

***TRANSLATING TRANSGRESSIVE TEXTS: GENDER, SEXUALITY AND THE BODY IN CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S WRITING IN FRENCH* BY PAULINE HENRY-TIERNEY**

Translating Transgressive Texts: Gender, Sexuality and the Body in Contemporary Women's Writing in French, Pauline Henry-Tierney, New York and London: Routledge, 2024, Hardback £145, ISBN 9781032620763

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Women's literature has long attempted to articulate the challenges facing women who write, in the face of masculinist discursive structures that alter, distort, and efface the feminine in language and literature. Indeed, much ink has been spilled over how women translate their particular experiences *into* language. After such marked attempts at translating the feminine self, what then do we make of translation *across* languages of such texts and writers? This is the central question that animates Pauline Henry-Tierney's *Translating Transgressive Texts: Gender, Sexuality, and the Body in Contemporary Women's Writing in French*. Looking to metropolitan France and Quebec at four instances of transgressive writing by women writers in French and their resulting English texts, Henry-Tierney examines the "complex relationship between translation and subjectivity" (2) for women writers whose narratives are intimately concerned with subverting and transgressing masculinist illusions of the "feminine" body and "female" experiences through varied articulations of gender, sexuality, and corporeality.

Undergirded by feminist translator and theorist Barbara Godard's notion of "dis/placement", Henry-Tierney adapts this idea not only to examine how four French autofictional texts "dis/place" the feminine in phallogentric narratives and expand the capacity of feminine subjectivities, but also to explore the role of translators and the impact of their translations on gendered identity, text, and language (1). In establishing this perspective in her introduction, Henry-Tierney rotates through several key terms—dis/placement, transgression, lived experience, sex, gender, corporeality, autofiction, paratext, and translation shift—that scaffold the book and, throughout the four case studies, organize her analysis. In a study principally concerned with the effects of linguistic and semiotic systems for iterating gendered identities and experiences, these terms specify the space of inquiry. The four texts chosen are "representative examples of transgressive writing" (5) in French because of their specific articulations of gender, sex, sexuality, corporeality, and pleasure from a female lens that challenges masculinist and established literary discourse. Moreover, their "autofictional" faculty "shapes the elaboration of subjectivity" (11) in the narratives, both resisting the reduction of transgressive material to purely biographical detail, and producing multiple and porous subjectivities across collective, lived, authorial, and narratorial scales of feminine experience. Centring on the gendered implications at every stage of the introduction, Henry-Tierney turns to translation then to understand its role "in dis/placing the self, including all iterations of the self" (13). That is to say, given the importance of gendered articulations for transgressive and fractured subjectivities in the French texts, Henry-Tierney

considers translation not as a secondary, neutral language act, but a process of “(re)writing subjectivity” (45). She understands the textual encounter with the translator as altering the cadence and tone of the textual articulations of gendered, sexual, and corporeal lived experiences. The manner in which translation and translators thus adapt and re-form feminine lived experiences of sex, gender, and corporeality across linguistic, orthographic, and grammatical systems becomes the mediating space for the argument and its nuances.

Before moving through the four texts, Henry-Tierney spends the first chapter charting the field of transgressive women’s writing and feminist translation that have led to her intervention on the topic. She turns to the post-1968 moment as the rise of texts, writers, scholars, translators, and readers engaging with “women’s social and material realities” (27) and asserting new (subversive, gendered) subjectivities. The following four chapters serve as case studies to interrogate the terms brought up in the introduction and build on the traditions of feminist translation and transgressive women’s writing explored in Chapter 1. Each chapter rotates through the author’s key terms for one of her case studies: an analysis of gender, sex, and corporeality in the original textual language; translation’s effects on the feminine bodies and subjectivities of the texts; and mapping the paratextual features, especially the reception of the original and translated texts.

Henry-Tierney’s analysis of these autofictional texts begins with Chapter 2, which takes up French-Canadian writer Nelly Arcan’s debut novel *Putain* (2001) and its translation *Whore* (2005) by Bruce Benderson. Concerned, as in the other case studies, with how Arcan “makes women’s presence tangible on the page” (58) Henry-Tierney focuses on the writer’s ability to re-write the feminine body as visible, agentic, and banal. And in a narrative focused on transgressive discourses (prostitution, incest, female sexuality, and anorexia, among others), she takes issue with the attempts of Benderson’s English translation to mitigate Arcan’s frank and lucid language through euphemism, metaphor, and re-writing. Chapter 3 picks up the focus on female bodies to explore the relationship between sexuality and textuality in Catherine Millet’s *La vie de Catherine M.* (2001) and its translation by Adriana Hunter (2002). Concerned with the physical processes, manifestations, and experiences of sex and sexuality, Henry-Tierney probes the language of Millet and Hunter and how they inform a (dis)comfortable relationship with female bodies and sex. Chapter 4, meanwhile, departs from the other case studies as it turns to look at the case of self-translation in Canadian writer Nancy Huston’s *Infrarouge* (2010) and *Infrared* (2011). Reading self-translation in light of her discussions of autofiction and dis/placement, Henry-Tierney explores the different approaches for references to gender, sex, and corporeality between Huston’s Francophone and Anglophone linguistic selves. Chapter 5 focuses on Nina Bouraoui’s autofictional text *Garçon manqué* (2000) and its translation *Tomboy* (2007). The deployment of grammatic, linguistic, and orthographic gender markers in French by Bouraoui comes under inspection as they are rendered into English, a language (supposedly) void of gendering. Such close reading reveals not only how “gendered identity is inherently linked to language” (157) but also the “gender coding equally present in the English language” (158), albeit oftentimes less structurally visible.

Each chapter or case study explores a different capacity for subjectivity and a different set of relationships between text, author, narrator, translator, critic, reader, and so on, even while centring on the same set of terms. This structure makes the text easily digestible. And in the continual back-and-forth between English and French texts, the contentious nature of feminine gender, sexuality, and corporeality in textual and literary spaces becomes quite evident thanks to Henry-Tierney's astute analysis. Her detailed readings carefully rotate the translation and translator through every facet to probe their relationship to language and femininity as mutually informing their work. In this manner, Henry-Tierney practices a sense of "dis/placement" to make visible gender, sex, and corporeality.

Cementing this perspective in the conclusion, Henry-Tierney writes that "the translation of transgressive women's writing in French is defined by dis/placement" (192). While such a claim has found room throughout the first chapter, it has not been the explicit focus of each case study, but rather the background from which a discussion of subjectivity and translation for women's writing can emerge. It would go too far to say that the term and its deployment become a methodological weakness; however, such an overreliance on the term seems at times to limit the rich textual analysis Henry-Tierney produces. Throughout the chapters, "dis/placement" takes on a different, yet productive, focus with each iteration, speaking to the reciprocally transformative possibilities between subversive subjects and languages. But as a term, it flattens the diverse, mutable, and dynamic plane of engagement Henry-Tierney has so carefully constructed.

It is the author's articulation, rather, of "the translation strategies employed and the textual effects engendered" and the 'transgressive modality of women's writing in French' (189) which makes *Translating Transgressive Texts* a valuable contribution to the field. Henry-Tierney brings together two important intellectual threads, women's writing and translation, through the perspective of "transgressiveness" to reveal the personal, social, interlingual, and intersubjective stakes of vocalizing subversive subjectivities and experiences in women's writing. It is this framework of transgression that imparts to the reader the realities of lived experiences and bodies for the formation of language and their "ever-evolving, dialogic dynamic" (192) between authors, translators, and readers for women's writing and translation.