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Difference/derivation: feminist translation under review

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being associated with government and business, the second with culture and publishing. Theorists, too, are generally divided between those who consider translation as an activity of linguistic transfer (and who use comparative stylistics, discourse analysis and sociolinguistics as explanatory disciplines) and those who explore translation as cultural mediation (and who rely on textual theories which have grown out of comparative literature) (Simon 1990: 98)[1]. In Simon's view, however, all translation in Canada, whether carried out under the aegis of government, business or cultural agencies, "implicitly takes as its point of reference the official image of bilingualism as promoted through translation: facing-page versions or identical reproductions, type-face twins, rigorously identical in status and message. The egalitarian image is easier to achieve when the texts are not signed, as is the case generally with government documents." (Simon 1990: 107). And, as Mossop (1990:345) points out, official bilingualism, which allows French and English-speaking Canadians equal access in their own language to government services and government employment without their having to know the other language, obviates the need for language learning by all but a few people:

> I do not think that the emphasis on individual language equality rather than inter-community understanding merely *reflects* existing relations between English and French Canada. It has also helped create them, and translation has played a role in this: when the goal is to let technical administrative messages pass between equal individuals, 'communicative' translation is the right approach, because it makes reading easier. If inter-community understanding were also a goal, then this method would not be used, *because it conceals the existence of the source-language community.*

In an article entitled "Literatures, Translation and (De)Colonisation", José Lambert (1995: 1) states that "translational activities of all kinds tend to borrow their rules and values, if not their very existence, from the dominant political environment, to the point that they are a part of what could be labelled as 'colonial' patterns". What relevance does this observation have in the Canadian context? The answer is that far from bearing out the official image of bilingualism as an egalitarian policy, translation reveals the relations of dominance in English-French relations. The establishment of bilingual institutions in Canada meant imposing personal bilingualism on civil servants only and putting in place an immense translating machine for

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[1] These two kinds of translation are not necessarily linked to the difference between literary and non-literary texts (although in practice this is often the case); they express two kinds of attitudes which can concern many types of communication. (Simon 1990: 98)

the rest. The dissymmetries of the resulting process are no secret: almost 90% of Federal government translation is carried out from English into French (Simon 1990: 97). Symbolically, translation comes to be the very representation of the play of equivalence and difference in cultural interchange.

The fact that translation implies commerce between unequal partners necessarily puts into place differing paradigms of understanding of the translation process. Quite obviously, then, translation cannot carry the same meaning for Quebec and for English Canada. In general, French to English translation (carried out in English-speaking Canada) insists on the political desirability of communication between all the peoples of Canada not only as a means of fostering national unity, but also as a means of discovering the key to the Québécois character. Jacques Godbout observes:

> the translation of Quebec literature during the last twenty years was proportional to the fear that English Canada had of seeing Quebec separate. Who are they, what do they want, what are they writing? Get that translated on the double so that we can finally understand who these people are who threaten us with extinction as Canadians. When this fear dissipated, after the referendum in 1980, literary translation also began to decline. It's strange how Toronto publishers progressively became less interested in Quebec books. There is a direct relationship between fear and translation; I leave this thought with you (Godbout in Homel and Simon 1988: 84).

However that may be, English Canadians see translation in Canada "as not simply a new rendering of a discourse, but a necessity of existence itself" (Jones in Blodgett 1982: 28). In translating, the translator becomes the audience, performing an act which completes the act of writing, "reinforcing our existence, providing a heightened and more articulate sense of our own identity - of one's self and the other" (Jones in Blodgett 1982: 28).

In Quebec, translation is a far more sensitive issue in that the Québécois see it as a symbol of cultural and linguistic domination by Canada. Political texts originate in English and are translated into French, leaving the Québécois with the feeling of being nothing but the powerless "target" audience in a "one-way" process (Blodgett 1982: 29,30). Ben-Z. Shek asserts that this reproduces "les rapports réels dominants- dominés de la conjoncture militaire en premier lieu, puis et par conséquent, politique et économique," and believes that this results in the "constante thématique ironique du traducteur et de la traduction" (Shek in Blodgett

1982: 30). Jean Darbelnet, for one, seems to be in agreement with this:

> Il y a, en quelque sorte, une usure de la langue par la traduction. Cela est sans doute vrai partout. Mais cette usure est particulièrement à redouter dans les pays bilingues où la traduction prend l'aspect d'une véritable institution. Et la language la plus exposé en pareil cas est la language minoritaire (...) Il en résulte que le français est fortement menacé d'anglicisation et que la traduction est une des voies, peut-être la plus largement ouverte, de l'anglicisation... Tout cela suppose qu'une communauté linguistique qui veut garder sa langue et qui comprend le danger des traduction médiocres est prête à donner aux traducteurs les moyens intellectuels, matériels, juridiques même, de travailler à ce qu'il n'est pas exagéré d'appeler une oeuvre de salut public (Darbelnet in Simon 1988: 75).

In fact, some Québécois have even gone so far as to attribute the so-called decline of the French language in Canada since the Conquest to 'l'oeuvre funeste de la traduction':

> On y dénature le sens propre des mots. On allie des vocables qui n'ont pas l'habitude de voisiner et on oublie d'en réunir qui demandent à l'être pour rendre clairement une idée...Les deux cultures peuvent coexister en notre pays bilingue, c'est leur droit. Elles peuvent s'influencer mutuellement, ce peut ne pas être un mal. Mais il ne faut absolument pas que notre idiome soit calqué sur l'anglais. Consentir à une traduction servile, c'est nous assujettir à l'anglais. Et dès qu'il y aura asservissement, nous aurons perdu ce qui caractérise un peuple de sang français (Benoit in Simon 1989: 52).

This negative attitude towards translation has given rise to a particular translation 'technique' in Quebec: non-translation or 'la nontraduction', as Jacques Brault calls it. For him, this type of "traduction comme travail sur l'altérité" evokes the close link between translation of the 'other and the promotion of literature in Quebec:

> Car c'est autant ma condition de Québécois que ma passion pour la poésie qui m'a obligé à me rapatrier par le détour du dépaysement. Mal dans ma langue comme on est mal dans sa peau, j'ai fini par admettre *en pratique* que le rapport vital de soi à soi passe par la méditation d'autrui. Tel est le noeud du nontraduire. La langue anglo-américaine m'agressait? Eh bien, je traverserais cette langue, je la traverserais jusqu'à ma langue propre (et inconnue) et au cours de cette traversée pénible et salutaire, je me perdrais dans l'autre et l'autre se retrouverait en moi...La traduction de la poésie, au Québec, si elle était perçue comme un reculturation vivifiante, comme une véritable odyssée désaliénante, cela, je crois, libérerait les poètes du Québec (d'une mère-Québec trop couveuse) et par là leur permettrait peut-être de se faire entendre dans le monde. Car ne sont traduits que ceux qui traduisent. C'est une loi du marché, cent fois hélas, mais c'est encore davantage une constante de la psychologie des groupes...(Brault in Simon 1988: 69).

An alternative to non-translation, also considered acceptable by the Québécois, is "la tradition annexionniste, assimilatrice". In a very interesting preface added to his translaton of the poems of John Robert Colombo, *The Great Wall of China: La Grande Muraille de Chine* (1969), Jacques Godbout states:

> Si cet 'entretien' n'est pas construit de même manière en anglais et en français, c'est tout d'abord que J.R. Colombo désirât que son livre devint, en français, une oeuvre originale et non une simple traduction. Mais c'est aussi parce que le traducteur n'a pu trouver place, dans *La Grande Muraille de Chine* pour toutes les idées qu'affiche Colombo ... elle contient de nouveaux éléments - des paysages inédits. (Godbout in Simon 1989: 42)

In Simon's view, by stating that his book, *La Grande Muraille de Chine*, in fact belongs to French culture, and that the author wished his book to become an original work in French and not a simple translation, Godbout has assumed co-ownership of the work in what could be called "la traduction annexionniste, assimilatrice". Whereas *The Great Wall of China* is a work which valorises individual liberty in the purest Anglo-Saxon tradition, *La Grande Muraille de Chine* is, as Simon (1989: 42) puts it, "un livre québécois qui voudrait satisfaire le double besoin de l'ordre des murs et des plaisirs de les sauter."

