GENDER AND THE METAPHORICS
OF TRANSLATION

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In a letter to the nineteenth-century violinist Joseph Joachim, Clara
Schumann declares, "Bin ich auch nicht producierend, so doch
reproducierend" (Even if I am not a creative artist, still I am re-
creating).[1] While she played an enormously important role repro-
ducing her husband's works, both in concert and later in preparing
editions of his work, she was also a composer in her own right; yet
until recently, historians have focused on only one composer in this
family. Indeed, as feminist scholarship has amply demonstrated,
conventional representations of women—whether artistic, social,
economic, or political—have been guided by a cultural ambivalence
about the possibility of a woman artist and about the status of wom-
an's "work." In the case of Clara Schumann, it is ironic that one of

[1] Joseph Joachim, *Briefe von und an Joseph Joachim*, ed. Johannes Joachim and
Andreas Moser, 3 vols. (Berlin: Julius Bard, 1911–13), 2:86; cited in Nancy B. Reich,
Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press,
1985), 320; the translation is Reich's. See the chapter entitled "Clara Schumann as
Composer and Editor," 225–57.

the reasons she could not be a more productive composer is that she was kept busy with the eight children she and Robert Schumann produced together.

From our vantage point, we recognize claims that "there are no great women artists" as expressions of a gender-based paradigm concerning the disposition of power in the family and the state. As feminist research from a variety of disciplines has shown, the opposition between productive and reproductive work organizes the way a culture values work: this paradigm depicts originality or creativity in terms of paternity and authority, relegating the figure of the female to a variety of secondary roles. I am interested in this opposition specifically as it is used to mark the distinction between writing and translating—marking, that is, the one to be original and "masculine," the other to be derivative and "feminine." The distinction is only superficially a problem of aesthetics, for there are important consequences in the areas of publishing, royalties, curriculum, and academic tenure. What I propose here is to examine what is at stake for gender in the *representation* of translation: the struggle for authority and the politics of originality informing this struggle.

"At best an echo,"[2] translation has been figured literally and metaphorically in secondary terms. Just as Clara Schumann's performance of a musical composition is seen as qualitatively different from the original act of composing that piece, so the act of translating is viewed as something qualitatively different from the original act of writing. Indeed, under current American copyright law, both translations and musical performances are treated under the same rubric of "derivative works."[3] The cultural elaboration of this view suggests that in the original abides what is natural, truthful, and lawful, in the copy, what is artificial, false, and treasonous. Translations can be, for example, echoes (in musical terms), copies or portraits (in painterly terms), or borrowed or ill-fitting clothing (in sartorial terms).

The sexualization of translation appears perhaps most familiarly in the tag *les belles infidèles*—like women, the adage goes, translations should be either beautiful or faithful. The tag is made possible both by the rhyme in French and by the fact that the word *traduction* is a feminine one, thus making *les beaux infidèles* impossible. This tag owes its longevity—it was coined in the seven-

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[2] This is the title of an essay by Armando S. Pires, *Américas* 4, no. 9 (1952): 13–15, cited in *On Translation,* ed. Reuben A. Brower (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), 289.

[3] United States Code Annotated, Title 17, Sect. 101 (St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishing Co., 1977).

teenth century[4]—to more than phonetic similarity: what gives it the appearance of truth is that it has captured a cultural complicity between the issues of fidelity in translation and in marriage. For *les belles infidèles*, fidelity is defined by an implicit contract between translation (as woman) and original (as husband, father, or author). However, the infamous "double standard" operates here as it might have in traditional marriages: the "unfaithful" wife/translation is publicly tried for crimes the husband/original is by law incapable of committing. This contract, in short, makes it impossible for the original to be guilty of infidelity. Such an attitude betrays real anxiety about the problem of paternity and translation; it mimics the patrilineal kinship system where paternity—not maternity—legitimizes an offspring.

It is the struggle for the right of paternity, regulating the fidelity of translation, which we see articulated by the earl of Roscommon in his seventeenth-century treatise on translation. In order to guarantee the originality of the translator's work, surely necessary in a paternity case, the translator must usurp the author's role. Roscommon begins benignly enough, advising the translator to "Chuse an author as you chuse a friend," but this intimacy serves a potentially subversive purpose:

> United by this Sympathetick Bond,
> You grow Familiar, Intimate, and Fond;
> Your thoughts, your Words, your Stiles, your Souls agree,
> No longer his Interpreter, but He.[5]

It is an almost silent deposition: through familiarity (friendship), the translator becomes, as it were, part of the family and finally the father himself; whatever struggle there might be between author and translator is veiled by the language of friendship. While the translator is figured as a male, the text itself is figured as a female whose chastity must be protected:

> With how much ease is a young Muse Betray'd
> How nice the Reputation of the Maid!
> Your early, kind, paternal care appears,
> By chast Instruction of her Tender Years.
> The first Impression in her Infant Breast
> Will be the deepest and should be the best.

