WOMEN TRANSLATORS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE:
GENRE, GENDER, AND LITERARY CREATIVITY

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by
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The goal of this dissertation is to examine the importance of translation in the history of women’s writings in nineteenth-century France and the ways in which it not only contributed to the development of women’s intellectual activities, but also afforded access to literary production. I therefore explore how translation, when conceptualized as a women’s literary activity, both reinforced existing roles for women in literature and at the same time allowed them access to other forms of creativity. For, contrary to the opinion of many scholars of literary genre and gender who do not discuss translation in this context, translation was intimately related to varied forms of textual production. In order to demonstrate this relationship and the enormous impact of translation on women’s conceptions of their creative capacities, I examine translations, as well as the prefatory discourse that often accompanies them, autobiographical statements by women translators, and fiction by women translators with texts from Thérèse Bentzon, Victorine de Chastenay, and Mme Lesbazeilles-Souvestre. I first address how literary creativity was a gendered activity in the nineteenth century, with women limited to certain secondary modes of literary production. I then examine the relationship between translation and the modes of textual creation named above in order to demonstrate the fundamental relatedness of these writings and, finally, I demonstrate the creative aspects of translation through a close reading of several translations in comparison to their source texts to show how translation was not only a creative activity, but a gendered one as well. Despite the widespread dismissal of translation in consideration with issues of gender and genre in nineteenth-century France, its inclusion opens important new areas of research.
and allows for a fuller understanding of what it meant to write as a woman in the nineteenth century.
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Introduction

My dissertation explores the practice of translation as a women’s literary activity in nineteenth-century France and how it served both to reinforce and to transform existing roles for women in literature. My goal is to examine and establish the importance of translation in the history of women’s writings and the ways in which it not only afforded access to literary production, but, most importantly, was a major factor in the transformation of women’s intellectual identities that contributed to the expansion of their cultural and professional horizons. In so doing, I also question many an assumption with regard to the status and nature of translation in and of itself.

While it has been acknowledged that translation has long been an important activity for women, most scholarship on women and translation concentrates on this activity before the nineteenth century. Scholars such as Tina Krontiris, and Danielle Clark, among others, have brought to light the importance of translation as a means of writing for women when publication in their own name was deemed inappropriate, for “en Occident, durant le Moyen Age et la Renaissance, la traduction est pour elles l’une des seules pratiques d’écriture socialement acceptable” (Delisle & Woodsworth 154). Yet, when it comes to the nineteenth century, the amount of research on women and translation tapers off significantly, only to become more vibrant in the context of analyses examining the appropriation of translation as a tool of feminist and post-colonial engagement in the twentieth century, with, for example, studies by Luise von Flotow,
Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood, and Nicole Brossard, among others. While several scholars, such as Susannah Stark, Christina Zwarg and Valérie Cossy, though not working specifically in the French context, have significantly increased the small amount of scholarship on women and translation in the nineteenth century, the subject still remains relatively unexplored, especially in comparison to the extant work on translation and women in other eras. This is perhaps in part due to the fact that women in the nineteenth century were publishing more prolifically than ever; the early part of the century saw a marked increased in publications by women writers in a wide variety of literary domains as diverse as fiction, poetry, children’s literature, journalism, and travelogues (Slama, “Femmes écrivains” 214-15). Perhaps, then, women’s increasing literary activity in the nineteenth century would suggest that the problem of authorship for women was largely solved and that translation did not have to be substituted as an acceptable alternative to more “creative” forms of writing. If that were the case, it would mean that translation no longer played the pivotal role for women that it did in earlier centuries when it gave them a means to enter the public sphere all while protecting them from censure for publication.

Yet, though women were publishing on a larger scale than ever before, this does not mean that their literary participation was unproblematically accepted; hostility towards women writers was still widespread, spanning the course of the century and including critics of most all ideological backgrounds (Bertrand-Jennings 28-29). One need think only of the derogatory appellation of ‘bas-bleu’ applied to women writers of the nineteenth century and works such as Les Bas-bleus (1878) by Barbey d’Aurevilly, which aimed to deny women’s legitimacy as authors and relegate them to the sidelines of
creation, or Honoré Daumier’s caricatures, which depicted the ‘bas-bleus’ in a ridiculous and unflattering light. Women were still viewed as intrinsically incapable of original creation by their very nature and denied legitimacy as authors based upon a supposedly inherent lack of capacity for original production. Published in 1860, Michelet’s *La Femme* put it thus: women are “productive aussi par son influence sur l’homme, et dans la sphère de l’idée, et dans le réel. Mais son idée n’arrive guère à la forte réalité. C’est pourquoi elle crée peu […] Les grandes créations de l’art semblent jusqu’ici lui être impossibles” (262). It was therefore only through their capacity to inspire men that women could hope to have creative influence, a stance that neatly relegated them to the sidelines of literary participation. Indeed, one of the most common ways to discredit women as intellectuals was to deny their capacity for originality and innovation; by preserving original creation as a domain specific to themselves, men “rationalize and justify claims to property in ideas and lines of inheritance, preserving for small groups of self-recruiting dominant males both intellectual hegemony and control of a variety of rewards and privileges” (Carroll 138). Literary critics such as Christine Planté, Chantal Bertrand-Jennings, and Simone Balayé have explored the tensions inherent for women publishing at this time and largely demonstrated the gendered nature of discourse on both women writers and the works they produced. Thus, despite women’s increased rate of publication in the nineteenth century, their literary activities were still always fraught with tension and notions of propriety and transgression.

The fact that publication remained a fractious activity for women in the nineteenth century, as it had always been, indicates that translation retained the capacity to play a transformative role for women as it had in earlier times. Translation’s place within the
spectrum of literary activities for women in the nineteenth century must not be ignored, but rather must be viewed both through the lens of the tensions at play with other forms of writing and in its historical nature as a traditionally ‘feminine’ form of literary production. At once a time-honored, acceptable opportunity and a means of participation in the literary scene at a time of unprecedented publication for women, what role did translation play in women’s literary activities in nineteenth-century France? Was it a continuation of earlier modes of publication, or did it, in fact, have revolutionary possibilities? Was it a middle ground that allowed women access to literature in a different format? Perhaps most importantly, how can we consider translation in conjunction with women’s other literary activities? It is just such questions that I discuss in this project, with the aim of situating translation as a literary activity among others in women’s creative lives in the nineteenth century. When considered in conjunction with their complete creative output, translation reveals itself as simultaneously a means of remaining within the norms of acceptability, by relying on a type of writing traditionally associated with the feminine, and a way of eschewing it, by using translation itself as a tool to make statements about women’s place in literature. Translation, then, becomes an important mode of understanding the polygraphic nature of women’s writing and its critical dimension, as well as the tensions inherent in the publication of creative work.

To include translation as an important activity of female intellectuals enriches current knowledge on the intersection of gender and literary genre in the nineteenth century and beyond. Failure to do so would negate a large section of women’s creative work in the nineteenth century and present an incomplete portrait both of feminine literary work and of generic divisions. Translation, in fact, played a large role in many
stages of women’s literary careers. A study of translation therefore permits us to challenge our present understanding of women’s creative realities in the nineteenth century and to question our assumptions of generic impermeability. Through a thorough examination of women’s translations, we can come to a new understanding of the cultural forces that are at work in such a production and, moreover, arrive at a new comprehension of the very process of generic categorization and assignation.