Another weapon in the linguistic war for Québécois writers is the French-derived sociolect *joual* - which has been extremely effective since the 1960s not only in transforming imported texts into Québécois texts, thus also successfully excluding the English-Canadian 'intruder', but also in creating new works which presented a threat to the established order. In fact, for those articulating a philosophy of cultural anticolonialism in Quebec, *joual* was to become a kind of peverse badge of honour which was to flaunt Quebec's alienation (Simon in Venuti 1992: 170). *Macbeth*, translated into Québécois by Michel Garneau and performed in the late 1970s shortly before the referendum which could have made Quebec independent, is a case in point. Annie Brisset (1991: 136) asserts that *Macbeth* was chosen for translation because it coincides with the norms underpinning the nationalist discourse which presents Quebec as a nation dispossessed since the British Conquest. Malcolm is the legitimate heir to the usurped kingdom. As such, he typifies the situation of the Québécois as enunciated in social discourse: split subjects, caught between two languages and two cultures in a territory that is itself divided. This identification with the circumstances surrounding the play *Macbeth* is intensified by the translator Garneau's decision to use the vernacular language of Quebec,

characteristic of the new school of Québécois drama which emerged in the late 60s. Prior to Garneau and the new generation of Quebec translators, foreign masterpieces were translated into standard French. A québécois audience would immediately be struck by Garneau's departure from this practice. The sociolect he uses is anchored specifically in the reality of Quebec but is found in no other Francophone community. Its use in the dialogues induces the spectators to read their own experience into the play, where the frequently repeated Je would seem to apply every bit as much to them as it does to Shakespeare's charters. Fiction and reality merge to the point where the spectators see their own individual and collective plight represented on stage and respond fully to the statement "J'appartiens à eune nation ben misérabe."(Brisset 1991: 121, 127).

Thus, unless it can be used for assimilation, appropriation of the 'other', French Canadian discourse on translation is generally negative, and the translation of English-Canadian literature into Québécois is even seen as a betrayal ideologically if not linguistically (Blodgett in La Bossière 1983: 17). The necessity of translation is acknowledged, but so is its potential for domination: "la traduction est nécessaire au Canada mais elle doit servir la langue français, plutôt que lui nuire."(Simon 1989: 53). There is little interest in translating the 'other'; as Shek puts it, "the Other is perhaps something with which Quebec is overloaded." (Blodgett in La Bossière 1983: 23) This attitude is fundamentally in contrast to that of English Canadians, who see translation as a bridge, a pathway to understanding the 'other' and negotiating the cultural differences embodied by language which might also bring understanding of the self.

4.3 Feminism as a sign of 'difference'

The notion that difference is inscribed in language, literature and translation is echoed in feminist discourse, which uses the metaphor of difference as the organising principle behind identity and meaning in order to reassess conventional attitudes to society, to language and to literature. As Hélène Cixous (in Sellers 1988: 149) explains:

> We work on the mystery of human being, including the fact that humans are sexed beings, that there is sexual difference, and that these differences manifest themselves, write themselves in text. The differences inscribe themselves in whatever is born from us. (...) In our work, we are motivated by the inscription of these differences which cannot be contained by the labels man/woman, masculine/ feminine. Difference transcends, it traverses everything that exists. It moves in a complex way through every expression, every creation, every

(textual) production.

In their move towards a theory of their own and the development of alternatives to phallocentric models, feminists have proclaimed their resistance to certain features of partiarchal theory, such as the commitment to a monolithic, singular Truth which remains static, perspectiveless, evades its own conditions of production, and may not be questioned; and the notion that scientific results are independent of their origin in particular individuals, the so-called 'observer-neutrality of science' (Grosz 1987: 478). According to Grosz, the results of science are not in fact independent of the processes and individuals which led to their discovery, but are closely linked to a set of shared assumptions which construct a sexually neutered object rather than a sexually specific one. Thus feminists also question the demand made by phallocentric theory that the producer of knowledge, able to produce true, objective and directly communicable knowledges, must also be able to be separated from the social, political, psychological and historical networks within which he (or less frequently, she) functions and produces theory. The poststructuralist theory of discourse is particularly useful to feminists in this regard since it provides politically useful understanding of the production and reproduction of patriarchal forms of power. Discourse is seen as being profoundly gendered (Foucault in Mills 1995: 159). It is in making claims to truth that discourses demonstrate their inevitable conservatism, their investment in particular versions of meaning and their hostility to change.

But 'difference' not only characterises feminists' opposition to patriarchy, but also the internal variations in feminist thought. Liberal feminists, seeking to achieve equality within existing social relations, have attempted to approach the question of truth from within the discursive framework of patriarchy, aiming, through reversal, to establish new truths, compatible with their interests. For instance, they have tried for many years to establish that being a woman does not preclude them from achieving in the educational and professional fields. However, in Weedon's (1987: 131) opinion, attempts to use these discursive strategies to claim the truth of alternative scientific 'facts' about women's nature are unlikely to bring about the radical transformation of patriarchal structures and practices. Feminists do not have the resources or the institutional positions and backing to make much impact on the discursive hierarchy of existing writing and research, backed, as it is, by an institutional investment in science which

confirms the status quo.

Radical feminist discourse takes a different position from liberal feminism both as regards the meaning of biological sexual difference and on the possibilities of reforming patriarchal institutions, practices, meanings and values. Its project is to reject patriarchal concepts of meaning and the ways in which they have defined women. Instead of arguing over the facts of women's nature, countering one set of scientific 'truths' with another, radical feminists such as the American writers Mary Daly and Susan Griffin attempt to redefine maleness by subverting accepted language and conventional rationality and producing new meanings and new subject positions (Weedon 1987: 132). According to Weedon (1987: 135):

> this totalising strategy of radical-feminist discourse, in which a new version of true, biological femaleness replaces patriarchal definitions, cannot engage with the problems and power relations of everyday life. The most it can do is to see them as effects of the patriarchy which it urges women to leave behind. It is a clear example of a discourse without the social and institutional power to effect change, but more than this, it rejects the need to engage politically with the complex power relations of particular patriarchal societies.

By fixing female nature abstractly, in separation from the social practices of everyday life, radical feminism leaves individual women to work out its meaning in their own lives. In practice this means adopting and adapting existing forms of femininity which are historically specific. In the United States, this has taken the form of separatist women's communes in which traditional forms of femininity are privileged, but removed from the service of men. They have the status of a sub-culture, contained within the power relations of patriarchal capitalism.

For poststructuralist feminism, neither the liberal feminist attempt to redefine the truth of women's nature within the terms of existing social relations and to establish women's full equality with men, nor the radical-feminist emphasis on fixed difference, realised in a separatist context, is politically adequate. Both these forms of feminist discourse are trapped by their attempts to define women's nature once and for all. Poststructuralist feminism requires women to pay attention to historical specificity in the creation of subject positions and modes of femininity, and in the determination of their place in the overall network of social power relations. In this the meaning of biological sexual difference is never finally fixed. It is a site

of contest over meaning and the exercise of patriarchal power. Then too, this discursive context, in which women can resist particular meanings and power relations, is subject to historical change. For poststructuralist feminists, an understanding of how discourses of biological sexual difference are mobilised, in a particular society, at a particular moment, is the first stage in intervening in order to initiate change."(Weedon 1987: 135).

Just as feminists choose different ways to challenge the dominant discourse in real life, they also take various approaches to language and writing in their attempts to develop their own alternatives to patriarchal models.