[4] Roger Zuber, *Les "Belles Infidèles" et la formation du goût classique* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1968), 195.

[5] Earl of Roscommon, "An Essay on Translated Verse," in *English Translation Theory—1650–1800*, ed. T. R. Steiner (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, Assen, 1975), 77.

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> Let no Austerity breed servile Fear
> No wanton Sound offend her Virgin Ear.[6]

As the translator becomes the author, he incurs certain paternal duties in relation to the text, to protect and instruct—or perhaps structure—it. The language used echoes the language of conduct books and reflects attitudes about the proper differences in educating males and females; "chast Instruction" is proper for the female, whose virginity is an essential prerequisite to marriage. The text, that blank page bearing the author's imprint ("The first Impression . . . Will be the deepest"), is impossibly twice virgin—once for the original author, and again for the translator who has taken his place. It is this "chastity" which resolves—or represses—the struggle for paternity.[7]

The gendering of translation by this language of paternalism is made more explicit in the eighteenth-century treatise on translation by Thomas Francklin:

> Unless an author like a mistress warms,
> How shall we hide his faults or taste his charms,
> How all his modest latent beauties find,
> How trace each lovelier feature of the mind,
> Soften each blemish, and each grace improve,
> And treat him with the dignity of Love?[8]

Like the earl of Roscommon, Francklin represents the translator as a male who usurps the role of the author, a usurpation which takes place at the level of grammatical gender and is resolved through a sex change. The translator is figured as a male seducer; the author, conflated with the conventionally "feminine" features of his text, is then the "mistress," and the masculine pronoun is forced to refer to the feminine attributes of the text ("*his* modest latent beauties"). In confusing the gender of the author with the ascribed gender of the text, Francklin "translates" the creative role of the author into the passive role of the text, rendering the author relatively powerless in relation to the translator. The author-text, now a mistress, is flattered and seduced by the translator's attentions, becoming a

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[6] Ibid., 78.

[7] On the woman as blank page, see Susan Gubar, " 'The Blank Page' and Issues of Female Creativity," in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. Elizabeth Abel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 73–94; see also Stephanie Jed, *Chaste Thinking: The Rape of Lucretia and the Birth of Humanism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, in press).

[8] Thomas Francklin, "Translation: A Poem," in Steiner, ed., 113–14.

willing collaborator in the project to make herself beautiful—and, no doubt, unfaithful.

This *belle infidèle,* whose blemishes have been softened and whose beauties have therefore been improved, is depicted both as mistress and as a portrait model. In using the popular painting analogy, Francklin also reveals the gender coding of that mimetic convention: the translator/painter must seduce the text in order to "trace" (translate) the features of his subject. We see a more elaborate version of this convention, though one arguing a different position on the subject of improvement through translation, in William Cowper's "Preface" to Homer's *Iliad:* "Should a painter, professing to draw the likeness of a beautiful woman, give her more or fewer features than belong to her, and a general cast of countenance of his own invention, he might be said to have produced a *jeu d'esprit,* a curiosity perhaps in its way, but by no means the lady in question."[9] Cowper argues for fidelity to the beautiful model, lest the translation demean her, reducing her to a mere *"jeu d'esprit,"* or, to follow the text yet further, make her monstrous ("give her more or fewer features"). Yet lurking behind the phrase "the lady in question" is the suggestion that she is the *other* woman— the beautiful, and potentially unfaithful, mistress. In any case, like the earl of Roscommon and Francklin, Cowper feminizes the text and makes her reputation—that is, her fidelity—the responsibility of the male translator/author.

Just as texts are conventionally figured in feminine terms, so too is language: our "mother tongue." And when aesthetic debates shifted the focus in the late eighteenth century from problems of mimesis to those of expression—in Abrams's famous terms, from the mirror to the lamp—discussions of translation followed suit. The translator's relationship to this mother figure is outlined in some of the same terms that we have already seen—fidelity and chastity— and the fundamental problem remains the same: how to regulate legitimate sexual (authorial) relationships and their progeny.

A representative example depicting translation as a problem of fidelity to the "mother tongue" occurs in the work of Schleiermacher, whose twin interests in translation and hermeneutics have been influential in shaping translation theory in this century. In discussing the issue of maintaining the essential foreignness of a text in translation, Schleiermacher outlines what is at stake as follows: "Who would not like to permit his mother tongue to stand forth everywhere in the most universally appealing beauty each genre is capable of? Who would not rather sire children who are

[9]William Cowper, " 'Preface' to *The Iliad of Homer,*" in Steiner, ed., 135–36.

their parents' pure effigy, and not bastards? . . . Who would suffer being accused, like those parents who abandon their children to acrobats, of bending his mother tongue to foreign and unnatural dislocations instead of skillfully exercising it in its own natural gymnastics?"[10] The translator, as father, must be true to the mother/language in order to produce legitimate offspring; if he attempts to sire children otherwise, he will produce bastards fit only for the circus. Because the mother tongue is conceived of as natural, any tampering with it—any infidelity—is seen as unnatural, impure, monstrous, and immoral. Thus, it is "natural" law which requires monogamous relations in order to maintain the "beauty" of the language and in order to insure that the works be genuine or original. Though his reference to bastard children makes clear that he is concerned over the purity of the mother tongue, he is also concerned with the paternity of the text. "Legitimacy" has little to do with motherhood and more to do with the institutional acknowledgment of fatherhood. The question, "Who is the real father of the text?" seems to motivate these concerns about both the fidelity of the translation and the purity of the language.