What remains to be done in the field of translation studies, and what I intend to do in this dissertation, is to examine translation as a women’s activity in nineteenth-century France not as an activity separate from writing and other forms of literary creation, but in conjunction with other literary productions; for their translations do not stand apart from their other texts, but rather together form a coherent corpus of work. As I shall demonstrate, the two aspects of their writing careers—translation and ‘creative’ writing—are both indelibly marked with one another, and thus to treat the one without evoking the other would result only in a lopsided analysis. With this goal in mind, in my analysis I treat not only translations, but the other literary productions of the women I am studying: namely fiction, autobiography, and prefaces. This will allow us to grasp how these women conceptualized their own creativity and place in the publishing world through a larger spectrum before I do a close study of several translations.

Essential in the exploration of translation as a creative activity for women in nineteenth-century France is a view of translation that refuses its categorization as an activity on the margins of literary creation and acknowledges its creative potential and the act of authorship it inevitably engenders. As Lawrence Venuti points out, translation is always an act that involves agency on the part of the translator: “any translating is
obviously intended action: a translator aims to rewrite a foreign text in another language, reproducing its specificity as much as linguistic and cultural differences permit and audiences require” (“Retranslations” 28). Translation, then, cannot be accurately categorized as a derivative act that merely involves transferring a text from one language to another, and any analysis that attempts to do so will inevitably result in an interpretation that denies the full critical reality of the act of translating. An approach such as Venuti’s that valorizes translation as an active process of creating meaning is an essential component of my analysis of women as translators. Regarding their translations as not merely derivative versions of a pre-existing text, but as acts that stem from “an obviously intended action” allows for both a more meaningful analysis of the translations themselves and the relationship among them and the other written productions of these women. Venuti is a strong proponent of thinking historically about translation, writing that “translations are profoundly linked to their historical moment because they always reflect the cultural formation where they are produced, the hierarchical arrangement of values that circulate in institutions and undergo various developments over time” (34). In the case of my own study, I will be historicizing translation as it was practiced in the nineteenth century in general, what that act permitted to women in particular and how it fit in with their overall creative development. The relationship between women and translation, then, must be considered in both its historical aspect, as a literary production belonging to a specific time and cultural milieu, and its gendered aspect as an act of writing with particular meanings and implications for women writers that it did not hold for male writers.
In deciding which texts to include in my dissertation as objects of study, there were several factors that motivated my choice of the texts and translators to examine. First of all, while there were some issues of availability, the wealth of women translators in the nineteenth century assured that I had a broad slate of translators and writers from whom to select my corpus. I wanted to examine both women who translated and wrote and those who only translated in order to present a more complete portrait of the various ways in which women practiced translation. However, I did not want to select too randomly and discuss different translators and writers in each section, because I felt that that would not allow for a continuous narrative thread throughout my analysis. Instead, I focus on three women from three different periods of the nineteenth century, one of whom translated only and two of whom both wrote and translated, in order to present as complete a portrait as possible of the possibilities and limitations inherent in translation for women in nineteenth-century France. These three authors are representative of what I found elsewhere in the corpus, but I am also in the process of establishing a database of women translators that will allow future expansion of scholarly work. I was equally careful to examine translations of texts written by both women and men that reflect varying positions in regard to the relationship between women and textual creation in order to present a broad variety of positions about women’s roles in literature.

Chapter One sets up my research question within the greater context of studies on both translation and literary genre and gender within the nineteenth century and demonstrates the need for research such as that which I am undertaking. I examine the development of translation theory and practice in France, both prior to and in the nineteenth century, as it relates to women specifically and with regard to its larger place
in literary discourse. Furthermore, with the support of contemporary critical work on translation, I probe the relationship between translation and creative writing; far from being two separate activities, translation and writing are essentially interrelated, which leads to questions as to how the influence of translation can be seen in writing, and vice-versa. Indeed, the study of translation as an important activity for women in nineteenth-century France permits us to problematize many aspects commonly associated with this activity, such as its supposedly repetitive nature and non-creative dimension. I also discuss the inherently problematic nature of situating translation as a literary genre, which has contributed to the exclusion of translation as a ‘women’s genre’ of writing.

Next, I situate my research within scholarship on nineteenth-century women’s literature, in particular the intersection of gender and genre and suitable modes of literary production for women. I begin by addressing the ways in which being female limited and defined acceptable modes of literary production and thus relegated women to a secondary role in the literary world. I also acknowledge how translation fits into this schema of “women’s writing,” even though it is largely unspoken of by the literary critics who treat questions of writing and gender in nineteenth-century France. I then examine how translation represented a “safe” literary activity and at the same time gave women opportunities to go beyond the boundaries of what was deemed appropriate for them through a review of the extant literature on women and translation. I also review the literature on translation as a women’s activity to identify in what ways my analysis both draws on and expands upon this research.

In Chapter Two, I begin my generic study of the intersection between creative writing and translation with an analysis of *Tentée* (1889), a novel written by Thérèse
Bentzon, a prolific writer and translator, which openly engages with the themes of women’s access to literature, their rights to create literature, and the tensions that arise when they wish to become active participants in the creation and dissemination of literary texts. I approach this novel with the aim of teasing out the influence of the act of translation on other works written by women writers/translators—how does translation affect the writing of fiction, and can the same constraints that would lead women to translate be identified in their fiction? As I demonstrate in this chapter, the prevailing discourse on women and creativity does, indeed, affect the portrayal of women’s relationship with writing in Tentée. Moreover, while this novel does not explicitly evoke translation, many of its themes, such as women’s capacity to appreciate as well as write literature and their reproductive versus their creative abilities, when considered in conjunction with the professional activities of the author, certainly have something to say about the place of both translation and writing in women’s careers in the nineteenth century. This analysis, then, permits me to problematize women’s roles in the literary world, as well as to explore translation’s relationship to writing.

Chapter Three examines autobiographical discourse by a woman translator/writer through the Mémoires de Madame de Chastenay, 1771-1815 (written in 1817, published 1896-97), by Madame Victorine de Chastenay, a translator and author, paying particular attention to the activity of translation with regard to the division of “masculine” and “feminine” literary genres. The study of this text allows me to examine the place Mme de Chastenay assigned to translation in her career: was translation mostly regarded as a literary debut or an apprenticeship in the art of writing, or did it have a more prominent place? How did Mme de Chastenay conceptualize the relationship among translation,
literary creation “proper”, women’s creativity, and intellectual activity? Mme de Chastenay was certainly aware of constraints and how they affected her literary reputation, and I explore the ways in which her career as a translator and writer along with the public reaction to her works that exemplify the generic restrictions set for women writers in nineteenth-century France.