4.3.1 Language and writing in feminism

The question of language could be said to be at the heart of the feminist struggle. For, as feminist critics ask, when woman is in a position analogous to Silence, Absence, and Madness in the paradigm of Western thought (Speech/Silence, Presence/ Absence, Logic/ Madness), what happens to her language? If her language is something other than silence, it must either be a usurped language (the language/logic of men used by women), or it must be something fundamentally 'other' itself (Felman in Bauer & McKinstry 1991: 10). Feminist criticism therefore assumes that women's exclusion from the dominant society has made a systematic and fundamental difference in the kind of art women make, the ways women think, and the ways women use language:

> While woman has been preoccupied with the survival of the young, man has appropriated to himself the symbolic tool of language - hence his ideological control[2] over the silent one, the stranger, the other. To take this language back, woman must challenge all of society, including its principal means of perpetuating itself: discourse. This questioning of the traditional language looms as a vital interrogation, a challenge which deals with the root causes of female oppression. (Rosenfeld 1987: 232)

Radical feminists in the seventies in particular viewed the conventional everyday language maintained by schools, universities, publishing houses and 'great works' of literature as an

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According to Cameron (1992: 138), "the radical feminist notion that men control language does not derive from the work of linguists, though it is in one sense a further application of Whorfian ideas, but has its roots rather in a more general discourse of twentieth century Western culture about the abuse of language as a coercive political instrument. Before feminism, and outside it, the idea of control over language for political ends has been mainly conceived as a form of state control."

instrument of women's oppression and subjugation which needed to be reformed, if not replaced by a new women's language. They thus took on the radical position of attacking language itself, rather than just the messages carried by the language. This meant that in the early 1970s the question of 'women's language' and sex differences in language became of increasing interest to researchers in many fields of inquiry. It was the linguist Robin Lakoff (1973) who first coined the term 'women's language' and proposed nine variables for study which she believed clustered together to form a style unique to women which was characterised by deference, powerlessness, and politeness. These variables include the use of specialised vocabulary in traditionally female areas (e.g. *sauté*, *whipstitch*); the use of milder expletives than men; the use of 'empty' adjectives that convey only an emotional reaction rather than specific information (e.g. *gorgeous*, *adorable*, *cute*); the use of tag questions, which she believes denotes insecurity; the use of wider ranges of pitch and intonation and exaggerated expressiveness; the use of 'superpolite' forms (e.g. *I wonder if you would mind...*); hedges (e.g. *Well*, *You know*, *Sort of*); hypercorrect grammar; and, finally, the assertion that women cannot tell jokes and have no sense of humour. In her view, the effect of women's style is largely negative, perceived as deferential, uncertain, powerless and a reflection of "girlish confusion" (Lakoff 1978: 147). As Mary Crawford (1995: 26) explains, "with Lakoff's call for attention to sex as a variable, the women's movement arrived in linguistic research." She inspired large numbers of linguists to pursue this area of research. However, the fact that Lakoff's observations were based mainly on intuition, meant that linguistic surveys were inconclusive; some studies substantiating Lakoff's observations and finding even more sex differences in language, others finding no sex-related differences at all. In fact, as Zahn comments, "lack of consistency in the studies attempting to substantiate the existence of sex-linked varieties has led some researchers to include the features described by Lakoff (1975) in the category of folklinguistic stereotypes ... or to express some doubt as to the actual degree to which men and women differ in their speech." (in Crawford 1995: 29). As Cameron (1990: 14) says, commenting on Dale Spender's notion of 'man-made language' and her call for resistance to this type of language: there is surely something very bizarre about Spender's vision of men, or an elite of them, getting round a table to decide on the rules of language. But one way in which Spender's idea of "man-made" language *is* realistic

> is in recognising the importance of human agency in constructing and changing linguistic practice (...) In order for your discourse to be appropriate and

> authoritative, especially if you happen to be a professional user of language (teacher, bureaucrat, journalist, etc.), you must obey the rules of codified tradition. For instance, according to a historical investigation conducted by Bodine, the representation of male-as-norm in the use of the generic he/man is not one of the 'entrenched, centuries-old oppressive power realities, early on incorporated into language', but was only fully established as a norm of correctness fairly late in the history of English by concerted activity on the part of conservative prescriptive grammarians. (Bodine in Cameron 1990: 19)

Cameron notes that this norm is currently being undermined because of the efforts of feminists and that authoritative grammars compiled by linguists are having to recognise this change of direction.

Whether or not it is possible to prove that there are differences between women's and men's speech, it is certainly true that many feminists have clear ideas about how women speak. Cameron (1992: 45) has found that feminists (non-linguists) tend to assert that women's speech contains the following features: disfluency, hesitations, false starts because of difficulties communicating in a 'male' language; unfinished sentences; use of questions, including statements couched as questions. It is also claimed that women's speech is not ordered according to the norms of logic (or to put this another way, it is ordered according to women's differing notion of logic); that women tend to speak less than men in mixed groups; and that women use co-operative and supportive strategies in conversation, whereas men are more competitive.

In my view, there is no point in trying to ascertain whether or not women actually speak this way. What is important to note, however, is the effect these ideas on language have had on feminist discourse, particularly experimental feminist writing, which is characterised by the use of intertextuality, disjunction, unfinished sentences, multivocality, 'illogicality', deconstructive style, neologism, exploration of body/ female rhythms, sexuality. This extract from Barbara Godard's translation of Théoret's *The tangible word* (1991: 112) is a case in point:

> And the crossing over begins to step on my language for believing in it that in witness of the law it comes from somewhere else but where do you come from you to make an issue of it to delude my origins are in your origins I was somewhere in an unknowable time prior to any conception a language was and

> I walked abstracted body towards her who made me born of a language as discriminated and as minor possible still that it may no longer be at last the scorn for it for its body imperfect that's all there is

But, again, feminists' views on language are very diverse, reflecting not only political differences within feminism itself but also within the great proliferation of 'discourses' - traditions, theoretical frameworks, academic disciplines - in which language is discussed in the modern age. Cameron (1990: 3) identifies three basic themes in feminist attitudes towards language: the theme of silence and exclusion from language, which also raises the question of finding an authentic female voice; the theme of 'naming' or representation, in which the meaning of gender is constructed and contested; and the theme of behavioural differences in language and their relation to male dominance and female culture.

In approaching these themes in various ways, feminists have traditionally followed one of two main schools of thought: the French school, which believes that

> the challenge facing the woman today is nothing less than to reinvent language... to establish a discourse the status of which would no longer be defined by the phallacy of male meaning. (Felman in Cameron 1990: 9)

and the Anglo-American school, as exemplified by Elaine Showalter in the following statement:

> The appropriate task for feminist criticism is to concentrate on women's access to language... on the ideological and cultural determinants of expression [i.e. the social rather than the psychic]. The problem is not that language is insufficient to express women's consciousness but that women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism and circumlocution. (Showalter in Cameron 1990: 10)

These two schools have traditionally approached feminism and the question of language from radically differing points of view. Put simplistically, the Anglo-American school is more concerned with fighting for women's rights and sees language as a medium which expresses pre-given meaning, such as in radical feminism, where language describes the already existing natural and distorted qualities of female sexuality and of woman as mother. The French school, in contrast, draws upon a strong philosophical and psychoanalytic background in attempting to subvert patriarchy in theoretical debate. French feminist texts use language in a way which is totally foreign to English-speaking feminists, for whom language is simply a

medium of communication, not a tool for philosophical/ psychoanalytical debates on the nature of language. In this sense language is seen as a labelling system (Weedon 1987: 83) used in fighting for women's rights.[3]

Until the 1970s these two schools remained largely unaware of each others' concerns, mainly because of the language barrier. Translation has since been able to bridge this barrier to some extent, an experience which is well described by Sandra Gilbert in her introduction to the English translation of *La jeune née*, *The newly born woman*:

