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Palimpsestes 22, « Traduire le genre : femmes en traduction », Paris, Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2009

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- 1 The latest issue of *Palimpsestes* addresses questions at the crossroads of two interdisciplinary fields of study, inflecting the journal's focus on translation and transcultural studies with a gender-oriented approach. The convergence points to common features of historically hierarchical conceptions of translation and gender, which have been widely contested and undone by theory and scholarship in recent decades. Bringing together the contributions of participants in the eponymous conference held at Université Paris III in October 2008, the publication is divided into three sections, offering up (at least) three different takes on the notions of "translating gender"/"women in translation" through ten case studies of works and writers shifting between French and English linguistic contexts, from the 18th century up until now.
- 2 These ten contributions are book-ended by three essays offering more personal and theoretical insight on feminist and *feminine* translation. The postface, notably, is the work of Canadian scholar and translator Luise von Flotow, who became a major figure in rethinking the relationship between gender and translation in feminist terms in the 1990s with the publication of *Translation and Gender. Translation in the "Era of Feminism"* (St. Jerome/University of Ottawa Press, 1997) and "Feminist Translation: Contexts, Practices and Theories"¹—part of the effort to move past ingrained "belles infidèles"-type discourse that has traditionally defined the act of translation in sexualized and patriarchal terms. Von Flotow's presence hovers throughout the volume, alongside that of compatriot Sherry Simon, author of *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission* (Routledge, 1996), and Gayatri Spivak, whose essay "The Politics of Translation"² has been a force in laying bare the contradictions and blind spots, the ideological implications that mark even so-called feminist translations in a postcolonial context, and in calling for translation practices based on engagement and intimacy

with the text, practices of surrender that, as she famously put it, are “more erotic than ethical”³.

- 3 Such erotic and intimate conceptions of translation are echoed throughout these articles, woven into a larger theoretical constellation that construes this act in terms of empathy, expansion and development, the imaginary and the unconscious. Sexualized paradigms are updated and at times subverted by contemporary thinking on translation that has been markedly influenced by psychoanalysis. In her preface, “Traduire un homme, traduire une femme... est-ce la même chose?”, Françoise Wuimart formulates a gendered framework in which to analyze the acts of writing and translation from a feminine perspective, exploring the links between these acts of (re)creation by drawing upon her own experience as a literary translator, and concluding on the importance of the role of the “Éros traductif, [...] ce principe actif du plaisir à l’oeuvre dans tout acte créatif, ou récréatif” (38). The psychoanalytic theory of Bracha Ettinger, notably her work on “matrixial metramorphics” is used to conceptualize feminist translation—touched upon briefly by Pascale Sardin in her foreword, and extensively discussed by von Flotow in her closing text, “Contested Gender in Translation: Intersectionality and Metramorphics.” Here, von Flotow highlights the concept’s relevance to the field of translation studies, “promot[ing] a view of translation as generative, as a labour that, like all such work and contrary to any notions of solitary grandeur, is dependent upon and in conversation with its environment, all the while exerting an influence on it as well” (253). She turns to the sociological concept of intersectionality to emphasize the fact that gender and translation must be considered hand-in-hand, but alongside a number of other identity components (sexuality, race, class, etc.) in looking at individual case studies, in order to “be made meaningful and applicable at a macro-cosmopolitan level” (248). The ten case studies that make up this publication move beyond their respective particularities to dialogue on a theoretical level that Pascale Sardin compares to a “rencontre amoureuse, [...] souvent heureu[se], parfois violent[e], [...] ambivalente et complexe” (20).
- 4 The first section, entitled “Femmes traduites,” examines historical and contemporary counterexamples to the ideals set forth in these introductory and concluding texts—ways in which female literary characters, feminine and feminist perspectives have been subject to undesirable transformations that undermine authorial intentions in translation from French to English or vice-versa. These three studies respectively treat various aspects of the 1853 French translation of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, the 1994 English translation of Assia Djébar’s *Loin de Médine*, and the 1999 English translation and subsequent cinematographic adaptation of Virginie Despentes’s *Baise-moi*. In “La chute de Hester Prunne ou le passage du féminin au masculin: comment l’héroïne de *The Scarlet Letter* devient personnage secondaire dans *La Lettre rouge -A-*”, Andrew Kovacs reveals how Paul-Émile Daurand Forgues diminishes the textual presence and psychological complexity of Hawthorne’s female protagonist in his 1853 French translation, choosing to refocus the narrative on the character of Roger Chillingworth. The novel is “masculinized” into a tale of justice and vengeance, “la quête du mari trompé” (57) through a series of radical macro- and microstructural transformations that render the text consistent with the codes and ideologies reigning in 19th-century France, and reflect the translator’s own preferences. A similarly disempowering case follows in Rim Hassen’s “Translating Women in Assia Djébar’s *Far From Madina*.” Here, the author examines how target readership expectations are taken

