Chapter 1
Taking gendered positions in translation theory

Because they are necessarily "defective," all translations are "reputed females." In this neat equation, John Florio (1603) summarizes a heritage of double inferiority. Translators and women have historically been the weaker figures in their respective hierarchies: translators are handmaidens to authors, women inferior to men. This forced partnership finds contemporary resonance in Nicole Ward Jouve's statement that the translator occupies a "(culturally speaking) female position" (Jouve 1991: 47). And Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood's echoing self-definition: "I am a translation because I am a woman" (de Lotbinière-Harwood 1991: 95).

Whether affirmed or denounced, the femininity of translation is a persistent historical trope. "Woman" and "translator" have been relegated to the same position of discursive inferiority. The hierarchical authority of the original over the reproduction is linked with imagery of masculine and feminine; the original is considered the strong generative male, the translation the weaker and derivative female. We are not surprised to learn that the language used to describe translating dips liberally into the vocabulary of sexism, drawing on images of dominance and inferiority, fidelity and libertinage. The most persistent of these expressions, "les belles infidèles," has for centuries encouraged an attitude of suspicion toward the seemly but wayward translation.

Feminist translation theory aims to identify and critique the tangle of concepts which relegates both women and translation to the bottom of the social and literary ladder. To do so, it must investigate the processes through which translation has come to be "feminized," and attempt to trouble the structures of authority which have maintained this association.

What indeed are the processes through which translation maintains and activates gender constructs? To begin to answer this question, I have chosen to move along a number of planes. First, conceptual: how have the sites of translation theory been implicitly gendered and how can this

theory be transformed? This is the task of the introductory chapter, which brings together the work of theorists who seek to disturb the clichéd language used to describe translation, and to replace it with terms which convey the active play of identities within translation practice. They do so through their understanding of the performative, and not simply representational, nature of language. Feminist translation thus reframes the question of "fidelity," which has played like a stultifying refrain through the history of translation. For feminist translation, fidelity is to be directed toward neither the author nor the reader, but toward the writing project–a project in which both writer and translator participate.

Gender difference has been played out not only in the metaphors describing translation, but in actual practices of translation, in the specific social and historical forms through which women have understood and enacted their writing activities. How has this relationship between social and writing roles been articulated (Chapter Two)? On the one hand, translation was the means through which women, beginning in the European Middle Ages, particularly, were able to gain access to the world of letters. Long excluded from the privileges of authorship, women turned to translation as a permissible form of public expression. Translation continued to serve as a kind of writer's apprenticeship for women into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (George Eliot was first known as the "translatress of Strauss," before she was known as a novelist.) In addition, translation was an important part of the social movements in which women participated, such as the fight against slavery. First-wave feminism was closely associated with this movement. Women have translated in order to build communication networks in the service of progressive political agendas and in the creative renewal of literary traditions. The great works of nineteenth-and twentieth-century French, Russian and German modernism were translated in part by women who made translation an expression of their political convictions. They believed, as Madame de Staël had so clearly stated, that movements of literary exchange are vital to the democratic life of any nation.

There is an intrinsic interest in unearthing the neglected intellectual and literary work of women: in bringing to light the strong figure of the "translatress" Aphra Behn, in making heard Madame de Staël's ringing appeal to translation as a cure for the ills of sclerotic literatures, in remembering the remarkable creative accomplishments of Constance Garnett and Jean Starr Untermeyer. The goal of this initial survey, however, is not so much to construct an archive as to suggest the kinds of interrelations upon which such genealogies might be built. Rather than provide a simple listing of women translators, this overview seeks to

highlight a number of moments when translation became a strong mode of expression for women. These moments show to what extent the role of the translator meshes with social values, and how positions in the social hierarchy are reflected in the literary field.

"The location and organization of difference are crucial to a culture's self-representation and its distribution of power," observes Mary Poovey (Poovey 1988:199). A mapping of some of the points of interdependence between the literary and social fields illustrates indeed how differences are "organized" through various levels of society. One particularly striking example of such literary and social imbrication is the way translation offered itself as a means of expression for women during the English Renaissance, when the world of letters was otherwise closed to them. Women were encouraged to translate religious texts when they were forbidden from undertaking any other kind of public writing activity. Women were able to use this very limited point of entry for significant ends (Krontiris 1992). This example highlights the way in which the social values of writing roles are intensely contextual, expressing the very specific lines of tension which traverse gendered positions at a given moment.

In what ways have women interpreted their role as translators? Feelings of aggressive rivalry or affectionate fusion have often been evoked to describe the closeness which translators feel for the texts they are working on–and, by extension, their authors. These feelings can be exacerbated when differences of gender are also involved, and when the translation work involves contact between the two writers. While some feminist translators have suggested that they might best deal with the discomforts of a negative legacy by ensuring that women's texts are translated only by women translators, men's by men, this solution could not be a long-term one.[1] As Lori Chamberlain argues,

> one of the challenges for feminist translators is to move beyond questions of the sex of the author and translator. Working within the conventional hierarchies…the female translator of a female author's text and the male translator of a male author's text will be bound by the same power relations: what must be subverted is the process by which translation complies with gender constructs.
>
> (Chamberlain 1992:72)

The creative discomforts of working relationships have been described with considerable wit by major translators of the twentieth century, Jean Starr Untermeyer, Willa Muir, Helen LowePorter and Suzanne Levine.

Beyond their anecdotal interest, and their value as chronicles of the translation process, these accounts show in what ways gender difference has been present—in sometimes productive, sometimes insidious, ways—in the activity of language transfer.

Two especially important areas involving feminist theory and translation are reserved for special examination in this book. The first is the transatlantic displacement of the writings of the French feminists, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous, into the Anglo-American intellectual world (Chapter Three). This exchange brings into light the network of tensions which are so characteristic of our current intellectual context: the conflictual pulls between internationalist feminist solidarity and national affiliations, the deconstructive drive toward attenuation of authorship and the continuing structures of textual authority, the fading of disciplinary borders and their continual reappearance. The "taming" of French feminist theory in the Anglo-American context came about through the gradual interpenetration of philosophical systems, on the one hand the speculative Continental tradition and on the other the more empirical Anglo-American tradition; this process of accommo-dation was facilitated by various levels and procedures of mediation: commentary, interpretation and translation.

The transatlantic passage of French feminist thought brought about effects of distortion and appropriation. These effects inevitably accompany any important movement of ideas; they result from the diversity of interests and desires which commands the exchange, and from the reformulation and renewals demanded of the target language. The distortion effects of the exchange are perhaps best witnessed in the reception given to the work of Hélène Cixous, which was until recently interpreted on the basis of a very narrow sampling.

The second case study examines contemporary feminist biblical translation (Chapter Four). What is particularly striking about the feminist intervention in this area is that it does not consider itself, nor is it often considered to be, an aberration in a seamless tradition. Rather, feminism appears as yet another social and ideological stance from which Bible translation can be undertaken—a new face in a long line of competing figures going back to the Septuagint. The debates over feminist and inclusive-language interpretations of the Bible enhance our understanding of translation as a substantial interpretative move, at the same time as they draw attention to the conflictual implications of gendered language. While there are strong and powerful voices calling for inclusive-language versions of the Bible (resulting in the 1995 publication by Oxford University Press of an inclusive-language version

of the New Testament and Psalms), there are equally insistent voices—among feminists—calling for more historically anchored versions. As is often the case with the Bible, the interaction between dogma and meaning becomes particularly intense. The long history of the Bible magnifies the importance of translation issues, showing them to be ideologically saturated. In contrast to most other areas of cultural transmission, where translation is so often treated as a mechanical act, biblical scholarship has always recognized that translation carries with it both the dangers and the promises of interpretation.

In both the transportation of French feminism and new projects of Bible translation there is a particularly revealing conjunction of gender and language issues. Consciously feminist principles are invoked in the choice and manner of the texts translated. These connections allow us to see how translation frames and directs ongoing processes of intellectual transmission. The links of mediation are not automatic; they are not imposed or organized by some dispassionate cultural authority. Rather, translators are involved in the materials through which they work; they are fully invested in the process of transfer.

The final chapter explores the forms which an alliance between translation studies and cultural studies could take. Following recent feminist theory, this section projects gender onto the larger canvas of cultural identity issues. Gender is an element of identity and experience which, like other cultural identities, takes form through social consciousness. The work of theorist Gayatri Spivak, in particular, works as a pivot, engaging the practice of translation with post-colonial theory. Like Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak challenges the meaning of translation within a universe of shifting borders, emphasizing the powers of translation to define and articulate otherness. Postcolonial theory, like the writing of women who invoke the transformatory potential of translation (such as Nicole Brossard, Eva Hoffman, Christine Brooke-Rose), questions the borders between nations and languages.