Chapter Four is devoted to the prefatory discourse surrounding translation through an examination of Thérèse Bentzon’s preface to her translation of Sarah Orne Jewett’s *A Country Doctor, Le Roman de la femme médecin* (1890) and Mme Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s preface to her translation of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre, Jeanne Eyre* (1854). This is an important element of my analysis because it presents the opportunity to examine the explicit discourse surrounding translation as conceived of and practiced by these women. A study of the prefatory discourse of translations gives us access to a variety of questions that may not be able to be directly addressed in a study that limits itself to only translations themselves denuded of the paratextual elements that surround them, namely, questions that direct our attention to the translation’s historical context, its intended reception, and its status as a translation. As I demonstrate, both women conceived of their activity and the texts they were translating in specifically gendered terms, either as upholding or challenging the prevailing standards for women in literature in the nineteenth century. Although the two prefaces demonstrate very different forms of discourse on the whole, they both openly engage in the topic of what it meant to be a women writer in the nineteenth century and the constraints and possibilities that surrounded their means of creation.
My fifth and final chapter is an analysis of translations in comparison to their source texts. I examine the intersection of translation and creation through a study of Thérèse Bentzon’s translation of several Bret Harte short stories in the collection *Récits californiens* (1873) and of Mme Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s *Jane Eyre*. An analysis of translations in relation to their source texts brings into play issues of creativity and fidelity, textual choices in relation to cultural norms for creation, and the formation of a particular vision of the female writer in nineteenth-century France. My methodological approach in this close-reading exercise relies on Antoine Berman’s *Pour une critique des traductions: John Donne*, in which Berman proposes a methodology for examining translations that aims to bypass the positive/negative dichotomy that all too often categorizes the discussion of translation. In setting up a critical tradition of translation, Berman is attempting to move away from the tradition of translation criticism in which the term ‘criticism’ implies a judgment or evaluation and instead shift towards an analysis that takes into account both the translation itself and the cultural factors that influenced its creation, as well as the specific translator him or herself (13-14).

As you can see, in the organization of my dissertation chapters I follow a logical progression from the periphery—fiction, autobiography—to the center—prefaces, translations—of translation related activity. Such an organization allows me to first examine women and translation within the greater context of discourse on women and creativity in the nineteenth century, always with an eye to translation’s place within this discourse, and then move on to a more specific micro-examination of translation itself. Thus, when I begin my comparative analyses of translations and source texts, the position of women vis-à-vis literary creation in general and translation in particular has already
been largely defined and explored, and sheds light on their various embodiments. Let us begin, then, by first taking a broader look at the history of translation in France and women’s place in shaping that history.
Chapter 1

Translation, Women’s Writing, and Textual Propriety: An Overview

1.1 A Brief Overview of Translation in France

In order to fully comprehend the ways in which the practice of translation and the theoretical discourse that surrounds it both changed and remained stagnant in nineteenth-century France, it will first be necessary to understand its historical importance and the modes of practicing and thinking translation in France and other European countries. I thus briefly discuss the importance of translation in the French context in order to better situate its evolution over the course of the nineteenth century. I then move on to a more in-depth discussion of practices and theories of translation in nineteenth-century Europe, in particular in France and Germany, since the German translation theorists were widely influential in changing the landscape within which translation was situated at this time. It is equally essential to briefly discuss contemporary work in translation theory, given that the developments in the field of discourse on translation today bear upon the ways in which we can situate translation as a women’s genre of writing in nineteenth century France in relation to both translation as a whole and to the larger schema of women’s literary productions at this time.

Translation long played an important role in France as a means of developing the French language; both religious and secular texts were translated from Latin and Greek into the French vernacular and projects were supported by the church and the monarchy
alike. Indeed, translation was an essential component in the transmission and diffusion of knowledge; a wide variety of classical authors, such as Aristotle and Ptolemy, were translated into French vernacular as early as the fourteenth century. Such translations served an important role in the development of the French language because it was often necessary for the translator to create neologisms in order to transmit the sense of the texts. Nicolas d'Oresme, for instance, through his translations from Greek, is credited with coining 450 neologisms that are still in use in contemporary French (Horguelin 34). Apart from linguistic innovation, translators were also instrumental in the development of modes and styles of scholarly writing in French, in terms, for example, of determining word order and rhetorical style, as they attempted to bring works from Greek and Latin into the burgeoning French language (Lusignan 149). During the Renaissance and beyond, translators served much the same purpose, acting not only as translators but as lexicographers, among other roles, and publishing works on rhetoric, grammar, orthography, and pronunciation. On the level of literary developments, imitation of Greek and Latin texts via translation was the model in terms of creating a French literary tradition, and translation of these classical authors led to a tendency on the part of the translators to correct and perfect (in their own eyes) their style and led to the tradition within French translation known as the “belles infidèles” (Delisle & Woodsworth 51-53). Such features indicate that translation was always an important activity in terms of the development of a French literary tradition and that translators were active participants in more than one realm of scholarly achievement and the acquisition and diffusion of knowledge.
It is particularly important to have a clear sense of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century school of translators who produced what were known as the ‘belles infidèles,’ for it was specifically against this tradition of translation that many of the nineteenth century translators were reacting as they attempted to formulate a new means of theorizing and practicing translation and to position it within the literary system. The term ‘belles infidèles’ is largely attributed to Gilles Ménage, who used the expression when describing the translation style of Nicolas Perrot d’Ablancourt, who was noted for his concern for the stylistics of his texts; above all, the three qualities with which he sought to endow his translations were clarity, concision, and elegance, therefore practically erasing the importance of the traditional concern with fidelity to the source text. Indeed, his stylistic preoccupations were often in direct opposition to fidelity in translation, and he consistently altered the content of the source texts to be more in line with his stylistic standards (Delisle & Woodsworth 53). It was this quality of his work that led Ménage to remark about one of these translations, “Je l’appellai la belle infidèle, qui était le nom que j’avais donné étant jeune à une de mes maîtresses” (cited in Delisle & Woodsworth 72). From the seventeenth century on, then, the term ‘belles infidèles’ has served to describe ‘free’ translations, that is, translations that are more concerned with constructing a style in line with French standards than with strict fidelity to the source material (Zuber 195-96).

Such an ethics of translation is significant because it indicates that far from being conceived as a mode of literary production separate from ‘creative’ writing, translation was perceived as literary creation in and of itself and the translations stemming from this tradition had a strong influence on the development of French literature. The term ‘belle
infidèle,’ moreover, associates women with translation by positing a translated text as a beautiful, unfaithful woman; as I shall demonstrate, the association of women and translation reinforces this identification of femininity and translation, both scorned and depreciated to the credit of the creation of original works. Lori Chamberlain, in “Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation” points out the implicit link between translation as a woman, beautiful but guilty of having “betrayed” the original text, and the act of writing works that will be translated, linked to man, to creation, and to an original paternity. She notes that this formula “mimics the patrilineal kinship where paternity—not maternity—legitimizes an offspring” (315). Thus, while the feminizing adornments of an unfaithful translation may render it beautiful, they will not make it a legitimate part of the literary system.

