendered discrimination of the French text, and this should not surprise us: translators are embedded in their historical and social contexts, and as stated by Stefan Baumgarten and Jordi Cornellà-Detrell, “translation is always a child of its own “‘ideological’ time” (2019, 2). Thus, translation preserves the biases and in particular the sexism present in certain passages of the text. In other sections, however, Morin and Adam Smith’s intervention has consequences for the formation of a critical reading of the text. In her analysis of *Annapurna*, for instance, Rak analyses the telling of the final part of the journey down the mountain, when Herzog

⁶ While it has not been possible to establish if Herzog was involved at all in the translation process, it should be noted that he knew Morin and Adam Smith (see for instance Morin 1968, 138). Additionally, it seems that he was happy with their translation: Janet Adam Smith’s copy of the published English volume is signed with the following dedication: ‘A Madame Janet Adam Smith qui a apporté tout son cœur à cette traduction – pour laquelle je lui témoigne toute ma gratitude. Amical souvenir Maurice Herzog’. Courtesy of Adam Roberts.

is severely injured and in tremendous pain. Herzog behaves in what would be considered a traditionally unmanly way: he cries and is afraid. In particular, Rak refers to the portion of the text where, hearing some cracking sounds in the night, Herzog suddenly fears that a crevasse might be opening, and he is “ashamed of these childish fears” (1952, 198).

Herzog also interprets his suffering as childlike because he cries and is comforted, and because he is dependent and shows emotion. Later, Herzog decides that injuries make him more manly, not less. His behaviour is explained as part of a heroic journey, and so it is not sissy-ness, childishness, or womanly behaviour when he lets himself be comforted. The retreat of Herzog results in greater understanding, not ridicule. (Rak 2021, 54)

Rak’s commentary opens our eyes to the layered implications of the English text, and it illuminates the gendered perception it creates in an anglophone audience. From the perspective of translation studies, we can look at the use of a gendered and sexist phrasing in French and how it changes the implications of this discourse. There, Herzog says “j’ai honte de mes inquiétudes de petite fille” (1951, 355), making an explicit, and derogatory, link with girlhood. The reason behind this rendition is not necessarily an emancipatory agenda: in a similar context, “- Bande de petites filles ! crie Lachenal furieux” (1951, 177), Morin and Adam Smith rendered it as

“sissies” (87), which is quoted by Rak as example. Whatever the reason for Morin and Adam Smith’s choices here, in the first instance they toned down the sexism of the text. This, as we have seen, contributes to a certain gendered reading of the book, which could have been different in a critical reading formulated on the French text.

Elsewhere in the book, as is common, some typically French idioms or aspects of the text are either kept in French in the English text (“don’t move, *nom d’une pipe* !”, 1952, 194) or cut (“Mon pauvre vieux, tout est fini pour moi !”, 1951, 359, translated as “oh but, Lionel, everything’s over for me”, 1952, 200). Beyond the discussion of the linguistic levelling of translated texts, this acquires a significant dimension in certain passages, such as the following, where Lachenal and Rébuffat complain about the weights that they are carrying (Rak 2021, 50-51).

“We’re not Sherpas !” said Lachenal bitterly. “We didn’t come to the Himalayas to be beasts of burden”, growled Rébuffat. (1952, 105)

“Nous ne sommes pas des sherpas! s’écrit Lachenal. - Ce n’est pas pour porter que nous sommes venus dans l’Himalaya!” appuie Rébuffat. (1951, 205)

This passage reveals what the analysis of translation can add to our understanding of the text. In particular, both passages show how the French alpinists feel treated like Sherpas and are offended by it. This hierarchy of the text is made even more evident in the English version, with the idiomatic expression “beasts of burden”, which, as highlighted by Rak, carries a considerable weight: “stereotypes about Sherpas (they are beasts of burden or mere servants because they are not white and European) and assumptions about class position (guides are also beasts when they are working at home) were closely imbricated with ideas about masculine strength and sacrifice” and later “the Sherpa men must do the jobs of animals and women” (2021, 51). Differences between the French version and the phrasing of the translation create a difference in analysis in relation to other passages, such as the following, situated after the summit chapter:

His answer proved that this victory was not just one man’s achievement, a matter for personal pride; no – and Terray was the first to understand this – it was victory for us all, a victory for mankind itself. (1952, 164)