Each of the chapters investigates one area of the interplay between gender and translation, but makes no claim to exhaust this area. That most of the translators discussed wrote in English is a sign of the preliminary nature of this research.[2] While the first and last chapters are largely theoretical in nature, the three middle chapters are intended as case studies which will hopefully provide material useful for continued research in these areas. Whether the complicities between gender and translation become the basis of a consciously transformative project (as in feminist translation theory and practice) or whether they emerge out

of social positions and networks, investigation of the interplay between them leads to unexpected views of otherwise familiar terrain.

A final preliminary remark must be made concerning the meaning of the term gender. Judith Butler opens her attempt to "trouble" the meaning of gender in something of an irreverent tone:

> Contemporary feminist debates over the meanings of gender lead time and again to a certain sense of trouble, as if the in-determinacy of gender might eventually culminate in the failure of feminism. Perhaps trouble need not carry such a negative valence.
>
> (Butler 1990:ix)

She argues that the search for definition should be abandoned in favor of genealogical critique:

> A genealogical critique refuses to search for the origins of gender, the inner truth of female desire, a genuine or authentic sexual identity that repression has kept from view; rather, genealogy investigates the political stakes in designating as an *origin* and *cause* those identity categories that are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin…. Precisely because "female" no longer appears to be a stable notion, its meaning as troubled and unfixed as "woman," and because both terms gain their troubled significations only as relational terms, this inquiry takes as its focus gender and the relational analysis it suggests.
>
> (ibid.: xi)

Gender, therefore, is never a primary identity emerging out of the depths of the self, but a discursive construction enunciated at multiple sites. In the context of this particular study, the historical variability of discourses of gender must be emphasized. Although Aphra Behn and Barbara Godard both use prefaces to draw attention to their identity as women translators, the import of that identity is vastly different in each case. While Behn points to her gender to apologize for her lack of a classical education and her ignorance in scientific matters, Barbara Godard emphasizes the ways in which her understanding of the creative project of the author animates her own work.

The ways in which translators draw attention to their identities as women—or more specifically as feminists—are highlighted here in order to explain the affinities or frustrations they feel in their translation work,

and in order to elucidate texts which themselves exploit the resources of grammatical gender for imaginative or political purposes. Gender is not always a relevant factor in translation. There are no *a priori* characteristics which would make women either more or less competent at their task. Where identity enters into play is the point at which the translator transforms the fact of gender into a social or literary project.[3]

GENDER IN TRANSLATION STUDIES

Some of the most exciting developments in translation studies since the 1980s have been part of what has been called "the cultural turn." The turn to culture implies adding an important dimension to translation studies. Instead of asking the traditional question which has preoccupied translation theorists—"how should we translate, what is a correct translation?"—the emphasis is placed on a descriptive approach: "what do translations do, how do they circulate in the world and elicit response?" This shift emphasizes the reality of translations as documents which exist materially and move about, add to our store of knowledge, and contribute to ongoing changes in esthetics.

More importantly, it allows us to understand translations as being related in organic ways to other modes of communication, and to see translations as writing practices fully informed by the tensions that traverse all cultural representation. That is, it defines translation as a process of mediation which does not stand above ideology but works through it.

This turn in translation studies prepared the terrain for a fruitful encounter with feminist thought. Feminism has been one of the most potent forms of cultural identity to take on linguistic and social expression over the last decades. *"La liberation des femmes passe par le langage"* was a familiar rallying call of the 1970s: women's liberation must first be a liberation of/from language. Through the work of feminist scholars over the last twenty to thirty years, there has emerged a clear sense of language as a site of contested meanings, as an arena in which subjects test and prove themselves. And so it is hardly surprising that translation studies should be nourished in important ways by feminist thought.

The consequences for translation have been various and decisive. Over the years, the critique of sexism in language has moved from a largely corrective and action-oriented attention to vocabulary (as we see in the work of Louky Bersianik or Mary Daly) to a broader examination of the symbolic power of the feminine in language. Attention has shifted from critical analysis of a single linguistic code (English, French) to the

conceptual terms regulating the intervention of individual and collective subjects within speech and writing.

The alliance between translation studies and feminism therefore emerged out of a common intellectual and institutional context. As fields of inquiry which emerged during the 1970s and gained increasing institutional recognition through the 1980s, translation studies and feminist thought are similarly grounded in the dynamics of a period which gave strong prominence to language. Translation studies have been impelled by many of the concerns central to feminism: the distrust of traditional hierarchies and gendered roles, deep suspicion of rules defining fidelity, and the questioning of universal standards of meaning and value. Both feminism and translation are concerned by the way "secondariness" comes to be defined and canonized; both are tools for a critical understanding of difference as it is represented in language. The most compelling questions for both fields remain: how are social, sexual and historical differences expressed in language and how can these differences be transferred across languages? What kinds of fidelities are expected of women and translators–in relation to the more powerful terms of their respective hierarchies?

For these fields of study, language intervenes actively in the creation of meaning. Like other forms of representation, language does not simply "mirror" reality; it contributes to it. Translation, we know, refers to a process of interlinguistic transfer. Translators communicate, re-write, manipulate a text in order to make it available to a second language public. Thus they can use language as cultural intervention, as part of an effort to alter expressions of domination, whether at the level of concepts, of syntax or of terminology.

ENGENDERED THEORY

> "Le traducteur subit, soumis, subjugue. Femelle, même s'il est parfois amazone. Pris, prisonnier, enferré, enserré. Ne s'appartient plus. Aliené, absorbé, ravi et dépossédé de sa parole propre. Parole de l'autre, l'auteur, la hauteur. Le traducteur est inférieur, postérieur, postsynchronisé. Le traducteur rend en son langage l'auteur publiable, mais il est oubliable.
>
> (Albert Bensoussan, quoted in Levine 1991:183)

Although presented in humorous mode, as a parody of the wordplay fashionable in French writing during the 1970s, Albert Bensoussan's

description of the translator as female is consonant with a long tradition. Translation is often explained in metaphorical terms, some figures–including the sexist tropes mentioned earlier (p. 1)—assuming extraordinary longevity. Two other popular figures are the "property" and the "clothing" metaphors. Translation is consistently represented as an unequal struggle for authority over the text: the author is the landlord, the translator simply a tenant. Even more persistent is the clothing metaphor, which presents the foreign author as now clothed in new garb (Woodsworth 1986).

Recent discussions of the use of metaphors to describe translation point to the real hermeneutical value of metaphor. It is suggested that there is something about the translating experience that calls for metaphorical language (D'hulst 1992). If this is indeed the case, we can wonder at the persistence of sexist language to describe translation.[4] If metaphor is to be considered proto-theoretical language, then the language of translation theory has indeed been profoundly marked by gender.

John Florio's reference to translations as "female" has spawned a rich progeny. In numerous prefaces and critical texts, including work as recent as George Steiner's *After Babel* (1975), the relation between author and translator, original and translation, is frequently sexualized. Lori Chamberlain suggests that these figures point to a frustrated struggle for mastery of meaning and for paternity rights over the bastard product of interlinguistic transfer. As Lori Chamberlain's discussion makes clear, the metaphorics of translation are a symptom of larger issues of Western culture and in particular of the anxieties involved in establishing and maintaining borders.

> What proclaims itself to be an aesthetic problem is represented in terms of sex, family, and the state, and what is consistently at issue is power… I would argue that the reason translation is so overcoded, so overregulated, is that it threatens to erase the difference between production and reproduction which is essential to the establishment of power.
>
> (Chamberlain 1992:66)

The historical continuity of gendered theorizing of translation is remarkable. Chamberlain refers to a particularly violent image taken from Deuteronomy 21:12–14 and used by Thomas Drant, the sixteenth-century English translator of Horace, to explain his method of translating the satirist. He refers to God's command to the Israelites to shave the heads and pare the nails of captive women they wish to make their wives

in order to remove all signs of beauty from them. Elizabeth Castelli has pointed out that this reference goes back in fact to Jerome, the father of biblical translation, who makes reference to the same scriptural citation to explain his work with secular texts (Fiorenza 1993:195). This example points to the remarkable continuity of the Western tradition of gendered theorizing of translation.