1.2 Translation in Nineteenth-Century France

The nineteenth century marked a significant rupture within the French tradition of translation, both in how translations were produced and in the value assigned to them. In Histoire de la traduction en France (1893), Justin Bellanger claims that a great divide marks the style and ethics of translations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and those of the nineteenth century. He asserts that the most striking difference that the reader will notice from more contemporary translations in looking at these older translations is “le peu de souci de l’exactitude rigoureuse” (2), which proves for him how unimportant the concept of fidelity was at this time. Bellanger clearly comes down against such an ethics of translation, asking his readers “que dirions-nous d’un portrait où le peintre aurait mis toutes les autres qualités, excepté la ressemblance ? […] moins
jalousées d’être vraies que de se faire lire avec plaisir, [les traductions] se distinguent quelquefois par les mérites du style, rarement par la fidélité‖ (2-3). Thus, not only is Bellanger critical of an ethics of translation that privileges style over textual fidelity, he equally expresses the opinion that any “mérites du style” automatically result in an unfaithful, and therefore unmeritorious, translation. Contrasting that style with contemporary practices of translation, he says that “l’exa tempt y a détrôné l’à peu près, et cette modification introduite dans les procédés des traducteurs marque une révolution radicale dans l’art de traduire” (3). Once again he is careful to stress the different code of ethics of translations that is currently in vogue in relationship to its heavy emphasis on the duty of fidelity to the source text and its rejection of earlier styles of translating. At the same time, he is expressly calling for a rejection of any principle of translation that would value style more than accuracy, thus reflecting the change in modes of translation that occurred during the nineteenth century. Such a stance on the part of Bellanger is the product of a far-reaching change in the norms and goals of translating that came to pass over the course of the nineteenth century and that had widespread implications for the ways in which translation was conceptualized, practiced, and received. In order to fully understand the extent of the changes to which Bellanger is referring, it is essential to examine how standards for translation developed in direct opposition to earlier ethics and in tandem with the flowering of the new literary and cultural movement of Romanticism.

Bellanger was far from being alone in his condemnation of the eighteenth-century standards that governed translation. Indeed, the growing dissatisfaction with the translative principles of the previous century and the development of a new ethics of translation in nineteenth-century French literary culture was an important theme in
studies of translation at this time, since translation occupied a tenuous and often contested, though in many ways essential, position in literary culture. In a positive sense, translation was seen as an important means of renewing and introducing new styles into a national literature, a position perhaps best exemplified by Mme de Staël in her works of literary criticism *De la littérature* (1799) and *De l’Allemagne* (1810) and in her article “De l’esprit des traductions” (1816). Though Mme de Staël did not publish any translations, outside of portions of Goethe’s *Faust* in *De l’Allemagne*, her theoretical writings on the subject of translation were highly influential in introducing a new manner of conceptualizing translation into European culture, both including and beyond France (Simon, *Gender in Translation* 61-62). Firstly, in *De la littérature* Mme de Staël identifies two very different literary traditions within Europe; she claims that the French, along with the Spanish and the Italians, are products of “la littérature du midi,” whereas the English and the Germans belong to the “littérature du nord,” which has a completely different set of influences and themes. She believes that these differences are due not only to different early literary models, but also to such factors as climactic variations, and she herself places a higher value on the “littérature du nord” as being more fitting to “l’esprit d’un peuple libre”. She by no means sees this literature as being without relevance to other literary traditions; indeed, in her view its “enthousiasme réfléchi, une exaltation pure, peuvent également convenir à tous les peuples” and thus would be of value to the southern literary traditions (*De la Littérature* 203-12). Based on her views on the differing value of the northern and southern European literatures and the high value that she places upon English and German literature in particular, it is no surprise that she
was such an ardent proponent of the benefits of translation as a means of enriching national literatures.

“De l’esprit des traductions” was written specifically in regard to Italy, though Mme de Staël’s observations are equally relevant to other cultural contexts, including that of France. Translation was a way of importing what she saw as superior literature into her own country’s literary tradition in order to renew and to continue to develop it, an idea that she explores more fully in “De l’esprit des traductions.” This article further elucidates her view that cross-cultural literary transmission was an essential component in the growth and renewal of literary traditions. She begins by positing that genius in any country is so rare that “si chaque nation moderne en étoit réduite à ses propres trésors, elle seroit toujours pauvre” (“De l'Esprit” 387), thus expanding upon her line of reasoning set out in De la littérature. Foreign literatures, she claims, can bring many new attributes into any national style, such as “des tournures nouvelles, et des expressions plus originales” and so are able to “préserver la littérature d’un pays de ces tournures banales qui sont les signes les plus certains de sa décadence” (“De l'Esprit” 389). Translation is in this way not mainly conceived of as a secondary literary activity, but as an essential step in the continuing evolution of all national literatures.

“De l’esprit des traductions” serves not only to stress the importance of translation, but also to outline what Mme de Staël saw as the proper way to practice translation. She claims that the French method of translating is improper in that it tends to give a French flavor to the texts that are translated; she finds that the German and the English have been much more successful conserving the original styles of translated texts. As I have already discussed, the pre-nineteenth century French method of
translation was not noted for its fidelity to the source text and instead attempted to insert
foreign works within the French literary tradition through the use of conventionally
French styles of writing, rather than preserving their differences (Simon, Gender in
Translation 63). Mme de Staël is therefore advocating for a means of translation that
places greater emphasis on fidelity and preservation of the source text’s stylistic features.
At the same time, though, neither does Mme de Staël see an exact fidelity as the mark of
a successful translation, finding that such an approach results in a loss of the original’s
charm (Staël, “De l’Esprit” 389-91). Translation, she claims, “ce n’est pas prendre un
compass, et copier les dimensions de l’édifice; c’est animer du même souffle de vie un
instrument différent” (395). Translation is therefore an activity that must find the right
balance between style and fidelity in order to both give a faithful rendering of the source
text and retransmit the charms of the original work. Such a depiction of translation
endows it with a power denied this activity when it is discussed in the context of literary
transmission; Mme de Staël not only gives translation the strength of renewing and
enriching national literatures, but at the same time identifies the translator’s task as one
imbued with a creative function through her emphasis on the importance, and, indeed, the
very possibility, of allowing readers in another language to find the same charm as was
present in the original.
Mme de Staël’s views on translation were also significant in that she believed that
translation, and thus the introduction of new literary forms, could have a positive effect
not only on a country’s literary establishment, but, in a broader scheme, on its cultural
life as well, in that the introduction of foreign ideas encouraged the growth of new forms
of creation in general; her call for translation was therefore an argument for “the
promotion of free trade in the realm of the arts” (Simon, “Germaine de Staël and Gayatri Spivak” 127-28). Translation, then, served the role of a mediator for Mme de Staël, capable of enacting change in more than just the literary world. She positioned translation as an explicitly political activity, linked to a free exchange of ideas both in and beyond literature, an idea which became prominent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Simon, *Gender in Translation* 62-65). Mme de Staël was thus a key figure in the rethinking of translation that both changed the way it was conceptualized and the way it was practiced1.