> Now (...) we can meet the "newly born woman" - the ancient/ innocent/ fluent/ powerful/ impossible woman - as she is, or as Clément and Cixous have envisioned her. What will we, products of a culture perhaps stodgier than France's, think of her thieving and flying, her utopian body, her desirous fantasizing and guilty shuddering? Everything about her - as most anglophone readers will no doubt feel - is intense, indeed hyperbolic. She is born of Flaubert and Baudelaire, or Rimbaud and Apollinaire, as well as (Clement and Cixous tell us) of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, Freud, Genet, Kleist, Hoffmann, Shakespeare and Aeschylus ... For an American feminist - at least for this American feminist - reading *The newly born woman* is like going to sleep in one world and waking up in another - going to sleep in a realm of facts, which one must labour to theorize, and waking in a domain of theory, which one must strive to (f)actualize.(Cixous & Clément 1986: x)

Largely through translation, the pragmatic vitality of American feminism, with its rich past of political activism, came into contact with a new, more conceptual dimension of feminism which provided the theoretical nourishment and analytical tools lacking in Anglo-American feminism. Through the French feminists, English-language readers came into contact with Continental philosophy and critical thought, modes of thinking which allowed a challenge to the very representation of knowledge, and to the discursive construction of sexual identity (Simon 1996: 87). However, the translation process has also been responsible for some misconceptions, notably the accusation of essentialism on the part of French feminist writers such as Cixous and Irigaray by Anglo-American feminists. Gayatri Spivak's comment in this regard is that the only way either Cixous or Irigaray can be read as essentialists is if too little

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[3] I do not intend to discuss these two streams in detail; this has been done many times before. See for instance Moi, T. 1985. *Sexual/textual politics*. London: Routledge; Marks, E. &Courtivron, I. de (eds). 1980. *New French feminisms*. Brighton: Harvester and Greene, G, & Kahn, C. 1985. *Making a difference: feminist literary criticism*. London: Routledge.

attention is paid to the stylistic effects and the rhetoricity of their texts (in Simon 1996: 107). What translators of feminist works have tended to neglect is the discursive context in which these texts are embedded. As was found in Walker (1990: 26),

> The reader of a feminist text translated from one language and culture into another may very well view that text from a different vantage point to the reader of the original text, not only because of differing source and target cultures, but also because of the specific feminist stance taken. Even if the translated text attempts to reproduce the ideology of the original exactly, the reader of the translated text may draw upon a different field of feminist experience which examines concepts in a different way.

Thus, language is not only an important site of struggle for feminists; it is also a source of conflict. Some Anglo-American linguists, for example, grounded in the sociolinguistic analysis of women's exclusion from language, find French feminists' esoteric, opaque manipulations of language elitist, and criticise their focus on literary language as opposed to more direct social action as a vehicle for women's emancipation. They also object to the extreme linguistic determinism characteristic of many French feminist writers, not to mention the old chestnut that Culture (language, social order) is masculine while Nature (libidinal drives, prerationality) is feminine. Equally disturbing for them is the total lack of empirical support for the claims about language, gender and consciousness that are made by some of these writers, unless psychoanalysis can be regarded as an empirical science.

Rita Felski (1989: 19) supports this view, stating that the notion of a woman's art, thought, or language holds many pitfalls, not least because of the variety of ways in which these concepts have been defined. Felski believes that a theoretical position which argues a necessary or privileged relationship between female gender and a kind of literary structure can be argued according to very different assumptions:

> by claiming that women are more likely to write in a particular style because of the existence of a specifically feminine psychology, for example, or by asserting that experimental literature, whether written by women or even in some cases by men, constitutes a 'feminine' mode insofar as it undermines the authority of a 'masculine' symbolic discourse.

Felski herself seeks to demonstrate that any particular style of writing *cannot* be classified as uniquely or specifically feminine, and that "the question of the most appropriate strategy for a feminist writing practice cannot be determined a priori, in relation to a concept of the

"feminine" text, however defined, *but instead requires a theoretical approach which can address the social meanings and functions of literature in relation to women writers and readers*" (my italics; Felski 1989: 19). In other words, she believes it is impossible to characterise literary forms as 'masculine', 'feminine', 'subversive' or 'reactionary' in isolation from the social conditions of their production[4]. Her position as regards some of the claims made in the experimental works of French feminists is that it is impossible to make a convincing case for the claim that there is anything inherently feminine or feminist in experimental writing as such; if one examines *l'écriture féminine*, for example, the only gender-specific elements exist on the level of content, as in metaphors of the female body. (Felski 1989: 5)

Deborah Cameron (1992) is one anglophone feminist who seems to support this view. As a linguist, she feels that much of the feminist project of Irigaray et al. is completely utopian; it stirs the imagination but has little concrete pay-off, because it tends to misconceive the nature of language. She concedes that conventions of usage and style do change (she cites the modernism of Joyce, Woolf and Richardson as examples) and it is obviously possible, not to mention desirable, to bring new topics and viewpoints into the literary domain. But, in her view

> the potential for 'reinventing language' in the literal sense some writers seem to intend this is negligible. On one hand, the form of natural languages is given (it appears) by human mental capacities. So Irigaray's vision of a totally different language, outside the grammatical structures we know, cannot be a description of an actual possibility. On the other hand - and this is an even more important point - language is irreducibly a social practice, grounded in history. Mere individual acts of will do not change it, nor can it be 'reinvented' from scratch. Whatever changes in perception and expression we manage collectively to bring about, we will always carry with us the baggage of history in the domain of language as everywhere else.

Cameron does, however, go on to state that the value of these strategies lies in the implication that the surface meanings of words reveal only one of a multitude of possible meanings."The alternative meanings and the linguistic creativity our culture represses cannot be suppressed

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4 Felski not only believes that French feminists have overestimated the political effects of language games, but also asserts that the focus on experimental work "limits oppositional culture to the reading and writing experiments of an intellectual elite" (1989: 6).}

altogether; and if feminists choose to uncover these submerged elements of language, that is a form of resistance to the status quo. It shows that people who insist 'that's not what it means' or 'you can't say that' rest their case not on the facts of language, but on the arrogance of power." (Cameron 1992: 112)

If one accepts, then, that it is primarily feminist content that makes the connection between experimental form and feminism, it follows that experiments with form such as linguistic plays on words, disruption of syntax, fragmentation of linear form, refusal of closure, rejection of genre categories and textual glossolalia have nothing specifically feminist about them. Rather, these are devices with 'oblique political signification' which have political impact in a certain context, and given a certain type of readership and interpretation. Many experimental texts are uncritically understood by theorists as being feminist and politically 'radical' because of the context in which they were written and read. Their avant-gardist and innovative impact is a direct result of their readers' preparedness to understand them in that way (Von Flotow 1991: 4). What is important, then, in conducting a gendered analysis is not to focus on content as if it were a self-evident given, but to see the substance of texts as a negotiation of textual elements and codes and forces outside the text which influence both the way that the text is constructed and the way that we decipher what is written.

4.3.2 Feminist discourse in Canada

Québécois feminism can be seen as a subset of the dialectic between the French and Anglo-American schools of feminism. The women's movement in English Canada, like that in other English-speaking countries, is predominantly pragmatic and experience-oriented. Feminist language has mainly interested linguists, sociologists and anthropologists, who follow a descriptive rather than a creative approach to the issue. English-Canadian fiction writers, too, do not seem to be as concerned with subverting phallocentric language as do their Québécois counterparts, who, while remaining North Americans and drawing upon the work of American linguists and sociologists, are also very much influenced by the intellectual traditions in France. Thus, Quebec feminist writing has been internationally as well as regionally inspired, and is grounded in recent feminist analyses of the unequal power relations in patriarchal cultures; in the related political debates of the left on racism, imperialism and nationalism; and in a number of the important contemporary political and philosophical discourses, such as

Marxism, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction. Karen Gould (1990: xv) comments:

> Indeed, Quebec feminism and the experimental forms of women's writing which have developed more or less concurrently since 1970 have been uniquely situated at the crossroads of radical political thought and recent theoretical discourses on women, language, and the construction of subjectivity. The dynamic evolution and interconnectedness of Quebec feminism and feminist modes of textual inscription can be attributed at least in part to the unusual cross-fertilization of three distinct cultural perspectives - Québécois, French and American - each of which has provided particular contexts from which to view the dynamics of sexual politics, the social construction of gender, and the conditions under which women live and write in contemporary society.