The extraordinarily long career of the term "Les belles infidèles" is another case in point. Introduced by the French rhetorician Ménage (1613–1692), the adage declares that, like women, translations must be either beautiful or faithful. Its success is due in some measure to the way it positions fidelity as the opposite of beauty, ethics as the opposite of elegance, the drudgery of moral obligation as incompatible with stylistic (or marital) felicity. It is certainly not fortuitous that the expression was coined at a time when translations were considered as the principal means by which French was to be legitimated as a national language. The strategy used by Nicolas Perrot d'Ablancourt and his school of translators (which was known as the School of "Les belles infidèles") was in fact a notoriously blatant policy of infidelity. He and his fellow-translators, many of them members of the Académie française, sought to enhance the prestige of French literature by providing translations of the Ancients, yet they wished at the same time to consolidate the norms of elegance of a nascent prose style (Zuber 1995; Cary 1963). Their program called therefore for systematically unfaithful translations. This stylistic infidelity has become something of a permanent feature of the French tradition of translation, according to Antoine Berman (Berman 1992). But correcting this cultural bias involves a reconceptualization of the relation between word and meaning, letter and spirit; it also involves a revaluation of the power of the receiving culture to mold imported works according to its own image.

The conflict between beauty and infidelity, between letter and spirit, reaches far back into the memory of Western culture. The terms which we use to divide production from reproduction include some of the most fundamental concepts of our philosophical vocabulary. Derrida has shown how these recurrent oppositions stem from a complicity between gender conceptions and writing, mimesis and fidelity. The conventional view of translation supposes an active original and a passive translation, creation followed by a passive act of transmission. But what if writing and translation are understood as interdependent, each bound to the other in the recognition that representation is always an active process, that the original is also at a distance from its originating intention, that there is never a total presence of the speaking subject in discourse (Derrida 1979)?

If there is no primary meaning to be discovered, if translation is not in thrall to a deep and distant truth, where is fidelity to be grounded? It is appropriate that "fidelity," this vexed and much-disputed term in the history of translation, should also have strong resonances in the history of gender politics. The crisis in marriage and the crisis in translation are identical, if considered from the point of view of their initial contract, according to Barbara Johnson.

> For while both translators and spouses were once bound by contracts to love, honor, and obey, and while both inevitably betray, the current questioning of the possibility and desirability of conscious mastery makes that contract seem deluded and exploitative from the start.
>
> (Johnson 1985:143)

Absolute fidelity, in this age of electronic reproduction, is reserved to the technologies of the photocopier and the sound system-although even these technologies are constantly confronted with the disappearing horizon of the absolute. When the indeterminations of consciousness are involved, can there be any standard by which fidelity is measured?

FIDELITY RECONSTRUED

The poverty of our conventional understanding of fidelity lies in its reliance on numerous sets of rigid binary oppositions which reciprocally validate one another. Translation is considered to be an act of reproduction, through which the meaning of a text is transferred from one language to another. Each polar element in the translating process is construed as an absolute, and meaning is transposed from one pole to the other. But the fixity implied in the oppositions between languages, between original/copy, author/translator, and, by analogy, male/female, cannot be absolute; these terms are rather to be placed on a continuum where each can be considered in relative terms. As Susan Bassnett points out, contemporary translation studies are struggling against "the old binary concept of translation [which] saw original and translated text as two poles," seeking in contrast to conceptualize translation as a dynamic activity fully engaged with cultural systems (Bassnett 1992:66). Barbara Godard emphasizes the ways in which this view of translation eliminates "cultural traces and self-reflexive elements," depriving the translated text of its "foundation in events." "The translator is understood to be a servant, an invisible hand mechanically turning the word of one language into

another" (Godard 1990:91). It is by destroying the absolutes of polarity that we can advance in our understanding of social and literary relations. Attention must shift to those areas of identity where the indeterminate comes into play. Equivalence in translation, as contemporary translation theory emphasizes, cannot be a one-to-one proposition. The process of translation must be seen as a fluid production of meaning, similar to other kinds of writing. The hierarchy of writing roles, like gender identities, is increasingly to be recognized as mobile and performative. The interstitial now becomes the focus of investigation, the polarized extremes abandoned.

Because it is an activity which has long been theorized in terms of a hierarchy of gendered positions, the rethinking of translation will necessarily upset traditional vocabularies of domination. In particular, the rethinking of translation involves a widening of the definition of the translating subject. Who translates? Fidelity can only be understood if we take a new look at the identity of translating subjects and their enlarged area of responsibility as signatories of "doubly authored" documents. At the same time, a whole nexus of assumptions around issues of authority and agency come to be challenged. When meaning is no longer a hidden truth to be "discovered," but a set of discursive conditions to be "re-created," the work of the translator acquires added dimensions.

It is in the context of the need for new vocabularies to describe translation that Barbara Godard argues for women "writing their way into subjective agency" through a poetics of identity which might be called "transformance" (Godard 1990:89, 90). Feminist writing and translation meet in their common desire to foreground female subjectivity in the production of meaning. "The feminist translator, affirming her critical difference, her delight in interminable re-reading and re-writing, flaunts the signs of her manipulation of the text. *Womanhandling* the text in translation would involve the replacement of the modest-self-effacing translator. […]Feminist discourse presents transformation as performance as a model for translation…. This is at odds with the long dominant theory of translation as equivalence grounded in a poetics of transparence" (ibid.: 91). Susan Bassnett argues for an "orgasmic" theory of translation, the result of "elements [that] are fused into a new whole in an encounter that is mutual, pleasurable and respectful" (Bassnett l992: 72).

Faced with texts which themselves challenge the way in which meaning is made, the translator is increasingly aware of her role in *determining* meaning, and of her responsibility in rendering it. Susanne

de Lotbinière-Harwood (1991) and Suzanne Jill Levine (1991), in different ways, explain how their creative inter-action with the work will provoke the emergence of new meanings. De Lotbinière-Harwood puts special emphasis on re-gendering the English language, in response to the provocative gender-consciousness of French-language writers; Levine is attentive to the marks which a conflictual "closelaboration" with text, author or cultural context will leave in the translation.

AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

Feminist translation has to do with issues of authority. Who is to determine when the magic moment of equivalence has been reached? Take the following often cited example, from a dramatic work produced by a group of feminist writers in Quebec in 1976: *"Ce soir,j'entre dans l'histoire sans relever ma jupe"* (von Flotow 1991: 69). A literal translation would be something like: "this evening I'm entering history without pulling up my skirt." The feminist translator Linda Gaboriau ventured the much stronger: "this evening, I'm entering history without opening my legs" (von Flotow 1991: 69). Has equivalence been attained?

Luise von Flotow's useful discussion of feminist translation opens with this example, emphasizing the fact that the cultural and social context of feminism has had much to do with the vigor and boldness of translation by women in Quebec and English Canada. Von Flotow names and describes three practices of feminist translation: supplementing, prefacing and footnoting, and "hijacking."

Supplementing, which compensates for the differences between languages, calls for interventionist moves by the translator. Von Flotow offers the example of Barbara Godard's translation (1983) of *L'Amèr,* a novel by Nicole Brossard. *"Amèr"* contains at least three terms: *mère* (mother), *mer* (sea) and *amer* (bitter). Godard's method of conveying the untranslatable wordplay of the title combines three terms: "The Sea Our Mother" and "Sea (S)mothers and (S)our Mothers" in a graphic play around a large "S": "The" standing to the left, "e," "our" and "mothers" vertically lined up on the right, forming "These Our Mothers" or "These Sour Smothers."

Supplementing, the equivalent of what some theorists call compensation, has always been recognized as a legitimate process of translation. However, in a cultural context like ours, where the predominant mode of translation is transparent and fluent, the foregrounding of such techniques can begin to look like textual exhibitionism.

Prefacing and footnoting, remarks von Flotow, have practically become routine in feminist translation. She points again to the work of Barbara Godard, this time to describe the very didactic role of her prefaces which both explain the intentions of the original text and outline her own translation strategies. Prefaces and footnotes draw attention to the translation process, at the same time as they flesh out the portrait of the intended reader.

Von Flotow's third technique, "hijacking," touches on the more controversial and problematic aspects of translation. She refers to the appropriation of a text whose intentions are not necessarily feminist by the feminist translator. Her example is the feminizing translation of Lise Gauvin's *Lettres d'une autre* by Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood. The author used the generic masculine in her text; the translator "corrects" the language, avoiding male generic terms where they appear in French and using *"Québecois-e-s"* where the original was happy with *"Québecois"* in all cases. While it is known that the author has feminist sympathies and worked in collaboration with the translator, Harwood explains in her preface that "My translation practice is a political activity aimed at making language speak for women. So my signature on a translation means: this translation has used every translation strategy to make the feminine visible in language" (Gauvin 1989:9).