into account in the Anglo-American translation, marked by strategies “that consciously [attempt] to deviate from the innovative and subversive images created by Djébar’s feminine language [...], and to impose preconceived and fixed assumptions about Muslim women on the other” (63). The question of grammatical gender and its implications in translation are at the heart of this analysis, prolonging the focus of the previous issue of *Palimpsestes* (21, 2008) entitled “Traduire le genre grammatical: un enjeu linguistique et/ou politique ?”. Other points of resistance marking an Anglo-American translation and target readership—to subversive elements of female sexualities, to the literary qualities of a text viewed nearly unanimously in terms of sociocultural shock value—are explored by Nadia Louar in “Version femmes plurielles: relire *Baise-moi* de Virginie Despentes.” The commercial and ideological stakes of Bruce Benderson’s homogenizing translation are multiplied by the fact that it presents itself as a preface, “une sorte de note explicative” (97), to the 2000 release of the film version of the novel, divorcing both works from the enunciative effects of the original text. Here, and throughout this first section, the classic oppositions of foreignizing/domesticating and faithful/unfaithful translation are intrinsic to understanding and analyzing cultural conceptions of gender and sexuality, and how these conceptions remain apparent—or not, in these three cases—in crossing national and linguistic borders.

- 5 The issue’s second section, entitled “Femmes traductrices,” examines ways in which women have been a force for textual innovation in bringing works from French to English or English to French readerships, through examples of specifically feminine subjectivities in translation. Here we have a comparative study of early French translations of the late-18th/early-19th century gothic novels of Anne Radcliffe, undertaken along gender lines; an analysis of Lady Mary’s 18th-century English translation of Marivaux’s *Jeu de l’amour et du hasard*; and an examination of Lucie Delarue-Mardrus’s 19th-century French translations of Edgar Allan Poe, Anna Wickham, and Edna Saint Vincent Millay. Elizabeth Durot-Boucé affirms a feminine tendency toward fidelity in translation, largely derived from the notion of empathy, in “Traducteurs et traductrices d’Ann Radcliffe, ou la fidélité est-elle une question de sexe?”, while Lynne Long and Anne-Marie van Bockstaele examine ways in which women translators *deviate* from the original text to impose new insight into the content. In “Lady Mary Translates Marivaux: A Female Perspective”, the former suggests that proto-feminist translation techniques may be employed by Lady Mary in modifying Marivaux’s vision of gender relations to reflect notions more akin to her own; while in “Traduction ou réécriture des genres? Le cas de Lucie Delarue-Mardrus (1874-1945)”, the latter explores a series of feminized rewritings, driven less by political or progressive than poetic impulse, “dans lesquels se construit un univers poétique où prédomine le genre du féminin” (160)—in the grammatical as well as symbolic sense. This section closes on a slightly different note, with “À la première personne du masculin? Résonances et résistances de la notion de genre dans la traduction de *Written on the Body* de Jeanette Winterson,” an article devoted to the ways in which Suzanne Mayoux’s 1993 French translation of Winterson’s novel responds to the particular challenges of this text in rendering the gender-unspecified narrator of the original text in French, which has much greater difficulty subverting the mark of gender as compared to English. The ambiguity is handled through translation strategies of alternation, oscillation and hesitation that seem to reinterpret and destabilize certain gender- and heteronormative cultural and linguistic stereotypes—

the analysis of which entails a shift from the binary gender framework that has more or less dominated the case studies up until this point, providing a transition to the third and final section of the issue.