In the metaphorics of translation, the struggle for authorial rights takes place both in the realm of the family, as we have seen, and in the state, for translation has also been figured as the literary equivalent of colonization, a means of enriching both the language and the literature appropriate to the political needs of expanding nations. A typical translator's preface from the English eighteenth century makes this explicit: "You, my Lord, know how the works of genius lift up the head of a nation above her neighbors, and give as much honor as success in arms; among these we must reckon our translations of the classics; by which when we have naturalized all Greece and Rome, we shall be so much richer than they by so many original productions as we have of our own."[11] Because literary success is equated with military success, translation can expand both literary and political borders. A similar attitude toward the enterprise of translation may be found in the German Romantics, who used *übersetzen* (to translate) and *verdeutschen* (to Germanize) interchangeably: translation was literally a strategy of linguistic incorporation. The great model for this use of translation is, of course, the Roman Empire, which so dramatically incorporated Greek cul-

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[10] Friedrich Schleiermacher, "Uber die verschiedenen Methoden des Uebersetzen," trans. Andre Lefevere, in *Translating Literature: The German Tradition from Luther to Rosenzweig*, ed. Andre Lefevere (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, Assen, 1977), 79.

[11] Cited in Flora Ross Amos, *Early Theories of Translation* (1920; reprint, New York: Octagon Books, 1973), 138–39.

ture into its own. For the Romans, Nietzsche asserts, "translation was a form of conquest."[12]

Then, too, the politics of colonialism overlap significantly with the politics of gender we have seen so far. Flora Amos shows, for example, that during the sixteenth century in England, translation is seen as "public duty." The most stunning example of what is construed as "public duty" is articulated by a sixteenth-century English translator of Horace named Thomas Drant, who, in the preface to his translation of the Roman author, boldly announces,

> First I have now done as the people of God were commanded to do with their captive women that were handsome and beautiful: I have shaved off his hair and pared off his nails, that is, I have wiped away all his vanity and superfluity of matter. . . . I have Englished things not according to the vein of the Latin propriety, but of his own vulgar tongue. . . . I have pieced his reason, eked and mended his similitudes, mollified his hardness, prolonged his cortall kind of speeches, changed and much altered his words, but not his sentence, or at least (I dare say) not his purpose.[13]

Drant is free to take the liberties he here describes, for, as a cler-gyman translating a secular author, he must make Horace morally suitable: he must transform him from the foreign or alien into, sig-nificantly, a member of the family. For the passage from the Bible to which Drant alludes (Deut. 21:12–14) concerns the proper way to make a captive woman a wife: "Then you shall bring her home to your house; and she shall shave her head and pare her nails" (Deut. 21:12, Revised Standard Version). After giving her a month in which to mourn, the captor can then take her as a wife; but if he finds in her no "delight," the passage forbids him subsequently to sell her because he has already humiliated her. In making Horace suitable to become a wife, Drant must transform him into a woman, the uneasy effects of which remain in the tension of pronominal reference, where "his" seems to refer to "women." In addition, Drant's paraphrase makes it the husband-translator's duty to shave and pare rather than the duty of the captive Horace. Unfortunately, captors often did much more than shave the heads of captive women (see Num. 31:17–18); the sexual violence alluded to in this de-scription of translation provides an analogue to the political and economic rapes implicit in a colonializing metaphor.

[12] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* trans. Walter Kauffmann (New York: Random House, 1974), 90.

[13] Cited in Amos, 112–13.

Clearly, the meaning of the word "fidelity" in the context of translation changes according to the purpose translation is seen to serve in a larger aesthetic or cultural context. In its gendered version, fidelity sometimes defines the (female) translation's relation to the original, particularly to the original's author (male), deposed and replaced by the author (male) of the translation. In this case, the text, if it is a good and beautiful one, must be regulated against its propensity for infidelity in order to authorize the originality of this *production*. Or, fidelity might also define a (male) author-translator's relation to his (female) mother tongue, the language into which something is being translated. In this case, the (female) language must be protected against vilification. It is, paradoxically, this sort of fidelity that can justify the rape and pillage of another language and text, as we have seen in Drant. But again, this sort of fidelity is designed to enrich the "host" language by certifying the *originality* of translation; the conquests, made captive, are incorporated into the "works of genius" of a particular language.