What is remarkable about this explanation is that the signature of the translator is given authority equivalent to that of authorship. As Barbara Godard has remarked, the affirmation of signature in this case is not a deconstructive move, but an attempt to reinstate a position of mastery. De Lotbinière-Harwood's autobiographical style of writing, her emphasis on the signature as the "fixing of a singular, embodied female subject," does suggest an appeal to "personal" rather than "discursive" positioning (Godard 1995b: 80). While we know, in this particular case, that the author seems to have been willing to abdicate her textual authority in favor of the translator's more radical stance toward language, one could wonder what the consequences of such a gesture might be in other circumstances. What would be the result of a translation which blatantly redirected the intention of the original text, consciously contravening its intentions?

We might recall here other cases where translation involves similar implications of deviance. In the emergence of new national literary forms, translation can be a means of skewing historical relations of authority. For instance, the *Fables* of Lafontaine were translated into Haitian creole in the nineteenth century; Shakespeare was clothed in the relaxed idioms of Quebec anglicized urban slang during the twentieth

(Brisset 1990). This parodization of elevated forms of writing becomes an instrument of cultural redress. The reader is provoked, forced to measure the distance between the conventional language of prestige and nascent forms of literary language.

Another mode of transgressive reappropriation was deployed by the modernist writers of Brazil. Their movement of "cultural anthropophagy" used translation to perform practices of trans-textualization. The political aims of the work of the de Campos brothers, Augusto and Haroldo, are transparent. They translate only the authors they believe to have revolutionized poetic form, including Pound and Joyce, in an attempt to radicalize the Brazilian literary idiom. Their techniques of "transtextualization" involve a displacing of European literary themes into the vocabulary of Brazilian modernism. This dethroning of literary icons, their displacement from high to low forms, involves a consciously transgressive impulse (Vieira 1994).

These somewhat unorthodox forms of language transfer remind us that literary exchanges can be undertaken in the service of a wide range of cultural agendas. Some of these practices might be understood as "hijacking" in the sense in which Luise von Flotow introduces it. However, the term hardly seems appropriate to describe most practices of feminist translation as they have been recently developed. Everything in these practices seems to point to a willful collusion and cooperation between text, author and translator. Author and translator are operating in a frame of contemporaneity, their work engaging in a dialogue of reciprocal influence. Feminist translation implies extending and developing the intention of the original text, not deforming it. That is why the most successful examples of such practices are to be found in an appropriate match between text and translating project.

CHALLENGING GRAMMATICAL GENDER

Where the feminist project of translation finds its most felicitous applications is in regard to texts which are themselves innovative writing practices. This is the case particularly of the language-centered texts of French feminist writers like Hélène Cixous, and of Nicole Brossard, France Théoret, Madeleine Gagnon and Louky Bersianik in Quebec.

The novel *L'Eugélionne* (1976) by Louky Bersianik gives rise to a particularly illuminating match between writing and translation strategies. The novel uses satire, parody and allegory in its examination and denunciation of the misogyny of our society and its languages (Scott 1984:2). It is in fact the story of a feminist "Evangelist," a messenger

carrying news of the overwhelming influence of patriarchy within the institutions and traditions of the Western world. It is a humorous but biting investigation into the sexist nature of human "knowledge," including the theories of a man designated as Saint Sigmund. A major part of the book deals with how language, that is the French language, plays a role in the oppression of women. Bersianik insists on the numerous ways in which language institutes and maintains social inequalities, and acts as a legitimating tool of patriarchal authority.

> Bersianik writes, in effect, to undo a linguistic system and a western philosophical tradition in which women have been continually subdued and silenced by patriarchal law and by a male-oriented grammar and lexicon that have alienated them from their own history, from meaningful patterns of self-expression, and, ultimately, from one another.
>
> (Gould l990:156)

Though Bersianik's critique is all-embracing, and, like Mary Daly's similarly ambitious attacks on language, invokes the phallo centrism of all Western institutions including the Church, she returns persistently to the question of language. Two aspects of language are especially emphasized: naming strategies and grammatical gender-marking. Both involve dilemmas for translation, because they use language-specific devices to foreground these grammatical features of French language usage.

The term gender, usually attributed to Protagoras (Cameron 1992:89), is derived from a term meaning class or kind and referred to the division of Greek nouns into masculine, feminine and neuter. Grammatical gender means that nouns are placed in classes not according to their meaning but according to their form. This form determines the way the word will behave grammatically as regards the agreement of adjectives, articles and pronouns. Grammatical gender is a formal property and has nothing to do with meaning.

Latin and Greek had three genders (as does modern German); there are also languages with two (French) and languages which have a much larger set (Bantu languages) (ibid.: 90). English has "natural" gender rather than grammatical gender. This means that gender is attributed not by form but by meaning.

Gender is not normally considered a "significant" element of language for translation. Because grammatical categories belong to the structural obligations of a language, they are, like the other elements which

constitute the mechanics of a language, meaningless. Roman Jakobson shows, however, that grammatical gender can be invested with meaning in certain cases, as when language is turned away from its instrumental or communicative functions and used in poetry and mythology. Grammatical gender then takes on symbolic meaning, as when the poet wishes to emphasize the mythological origins and gendered identities of the terms for the days of the week, the terms for night and day, or sin and death (Jakobson 1959). In these cases, grammatical gender must be taken into consideration for translation.

While grammarians have insisted on gender-marking in language as purely conventional, feminist theoreticians follow Jakobson in re-investing gender-markers with meaning. The meaning which they wish to make manifest is both poetic and, especially, ideological. They wish to show in what ways gender differences serve as the unquestioned foundations of our cultural life.

That gender differences in language exercise a powerful imaginary role, even in English which has only "natural" and not "grammatical" gender, is clear in the following "thought experiment" reported by Deborah Cameron. Participants were presented with the following pairs of words: knife/fork; Ford/Chevrolet; salt/ pepper; vanilla/chocolate; they were asked which word of each pair was masculine and which was feminine.

> Strangely enough, people were able to perform this bizarre task without difficulty. Even more strangely, there was near total agreement on the "right" classification. Knife, Ford, pepper and chocolate were masculine, while fork, Chevrolet, salt and vanilla were feminine. This phenomenon is called "metaphorical gender."
>
> (Cameron 1992:82)

The experiment seems to indicate "that the concepts 'masculine' and 'feminine' are infinitely detachable from anything having to do with 'real' sexual difference" (ibid.:82). They are associated with corresponding contrasts such as strong/weak, active/passive. It shows also that gender is relational, and is in fact an extension of the binary, oppositional structure that pervades all our thinking.

In fact we have been taught to consider as oppositional terms which are really aspects of a continuum, like old and young.

These considerations emphasize that, despite the absence of a strict version of grammatical gender, gender distinctions continue to operate massively through the English language. Indeed, they mark the work of

grammarians who present the masculine as an "unmarked" form, the simple form of the word, a form which can be used generically, and with relative neutrality of meaning (ibid.:97). Componential analysis, an influential approach to the understanding of vocabulary, builds this bias into its very methodology. And examples from common usage show that even when an English pronoun is theoretically neutral, it can carry an implicit gender charge. Formulations like "members of Parliament and their wives" or "the Greenlanders often swap wives" (Scott 1984:13) show that the apparent gender neutrality of English is constantly belied by the identification of the species (mankind) with the male of the species. The absence of "grammatical" gender in English seems to be adequately compensated for by the presence of "psychological" or "metaphorical" gender.

These considerations form the basis for Howard Scott's work in translating the *Euguélionne's* critique of gendered language from the French. Scott explains that his role as a translator of the book was not to provide an erudite *explanation* of sexism in the French language for the English-speaking reader, but to provide an equivalent political message. Bersianik's call for "voluntarist action" on language, for conscious manipulation of the linguistic code to reflect the realities of gender, is to be given equal—but different—actualization in English.

How is this to be done? The Académie française, according to Bersianik, insists on the rule of the predominance of the masculine over the feminine. The grammatical consequence of accepting the masculine as the norm is the humiliating fact that a sentence such as "Three hundred women and one (male) cat walked down the street" would have to be put in the grammatical masculine. After all, the rule says that the masculine takes precedence over the feminine. While the French women in Bersianik's novel picket the Académie française asking for a change to put an end to the humiliating and illogical superiority of the masculine, Scott's English-speaking picketers address themselves to the "Guardians of Grammar," there being no Academy in Anglo-Saxon culture, norms being maintained nonetheless by grammarians, editors, teachers and other assorted pedants (Scott 1984:26). They ask why it is logical to say "Everyone please take off his boots," when there are 300 women and 1 man in the room (ibid.:112)? They propose that permission be granted for the use of the indefinite "their," even in the singular. This would allow the request to be rephrased as "Everyone please take off their boots." Would this not be a more just and logical formulation? They ask further: "Why does a MASTER wield authority, while a MISTRESS waits

patiently for her lover and master to come to her?" "Why are CHEFS male, while most of the GOOKS on this planet are women"? and so on.