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1 While Mme de Staël was certainly influential in changing the practice of translation in the 19th century, it must be noted that her position on the positive potential of translation did not originate in France, but was rather a product of the influence of German literary culture, and thus a change of translation ethics was not only coming about in France, but in other European countries as well. There was a longstanding tradition in German literary culture, dating at least to Luther, of making translation an object of reflection, whether it be reflection of the methodological or empirical variety, reflection on cultural and literary matters, or reflection on the act of translation itself and its literary, linguistic, and metaphysical implications. German Romantics, such as Goethe, Hölderlin, and Lessing, for instance, were particularly interested in the practice of translation as a means of founding a national literature through the transmission of both literary forms and content. Their theoretical texts on translation were closely intertwined with their literary and critical reflections (Berman, *L'Epreuve de l'étranger* 27-30). Such a conception of translation did not, however, result in translations that were aligned with the French school of domesticating foreign works, but rather built an ethics of translation that emphasized a preservation of the foreign qualities of the works to be translated in order to develop German-language literature and culture through the importation of new forms and ideas. As such, translation formed part of a nationalistic project to build and enrich textual productions in German through translations not of contemporary literature, but of Greek and Latin texts that appealed to a culturally elite minority. This conception of translation as a vehicle for
Both Mme de Staël, looking ahead to the changes she hopes to see in translation in the nineteenth century, and Bellanger, looking back on those changes that did come to pass over the course of the century, express remarkably similar views on why pre-nineteenth century translation traditions were, in their eyes, lacking. The questions remain, first of all, of what were the cultural conditions that led to this evolving view of translation, and, secondly, of what concrete alterations in translation style did, in fact, come to pass over the course of the century. The dissatisfaction with the French ethics of translating before the nineteenth century expressed by both Bellanger and Mme de Staël reflects change in the ethics of translation that came about in the mid-nineteenth century, "foreignizing" texts was in direct opposition to the French tradition of the 'belles infidèles' and was explicitly viewed as a means of combating the French cultural domination of German-speaking areas (Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility* 99-107). Schleiermacher, in his 1813 lecture "On the Different Methods of Translating," states "If [the translator’s] readers are supposed to understand, then they must comprehend the spirit of the language that was native to the writer, and they must be able to see his peculiar way of thinking and feeling" (39). Such a method of translating is directly related, in his view, to the development of the German language and culture: "just as our soil itself has probably become richer and more fertile, and our climate more lovely and mild after much transplanting of foreign plants, so do we feel that our language … can only flourish and develop its own perfect power through the most varied contacts with what is foreign" and goes on to directly contrast this ethics with the French method of translation, questioning "who would claim that anything has ever been translated into French from either the classical or the Germanic languages?" (53). This view of translation as a means of developing and enriching a national literature through preservation of a text’s foreign elements was clearly a strong influence on Mme de Staël, and thus on French practices of translation in the 19th century. It also indicates a growing interest in positioning translation as a valuable literary activity.
because of a broader shift in literary culture, in large part due to the rise of the Romantic movement. The Romantic sensibility brought about a widespread revision in the way that translation was perceived, and it moved away from the ‘belles infidèles’ of the eighteenth century towards a more rigorous notion of what formed a quality translation, and thus a new notion of fidelity in translation. Not only did the ethics governing translation evolve, but they changed in accordance with wider literary movements that enacted broad changes upon all aspects of literary production and reception in the nineteenth century (Lambert, “La Traduction en France” 396-97). Translations in the nineteenth century were characterized by attributes completely missing from the earlier tradition of ‘belles infidèles,’ as Bellanger, for one, was quick to point out.

At the same time, though, even as theorists of translation in the nineteenth century were eager to emphasize how their ideas on translation differed from those of the previous century, we must not rush too quickly to the judgment that the manner in which they translated did indeed change substantively from one epoch to the next. As José Lambert points out, there is most always a disconnect between “la parole et l’acte” (“La Traduction en France” 397) that should render us suspicious of too firm a faith in the professed translating ethics that stressed their change and difference. It is therefore necessary to take such considerations into account in order to nuance the stance towards

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2 Lambert goes on to explain that “la méfiance est de rigueur dès que l’âge romantique … explicite et justifie sa conception de la traduction. Il se contente souvent de reprocher à ses prédécesseurs une série d’erreurs, et cela d’après des critères esthétiques, commerciaux ou autres, qui sont eux-mêmes sujets à caution” (397-98). Many translators who were closely linked with the Romantic ethics of translation, Lambert notes, did not actually follow to the letter their proposed fidelity and in fact altered or completely cut certain portions of their source texts in order to conform to their readers’ tastes, just as the previous century’s ‘belles infidèles’ had done. Such changes and alterations oftentimes went unnoticed because knowledge of the foreign language in question was not necessarily considered to be a prerequisite in critical judgments on translations (399, 402).
translation proposed by Bellanger, Mme de Staël, and others, and to comprehend fully both the discourse on and practices of translation. As most theorizing was done by men, moreover, with the noted exception of Mme de Staël, of course, and women were marginalized in the realm of theoretical discourse, it is difficult to state with any certainty how our corpus of translators positioned themselves in regard to the changing ethics of translation: did they, too, subscribe to the idea that translations must mark a greater fidelity to the source text, or were they more in line with the earlier standards that allowed for greater variation in translation? Over the course of this study, I address such questions in an attempt to further elucidate the ways in which nineteenth-century women conceptualized and practiced translation.

In addition to such growing reflection on the activity of translation that stemmed from the German Romantics, literary institutions within France were equally important in spreading interest in foreign language texts. Translations from the English were widely distributed through the epoch’s important literary periodicals, such as the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and the *Mercure de France*, both of which published current texts from England and America, and many leading literary figures were also active as translators (Gounel 206). Such literary imports played an integral component in the development of textual practices in nineteenth-century France, for they served as new models for creation and were often absorbed within the canon of essentially French texts (Lambert, “Théorie de la littérature” 165). The shift in French thinking on translation was thus part of a wider re-imagining of the possibilities inherent in this activity that was going on all throughout Europe.
By the same token, though, one must not suggest that thinking on translation underwent a complete shift that left only room for a positive view of this activity. Part of the process of refining our image of translation theory and practice as expressed by those who lauded its changing style includes understanding the ways in which they sought to limit the possibilities of translation and its inclusion as a literary genre, since they by no means had a universally positive view on its importance and potential, nor of its relationship to the literary system as a whole. Even Mme de Staël, who so keenly saw the possibilities of translation’s effects on the literature, used language that places some doubt upon her view of translation as an integral part of that system on the same level as other forms of literary creation. She claims that “il n’y a pas de plus éminent service à rendre à la littérature, que de transporter d’une langue à une autre les chefs-d’œuvre de l’esprit humain” (Staël, “De l’Esprit” 387, emphasis added). Thus, even as she praises the importance of translation, Mme de Staël positions it as a service that is to be rendered to literature, and not as a literary production in and of itself, and in so doing she maintains its contingent status within the literary system. The translator, then, would not be an author if one subscribes to this view of translation, but rather a sort of literary servant or tradesperson always in service to and under the dominion of the primary object. Moreover, she decries the very need for translation as recourse to the fact that no one can learn every language in which literature is produced: “la meilleure manière, j’en conviens, pour se passer des traductions, seroit de savoir toutes les langues dans lesquelles les ouvragens des grands poètes ont été composés” (388). In this way she is indirectly pointing out that in the best of all possible worlds, translation would not even be necessary, and that we would all be able to do without translations all together. Even
when translation can be beneficial and successfully practiced, both of which she upholds as true, it is at best a poor substitute for reading the original works and, at any rate, counts only as a peripheral activity within the literary system. Even from a proponent of translation’s possible positive effects, then, this activity is always considered to be outside the realm of the literary.  