It should by now be obvious that this metaphorics of translation reveals both an anxiety about the myths of paternity (or authorship and authority) and a profound ambivalence about the role of maternity—ranging from the condemnation of *les belles infidèles* to the adulation accorded to the "mother tongue." In one of the few attempts to deal with both the practice and the metaphorics of translation, Serge Gavronsky argues that the source of this anxiety and ambivalence lies in the oedipal structure which informs the translator's options. Gavronsky divides the world of translation metaphors into two camps. The first group he labels pietistic: metaphors based on the coincidence of courtly and Christian traditions, wherein the conventional knight pledges fidelity to the unravished lady, as the Christian to the Virgin. In this case, the translator (as knight or Christian) takes vows of humility, poverty—and chastity. In secular terms, this is called "positional" translation, for it depends on a well-known hierarchization of the participants. The vertical relation (author/translator) has thus been overlaid with both metaphysical and ethical implications, and in this missionary position, submissiveness is next to godliness.

Gavronsky argues that the master/slave schema underlying this metaphoric model of translation is precisely the foundation of the oedipal triangle:

> Here, in typically euphemistic terms, the slave is a willing
> one (a hyperbolic servant, a faithful): the translator considers
> himself as the child of the father-creator, his rival, while the
> text becomes the object of desire, that which has been com-

pletely defined by the paternal figure, the phallus-pen. Tra-
ditions (taboos) impose upon the translator a highly restricted
ritual role. He is forced to curtail himself (strictly speaking)
in order to respect the interdictions on incest. To tamper with
the text would to tantamount to eliminating, in part or totally,
the father-author(ity), the dominant present.[14]

Thus, the "paternal care" of which the earl of Roscommon speaks
is one manifestation of this repressed incestuous relation with the
text, a second being the concern for the purity of "mother" (ma-
donna) tongues.

The other side of the oedipal triangle may be seen in a desire
to kill the symbolic father text/author. According to Gavronsky, the
alternative to the pietistic translator is the cannibalistic, "aggressive
translator who seizes possession of the 'original,' who savors the
text, that is, who truly feeds upon the words, who ingurgitates them,
and who, thereafter, enunciates them in his own tongue, thereby
having explicitly rid himself of the 'original' creator."[15] Whereas the
"pietistic" model represents translators as completely secondary to
what is pure and original, the "cannibalistic" model, Gavronsky
claims, liberates translators from servility to "cultural and ideolog-
ical restrictions." What Gavronsky desires is to free the translator/
translation from the signs of cultural secondariness, but his model
is unfortunately inscribed within the same set of binary terms and
either/or logic that we have seen in the metaphorics of translation.
Indeed, we can see the extent to which Gavronsky's metaphors are
still inscribed within that ideology in the following description:
"The original has been captured, raped, and incest performed. Here,
once again, the son is father of the man. The original is mutilated
beyond recognition; the slave-master dialectic reversed."[16] In re-
peating the sort of violence we have already seen so remarkably in
Drant, Gavronsky betrays the dynamics of power in this "paternal"
system. Whether the translator quietly usurps the role of the author,
the way the earl of Roscommon advocates, or takes authority through
more violent means, power is still figured as a male privilege ex-
ercised in family and state political arenas. The translator, for Gav-
ronsky, is a male who repeats on the sexual level the kinds of crimes
any colonizing country commits on its colonies.

As Gavronsky himself acknowledges, the cannibalistic translator
is based on the hermeneuticist model of George Steiner, the most

[14] Serge Gavronsky, "The Translator: From Piety to Cannibalism," *Sub-stance*
16 (1977): 53–62, esp. 55.
[15] Ibid., 60.
[16] Ibid.

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prominent contemporary theorist of translation; Steiner's influential model illustrates the persistence of what I have called the politics of originality and its logic of violence in contemporary translation theory. In his *After Babel*, Steiner proposes a four-part process of translation. The first step, that of "initiative trust," describes the translator's willingness to take a gamble on the text, trusting that the text will yield something. As a second step, the translator takes an overtly aggressive step, "penetrating" and "capturing" the text (Steiner calls this "appropriative penetration"), an act explicitly compared to erotic possession. During the third step, the imprisoned text must be "naturalized," must become part of the translator's language, literally incorporated or embodied. Finally, to compensate for this "appropriative 'rapture,'" the translator must restore the balance, attempt some act of reciprocity to make amends for the act of aggression. His model for this act of restitution is, he says, "that of Levi-Strauss's *Anthropologie structurale* which regards social structures as attempts at dynamic equilibrium achieved through an exchange of words, women, and material goods." Steiner thereby makes the connection explicit between the exchange of women, for example, and the exchange of words in one language for words in another.[17]