In another passage of the book, the question of abortion is raised. The tormenters of a woman who has dared to seek abortion wish to emphasize the responsibility of women as criminals. They say, there-fore, "Le ou la coupable doit être punie," emphasizing the female identity of the guilty person and overturning the rule which would have made the noun masculine. In his translation, Howard Scott does the same in English when he adds the unexpected pronoun "she": "The guilty one must be punished…whether she's a man or a woman!" (ibid.:35).

While it might have been assumed that Bersianik's language-specific critique of male institutional authority would have been untranslatable, Howard Scott shows that the persistence of "natural" gender in English makes many of Bersianik's critiques equally pertinent in that language. Sometimes the very ease of translation is proof of the way all Western languages are saturated with sexism. In *L'Euguélionne,* there is a long alphabetical listing of hundreds of negative epithets referring to women, which is rather easily replaced by an equally long list of negative epithets in English: "Adulteress, Amazon, Babe, Bag, Battle-ax, Bird, Bitch, Broad, Bunny, etc." (ibid.: 81–88). As a work of fiction in which humor is combined with didacticism, as an incisive and heady cry of denunciation emerging out of the first years of second-wave feminism, the novel gathers strength in this act of creative conversion.

Scott's emphasis on the persistence of gender-marking in English is echoed by Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood's insistence that "We need to *resex* language" (de Lotbinière-Harwood 1991:117). French texts by Bersianik and Michele Causse (1989) have given Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood the opportunity to develop a translation practice which "aims to make the feminine visible in language so that women are seen and heard in the world." This belies the apparent neutrality of English. English, too, is a "'he/man' language, that is, it too uses the masculine pronoun 'he' and generic 'man' as universal signifiers" (ibid.:112). When Louky Bersianik asks "Quel est le féminin de garçon? C'est garce!" (literally, "What is the feminine of boy? It's slut!" *Garce* is not really the feminine form of *garçon* but a derogatory term meaning slut or whore), Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood translates: "What's the feminine of dog? It's bitch" (ibid.:118).

The French lesbian writer Michele Causse feminizes words which are not normally feminized in French, writing "Nulle ne l'ignore, tout est langage" (playing on the expression "Nul n'est censé ignorer la loi" or "Ignorance of the law is no excuse") or "Une muette parle a un sourd"

(de Lotbinière-Harwood 1991:123–124). Adaptations cannot be made here, short of inventing entirely new grammatical terms in English. De Lotbinière-Harwood came up with an original solution: to use a bold e in the English to indicate the foregrounding of gender in French. Thus: "No one ignores [is ignorant of] the fact that everything is language" and "A mute one speaks to a deaf one" (ibid.:123–134). Elsewhere Harwood draws attention to the message of the text through capitalization: "HuMan Rights" (ibid.:125).

And in her translations of Nicole Brossard's *Le Desert mauve (Mauve Desert),* de Lotbinière-Harwood seeks out every expression of gender-marking. Responding to Brossard's own gender-marking of the text, she constantly sought new ways of transferring these gender-markings to English:

> My translation spells "author": "auther," as a way of rendering the feminized *auteure* pioneered and widely used by Quebec feminists; and renders the beautiful *amante,* lesbian lover, by "shelove." To further eroticize the foreign tongue, "dawn," a feminine noun in French, is referred to as "she" in the sentence: "Dawn attracts, this is certain, dawn fascinates. She is at the edge of night, at the edge of the soul a quiet certitude, an appeasement of the eyes smitten with changes and utopias."… By being gender-specific about the characters' interpersonal relations in a way English grammar does not normally allow, these feminization strategies make it possible for target-language readers to identify the lesbian in the text.
>
> (de Lotbinière-Harwood 1995:162)

TRANSLATING THE SIGNIFIER: NICOLE BROSSARD AND BARBARA GODARD

The examples discussed from the translation work of Howard Scott and Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood focus on grammatical gender and naming. Other practices of language-centered writing by feminists use the techniques and perceptions of modernism and post-modernism to investigate the very processes through which meaning comes to be. One of the most important contemporary feminist writers to investigate these processes of meaning creation is Nicole Brossard, a Quebec feminist writer who has achieved an international reputation. "More so than any other writer in Quebec, Brossard has attentively mapped the crucial

points of intersection and divergence between literary modernity and contemporary feminist practices of writing and reading" (Gould 1990: 53). Her writing is important here because of its powerful avant-garde techniques, which have engaged the theory and practice of feminist translators, notably Barbara Godard.

It is appropriate that particular attention be given here to Barbara Godard as the translator of Brossard. Godard's search for innovative modes through which the translator's position can be spoken make her work central to any formulation of feminist translation. This work has been developed through translations, prefaces, theoretical articles and, most recently, in the form of a translator's diary.

In addition, the complicity between avant-garde women's writing and translation was articulated by Godard in the pages of the journal *Tessera,* a Canadian periodical linking English-and French-speaking feminists (see Godard 1994). The journal was in fact founded to nourish dialogue between women writers and theorists from English Canada (in particular the West Coast and the Toronto regions) and from Quebec. Contrary to what might be expected, such literary exchange is not frequent in Canada, where English-and French-language creative writing is usually carried on within entirely separate institutions and traditions. The exchange also differed from other kinds of more clearly symbolic translation projects within Canada. The editors of *Tessera* were working with a strong sense of translation as creative interchange, as work which would carry across ideas and forms, extending into new writing projects. This intercultural challenging of boundaries accompanied a desire to break down the isolation of academic language, to put the accent on innovative forms, and to insist on the speaking subject. Godard's translation work thus ties into the Canadian context of cultural interchange which imposes necessary attention to the unequal valences of the French and English languages.

To permit an understanding of some of the complexities of interplay between Nicole Brossard's writing, in particular *Picture Theory,* and the translation process, it would be useful to begin with some excerpts from Barbara Godard's translation diary (Godard 1995a). In this diary, Godard records the stages of her evolving relationship to the ideas and the forms of the text.

> Would keeping a record of the translation process be one way to explore the interdiscursive production of meaning that is translation? The idea came to me in March when I was translating a poem of Lola Tostevin's… I was having trouble with the

> translation–difficulties involving the word play. The plan had been to write a text on the translation of the poem. Both re/writings came together: the essay on the process and the translation itself.
>
> (Godard 1995a:69)

Godard pursues this double path of process and translation on the one hand by reading the texts which are cited in Brossard's novel, texts by Wittgenstein, Gertrude Stein, Joyce, Djuna Barnes, etc., and on the other by discussing specific translation problems-questions of rhythm and repetition being uppermost in *Picture Theory*. By mapping out the theoretical sources, and relating a variety of other serendipitous readings and encounters to the themes of the book, Godard reconstructs to some extent the thought processes behind the writing. Many disparate influences come to shed light on the workings of the text: Bakhtin on double-voicedness and the language clashes of the novel, Derrida on the mime of the masquerading subject, François Jacob on the actual and the virtual, quantum theory for its model of undecidability and parallax. Godard's tracking of her own intellectual footsteps, her attentiveness to the workings of her own mind, restores the reality of translation as a truly associative process, an ongoing appeal to memory and to a private thesaurus, a pingpong of potentially infinite rebounds.

The multiple dimensions of the translation process are part of what Godard understands as the "metonymic or contingent" nature of translation. According to this theory, translation is not a "carrying across, but a reworking of meaning" (Godard 1995a:73). Translation is not a simple transfer, but the continuation of a process of meaning creation, the circulation of meaning within a contingent network of texts and social discourses. Keeping a diary becomes therefore a means of providing a record of the "interdiscursive production of meaning" that is translation (ibid.:2). The writing of Nicole Brossard offers a particularly rich terrain for this mapping of cross-influences, creating many points of entry for the translator.

This attentiveness to the interdiscursive dimensions of writing, the need to restore the text to its social and intellectual context, does not prevent Godard from also scrutinizing the surface of the text: verb forms, wordplay, rhythm.