Mme de Staël’s discourse on translation is also revelatory of the generic hierarchy which functioned within translation itself. “De l’esprit des traductions“ is largely occupied with a discussion of the translation of classical authors, such as Homer, as well as authors already largely considered to be an important part of the literary canon, such as Shakespeare. Her analysis of translations of modern literature is limited to poetry and theater, both highly valorized literary genres on the reigning scale of values. Translation of novels, for example, does not come into play in her discussion, and thus her discourse reinforces the notions of “high” literature, for which translation must be strictly regulated and commented upon in order to preserve these works’ original beauty, and “lower” forms of literature, whose translations are not subject to such scrutiny. Indeed, most of the in-depth commentary devoted to translation in the nineteenth century is not occupied with contemporary translations, but with the translation of already canonical authors. Most translations of so-called important literary works, moreover, were done by men; Mme Dacier served as the most well-known exception to this rule.  

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3 The view of translation as, at best, a necessary evil is often put forth, particularly in relation to the biblical story of Babel: the confusion of languages, which creates the need for translation, was man’s punishment (Merrill 140). See also Jacques Derrida, “Des Tours de Babel”, and George Steiner, After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation.

4 Mme Dacier was an eighteenth-century intellectual particularly well-known as a translator and a critic of Latin and Greek texts. Most notably, she translated the Iliad (1711) and the Odyssey (1716), both editions of which were very well received. She was also an active participant in the quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns (Beauchamp 34-44).
roles as translators of contemporary literature thus goes unmentioned through the higher valorization placed upon translations of works that were already considered canonical. As I will discuss more fully in a later section of this chapter, generic hierarchies and the confinement of women to a subaltern place on that scale was an essential part of the construction of women’s identities as literary creators in the nineteenth century, and the distinction between higher and lower forms of literature in the realm of translation that confined women to the translation of less prestigious works is reflective of the larger genre/gender divisions that dictated their possibilities for literary production.

More generally speaking, Bellanger, looking back from the end of the century, expresses a conflicting point of view on the nature of translation within the literary system. He proposes the following statement to serve as an epigraph to his book: “il y a au monde une chose plus rare que de composer un bon livre, c’est de composer une bonne traduction” (4). This statement could be interpreted in several ways, both positive and negative in the view it takes of translation. In a positive sense, such a statement could serve to celebrate the talent required to successfully translate a text; though, again, success would be dependent on what an individual considered to be the ‘correct’ ethics to follow in translating. Yet, for the most part, I interpret this statement as a negative prediction on the viability of achieving a successful translation, for it denies the very possibility of translation as a successful endeavor capable of retransmitting the ‘spirit’ of the original work, thus dooming translation, and translators, to eternal failure. This statement also serves to set translators up in opposition to writers, those who would compose a book, which once again positions them as being exterior to the mainstream of literary production and places them on a lower scale in the hierarchy of textual creation.
Other factors which must be considered in order to present a complete view of the perception of translation is the fact that the introduction of foreign texts within the French literary system was not without controversy. It was oftentimes seen as harmful to French literature, and patriotic writers viewed the widespread appeal and availability of foreign literature as a sign of decadence (Gounel 207). Its status as a secondary production based on a creative original, moreover, led to its categorization as a minor literary practice at best. Indeed, translators themselves often considered their work to be secondary (Lambert, “Théorie de la littérature” 167). Translation was a so-called “easy” activity and held in small esteem as a practice without any prestige because of its perceived lack of original creative input and its necessarily incomplete appropriation of another text and language (Gounel 207-09). Furthermore, the idea of translation as an artistic form rarely formed part of the public discourse on translated texts; any inquiry was limited solely to the technical question of fidelity and exactitude, yet rarely were the sense of these terms held up to any scrutiny (Lambert, “Théorie de la littérature” 165-66). Such a lack of widespread reflection implies that translation was still seen as a rote, largely uncreative activity, thus reinforcing its association as an appropriate activity for women, thought to have less literary talent than men.

An article written for the Revue de Paris by Charles Nodier in 1834 perhaps best exemplifies this conflicting attitude towards translation, simultaneously praising its theoretical value and underscoring its many perceived deficiencies. Nodier begins by praising the source material that is currently being translated in France, while at the same time highlighting the lack of quality found in the translations of these works by referring to translations as “ces génies incorrects, bizarres, quelquefois difformes
Thus, while he sees translation as a necessary and valuable activity for the development of French literature, the means by which it is practiced is, to him, unacceptable; even when the source material is admirable, the results themselves are inadequate.

He specifically points to the frequently conflictual role of the translator as the reason for what he perceives as poor translations:

le vrai révolutionnaire en littérature, c’est le traducteur, homme passif par son métier, actif par son influence, qui devait nous révéler mécaniquement les conquêtes de la pensée, en inscrivant sa phrase obéissante sous la phrase d’un grand écrivain. Il est probable que cet artisan grossier de la parole s’effraya longtemps de son propre ouvrage et que, trop timide pour nous montrer un génie original dans sa nudité mal séante, il se fit un lâche devoir de l’habiller à notre mode, ou plutôt de le travestir sous de méchants [sic] lambeaux de phraséologie classique ramassés dans les ruisseaux des collèges. (249)

Nodier is therefore identifying one of the main contradictions thought to be inherent to the practice of translation: on the one hand, it was perceived as a passive activity insomuch as it involved the repetition, to some extent, of the words of the source text’s author. On the other hand, its active component in influencing the development of a national literature was also acknowledged. The active and passive elements of translations correspond to what, in Nodier’s view, are the positive and negative roles of the translator: positive in that he was, in a sense, a literary innovator, or “révolutionnaire,” and negative in the reproductive, or “passif” role of an imitator. The negative personality traits that Nodier associates with the translator—passivity, timidity,
crudemness, cowardliness—underscore the perceived inferiority of those who practiced a necessary means of literary production. Nodier’s comparison of translators to artisans, and not artists as writers were considered to be, and his assertion that they should be “obéissants” denies them any creative authority and places them on a lower plane than original creators. Furthermore, this male translator to whom Nodier is referring is not, in fact, a man per se because he does not display typical masculine characteristics in his literary activities, rejects the masculine role of the revolutionary, and instead associates himself with the so-called womanly characteristics of obedience, passivity, and timidity. As I will discuss more fully in a following section, such associations were essential components in translation’s perceived relationship to specifically feminine talents and the construction of translation as an appropriate task for women in the literary world.

As I have demonstrated, thinking on the practice and importance of translation underwent important changes in nineteenth-century France, in both positive and negative senses. While translation in general was held to differing standards of fidelity and came to be seen as an important tool in literary transmission and development, it was still widely regarded as a sub-literary genre whose practitioners were not creators in the same sense as writers in other genres. The inclusion of twentieth- and twenty-first century translation theory permits me to move beyond such a dichotomy or to at least approach it in a critical way such as considering the possibility of translation as being an inherently double act of both reading and writing. Contemporary analyses of translation have a direct bearing in the remarks and chapters that follow, so I will be brief here and touch only upon a few points. In Chapter Five, where one finds my textual analysis of translations along with their source texts, I discuss the subject in greater
depth, particularly with regards to issues of textual fidelity and freedom and the autonomy, or lack thereof, of the translator.