Steiner makes the sexual politics of his argument quite clear in the opening chapter of his book, where he outlines the model for "total reading." Translation, as an act of interpretation, is a special case of communication, and communication is a sexual act: "Eros and language mesh at every point. Intercourse and discourse, copula and copulation, are sub-classes of the dominant fact of communication. . . . Sex is a profoundly semantic act."[18] Steiner makes note of a cultural tendency to see this act of communication from the male point of view and thus to valorize the position of the father/author/original, but at the same time, he himself repeats this male focus in, for example, the following description of the relation between sexual intercourse and communication: "There is evidence that the sexual discharge in male onanism is greater than it is in intercourse. I suspect that the determining factor is articulateness, the ability to conceptualize with especial vividness. . . . Ejaculation is at once a physiological and a linguistic concept. Impotence and speech-blocks, premature emission and stuttering, involuntary ejaculation and the word-river of dreams are phenomena whose interrelations seem to lead back to the central knot of our humanity. Semen, excreta, and words are communicative products."[19] The al-

[17] George Steiner, *After Babel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 296, 298, 300, 302.
[18] Ibid., 38.
[19] Ibid., 44, 39.

lusion here to Lévi-Strauss, echoed later in the book in the passage we have already noted ("an exchange of words, women, and material goods"), provides the narrative connecting discourse, intercourse, and translation, and it does so from the point of view of a male translator. Indeed, we note that when communication is at issue, that which can be exchanged is depicted at least partially in male terms ("semen, excreta, and words"), while when "restitution" is at issue, that which can be exchanged is depicted in female terms.

Writing within the hierarchy of gender, Steiner seems to argue further that the paradigm is universal and that the male and female roles he describes are *essential* rather than *accidental*. On the other hand, he notes that the rules for discourse (and, presumably, for intercourse) are social, and he outlines some of the consequent differences between male and female language use:

> At a rough guess, women's speech is richer than men's in those shadings of desire and futurity known in Greek and Sanskrit as optative; women seem to verbalize a wider range of qualified resolve and masked promise. . . . I do not say they lie about the obtuse, resistant fabric of the world: they multiply the facets of reality, they strengthen the adjective to allow it an alternative nominal status, in a way which men often find unnerving. There is a strain of ultimatum, a sep-aratist stance, in the masculine intonation of the first-person pronoun; the "I" of women intimates a more patient bearing, or did until Women's Liberation. The two language models follow on Robert Graves's dictum that men do but women are.[20]

But, while acknowledging the social and economic forces which prescribe differences, he wants to believe as well in a basic bio-logical cause: "Certain linguistic differences do point towards a physiological basis or, to be exact, towards the intermediary zone between the biological and the social."[21] Steiner is careful not to insist on the biological premises, but there is in his own rhetoric a tendency to treat even the socialized differences between male and female language use as immutable. If the sexual basis of commu-nication *as* the basis for translation is to be taken as a universal, then Steiner would seem to be arguing firmly in the tradition we have here been examining, one in which "men do" but "women are." This tradition is not, of course, confined to the area of trans-lation studies, and, given the influence of both Steiner and Lévi-

[20] Ibid., 41.
[21] Ibid., 43.

Strauss, it is not surprising to see gender as the framing concept of communication in adjacent fields such as semiotics or literary criticism.[22]

The metaphorics of translation, as the preceding discussion suggests, is a symptom of larger issues of western culture: of the power relations as they divide in terms of gender; of a persistent (though not always hegemonic) desire to equate language or language use with morality; of a quest for originality or unity, and a consequent intolerance of duplicity, of what cannot be decided. The fundamental question is, why have the two realms of translation and gender been metaphorically linked? What, in Eco's terms, is the metonymic code or narrative underlying these two realms?[23]

This survey of the metaphors of translation would suggest that the implied narrative concerns the relation between the value of production versus the value of reproduction. What proclaims itself to be an aesthetic problem is represented in terms of sex, family, and the state, and what is consistently at issue is power. We have already seen the way the concept of fidelity is used to regulate sex and/in the family, to guarantee that the child is the production of the father, reproduced by the mother. This regulation is a sign of the father's authority and power; it is a way of making visible the paternity of the child—otherwise a fiction of sorts—and thereby claiming the child as legitimate progeny. It is also, therefore, related to the owning and bequeathal of property. As in marriage, so in translation, there is a legal dimension to the concept of fidelity. It is not legal (shall I say, legitimate) to publish a translation of works not in the public domain, for example, without the author's (or appropriate proxy's) consent; one must, in short, enter the proper *contract* before announcing the birth of the translation, so that the parentage will be clear. The coding of production and reproduction marks the former as a more valuable activity by reference to the division of labor established for the marketplace, which privileges male activity and pays accordingly. The transformation of translation from a reproductive activity into a productive one, from a secondary work into an original work, indicates the coding of translation rights as property rights—signs of riches, signs of power.

[22] In her incisive critique of semiotics argued along these lines, Christine Brooke-Rose makes a similar point about Steiner's use of Lévi-Strauss; see "Woman as Semiotic Object," *Poetics Today* 6, nos. 1–2 (1985): 9–20; reprinted in *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives,* ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 305–16.