- 6 The final section, entitled “Femmes, (auto-)traductrices et féministes,” addresses the question of specifically feminist translation ideals and tools, which have gained prominence in recent decades. In “Updating the Politics of Experience: Angela Carter’s Translation of Charles Perrault’s ‘Le Petit Chaperon rouge,’” Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère assesses Carter’s 1977 politicized retranslation of Perrault’s famous tale (the only in-depth case study in the issue of a text being translated by a non-contemporary of the author). Here, Carter strives less to introduce her own explicitly feminist agenda than to emphasize the “emancipatory potential” (266) already present in Perrault’s writings—a rereading and rewriting as “a bold gesture of re-invention from a woman’s perspective and in a different socio-historical context” (188). A multiplicity of techniques and experiences are key to conceptualizing feminist translation, and the case studies here are emblematic of this diversity. Self-translation, which undermines any notion of hierarchy between original and translation, mother tongue and second language, is the subject of Jane Élisabeth Wilhelm’s “Écrire entre les langues: traduction et genre chez Nancy Huston.” The deconstruction of traditional visions of translation as the act has long been considered by Western culture—challenged in this article and in Huston’s complex, multilayered work—is inextricably linked with a deconstruction of gender and gender roles assumed by such paradigms (man is to woman as original is to translation—superior to inferior); the (re)creative aspect of translation that dominates sections two and three of this issue takes on profoundly new implications when the same individual acts as the writerly force in both languages. Deeply-ingrained translation paradigms are also shaken up in the section’s closing article, in which Carolyn Shread discusses her own unexpected introduction of multilingualism into her “English” translation of Marie Vieux-Chauvet’s *Les Rapaces* with this final case study, “La traduction métramorphique: entendre le *kreyòl* dans la traduction anglaise des *Rapaces* de Marie Vieux-Chauvet.” Here, Bracha Ettinger’s conceptual tools—notably that of *plusieurté* or *severality*—are vital to rethinking the “relation entre texte source et texte cible, mais aussi les éléments clefs de la traduction: langue, culture, nation” (228).
- 7 Inquiring into the mutual implications of gender and translation opens up a vast swath of methodological and theoretical territory whose shifting nature is evidenced here. The core is literary by nature, but the tools for analysis are fundamentally interdisciplinary, spanning the fields of history, sociology, psychoanalysis, anthropology, linguistics and more. More than merely esthetic, the issues at stake in translation—and in “translating gender”—are ideological, and evolving techniques of “feminist” translation seek to render these issues visible, to create spaces for fruitful textual dialogue through innovative techniques for translation, and by viewing translation as an act of creation in its own right. These ten case studies are located in the overlapping area between a variety of Anglo-Saxon “studies” now infiltrating France—gender and translation, notably, as well as postcolonial—and are the work of scholars of diverse Anglo- and Francophone horizons (France, Great Britain, Switzerland, Canada, the United States, and Belgium), boding well for the future of this area of research, in which a great deal of work remains to be carried out on both sides of the Atlantic.

NOTES

1. in *TTR. Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction. Études sur le texte et ses transformations*, vol. 4, N° 2, Montreal, Concordia University, 69-84, 1991.
 2. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Politics of Translation" (1992) in *The Translation Studies Reader*, Lawrence Venuti (ed), Routledge, New York, 2004, 369-88.
 3. Ibid., 372.
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Thèmes : Recensions

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