In Howard Scott's (1984: 74) view, this cross-fertilisation of American and French approaches to feminist theory and praxis "makes for a type of writing which is both an effective analysis of sexism in our society, and a poetic and often humorous work of creation." The doubled influence of French and Anglo-American writing is clearly evident in what is termed the 'split-practice' of feminist writing in Canada, the combination of academic and populist activism which addresses specific targets in patriarchal society, and experimental feminist writing which seeks to subvert patriarchy rather more obliquely, through linguistic experimentation. The aims of these two types of writing can be distinguished in terms of 'direct' and 'oblique' political signification (Von Flotow 1991: 4). Direct political signification needs no explanation; writing characterised as having oblique political signification demonstrates a subtler form of criticism, and may have political impact in certain contexts. In Quebec of the 1970s, women (such as Brossard and Théoret) participated in both types of initiatives, in collaborative publishing projects, in writing newspaper articles, in the organisation of a feminist paper and of congresses as well as writing more academic literary works.

Nicole Brossard, Madeleine Gagnon, Louky Bersianik and France Théoret, who first began writing in the 1970s, are the best known Québécois feminist writers and are credited with dramatically changing the course of Quebec letters and introducing a new era of textual experimentation and feminist theorizing on women's writing (Gould 1990: xiv). Other women writers in Quebec who have made a significant contribution are: Yolande Villemaire, Carole Massé, Geneviève Amyot and Michèle Mailhot and, more recently, Louise Bouchard, Louise

Dupré, Denise Desautels, Monique La Rue and Julie Stanton. The theatrical innovations of a number of important feminist dramatists such as Jovette Marchessault, Marie Savard, Marie Laberge and Denise Boucher are also noteworthy.

Although feminist writers in Quebec cannot be said to constitute a cohesive artistic political group *per se,* according to Karen Gould (1990: xv) it is the *re*-envisioning of women's relationship to language structuring the various women's textual explorations which ultimately "gives a collective social meaning to the otherwise unique character of their individual works." The texts of these writers celebrate women's `new' entry into language by rebelliously exposing the traps and conventions of phallocentric discourse and by asserting the significant difference(s) of women's experiences and perspectives in writing. Since it is these innovative writing practices which have brought them fame, this is the focus of my discussion of some of their work, with a view to determining how these strategies link up with feminist translation.

One element present in Québécois feminist writing in general which could be said to have had an influence on feminist translation is the consideration that true objectivity is impossible; any position is inherently biased. In fighting for feminist discourse as opposed to the dominant discourse, feminists are fully aware that a literature which attempts to subvert patriarchal thought reconstructs its own discourse and cannot claim to be free of myth. As Ruthven says: "every act of demythologising involves a corresponding act of remythologising (...) [Pleading for] 'no more mythologies' makes better sense if interpreted to mean 'no more patriarchal mythologies'" (Ruthven 1984: 79). According to Bauer and McKinstry (1991: 4), for feminists in general, the object is not, ultimately,

> to produce a feminist monologic voice, a dominant voice that is a *reversal* of the patriarchal voice (even if such a project were conceivable), but to create a feminist dialogics that recognises power and discourse as indivisible, monologism as a model of ideological dominance, and narrative as inherently multivocal, as a form of cultural resistance that celebrates the dialogic voice that speaks with many tongues.

As Barbara Godard (1991b: 7) puts it in her preface to *The Tangible Word*, the translation of France Théoret's *Bloody Mary, Une voix pour Odile , Vertiges et Nécessairement putain*:

> Working in negativity, this theorizing of the subject does not aim simply to

> invert the current hierarchy to produce a new woman-centred order but rather to interrogate the grounds on which such power relations are formed by working on the instance of enunciation, undermining the concept of a `unary' subject, displacing it with an exploded, heterogeneous subject in an exploratory writing.

Nicole Brossard reveals a similar viewpoint in *The aerial letter* (1988: 43):

> I see that when I write, I do it in struggle and for my survival. See very well what in my gaze sends me alarmed toward other women and solidarity. No hidden reef: I don't want to have to possess anything or anyone, text or persons, unless it's by mutual pleasure.

The idea that every position must necessarily be subjective leads to the conscious visibility of the author/ narrator in literature, and to an extreme degree of self-consciousness brought to the act of writing itself. In *The aerial letter* (1988: 47), Brossard states:

> What is it with the persistent use of *I* in this text? How does it differ from the I used in the diary, the intimate journal? *I* has meaning only in reality, that is, in the written work. On this side, and beyond, *I* dissolves; it decomposes in an anarchy of forms. Me, that's an /other thing entirely.

This consciousness of self also manifests in the insistent blurring of fiction and theory, the imaginary and the real, the exotic and the mundane, the personal and the political. This is particularly evident in *French Kiss*, which opens with the strategic positioning of the female narrator in the grammar of her body, "a grammar of woman's desire mirrored in the cityscape" (Gould 1990: 71):

> Chevauche la grammaire. Je m'étale, ardent, dérisoire et désir. Jusqu'au déplacement le plus total et réversible de la conscience. A la ville et dans la poitrine: des irrigations lentes et progressives. (Brossard 1974: 7).

In *French Kiss* (1974) (and in *Le Désert Mauve* (1987)), Brossard attempts to map woman's body onto the city, to create a sense of space for her characters. Traditionally, women have occupied only marginal space, which Brossard tries to reverses in her novels. In fact, it could be said that Brossard's feminist project, put simply, is to create a cultural and epistemological space for women through the writing of utopian fiction. As Gould (1990: 54-55) puts it:

> Brossard's political strategy here is to carry women's bodies (both fictional and real) into the urban sphere.... By constructing numerous analogies that break down the distance between women and the urban city, between the female body in motion and the male-dominated metropole, Brossard turns an impressive symbol of male power (Montreal) into a physical site of female self-discovery and an exciting point of entry for *l'écriture au féminin.*

> Moreover, the exploratory nature of Brossard's language in FK demonstrates how the structure of patriarchal language must themselves be disasembled so that discourses on the city and on modernity in general are no longer constructed within the restrictive frameworks of linear, quantitative, and scientific modes of expression.

The search for a sense of self which motivates contemporary women's writing also finds clear expression in the use of the concept of translation as a metaphor to describe the feminist endeavour, a notion which was briefly described in the previous chapter. Translation serves as a trope to describe what women do when they enter the public sphere: they translate their private language, their specifically female forms of discourse, developed as a result of gendered exclusion, into some form of the dominant patriarchal code. (Von Flotow 1997: 12). For the metaphorics of translation provides a means through which to describe the process of reading between or outside the lines of the dominant discourse for information about cultural formation and authority. For Cixous, for instance:

> To understand the other, it is necessary to go in their language, to make the journey through the other's imaginary. For you are strange to me. In the effort to understand, I bring you back to me, compare you to me. I translate you in me. And what I note is your difference, your strangeness. At that moment, perhaps, through recognition of my own differences, I might perceive something of you" (Cixous in Sellers 1988: 146)

This influence is clearly acknowledged by feminist translators. As Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood explains: "I got away with these bold tactics (hysterics?) because the writer I was translating does 'revolutionizing' things with and to language herself, and because *Trivia* editor Lise Weil is receptive to subversive work on language (Again, the importance of context.)" (De Lotbinière-Harwood 1991: 60). Barbara Godard also acknowledges how Théoret's vision of textuality as translation has influenced her work:

> Writing is a praxis, not only an aesthetics but also an ethics and a politics, a signifying practice blurring the boundaries between them in fiction/ theory. This `deterritorialisation'. a transformative project of articulating the in/unarticulate(d), is an encounter with alterity and transcoding that Théoret terms translation... Théoret elaborates a theory of textuality as translation, and thus provides a theory for her translator of transcoding as the slippage of signifiers producing an effect of transformation. (in Théoret 1991: 9-11).