[23] Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 68.

I would further argue that the reason translation is so overcoded, so overregulated, is that it threatens to erase the difference between production and reproduction which is essential to the establishment of power. Translations can, in short, masquerade as originals, thereby short-circuiting the system. That the *difference* is essential to maintain is argued in terms of life and death: "Every saddened reader knows that what a poem is most in danger of losing in translation is its life."[24] The danger posed by infidelity is here represented in terms of mortality; in a comment on the Loeb Library translations of the classics, Rolfe Humphries articulates the risk in more specific terms: "They emasculate their originals."[25] The sexual violence implicit in Drant's figuration of translation, then, can be seen as directed not simply against the female material of the text ("captive women") but against the sign of male authority as well; for, as we know from the story of Samson and Delilah, Drant's cutting of hair ("I have shaved off his hair and pared off his nails, that is, I have wiped away all his vanity and superfluity of matter") can signify loss of male power, a symbolic castration. This, then, is what one critic calls the *manque inévitable*: what the original risks losing, in short, is its phallus, the sign of paternity, authority, and originality.[26]

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In the metaphoric system examined here, what the translator claims for "himself" is precisely the right of paternity; he claims a phallus because this is the only way, in a patriarchal code, to claim legitimacy for the text. To claim that translating is like writing, then, is to make it a creative—rather than merely re-creative—activity. But the claims for originality and authority, made in reference to acts of artistic and biological creation, exist in sharp contrast to the place of translation in a literary or economic hierarchy. For, while writing and translating may share the same figures of gender division and power—a concern with the rights of authorship or authority—translating does not share the redemptive myths of nobility or triumph we associate with writing. Thus, despite metaphoric claims for equality with writers, translators are often reviled or ignored: it is not uncommon to find a review of a translation in a

[24] Jackson Matthews, "Third Thoughts on Translating Poetry," in Brower, ed. (n. 2 above), 69.

[25] Rolfe Humphries, "Latin and English Verse—Some Practical Considerations," in Brower, ed., 65.

[26] Philip Lewis, "Vers la traduction abusive," in *Les fins de l'homme: A partir du travail de Jacques Derrida*, ed. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy (Paris: Editions Galilee, 1981), 253–61, esp. 255.

major periodical that fails to mention the translator or the process of translation. Translation projects in today's universities are generally considered only marginally appropriate as topics for doctoral dissertations or as support for tenure, unless the original author's stature is sufficient to authorize the project. While organizations such as PEN and ALTA (American Literary Translators Association) are working to improve the translator's economic status, organizing translators and advising them of their legal rights and responsibilities, even the best translators are still poorly paid. The academy's general scorn for translation contrasts sharply with its reliance on translation in the study of the "classics" of world literature, of major philosophical and critical texts, and of previously unread masterpieces of the "third" world. While the metaphors we have looked at attempt to cloak the secondary status of translation in the language of the phallus, western culture enforces this secondariness with a vengeance, insisting on the feminized status of translation. Thus, though obviously both men and women engage in translation, the binary logic which encourages us to define nurses as female and doctors as male, teachers as female and professors as male, secretaries as female and corporate executives as male also defines translation as, in many ways, an archetypal feminine activity.

What is also interesting is that, even when the terms of comparison are reversed—when writing is said to be like translating—in order to stress the re-creative aspects of both activities, the gender bias does not disappear. For example, in a short essay by Terry Eagleton discussing the relation between translation and some strands of current critical theory, Eagleton argues as follows:

> It may be, then, that translation from one language into another may lay bare for us something of the very productive mechanisms of textuality itself . . . The eccentric yet suggestive critical theories of Harold Bloom . . . contend that every poetic producer is locked in Oedipal rivalry with a "strong" patriarchal precursor—that literary "creation" . . . is in reality a matter of struggle, anxiety, aggression, envy and repression. The "creator" cannot abolish the unwelcome fact that . . . his poem lurks in the shadows of a previous poem or poetic tradition, against the authority of which it must labour into its own "autonomy." On Bloom's reading, all poems are translations, or "creative misreadings," of others; and it is perhaps only the literal translator who knows most keenly the psychic cost and enthrallment which all writing involves.[27]

[27] Terry Eagleton, "Translation and Transformation," *Stand* 19, no. 3 (1977): 72–77, esp. 73–74.

Eagleton's point, through Bloom, is that the productive or creative mechanism of writing is not *original*, that is, texts do not emerge ex nihilo; rather, both writing and translating depend on previous texts. Reversing the conventional hierarchy, he invokes the secondary status of translation as a model for writing. In equating translation and "misreading," however, Eagleton (through Bloom) finds their common denominator to be the struggle with a " 'strong' patriarchal precursor"; the productive or creative mechanism is, again, entirely male. The attempt by either Eagleton or Bloom to replace the concept of originality with the concept of creative misreading or translation is a sleight of hand, a change in name only with respect to gender and the metaphorics of translation, for the concept of translation has here been defined in the same patriarchal terms we have seen used to define originality and production.