1.3 Contemporary Translation Theory

In order to provide an overview of many of the important issues brought up by contemporary translation theory, I have concentrated on one article in particular that touches upon many of the ideas that inform modern thinking on the practice and theory of translation. In “L’intertextualité démontée : le discours sur la traduction,” Luce Guillerm sees the importance of translation in large part residing in its necessarily double and reflexive nature: it is at the same time an act of reading and an act of writing and “une mise en crise de l’un par l’autre” (54), for the construction of meaning in the source text requires both a reading of the text and its re-writing in another language. Such an assertion is important in that it emphasizes the importance of both the “passive” and the “active” roles of the translator, as a receiver and as a producer of meaning, while at the same time negating the view that the translator is a passive copyist moving from one language to another. This is important in relation to nineteenth-century women translators because it stresses the femininity of translation—its so-called passivity—and its masculinity—associated with activity—and thus simultaneously sheds light upon the appropriate and transgressive aspects of translation for women.

Furthermore, Guillerm claims that translation is reflexive in that the translator “se voit imposer une interrogation en profondeur sur son instrument, la langue” (55). Two languages are thus in constant interaction and the work of translation necessitates a continuing attention to the evolution of language structures and conventions. Most
importantly, perhaps, Guillerm stresses the ambiguous position of the translator, constantly caught between two contradictory poles in relation to textual authority. On one side, undertaking the act of translation implies a recognition of the authority of the source text, while at the same time it permits the translator to play with this authority: to accept it, deny it or find some point in between; in Guillerm’s words, “la toute-puissance du modèle rencontre la liberté d’écrire” (54-56). This ambiguity relates generally to the tenuous position of the translator as either textual creator or reproducer, and in particular to the tension between women and authorship in the nineteenth century. Guillerm also acknowledges the temporality of any ethics or practice of translation and sees translation, and the study and discussion of translation, as an important means of exposing and examining the relationship between writing and the societal standards under which it is produced at various epochs (59). This is especially pertinent to my present study, for I in large part aim to expose the cultural mechanisms at work in the construction of translation as an appropriately feminine activity in relation to women’s activities as writers.

As Guillerm stresses, there are several important points to keep in mind as I embark upon my study of translation: the constant ambiguity of the translator as either imitator or creator, the temporality of any practice or theory of translation, and translation’s simultaneously active and passive nature. All of these attributes inform all aspects of my work, for they allow me to place translation in a specific context and to nuance any analysis with an acknowledgment of its contingent nature. As Lawrence Venuti has pointed out, any translation is implicated with the very creation of values at a specific historic moment (“Retranslations” 25). Keeping both this and Guillerm’s
cautions in mind, I undertake my study of translations and their surrounding discourse always with an eye towards their temporality and often ambiguous status.

There are several contemporary thinkers on translation whose work particularly informs my later analysis of translations in comparison with their source texts, and though I go into more detail in Chapter Five, it is helpful at this point to point out briefly the most relevant aspects of their work to my own. One of the most influential theorists and practitioners of translation today, Lawrence Venuti, has made important contributions to translation theory as an advocate of both reintegrating translation into more mainstream literary studies and proposing a view of fidelity that does not define it as an absolute concept, but as a culturally constructed one. He points out that “a translation always communicates an interpretation, a foreign text that is partial and altered” (The Scandals of Translation 5). Yet he does not see this as an inherent liability of translation, but rather as an opportunity to question the very cultural mechanisms that inform any given “interpretation” and lead to its being construed as either faithful or unfaithful to the source text. He explains that the aim of a reading is not to ascertain whether or not a translation is faithful to the source text, but to judge how it fits into the literary tradition and conception of translation, fidelity, and freedom of a given culture and epoch (The Translator's Invisibility 37). Venuti thus advocates what he terms a “historicist” approach to evaluating translations “that aims to situate canons of accuracy in their specific cultural moments” (38). As my own analysis of translation is steeped in a gendered vision of what it meant to write as a woman in nineteenth-century France, Venuti’s critical perspective allows me to incorporate this approach into my own study of
specific translations and how they conform to or defy the gendered roles set out for
women as creators at this time.

Contemporary translation theory is also useful in defining a methodology that will
permit a rich and meaningful analysis of the translations I am studying. Antoine Berman,
in *Pour une critique des traductions: John Donne*, proposes a methodology for analyzing
translations that aims to escape the positive/negative dichotomy that all too often
characterizes analyses and reviews of translations and to correct the deficiencies in this
type of analysis, while supplying a more rigorous tool that encourages critical thinking
engaging with both the translation and the circumstances that surrounded its creation.
His proposed methodology does not rely on a strict adherence to the source text, but
rather a view that privileges the translated object as a text in and of itself. In setting up a
critical tradition of translation, Berman is proposing a shift towards a definition that
requires an “analyse rigoureuse d’une traduction, de ses traits fondamentaux, du projet
qui lui a donné naissance, de l’horizon dans lequel elle a surgi, de la position du
traducteur” (Berman, *Pour une critique des traductions* 13-14). Berman furthermore
aims to move definitively away from an evaluation of translations as good or bad and
instead seeks out the whys of any particular translations: why it is either ‘good’ or ‘bad’
in a certain critic’s eyes (37). His approach is fundamental to my own conception of how
to approach an analysis of translation because it allows for the inclusion of cultural forces
that shape any literary production at a given time and permits me to view the translators I
am studying as producers of texts within a complex set of mechanisms that informs their
choices and strategies as translators.
Another theoretical perspective on translation of interest to my own studies is one that specifically looks at how gender has shaped the practice and reception of translation. Such theorists as Sherry Simon and Doris Kadish examine at women’s activities as translators with the goal of contextualizing the differing meaning translation had for women. Simon’s assertion that gender differences are present within practices of translation “in the specific social and historical forms through which women have understood and enacted their writing activities” (Gender in Translation 2) brings a depth to Venuti’s and Berman’s questioning of fidelity that formally takes gender into account and considers how this act of writing was particularly pertinent to women. Her approach opens the possibility of viewing translation as an act of writing with specific implications for women, in relation both to their other modes of literary production and to the social constructs that defined their relationship to literary production.

1.4 Translation as a Literary Genre

Referring to translation as a literary genre in and of itself is not a given fact with which everyone would agree. Over the course of the centuries, it has been presented and categorized in a variety of different ways, ranging from a sub-literary, secondary activity to a literary genre with creative tendencies in and of itself. Yet, even though it may be problematical to categorize translation as a literary genre in its own right, doing so implies that it occupies an important position within literary systems. Within literary traditions, generic divisions of varying types of texts have the effect of officially installing certain texts as literature and regulating the literary system as a whole (Dubois
The consideration of translation and its relationship to generic divisions is thus a crucial question to discuss, for it permits us to situate translation as part of the wide variety of modes of literary production and define it in relation to the other textual practices that I study. As I shall demonstrate, generic categorizations come with both positive and negative consequences, both of which will undoubtedly have an influence on the way in which translation is received and studied within the academy. First, I discuss several of the ways in which translation has been presented with regards to generic divisions. I then discuss why it is, in fact, difficult to categorize translation as a literary genre and both the positive and negative effects of such a categorization. This permits me to locate the importance and power of generic divisions in the classification and regulation of the literary system, and, as specifically concerns this project, to situate translation among the other genres of ‘women’s writing’ in the nineteenth century.