4.3.2.1 The writing of Nicole Brossard

Nicole Brossard, along with Gagnon, Bersianik and Théoret, has used her experimental texts

to theorise on the nature of women's oppression in patriarchal culture and to delegitimise male authority by undermining the rigid, constricting forms of its discourse (Gould 1990: xvi). For Brossard, as for the other feminist writers of her time, writing in the feminine signals the first steps in a period of transition from a patriarchal to a more egalitarian society, from a notion of sexuality based on reproduction and commodification to an understanding of sexuality that incorporates the polyvalent, fluctuating, and regenerative aspects of the female body, its passions and its knowledge. Her writing asserts the significant difference(s) of women's experiences and perspectives, challenging existing patriarchal structures and conventional approaches to writing (Gould 1990: 50). As Nicole Brossard puts it in *The aerial letter* (1988: 37):

> My woman's being uses men's knowledge to better resist and annihilate the violence and oppression on which this knowledge of men (of humanity) is built. All bodies know their fragility before the beast. The beast is in power. I write so that I won't be his dozing beast of burden. On these last days of my internment, the beast consumes itself.

For Brossard, writing and work on language is the key not only to creative expression, but also to philosophical/ theoretical work, and to the transformation of cultural values and practices. As Louise Forsyth remarks in the preface to *Picture Theory* (1989: 12-13):

> Depuis longtemps dans sa pratique d'écriture Nicole Brossard s'attaque au fonctionnement de la langue, ce premier système symbolique. C'est par les mots et les structures de la langue que les poètes font sens de ce qu'elles/ils *voient* dans le paysage de l'espace mental. C'est aussi, malheureusement, la langue qui permet aux idéologies dominantes d'imposer leur modèle monolithique du monde...L'analyse et la mise en évidence se l'arbitraire simpliste et dangereux de cette logique s'imposent pour retrouver la richesse polysémique de la langue aussi bien que la complexité vitale de l'esprit humain. Il est nécessaire de créer de nouvelles `abstractions'.

In her radical feminist writings, Brossard attempts to create these "nouvelles abstractions" by writing in a language which questions the sexism of the tongues we speak and write:

> Explorer [la] différence, c'est nécessairement l'inscrire dans un langage qui questionne le sexisme des langues que nous parlons et écrivons. C'est par le fait même, amorcer des lieux nouveaux d'écriture et de lecture, c'est par le fait même, inscrire une littérature de l'inédit. Interdite et inédite. (Brossard 1976: 13)

Moreover, the exploratory nature of Brossard's language demonstrates how the structure of

patriarchal language must themselves be disasembled so that discourses on the city and on modernity in general are no longer constructed within the restrictive frameworks of linear, quantitative, and scientific modes of expression. In *French Kiss* she states:

> D'abord, la *décomposition* des rues, des images familières au bord des trottoirs, la destruction du pouvoir linguistique qui contrôle l'agglomération. Sectionnée, pourcentagrammé en quadrilatères saisissants - dont il est difficile de sortir une fois qu'on a pénétré à l'intérieur. Grammaire vaseuse d'imitation. (Brossard 1974: 54-55)
>
> First, *decomposition* of the streets, those familiar images beside the sidewalks; destruction of the language-power which controls the aglomeration. Segmented, percentiled in arresting quadrilaterals - hard to get out of once you're inside. The grammatical slit of imitation. (Claxton 1986: 44)

Brossards' prose works belong to a genre all her own, known as *théorie-fiction, la fiction théorique*. These works successfully synthesise poetry, the genre in which Brossard began her writing career, the novel, and theory. As Forsyth (in Lewis 1985: 159) puts it, "a dynamic text, incorporating a poetic and a theoretical dimension, is an effective weapon in the struggle for social change."

Brossard is also clearly influenced by the ideas of poststructuralism and deconstruction, where the interpretation of a text is not seen as recovering some deeper `given' objective meaning which controls and unifies the text's structure, but as exposing what is usually suppressed, namely the infinite possibilities, the 'free play' of meanings. As Sherry Simon explains, "[t]he moment of Derrideanism through translation tells a story somewhat similar to the one which unfolded on feminist terrain. This is in part because the anti-metaphysical dynamics of Derrideanism are very much at work in the texts of French feminists and provide the conceptual underpinnings of their critique on language." (Simon 1996: 92) What is important is not to look at the original message, or its codification, but at the multiple forms and interconnections through which it must pass in order to speak, to refer at all (Wales 1989). Writing is seen as "the endless displacement of meaning which both governs language and places it for ever beyond the reach of a stable, self-authenticating knowledge" (Norris 1982: 29). Thus language covertly undermines what it asserts, and the meaning of a text always turns inside out, as it were, into an 'aporia', which de Man (in Geslin 1996: 145) defines as "allowing for two incompatible, mutually self-destructive points of view." In other

words, deconstructive criticism sees a text as saying "two entirely incompatible things at the same time" (Hillis Miller 1975: 30): the referential meaning and its polar opposite. Thus, Brossard considers writing to be a praxis, a means to subvert patriarchal discourse while giving form to a woman's vision of the universe. In *The aerial letter* (1988: 45), she states:

> And out of this my fiction. My connection. I venture to know better (other than in opposition: in process, rather) the different layers in me. I make discoveries through language. Through language I open myself unprotected. A space for breathing, the other for looking. And it crosses over, converges; making itself fully sufficient for the exploration.

Thus it would appear that, for Nicole Brossard, what is of overriding importance is that the feminist writer should endeavour to unveil the workings of the patriarchal system of values and display the structures which control the social and cultural order by confronting the politics of language. She expresses this as follows:

> To write is always to make the inadmissible emerge; to produce, from the collective imaginary territory we occupy, other cues, other vehicles for thought. It is to conceive of a link between mental space, body and reality: in sum, through the very practice of language to conceive of what is inconceivable outside language. It is to know how to *be synchronized* there. (Brossard in Gould 1990: 50)

How exactly are these ideas and motivations embedded in Brossard's text? How can Nicole Brossard's 'mind style' (i.e. the nature of her discourse in general, her world view as revealed by the totality of her writings) be characterised? According to Halliday (1971: 339), a feature that is brought into prominence will be 'foregrounded' only if it relates to the meaning of a text as a whole. This relationship is a functional one; if a particular feature of the language contributes, by its prominence, to the total meaning of the work it does so by virtue of and through the medium of its own value in the language - through the linguistic function from which its meaning is derived. Where that function is relevant to our interpretation of the work, the prominence will appear as motivated.

What particular feature of Brossard's language contributes, by its prominence, to the total meaning of her work?

Consider the following three extracts from Brossard's prose works, *French Kiss: étreinte-exploration* (1974, 1980), *L'amèr ou le chapitre effrité* (1977,1988) and *Picture Theory*

(1982,1989). The extracts have been drawn from the introductory paragraphs from each book so that any references made to plot or character will be as clear to the critic as they would be to the first-time reader of each book.

Extract 1: *French Kiss* (Brossard 1974: 7)
UNE FOIS
Chevauche la grammaire. Je m'étale, ardent, dérisoire et désir.
Jusqu'au déplacement le plus total et réversible de la conscience. A la ville et dans la poitrine: des irrigations lentes et progressives.
On y confond les mots
Il fait si chaud!

Tout serait-il vraiment donc du côté de la folie, à la surface jaune et molle de l'oeuf, vague et délirant; du côté de la folie, de la poitrine ou du côté de ce qui n'est pas transparent en Camomille et qui peu à peu l'amène et la lie au sursaut terrible qui me vise et vire contre moi-même. Dans la narration... fictive et artifices ... luisants volatiles dans le noir qui pourrait bien être celui dense de la nuit entre mille conifères.