At the same time, however, much of recent critical theory has called into question the myths of authority and originality which engender this privileging of writing over translating and make writing a male activity. Theories of intertextuality, for example, make it difficult to determine the precise boundaries of a text and, as a consequence, disperse the notion of "origins"; no longer simply the product of an autonomous (male?) individual, the text rather finds its *sources* in history, that is, within social and literary codes, as articulated by an author. Feminist scholarship has drawn attention to the considerable body of writing by women, writing previously marginalized or repressed in the academic canon; thus this scholarship brings to focus the conflict between theories of writing coded in male terms and the reality of the female writer. Such scholarship, in articulating the role gender has played in our concepts of writing and production, forces us to reexamine the hierarchies that have subordinated translation to a concept of originality. The resultant revisioning of translation has consequences, of course, for meaning-making activities of all kinds, for translation has itself served as a conventional metaphor or model for a variety of acts of reading, writing, and interpretation; indeed, the analogy between translation and interpretation might profitably be examined in terms of gender, for its use in these discourses surely belies similar issues concerning authority, violence, and power.

The most influential revisionist theory of translation is offered by Jacques Derrida, whose project has been to subvert the very concept of *difference* which produces the binary opposition between an original and its reproduction—and finally to make this difference undecidable. By drawing many of his terms from the lexicon of sexual difference—dissemination, invagination, hymen—Derrida exposes gender as a conceptual framework for definitions of mimesis and fidelity, definitions central to the "classical" way of

viewing translation. The problem of translation, implicit in all of his work, has become increasingly explicit since his essay "Living On / Border Lines," the pretexts for which are Shelley's "Triumph of Life" and Blanchot's *L'arrêt de mort*.[28] In suggesting the "inter-translatability" of these texts, he violates conventional attitudes not only toward translation, but also toward influence and authoring.

The essay is on translation in many senses: appearing first in English—that is, in translation—it contains a running footnote on the problems of translating his own ambiguous terms as well as those of Shelley and Blanchot. In the process, he exposes the im-possibility of the "dream of translation without remnants"; there is, he argues, always something left over which blurs the distinc-tions between original and translation. There is no "silent" trans-lation. For example, he notes the importance of the words *écrit, récit,* and *série* in Blanchot's text and asks: "Note to the translators: How are you going to translate that, *récit,* for example? Not as *nouvelle,* 'novella,' nor as 'short story.' Perhaps it will be better to leave the 'French' word *récit.* It is already hard enough to under-stand, in Blanchot's text, in French."[29]

The impossibility of translating a word such as *récit* is, according to Derrida, a function of the law of translation, not a matter of the translation's infidelity or secondariness. Translation is governed by a double bind typified by the command, "Do not read me": the text both requires and forbids its translation. Derrida refers to this dou-ble bind of translation as a *hymen,* the sign of both virginity and consummation of a marriage. Thus, in attempting to overthrow the binary oppositions we have seen in other discussions of the prob-lem, Derrida implies that translation is both original and secondary, uncontaminated and transgressed or transgressive. Recognizing too that the translator *is* frequently a woman—so that sex and the gender-ascribed secondariness of the task frequently coincide—Derrida goes on to argue in *The Ear of the Other* that "the woman translator in this case is not simply subordinated, she is not the author's sec-retary. She is also the one who is loved by the author and on whose basis alone writing is possible. Translation is writing; that is, it is not translation only in the sense of transcription. It is a productive writing called forth by the original text."[30] By arguing the inter-dependence of writing and translating, Derrida subverts the auton-

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[28] Jacques Derrida, "Living On / Border Lines," trans. James Hulbert, in *Decon-struction and Criticism,* ed. Harold Bloom et al. (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 75–176.

[29] Ibid., 119, 86.

[30] Ibid., 145; Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation,* ed. Christie V. McDonald, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 153.

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omy and privilege of the "original" text, binding it to an impossible but necessary contract with the translation and making each the debtor of the other.

In emphasizing both the reproductive and productive aspects of translation, Derrida's project—and, ironically, the translation of his works—provides a basis for a necessary exploration of the contradictions of translation and gender. Already his work has generated a collection of essays focusing on translation as a way of talking about philosophy, interpretation, and literary history.[31] These essays, while not explicitly addressing questions of gender, build on his ideas about the doubleness of translation without either idealizing or subordinating translation to conventionally privileged terms. Derrida's own work, however, does not attend closely to the historical or cultural circumstances of specific texts, circumstances that cannot be ignored in investigating the problematics of translation.[32] For example, in some historical periods women were allowed to translate precisely *because* it was defined as a secondary activity.[33] Our task as scholars, then, is to learn to listen to the "silent" discourse—of women, as translators—in order to better articulate the relationship between what has been coded as "authoritative" discourse and what is silenced in the fear of disruption or subversion.