> Each word here is important in itself yet is only one instance in the web of prose. Each word, each group of words, is used again and again with new words, the words making new contexts for the word, the phrase. These are the "sonorous liaisons" confounding

> two words, linking one sound after another in the spiral which turns around and around on itself. "A rhythm is a rhythm is a rhythm," Brossard echoes Stein, reading, writing, "in the heart of a suffering that was not mine in the sentences I prolong-"… Since the words construct reality, each word needs to be carefully constructed in itself, carefully reconstructed in translation, to build up the sonorous as well as syntactic, semantic chains for wor(l)ding.
>
> (Godard 1995a:72)

Repetition is one of the problems she finds most vexing: how to remember the words chosen to translate a word which is ritually repeated in the original, and therefore must be repeated in the translation? The diary form echoes, in turn, the rhythms of the translator's work as her moods change from the tedium of the forced effort of the daily task to the exhilaration of sudden insight. The ragged shapelessness of the diary emphasizes the ongoing movement of writing and translation as "arts of approach":

> No final version of the text is ever realizable. There are only approximations to be actualized within the conditions of different enunciative exchanges. As such, translation is concerned not with "target languages" and the conditions of "arrival" but with the ways of ordering relations between languages and cultures. Translation is an art of approach.
>
> (ibid.:81)

In her preface to *Picture Theory,* (Brossard 1991), Godard exposes the difficulty of translating a text which unfolds at the intersection of science, philosophy and postmodernism, a text held together not by narrative but by networks of signifiers, constantly redeveloped in new combinations. *Picture Theory,* published in 1982, is an ambitious synthesis of Brossard's innovative work until that point, a body of work comprising more than fifteen volumes of poetry and experimental prose. Karen Gould describes this work as a "probing meditation on the invisibility of women's desire made visible through fiction, on the unrepresentable *extase* of a lesbian love scene rendered emotionally 'real' through abstraction" (Gould 1990:86). Godard places *Picture Theory* in the tradition of the "great modernist books of the night," especially Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* (Godard 1991:7). And yet it is a book about light, about perception, a fiction of science, developing the narrative function

as hologram. The novel's first chapter involves four attempts to rewrite a scene of lesbian love, a scene whose profoundly revelatory truth is impossible to render into language. The text then moves between memory and the scene of writing, the luminous scenes of pleasure and the sites of urban obligation. There is constant interplay throughout the text of emotional intensity and the possibility for abstraction, the unbridgeable gap between the ecstatic moments of lived experience and the possibility for thought and abstraction which they release. Between these zones is the illusory surface: skin, screen. In this reframing of the relations between "reality" and "words," *Picture Theory* foregrounds a theory of the signifier as a "network of sliding signs," a theory deploying the "surrealist 'drift' of the sign" (ibid.:10).

The challenge of translating *Picture Theory* is to orchestrate the repeated themes and developments in the same way as is done in the original, reactivating fragments and themes. Godard emphasizes the "transferential process" of translation, the reading subject becoming the writing subject. Like the author, the translator uses disjunctive strategies, breaking with a unified language. For example, Brossard uses English words in her French text in order to disrupt the code and to enhance the power of certain terms. Godard indicates the passages which Brossard wrote in English in boldface. Elsewhere, she introduces French into her own text, this time with-out italics or boldface, in order to reproduce Brossard's strategy. The following sentences, for example, are part of the English text: "Habiter rue Laurier dans les bras de Claire Derive, lightly dressed, thinking of writing"; "Le poème hurlait **opening the mind**"; "II neige, rue Laurier, our arms are crossed in such a way that the words we utter resonate from inside our breasts" (Brossard 1991: 128, 153, 144).

The interventionism of the translator is by no means gratuitous but solicited and oriented by the text itself. Godard's translation follows the mode of meaning generated by Brossard rather than the strictly surface phenomena which result. These strategies include using graphic modes of representation–in *These Our Mothers,* particularly, where a single French word is translated by two variants *("défaite"* becoming "defeat" or "de facto" (Brossard 1983:17)), and *"mère"* occasionally becomes "m ther" (ibid.:19), and in the recreation of semantic ambiguity in English. *"Pour écrire, rêver est un accessoire"* (21) becomes "Dreaming is an accessory to writ(h)ing" (17). *"Chaque fois que l'espace me manque a l'horizon, la bouche s'entrouvre, la langue trouve l'ouverture"* (26) becomes "Each time I lack space on the her/i/zon, my mouth opens, the tongue finds an opening, (her eye zone)" (22). *"La mère recouvrant la*

mer comme une parfaite synthèse" (29), becomes "(Mère) She covering (mer) sea like a perfect synthesis" (23). Only very occasionally does Godard use footnotes, as in an explanation of the French word *élan,* referring both to a burst of feeling and to a moose, the second meaning being important in Brossard's reference to hunting (81). There is no sense here of the translator's note disturbing the tranquil transparency of the page: Brossard herself uses many kinds of graphic devices to complicate the visual aspect of the page.

Godard's own devices confront the reader of the English text with the ambiguity of the meaning of the signifier, just as polysemy leaves the meaning of the signifier ambiguous in the French. "Florence and Claire were lo(u)nging on the sand" (71) does not translate any particular word in the French sentence, which, how-ever, suggests the quality of emotion exchanged in the looks between the two women, stretched out on the sand. Godard underlines the complicities between matter and thought in "text/ure t/issue" (150). The same impulse motivates "the (f)actuality of words" (152). When Godard writes "Lang uage is feverish like a polysemic resource" (153), we understand that the disjunctive space separating the letters within the word itself refers to the impulse which drives Brossard's own text, its own self-conscious foregrounding of the power of language.

Although these explicit graphic interventions are not quantitatively important (they are scattered sparsely throughout the text), they clearly mark the presence of the translator within the text. The reader is reading Nicole Brossard and Barbara Godard together. This presence is clear as well in the wordplays with which Godard translates other titles by Nicole Brossard. *Amantes* (female lovers) becomes *Lovhers* (a particularly happy find!), and *L'Amér,* as noted earlier, is *These Our Mothers.* These plays on words move right through the text, and so in *L'Amèr,"J'ai tué le ventre et fait éclater la mer"* (20) becomes "I have killed the womb and exploded the Sea/ Sour mother" (14).

Like other works by Brossard and by other feminist writers, *Picture Theory* foregrounds the work of translation within its own writing. This is done through repetition (with difference), as the same scene is rendered in various ways, emphasis being placed on the "angle of vision." The section of the book called "Screenskintoo" is an echoing of "screenskin." This echoing becomes the very basis of Brossard's later novel, *Mauve Desert* (see pp. 158–161), and under-pins the critique of forms of representation. In *Picture Theory,* it is the hologram which becomes the privileged symbol of this self-conscious process of representation, "a superposition of multiple images from successive exposures, an

overlapping, a trope of intertextuality, of the interaction of discourses," a virtual image displaying its trans-formation of fact.

> The screen of representation is the white space or the gendered bodily surface on which desire inscribes its fiction. The hologram as figure for meaning making moves beyond Wittgenstein's understanding of picture as fact. The hologram does not depict its pictorial form iconically, it performs it.
>
> (Godard 1991:11)

In this way, the project of the feminist translator concords with the impulse of the text, questioning the most basic relationship of word to object, word to emotion, word to word. The writing of Nicole Brossard places transformation at the very center of its complex attention to the mechanisms of representation. It sets into play a dynamic of multiplicity and mimicry which makes linear and transparent meaning impossible. This conflation of writing with translation and transformation is clearly at odds with a long-dominant theory of translation as equivalence of fixed meanings. Feminist writing and translation practice come together in framing all writing as re-writing, all writing as involving a rhetoricity in which subjectivity is at work.

These perceptions of the active nature of language and of the determining role of the writing subject are not exclusive to feminist theory. They are central to the tenets of literary semiotics, post-modernist theory and critical practices included under the general rubric of deconstruction. It has been the feminist project, however, which has most cogently brought these perceptions to material realization with respect to translation. The combined work of Barbara Godard, Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood, Carol Maier, Suzanne Jill Levine, Kathy Mezei, Luise von Flotow and others offer a fresh, sometimes purposefully provocative, take on the power of words.

THE VIOLENCE OF APPROPRIATION

It is not surprising that the ideas and practices of feminist translators have met with some opposition. It is perhaps surprising, however, that one of the most cogent critiques of feminist translation has come from the point of view of radical deconstructionism. For Rosemary Arrojo, the idealism of feminist translation appears simply to be a reverse-image of masculinist configurations. She wonders what makes a "feminist translator's affirmation of her delight in interminable re-reading and re-

writing" the text some-thing positive and desirable whereas Steiner's "masculine" model is merely "violent" and "appropriative" (Arrojo 1995: 73). Why is a masculinist interpretive model a betrayal while a feminist one is enriching? Arrojo's critique goes further. Is the search for a "pacifistic" theory of translation not incompatible with the human need to "make reality (and consequently, also texts and objects) our own, the need to fight for the power to determine and to take over meaning"? Are these moves and desires not in themselves inevitably violent, "since they always intend to replace, or at least to supplement, other moves or other theories" (ibid.:74)? Arrojo suggests that "otherness" cannot only be projected onto the practices of those we reject but recognized as it faces us "in our own territory."