Elle témoigne que cette victoire n’est pas la victoire d’un seul, celle de l’orgueil, non, Terray l’a compris le premier, mais la victoire de tous, la victoire de la fraternité humaine. (Herzog 1951, 300)

As it also emerges from this passage, the expedition to Annapurna was a heavily politicised one (see for instance Vivier, Laffage-Cosnier, Guillain, 2020). Rak highlights in particular the symbolic role of the French flag, arguing what follows: “Herzog [...] saw his own experience as a paradigmatic experience of brotherhood with his climbing partner [Lachenal] and with all humankind [...] he not only represents all mountaineers in history, but he becomes a point of symbolic condensation of mankind itself” (2021, 52). The French version of the text confirms this importance and national value. However, if we look at the French, we see that there is also the word *fraternité*, not present in the English text. In this specific context, *fraternité* is far from being a politically neutral lexical choice (being one of the three words of the Republican motto), and other translators might have considered keeping it in the English version as well. By transforming this word into a generic “mankind”, however, Morin and Adam Smith altered the political plan of the mountaineer and of his victory as well: no longer the message of reconquest that Herzog was sending to a France in need of new achievements after the Second World War, but a more universal(ly British) imperial desire. Drawing on these examples, I argue that our understanding of gender (as well as race, class, nationality) in mountaineering writing can be enriched and complicated by looking at the translation process behind it, at its agents and texts, and by accounting for their instability and variation – as unstable and variating gender performances and norms.

- Conclusion

As we have seen, translation studies can enrich existing research on mountaineering non-fiction, by considering how some linguistic features might not belong to previous versions of the text, or they might raise different issues in other languages and translations. Adding the perspective of translation studies to feminist and postcolonial research on mountaineering is important as it allows us to explore another layer of invisibility and agency.

Translation and translators have long been invisible in both feminist and mountaineering studies. Şebnem Susam-Sarajeva pointed out this problem in her analysis of the anglophone reception of Hélène Cixous: “I rather contend that the rarity of retranslations in the case of Cixous confirms the 'deproblematization' of translation (cf. Paker 2002: 128-131) in the Anglo-American feminist critical system. Translations in this system were often seen and presented as unproblematic and 'transparent'” (2006, 156; see also Simon 1996, 85). This also happens in mountaineering studies: for instance, it is quite common to see Messner quoted in English with no reference to Audrey Salkeld’s translation, and bibliographies (unlike Rak’s) that do not acknowledge translators. This article wants to take a first step in redressing the balance, by considering Morin’s and Adam Smith’s combined invisibilities as women, translators, and female mountaineers. As I have shown, we can start a new dialogue with Rak’s reading of the gender dynamics of the English version of *Annapurna* by bringing to the fore the complexities of two women translators who worked on these textualisations

of the masculine environment they were trying to inhabit as mountaineers. Academic scholarship (and feminist in particular) should account for the labour of translators and make visible the women who brought these texts to international audiences. In the case of women translators, we should therefore also ask how they react to textualized male domination, and how they work with it. The implications go beyond the development of feminist criticism: applied consistently, this methodology will contribute to restore the views and subjectivities of all agents and voices who contribute to the making of a mountaineering text, including those of indigenous mountain populations from all over the world.

A step in this direction is also taken by Rak's latest work, on Ang Tharkay's memoir, which is known as the first Sherpa memoir of mountaineering literature. By discussing if and how Tharkay's own voice is present in the text, Rak leads again the field of mountaineering scholarship to ask the most pressing questions of authoriality and mediation. Translation studies needs to become a key element of this debate: in the recent English translation of the French text of *Mémoires d'un sherpa*, the clear effort by Mountaineers Books to reframe Tharkay's role and to invite his relatives to speak and write for the edition coexists with the fact that *Annapurna* is still quoted in English with no reference to Morin and Adam Smith (Tharkay 2016, 139-140, 189). These efforts should then be combined: the commitment to re-establishing and making more widely available different perspectives on the history of mountaineering should go hand in hand with a dedication to investigating the

hidden labour of its translators (and other agents of the literary field). In this respect, literary translator studies and translation history show their key contributions: by considering the role played by agents such as Morin and Adam Smith we see how, despite its surface, mountaineering has not always been a boys' game.

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Anna Saroldi

Merton College

Merton St

Oxford OX1 4JD

United Kingdom

anna.saroldi@merton.ox.ac.uk