Extract 2: *L'Amèr ou le chapitre effrité* (Brossard [1977], 1988: 19)
L'AMÈR
J'ai tué le ventre. Moi ma vie en été la lune. Moi ma mort. Trente ans me séparent de la vie, trente de la mort. Ma mére, ma fille. Mamelle, une seule vie, la mienne. Réseau clandestin de reproduction. Matrice et matière anonymes.

le même jour. Un sexe noir, un sexe blanc. L'un que je caresse, l'autre que je lave. La cyprine, l'urine. La jouissance et le travail comme versants d'une même unité. Vos corps, amante et fille. J'écris pour ne pas vous abîmer vos corps et pour y retrouver mon espèce, mon centre

Extract 3: *Picture Theory* (Brossard [1982], 1989: 35)
Dans le bar du Hilton, le danseur des Caraïbes dit: vous vous souviendrez sans doute de Curaçao à cause d'un détail (Anna, que le hasard m'avait fait rencontrer quelques heures auparavant, m'avait prévenue qu'une réalité n'en recouvre pas nécessairement une autre mais qu'hôtesse de l'air entre le Venezuela et Aruba la laissait à désirer). Ainsi chaque phrase ou dans le casino (ce qui s'en suivit fit dire à une femme: il est tard) lorsque les jeux tirés, j'allais d'une table à l'autre. Seules deux femmes misaient.

D'instinct et de mémoire, j'essaie de ne rien reconstituer. De mémoire, j'entame. Et cela ne peut être d'enfance. Seulement d'extase, de chute, de mots. Ou de corps autrement. Cellule d'urgence comme c'est corps à son ultime, à son insu, la langue le dira.

Lorsque Florence Dérive entra à l'Hotel de l'Institut, Montréal, 1980, rue Saint-

> Denis. Des bribes de phrases à l'intérieur. À la réception. C'était la nuit. Depuis Finnegans Wake. C'était la nuit. Itinérante, Florence Dérive et tellement d'une femme. Cerveau---------- mémoire. La nuit, nombres et lettres.

Traditionally, the opening chapter of a book represents a gradual setting of the fictional scene in which the story will take place, allowing the reader to identify the protagonists and assign characters to them etc. This is not the case in Brossard's texts. While the participants are identified by name in her works, no information about them is provided. Even pronominal reference is rare in the third extract, where 'Florence Dérive' seems to be nothing but a name repeated at intervals. And in the second extract, 'Camomille' clearly refers to a character in the narrative, but because the word itself is a play on words, the identity of the person is even more obscure. The event line is also largely obscure in all three texts.

According to Gleason (in Gutwinski 1976: 154) the organisation of the event line and the identification of the participants are two of the systems of structure that hold discourse together. Brossard deliberately disregards these mechanisms, forcing the reader to reexamine conventional notions of language and writing and to question the presumably self-evident value of literary texts over which patriarchy has claimed custody. The only clues to theme are recurring items belonging to the same lexical sets, such as words relating to the writing process, to the female body, and to female sexuality. In fact, the cohesion in these texts depends largely on the introduction of a lexical item or items and then its exact repetition in close proximity in the text. For example, in the third paragraph of the extract (Brossard 1989: 35), it is only the repetition of *Florence Dérive*, *C'était la nuit* and *la nuit,* the link with *mémoire, femme, phrase* in the preceding paragraph and the link with *Montréal* and *nombres* in the following paragraph which connect the narrative in any way.

A tentative explanation for Brossard's deviance from the norm of prose writing might be found in this quote by Leech and Short (1980: 2):

> The poet, more obviously than the prose writer, does 'interesting things' with language. And if one wanted to find a definition of poetry that went deeper than the run-of-the-mill dictionary definition, it might be that whereas in poetry, aesthetic effect cannot be separated from the creative manipulation of the linguistic code, in prose, it tends to reside more in other factors (such as character, theme, argument) which are expressed through, rather than inherent in, language... [T]he effects of prose style, and their sources in the language,

are often more unobtrusive than those of poetic language.

The degree of foregrounding in Brossard's writing, and the interpretative process it elicits, are of a kind more readily associated with poetry than with prose. But it is not only the fact that Brossard's preoccupation with the workings of language is such that it largely overrides factors such as plot, setting and character that makes her writing more akin to poetry, it is also her use of 'poetic' language. Brossard tends to produce sound patterning more intensively than is usual in narrative text (the fact that she is also a well-known poet might help to explain this characteristic). Her use of alliteration in particular is a poetic device which gives her texts cohesion. For example, in the first paragraph of the third extract (Brossard 1989: 35), the alliteration in 'd' is quite striking:

> *D*ans le bar *d*u Hilton, le *d*anseur des Caraïbes *d*it: vous vous souvien*d*rez sans *d*oute *d*e Curaçao à cause *d*'un *d*étail (Anna, que le hasard m'avait fait rencontrer quelques heures auparavant, m'avait prévenue qu'une réalité n'en recouvre pas nécessairement une autre mais qu'hôtesse *d*e l'air entre le Venezuela et Aruba la laissait à *d*ésirer). Ainsi chaque phrase ou *d*ans le casino (ce qui s'en suivit fit *d*ire à une femme: il est tard) lorsque les yeux tirés, j'allais *d*'une table à l'autre. Seules *d*eux femmes misaient.

As is the alliteration in "m" in the first paragraph of *L'Amèr:*

> J'ai tué le ventre. *M*oi *m*a vie en été la lune. *M*oi *m*a *m*ort. Trente ans *m*e séparent de la vie, trente de la *m*ort. *M*a *m*ére, *m*a fille. *Mam*elle, une seule vie, la *m*ienne. Réseau clandestin de reproduction. *M*atrice et *m*atière anonymes.

Another technique which is characteristic of Brossard's writing is wordplay, the use of which could be said to be a way of overcoming socially conditioned reflexes against sexual themes, by introducing and attacking forbidden topics indirectly. Brossard creates neologisms and dismantles individual words to examine their concealed meanings, thereby parodying and attacking conventional language and the semantic categories which we use for making sense of the world. One of her most telling wordplays which forms part of her critique of the masculine as a generic term is her play on the silent 'e' that marks the female gender in French, for example her emphasis on the 'femaleness' of Marielle, who is called Elle for short in *French Kiss*, or her spelling of *laboratoir* without its ending in 'e' to signify a purely male domain.

For poststructuralists, the use of wordplay is seen as a radical way of uncovering the workings of language. However, linguists, aware that punning can be traced back for centuries, are in general very sceptical about poststructuralist claims to have produced 'difference', to have invented a new language.[5] In any case, in Brossard's case it is not solely the use of punning and neologism (which admittedly have been used before) which allow her to create a 'different' language. The three extracts quoted above reveal that although punning and neologism are characteristic of Brossard's writing, they do not occur frequently enough to be the dominant style marker of her language. Rather, her texts are connected by 'wordplay' in the broadest sense, by lexical chains woven through the text. For Brossard, meaning resides in the pattern of signifiers in the text.

4.4 Feminist translation in Canada

Canadian feminist translation has been defined as follows:

> It is a phenomenon intimately connected to a specific writing practice in a specific ideological and cultural environment, the result of a specific social conjuncture. It is an approach to translation that has appropriated and adapted many of the techniques and theories that underlie the writing it translates (Von Flotow 1991: 74).

Feminist translation in Canada is an approach to translation which developed partly as a result of sociocultural factors examined earlier in this chapter, such as the diglossic situation in Canada and the resultant negative view of mainstream translation in Quebec as the concrete proof of this diglossia. Another factor which led to the phenomenon of feminist translation is the concern about language so characteristic of Quebec writing which arose out of the frustration of political and linguistic powerlessness. This concern with language, together with the upsurge in feminist writing on both sides of the Atlantic, inspired Québécois women writers from the late 1970s onwards to begin developing innovative ways of writing which challenged patriarchal society through the manipulation of language. Their writing also owes much to poststructuralism and deconstruction.

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5 For instance, Attardo (1994: 171) comments:
The post-structuralist interest in puns, is, unfortunately, fundamentally misguided, in that puns are taken to 'reveal' senses not otherwise accessible to the text, or to be evidence of a 'different' mode of producing signs, i.e. denying the arbitrary nature of the sign, which they see as a symptom of the tendency to privilege one meaning to the detriment of all others in a text.