There must indeed be a revaluation of the dialectic between translator and text. How is this movement between reading and rewriting, reception and appropriation, to be reconfigured in such a way as to avoid re-imposing the violence of subjectivity? Can there be a version of the female subject which does not re-introduce new but still vigorous dichotomies?

Arrojo's critique underlines the ineluctability of violence in any act of interpretation or writing. Nietzsche, on the one hand, psychoanalysis, on the other, show that there is no escape from the violence involved in any attempt to make sense of the world, any attempt to use language in order to master the disorder of what lies beyond language. But beyond this all-englobing understanding of the drive to meaning as the expression of a will to power, there must be exploration of specific writing relationships. Surely what is to be most criticized in many of the masculinist formulations of fidelity in translation is the fact that they suppose a "universal" subject. Steiner's translator is never explicitly defined as masculine, never inserted into a specific historical context. The model that Steiner provides is presented as gender-free, and yet the whole "thrust" of Steiner's argument supposes the perspective of masculine sexuality. The power of feminist reformulations of the translating subject has been to give clear recognition to the specific conditions of the translating relationship, one of those conditions being the gendered nature of the text and of the subject. The feminist translator affirms her role as an active participant in the creation of meaning. In theoretical texts, in prefaces, in footnotes, she affirms the provisionality of meaning, drawing attention to the process of her own work.

What feminist theory highlights is a renewed sense of *agency* in translation. This agency cannot be understood as that of a free and unfettered writing subject. Rather, this agency must be understood in

relation to the various sites through which the translating subject defines itself. How are these sites to be defined? We can speak of a geographical position, a historical moment, of the relationship between translator and author, etc. But perhaps the most important aspect of the "enunciating position" of the translator is the *project.* Far from being blind to the political and interpretative dimensions of their own project, feminist translators quite willingly acknowledge their interventionism. This recognition gives content to the "difference" between original and translation, defines the parameters of the transfer process, and explains the mode of circulation of the translated text in its new environment.

IDEOLOGICALLY UNFRIENDLY TEXTS

The principles of feminist translation are, as we have shown, best illustrated when applied to texts which call for an active process of re-writing. The corollary question then becomes: what happens to the feminist translator when she is faced with less writerly texts, or, worse, texts which are esthetically or ideologically antipathetic to her?

This question suggests a larger one: should translators work only on "sympathetic" rather than "antagonistic" texts? The debate between the advantages of affinity versus friction has been a persistent one in Western letters. It has been recognized that translation is a way for writers to gain creative stimulation. It allows them to step out of their writing selves and take on the voice of another author. Seeking out authors whose work is different from one's own, whose work even challenges one's own, would be part of the logic of this operation.

Women translators have added some new dimensions to this well-rehearsed theme, pointing to gender as a new axis around which writing relationships are created. Frequently described in celebratory terms, the encounter of subjectivities framed by feminist translation is not without its frustrations. Luise von Flotow's description of her attraction to the writing of Anne Dandurand and Elfriede Jelinek, and her attempts to move their aggressive eroticism into English, situates the strength of that encounter in a common sensibility. Not so in her two subsequent experiences with France Théo ret's *L'Homme qui peignait Staline* and Bianca Zagoline's *La Femme a la fenêtre,* where she felt compelled to make changes to the text in accordance with her own esthetic and feminist sensibilities. These reactions of frustration are operative in all experiences of translation, and yet a feminist sensibility allows von Flotow to analyze them in a particularly sensitive and revealing way (von Flotow 1995).

In one of the first reflections on this question, in the early 1980s, Garol Maier speaks of the translator's attempt to "give voice, to make available texts that raise difficult questions and open perspectives." She believes that women translators should get "under the skin" of both antagonistic and sympathetic works. In so doing, they become independent, "resisting" interpreters of these works (Maier 1985:4).

Maier gives an example of the way in which the translation can accompany the work, guiding it into its relationship with its second public, and also providing a voice for the translator. Referring to the poetry of Octavio Armand and in particular to the shadowy presence of women in it, she describes the development of her own relationship to the text. As she became a "stronger, more antagonistic reader and translator," her identification became less submissive (Maier 1985:6). Her initial merging with the text develops into a need to be seen, to address the taunts. Antagonism does not lead to rupture, but to increased engagement.

Maier's experience is to be contrasted with that of Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood who recounts her experiences of translating macho poetry by the rock poet and singer Lucien Francoeur as the point of tension which impelled her forward into a feminist agenda. In 1979, in her preface to her translations of the poems of Francoeur, de Lotbinière-Harwood takes up the idiom and the cause of Francoeur:

> lucien & moi, nous sommes québécois. from the opposite sides of the track, we met through rock & roll/the american dream, we are the pepsi generation, wired for sound and vision, we are the white niggers of america, rock is our culture, elvis, jerry lee, eddy, hank, gene, roy, johnny, black roots/red-hot rhythm, stopped anapestic: magnetic, marginal, subversive, rebel music, urban guerilla music. historically, we ARE that.
>
> (de Lotbinière-Harwood 1995:57)

Harwood's total identification with Francoeur and with the nationalist rebellion against the imperialism of the English language is superbly described in the poetic introduction she provides for *Neons in the Night* (Francoeur 1981). Harwood re-creates the tone and the spirit of Francoeur's original blend of American rock culture and French poetry of transgression. Here is the beat of French America, transferred from hybridized French back into English, but transformed again through this additional border crossing.

Harwood explains that Francoeur was the first and last male poet she translated. During the three years she spent on his poetry, she realized that she was being forced by the poems' stance, by language, to "speak in the masculine…as if the only speaking place available, and the only audience possible, were male-bodied" (de Lotbinière-Harwood 1995: 64). But the new context of feminism, and feminist analysis of women's relationship to language, made her aware of the coercion of language positions and moved her affiliation from the spirit of rock 'n' roll to "the spirit of sister-hood" (ibid. 1995:64).

Were Harwood's translations affected by the different subject positions which she has adopted? Certainly they were. Especially as she takes on the writing of self-consciously transgressive feminist writers, Harwood feels increasingly authorized (or, in her vocabulary, autherized) to valorize the signs of the feminine in the translated text–even if this involves some infractions to normative grammar.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITIES

It is a feature of contemporary feminist literary transmission that increased attention is being given to the politics of translation. The very idea of an international feminist community cutting across barriers of national identity brought with it a necessary concern for the work of translators. One example of such a project is the anthology *Women Writing in India* (Tharu and Lalita 1993). This is a magnificent collection of writings, the result of a major scholarly effort to rediscover forgotten texts and to re-excavate the foundations of the Indian literary establishment. The second volume, published in 1993 and devoted to twentieth-century literature, consists mainly of translations from Indian languages. I would argue that the attention to language shown in the anthology is not the chance result of the particular sensitivities of the editors. There is in the feminist project of restoring forgotten voices a necessary sensitivity to the material conditions of writing. It makes sense that such attentiveness extend to the conditions of transmission of the work.

While most introductions to translations are content to vaunt the accuracy and readability of the texts, the editors of this anthology present a careful analysis of the problems involved. Their criteria for judging a translation included the fact that "translation takes place where two, invariably unequal, worlds collide," emphasizing the inequalities between the worlds represented (Tharu and Lalita 1993:xx). There is

often a reductive process in play when local, regional languages are turned into versions of international idioms like English.

> We have tried, therefore, in the translations (not always successfully) to strain against the reductive and often stereo-typical homogenization involved in this process. **We** preferred translations that did not domesticate the work either into a pan-Indian or into a "universalist" mode, but demanded of the reader too a translation of herself into another sociohistorical ethos.
>
> (ibid.:xx)

This does not mean that abundant glosses are provided. The reader is to work her way into these universes, learn slowly, "as she relates to the objects, the concerns, the logic of the worlds women have inhabited over the years."

Most interesting is the admission by the editors that some texts could not be integrated because of the "failure" of their translations. In one case, a leading contemporary Hindi writer's dialect, using earthy, lewd diction, was considered untranslatable into standard English. A story by a leading Urdu writer was left out "because of disagreements over the translation" (ibid.:xxi xxi). Unfortunately there is no additional information given concerning these failures.

Attention to the specificity of the source languages of their texts is also reflected in another failure recounted by the editors. They had at first intended to reproduce through transliteration the specific pronunciation of Indian words as they existed in their original languages. The idea was to re-anchor these terms within the regional languages, thus respecting their various origins. In the end the visual result of this effort was considered excessively foreignizing and confusing. Recognizing that the tradition they were most wary of reproducing was the erudite distancing of the Orientalist gaze, the editors chose to abandon this project. The same decision underlay the decision to italicize an Indian-language word the first time a reader meets it, but not later. "What we had gained as a result of all this was a 'reader-friendly' page that did not look like an Orientalist text. What we had lost–and we are sad about it–was the variety of the regional languages" (ibid.:xxii).