Beyond this kind of scholarship, what is required for a feminist theory of translation is a practice governed by what Derrida calls the double bind—not the double standard. Such a theory might rely, not on the family model of oedipal struggle, but on the double-edged razor of translation as collaboration, where author and translator are seen as working together, both in the cooperative and the subversive sense. This is a model that responds to the concerns voiced by an increasingly audible number of women translators who are beginning to ask, as Suzanne Jill Levine does, what it means to be a woman translator in and of a male tradition. Speaking specifically of her recent translation of Cabrera Infante's *La Habana*

[31] Joseph F. Graham, ed., *Difference in Translation* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985).

[32] For a critique of Derrida's "Living On / Border Lines" along these lines, see Jeffrey Mehlman's essays, "Deconstruction, Literature, History: The Case of *L'Arrêt de mort*," in *Literary History: Theory and Practice*, ed. Herbert L. Sussman, Proceedings of the Northeastern University Center for Literary Studies (Boston, 1984), and "Writing and Deference: The Politics of Literary Adulation," in *Representations* 15 (Summer 1986): 1–14.

[33] Margaret P. Hannay, ed., *Silent But for the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators, and Writers of Religious Works* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1985).

para un infante difunto, a text that "mocks women and their words,"
she asks, "Where does this leave a woman as translator of such a
book? Is she not a double betrayer, to play Echo to this Narcissus,
repeating the archetype once again? All who use the mother's father-
tongue, who echo the ideas and discourse of great men are, in a
sense, betrayers: this is the contradiction and compromise of dis-
sidence."[34] The very choice of texts to work with, then, poses an
initial dilemma for the feminist translator: while a text such as
Cabrera Infante's may be ideologically offensive, not to translate it
would capitulate to that logic which ascribes all power to the orig-
inal. Levine chooses instead to subvert the text, to play infidelity
against infidelity, and to follow out the text's parodic logic. Carol
Maier, in discussing the contradictions of her relationship to the
Cuban poet Octavio Armand, makes a similar point, arguing that
"the translator's quest is not to silence but to give voice, to make
available texts that raise difficult questions and open perspectives.
It is essential that as translators women get under the skin of both
antagonistic and sympathetic works. They must become indepen-
dent, 'resisting' interpreters who not only let antagonistic works
speak . . . but also speak with them and place them in a larger context
by discussing them and the process of their translation."[35] Her essay
recounts her struggle to translate the silencing of the mother in
Armand's poetry and how, by "resisting" her own silencing as a
translator, she is able to give voice to the contradictions in Armand's
work. By refusing to repress her own voice while speaking *for* the
voice of the "master," Maier, like Levine, speaks through and against
translation. Both of these translators' work illustrates the importance
not only of translating but of writing about it, making the principles
of a practice part of the dialogue about revising translation. It is
only when women translators begin to discuss their work—and when
enough historical scholarship on previously silenced women trans-
lators has been done—that we will be able to delineate alternatives
to the oedipal struggles for the rights of production.

For feminists working on translation, much or even most of the
terrain is still uncharted. We can, for example, examine the historical
role of translation in women's writing in different periods and cul-
tures; the special problems of translating explicitly feminist texts,
as for example, in Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz's discussion of the prob-

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[34] Suzanne Jill Levine, "Translation as (Sub)Version: On Translating *Infante's
Inferno," Sub-stance* 42 (1984): 92.
[35] Carol Maier, "A Woman in Translation, Reflecting," *Translation Review,* no.
17 (1985), 4–8, esp. 4.

lems of translating Adrienne Rich into Spanish;[36] the effects of the canon and the marketplace on decisions concerning which texts are translated, by whom, and how these translations are marketed; the effects of translations on canon and genre; the role of "silent" forms of writing such as translation in articulating woman's speech and subverting hegemonic forms of expression. Feminist and post-structuralist theory has encouraged us to read between or outside the lines of the dominant discourse for information about cultural formation and authority; translation can provide a wealth of such information about practices of domination and subversion. In addition, as both Levine's and Maier's comments indicate, one of the challenges for feminist translators is to move beyond questions of the sex of the author or translator. Working within the conventional hierarchies we have already seen, the female translator of a female author's text and the male translator of a male author's text will be bound by the same power relations: what must be subverted is the process by which translation complies with gender constructs. In this sense, a feminist theory of translation will finally be utopic. As women write their own metaphors of cultural production, it may be possible to consider the acts of authoring, creating, or legitimizing a text outside of the gender binaries that have made women, like translations, mistresses of the sort of work that kept Clara Schumann from her composing.

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[36] Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz, *Translating Poetic Discourse: Questions on Feminist Strategies in Adrienne Rich* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1985). For other work that begins to address the specific problem of gender and translation, see also the special issue of *Translation Review* on women in translation, no. 17 (1985); and Ronald Christ, "The Translator's Voice: An Interview with Helen R. Lane," *Translation Review,* no. 5 (1980), 6–17.