A third factor was of course the demand for the works of Québécois women writers to be translated for English-speaking feminists. Here it is important to mention that attempts had previously been made to translate French feminist texts into English. However, the translators felt that they could not successfully communicate the message of the text using conventional translation strategies, since these texts depended upon the manipulation of the French language as a gendered language as well as on a theoretical tradition which was unfamiliar to the English target reader.

So, it was against this background that the group of Canadian translators (not all of them female) began to translate the works of Quebec feminist writers such as Nicole Brossard, France Théoret, Louky Bersianik, Anne Hébert and others. As explained earlier, they call themselves 'feminist translators' not only because they translate feminist works (which occurs in other countries as well) but also because they wish to imitate the original authors' innovative writing processes as part of the translation process. In other words, where the Quebecois feminist writers use language as a metaphor for feminist struggle[7], feminist translators aim to use translation as a metaphor for struggle. In doing so, not only do they claim to utilise unusual translation strategies, but they also make certain claims which impinge upon certain conventional views on translation.

In the next section, the concerns of feminist translators as expressed in metatexts will be discussed with reference to a number of metatexts written by feminist translators: all three prefaces to translations of Brossard's prose works: the prefaces to *These our mothers or: the disintegrating chapter* (1983) and *Picture Theory* (1991) by Barbara Godard and the preface to *French Kiss or: a pang's progress* (1986) by Patricia Claxton (The other translations of Brossard's work do not contain translators' prefaces). The preface to Lise Gauvin's *Letters from an other* (1993) and the book *Re-belle et infidèle/ The body bilingual* (1991) written by Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood, the preface to Madeleine Gagnon's *Lair* by Howard Scott and his Masters thesis on Bersianik (Scott 1984), and the preface to Théoret's *The tangible word*

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7 "[Brossard] has always known that work on language is the key not only to creative expression, but also to philosophical/ theoretical work, and to the transformation of cultural values and practices. Language produces the ideas, with all their inherent ideological assumptions, of what is collectively taken to be reality."(*The aerial letter* 1988:11)(see also 12).

by Barbara Godard plus certain articles written by Godard will also be examined in order to outline the general trends in feminist translation.

4.4.1 Theoretical concerns of feminist translators as expressed in metatexts

Feminist translators find prefaces a useful tool for commenting on their translations, using the spaces between underlying text and translated text to address readers in their own voices, supply information about the auther, comment on the text and on their translation strategies, credit their sources and suggest further reading. (De Lotbinière-Harwood 1991: 157,8) For Von Flotow (1991: 76) this tendency is a deliberate strategy which reflects feminist translators' proactive stance towards translation: "It has become almost routine for feminist translators to reflect on their work in a preface, and to stress their active presence in a text in footnotes." (Von Flotow 1991: 76).

However, Jean Delisle (1993: 205) makes the point that feminist translators are not unique in their use of prefaces. Clear parallels can be drawn between feminist translators and medieval translators as regards their appropriation of the target text, search for legitimacy, interventions in language, their visibility in their translations, and the way in which they write their prefaces. Delisle's (1993) analyses several prefaces by medieval translators according to the following criteria:

a) the commissioning of the translation
b) the translator explains the difficulty of the undertaking
c) the translator expresses some doubts as to her/his capacity to perform this task
d) Nevertheless, s/he accepts the task, aware of its importance
e) S/he expresses a feeling of honour at being asked to do this task
f) S/he forestalls possible criticism of her/his work by demonstrating that she is well aware of the "translation dilemmas which pose ethical questions"
g) S/he asks for the indulgence of her readers in raising several questions.

He then applies this schema to Marlene Wildeman's (1988) preface to the translation of Brossard's *The Aerial Letter* (a collection of essays) and to Howard Scott's (1989) 'translator's introduction' to Gagnon's *Lair,* successfully demonstrating the similarities between these prefaces by two avowed feminist translators and those of medieval translators.

Feminist translators are thus clearly not unique in writing translation prefaces. Nevertheless

these prefaces are an interesting object of study, both because they provide some insight into the intentions of the translator and because they can be useful in focussing on the distance between the intentions of translators and their final products, allowing the reader to "come to understand the 'translator' as traversed and indeed constituted by the various discourses which define literature and its functions in a particular historical context" (Guillerm in Bassnett and Lefevere 1990: 110). Rather than dismissing prefaces for being too closely linked to political imperatives, Simon (in Bassnett 1990: 112) suggests that they be read precisely at this level, for in addition to revealing the historically shifting relationship between author and translator and foregrounding the foundations of literary values, prefaces are useful precisely because they trace the contours of literary ideology and expose for us the sociopolitical context which commands literary exchanges.

Perhaps the preface that best explains the aims of feminist translation (and the objections to this type of translation) is the one written by Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood for the translation of Lise Gauvin's *Lettres d'une autre*:

> About the *her* in other
>
> Just a few words to let you know that this translation is a rewriting in the feminine of what I originally read in French. I don't mean content. Lise Gauvin is a feminist, and so am I. But I am not her. She wrote in the generic masculine. 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 possible translation trategy to make the feminine visible in language. Because making the feminine visible in language means making women seen and heard in the real world. Which is what feminism is all about. You've probably heard about things getting 'lost' in translation. Here some things have been added in translation. (De Lotbinière-Harwood in Gauvin 1989: 9).

De Lotbinière-Harwood was criticised strongly by David Homel for her excessive interference in the translation:

> The translator[...] is so intrusive at times that she all but hijacks the author's work. In the introduction she tells us she intends to make her presence felt [...] To this end she frequently breaks into Gauvin's work, explaining what Gauvin really meant and sometimes offering the French equivalent for the English on the page. (Homel in von Flotow 1991: 79)

Homel further faults the work for its excessive footnoting and narrow didactic approach. In his view, Gauvin's book has become an "informal textbook on contemporary Quebec culture" and has been "ideologically corrected" (i.e. feminised) beyond the author's original intention. The translator countered this by responding that (a) the translation targeted a North American readership, including colleges and universities, and that notes explaining the referendum and *tourtière* were therefore justifiable, and that (b) she worked closely with the author on the English version, from which von Flotow (1991: 79) infers that she had her permission to 'correct' the text. Von Flotow's own opinion is as follows:

> De Lotbinière-Harwood has in fact 'hijacked' the text, appropriated it, made it her own to reflect her political intentions. And the fact that this translation won the prize awarded for the translation of French-Canadian literature by Columbia University in 1991 further validates her strategies. In this case, the translator's collusion with the author is, I think, of secondary importance. Here the translator is writing in her own right. (Von Flotow 1991: 80)[8]

Thus, faced with texts which themselves challenge the way in which meaning is made, the feminist translator is clearly aware of her role in determining meaning, and of her responsibility in rendering it. In fact, the visibility of the feminist translator, as opposed to the 'invisibility' of the conventional translator, could be said to be the most striking characteristic of feminist translation as expressed in meta-texts. De Lotbinière-Harwood (Gauvin 1989: 9) explains what visibility means for her: she aims to use the feminised French form *Québécoises* wherever Gauvin uses the generic masculine plural *Québécois*, thereby using a source language feminisation strategy to "inscribe the feminine" in the English translation. She states: "As you read, it will constantly confront you with its otherness. You won't be able to forget that this is a translation."[9]

This consciousness of the translator's visibility is clearly seen in the explanation of the

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8 Von Flotow (1991: 78) also comments rather wryly that in an American academic climate where there is growing demand for marginal literatures, whether Canadian, francophone or radical lesbian, and where women's studies programs are the rule rather than the exception, it makes sense to target the large academic establishments and budgets by practising and proclaiming deliberate feminist interventions in texts.

9 De Lotbinière-Harwood's translation is not one of the texts I examine in detail in this thesis. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that her strategies (changing *Québécois* to *Québécoises* and adding footnotes to certain concepts) do not interfere with the smooth flow of the text and cannot be called "hijacking". I contend that it was her radical metatextual commentary to the translation rather than the translation itself which caused Homel to read her work in a certain way and gave rise to his criticism.