The sometimes irreconcilable conflict between ideological concerns and the demands of successful transmission is highlighted in this discussion. A desire to respect cultural specificity comes up against the need to take these Indian texts out of the Orientalist tradition and reframe them within the new internationalism of women's writing. As we will

see in Gayatri Spivak's politics of translation in Chapter Five of this book, the postcolonial context imposes its own constraints on the translation process. Attention must be given not only to the gendered aspects of the exchange, but to the heritage of inequality inscribed into the very languages of contact.

THE HISTORICAL DIMENSION

The contradictory pulls of different ideological pressures can also be a problem in translating texts which are historically, as well as culturally, distant. So far we have discussed the relationship between the translator and contemporaneous texts. Adding a historical dimension to this question introduces additional complexity. Consider the dilemma of a translator facing a text whose ideological position seems discordant with what we today consider correct but which was thought radical in its own time. This is the case for eighteenth-century French anti-slavery writings by Olympe de Gouges, Claire de Duras and Germaine de Staël, writings recently collected and translated under the title *Translating Slavery* by a group of scholars under the direction of Doris Kadish and Françoise Massardier-Kenney (Kadish and Massardier-Kenney 1994). In a series of essays, the contributors foreground issues of gender and race, questioning the position of both writer and translator. How is the translator to inscribe her ambivalence toward the text, her enthusiasm for the political activism of these important French women writers, as well as the need to contextualize the ambivalent message which they deliver? How is the translator to mediate between two historical moments which do not frame the representation of race in the same ways?

The editors of the volume show how these texts, though progressive in their time, are nourished by what we now recognize as Western condescension and by exoticizing forms of cultural imperialism. None of these women, in their political lives or in their fiction, argued for the total abolition of slavery, but only militated for the attenuation of the cruelty associated with it. Their texts use what we today consider derogatory epithets for describing foreign cultures. Is it sufficient, asks Massardier-Kenney, to acknowledge this distance in the preface, or should a recognition of the progressive nature of the text in its time become part of the texture of the translation(ibid. 14–15)?

Though the contributors for the most part acknowledge the delicate nature of the issues involved, the desire to valorize the anti-slavery writings of these women without imposing an anachronistic grid on their work, there is also some discussion of possible textual interventions by

translators. One highly original suggestion is proposed by the translators of Madame de Staël's *Mirza.* They suggest that some of the exoticizing dynamics of de Staël's text could be attenuated if the text were more concretely grounded in African reality. At a few strategic moments in the text, the translators intro duce a new language: Wolof. They choose to translate not from French to English, but from French to Wolof, the language in which the African characters represented in the text would have "realistically" spoken. The English translation of these few Wolof phrases is given in parentheses. The translators thus introduce into the text a language whose presence was only implicit in Madame de StaëPs story. They have restored the voice of characters whose ability to communicate was constrained by a passage through the imperial language. Code-switching becomes a way of inscribing multiplicity in a text governed by universalizing modes of representation.

The positions of the translators are mapped out perhaps only too explicitly in relation to both historical and contemporary understandings of cultural difference. In opting for a more complex representation of language itself than is present in the original text, they call attention to their own intervention in it. Their intrusive presence as translators is clearly foregrounded in the critical apparatus of the volume. In its double attention to gender and race, their translation seeks to reverse effects of cultural domination, using language to draw attention to patterns of oppression.

We might call this a strategy of "supplementing," in the vocabulary provided by Luise von Flotow (see pp. 14–15), although opponents would perhaps prefer to call it "hijacking." It is certainly a very visible and explicit form of interventionism, not necessarily demanded by the text itself, but rendered pertinent by the dissonance between the value and intention of the text in its time and contemporary perceptions. A historical preface would no doubt have been sufficient to underline this disparity, yet the introduction of code-switching into the text has an additional performative thrust. The historical integrity of the text is not respected, but the text now opens onto a plurality of languages which might well have been pleasing to the polyglot cosmopolitan, Madame de Staël.

ETHICS AND THE TRANSLATING SUBJECT

Why is this strategy acceptable? An answer to this question is possible only within the very broadest discussion of the ethics of translation. No writer has contributed more forcefully to this discussion than Antoine

Berman, the French translator and philosopher whose premature death has deprived translation studies of a vital source of inspiration. His ethics of translation takes into account the total context of mediation in which translation takes place, privileging translation moves which are buttressed by a comprehensive critical project (Berman 1995). The grounds for the evaluation of translations, according to Berman, are at once ethical and poetic. The "poeticity" of a text is defined by the translator's success in having created an esthetic object: Berman uses the expression *"faire texte"* or *"faire oeuvre"* (Berman 1995:92). There is no particular esthetic mold that the translation must fall into, there is no particular method which is obligatory. What matters is that the translator has created an esthetic object.

The ethical character of translation is defined by "respect" for the original, an attitude which according to Berman includes dialogue and even confrontation. It also includes respect for the reader, and for the reader's need for complexity. And therefore Berman can offer this lapidary formula: "Translators have *all the rights* as long as their game is played up front" (ibid.:93).

In other words, in contradiction with the position which he maintained in his influential first book, *L'Epreuve de l'étranger* (*The Experience of the Foreign*), Berman suggests that there is no absolute locus for truth in translation. In that book, published in 1984, he resolutely took a position against ethnocentrism in translation, and in particular criticized the French tradition of edulcorating translations. His latest work (*Pour une critique des traductions: John Donne*, 1995), however, somewhat modifies this position. To the extent that the translator makes explicit his or her project, and constructs a translating relationship based on coherent esthetic and ethical principles, the translation can be considered successful. Of course, these principles necessarily imply a translation which opens, amplifies and enriches a work; reductive, ethnocentric translations would not be acceptable within this framework.

Dismissing the longstanding but sterile standoff between literalism and freedom, source-oriented and target-oriented translation, Berman argues that "Every significant translation is grounded in a project, in an articulated goal. This project is determined by both the position of the translator and by the specific demands of the work to be translated" (Berman 1995:76). These goals do not necessarily have to be set out in verbal form, but they are part of the larger processes of mediation through which literary works and cultural movements are transmitted from one site to another. In addition, Berman points to the "horizon" which determines the parameters of the translating project. It is this changing

horizon which accounts for the necessity of re-translations, and the continually changing ways in which social movements come to nourish the work of linguistic exchange.

In particular, Berman emphasizes the creative role of the translating subject. He argues against the functionalist approach of the polysystem theorists, who defer to the overarching authority of the "norm" to explain the interaction of translation with writing practice. The translator, for Berman, is far more than a passive relay through which the norms of the receiving culture are reproduced (ibid.: 50–63). The subjectivity of the translator must be understood as part of a complex overlay of mediating activities, which allow for active and critical intervention.

To the extent, then, that Berman emphasizes the power of the translating subject to formulate ethical and esthetic goals, to the extent that he recognizes the translating project as a formative influence on the resulting text, his outlook is consonant with that of much feminist translation theory and practice. Would he have approved of the innovative translation of Madame de Staël's text, its deliberate anachronisms, its unexpected extension of the horizon of translation? This question nicely points to the very different horizons which separate Berman from critics working within the perspective of identity politics. While Berman would certainly agree with feminist translators that the translating subject carries critical authority, he might not agree to the specific contents which could be conveyed by such authority. In particular, it is not entirely certain that the very conscious intervention into identity politics which gives rise to the alternative translation of Madame de Staël's text would fit the definition which Berman gives to the creation of an esthetic object. When Berman speaks of the "position" of the translating subject, he is not referring to the categories of identity politics familiar to the Anglo-American milieu, but to the building of the self-awareness of the translator within the domain of the "scriptural" (ibid.: 74–75).

Nevertheless, his call for a theory of the "translating subject" (ibid.: 75) has resonance for theoreticians of feminist translation. This subject is not to be confused with the person of the translator herself, who would be a self-declared authority, sole source of responsibility for meaning creation. Nor is it to be grounded in an atemporal or prediscursive essence. This elusive and complex position cannot be given a content-based definition. It is perhaps best approached through overlapping descriptions like the ones attempted by Barbara Godard, Suzanne Jill Levine, Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood or Luise von Flotow, in their personalized forms of critical writing. In mapping out the cognitive and

affective components of translation, they provide a view of the territory within which the translator maneuvers. Exploring the lie of this land, we understand that it is the ongoing relation of the translator to her writing project–and not a single predetermined imperative–which creates the conditions for successful translation.