In Seuils, Gérard Genette positions translation as forming part of literary paratexts, rather than as a literary genre. He briefly explains that he has chosen not to examine translation as paratext in the present work, but rather just briefly touches upon it, because of the scope such a project would require (372). Clearly, then, for Genette translation occupies the periphery of literary activity and should thus be examined according to a different set of standards. For Jeanette Beer as well translation is not and should not be classified as a literary genre, though for different reasons than Genette; in her view, because it is “infinitely variable” (vii) in its practice it cannot fall under one genre. She would rather prefer to view it as a “multi-faceted set of practices” (vii). As we shall see, she is not alone in such a preference; at the same time, though, this does not mean the refusal to categorize translation as a genre is unproblematic.
There are several reasons why it has historically been perhaps more difficult to classify translation as a literary genre than it is to do so with other modes of writing; some of these reasons are proper to the nineteenth century, some to the ways in which we categorize textual production today. In the literary environment of the nineteenth century, one of the biggest obstacles that prevented translation from being viewed as a valued literary genre was the hierarchy of literary usages created and maintained by the ideology of Romanticism in which the creator himself was just as important a figure as the works he created. This created a cult of the “grand homme” which led to a sharp contrast between the so-called “geniuses” of literary creation and those who were viewed as mere “littérateurs”. Within this cultural context, mediocre literary producers or a perceived lack of creativity was viewed as worthless of any serious consideration (Diaz, “Grands hommes et ‘âmes secondes” 65-71). The translator was part of this undervalued class of “littérateurs,” since translation was seen as an activity with little to no part in the creative process and the translator by virtue of his or her very activities had no claim to be a “grand homme”. Translation therefore remained on the sidelines and was not taken into consideration as an important part of the literary system.

Regarding the problematical nature of classifying translation, as well as certain other forms of writing, as literary genres in modern literary studies, Patricia Meyer Spacks stresses the link between canon formation and genre assignation and goes on to explain that those genres that are thought of as “imaginative” genres, such as fiction, drama, and poetry, are most easily included in a list of canonical works, whereas the modes of writing that tend to elude easy justification as imaginative, and thus generic categorization, are often assigned positions of relative marginality within literary culture.
This creates difficulties both in positively identifying such productions with a generic division and promoting their study and diffusion within the literary system. Meyer Spacks makes these remarks in direct reference to published letters and notes that their “assumed marginality” is based upon their perceived differences from more traditional modes of “literature,” in that their categorization as creative and imaginative is not unproblematic (“Forgotten Genres” 47-49). She goes on to identify these letters as a “liminal” practice, “existing on the border between fiction and non-fiction, between the private and the public, between the spontaneous and the contrived” (57) in order to further problematize the difficulty in ascribing them to a literary genre of their own. I find the correlation between the difficulty in placing published letters within a definite literary genre and placing translation within a generic categorization to be remarkably similar; translation, too, is a liminal practice that is situated at a borderline position in literary discourse. It is not unanimously regarded as either a thoroughly creative or imitative practice, for it involves both adhesions to a pre-defined ‘original’ and creative use of language and structure through the transmission of a text from one language to another. Such uncertainties do not lend themselves to an easy placement as either a literary genre or as a secondary practice with limited importance to literary studies.

Yet, although lack of a generic categorization can pose problems regarding the study of translation, it must be noted equally that any generic categorization, while positive in certain senses, can also pose problems. Whether or not one chooses to refer to translation as a literary genre has important implications for the possibilities of privileging translation as an object of study, and affects the ways in which any text, translation or otherwise, is studied and placed within literary history. If we
understand the term genre as referring to the ensemble of rules that permits the very
 genesis of a literary text as, say, a poem or a novel, then a generic categorization allows
 the institutionalization of a given text as part of the larger literary system (Leuilliot 247).
 In a positive sense, such categorization as a legitimate genre within the literary hierarchy
 inserts any particular practice of textual production within recognized literary traditions,
 and, in so doing, allows them to be part of the process of literary canonization and
 therefore validated as objects of academic study (Meyer Spacks 47). Moreover, the very
 usage of the word genre implies that a given text can indeed be qualified as literary, a
 qualification that connotes the existence of tradition, literary models, codes of production
 and thus as belonging to a system that both regulates and, more importantly, makes
 possible production within a given genre (Planté, “L'Épistolaire, un genre féminin” 13).
 To classify translation definitively as a literary genre would thus allow access to it as an
 object of study and justify its inclusion within the academy. It would equally permit
 scholars to view translation in relation to the ensemble of means of textual production of
 a given epoch and to study it in relation to these other means of production.

 However, in a negative sense, generic categorizations can also imply the
 existence not only genre of designations, but of hierarchies among these genres, for some
texts are assigned greater value than others within the literary system. A discriminatory
hierarchy of literary genres results in the depreciation of certain genres to the profit of
others and thus the concept that certain textual productions are minor in comparison to
others (Leuilliot 247). Translation is one among those genres that risks minorization in
comparison to the more highly valued literary forms. Indeed, translation has historically
been considered a low literary form not deserving the same level of attention and study as
those considered to be high literature (Lambert, “Théorie de la littérature” 168).

Moreover, such a minorization of certain literary genres is often explicitly linked to their perceived status as specifically feminine modes of literary production. For example, it is in rapport to the ensemble of these hierarchies that some genres, such as the epistolary, are perceived to be particularly ‘feminine’; the epistolary is only feminine insomuch as it is placed in relation to other literary genres which are not (Planté, “L’Épistolaire, un genre féminin” 13). As a feminine genre, the epistolary is therefore encapsulated within an institutionally sanctioned designation that places it on a lower scale than, say, poetry or any other genre thought to be traditionally masculine. Translation’s traditional association as a specifically feminine means of literary production assures that it, too, will be placed on the lower scale of the hierarchy, if it is universally admitted to even be a genre in and of itself, and this frame of reference will remove it from certain privileged realms of literary study.

Generic assignation of any given category of texts can also be viewed as negative in that it will always necessarily exclude certain literary productions if they do not follow the agreed upon standards that govern inclusion within that specific genre. Domna C. Stanton sees the blurring of such generic lines in relation to autobiographical texts as a positive development, for this dissolution of set generic standards leads to a greater consideration of what can be considered to be an autobiography, thus enriching the study of these texts as a whole. She posits that the rejection of specific standards has opened up new and fruitful areas of inquiry that allow scholars to take on a broader variety of questions and subvert traditional means of generic thinking (Stanton 18-19). Translation is another such mode of writing that would perhaps be restricted if it were
indeed confined within the rules that bind a set genre. For example, can a fine, distinct line between translation and, say, adaptation really be drawn with any certainty? Critics who do attempt to draw such lines often find themselves in the position of making arbitrary decisions based on amorphous and questionable criteria, and thus fall into the trap of setting up both unclear and unhelpful categories of texts. In the texts that I have been studying, there are often varying means of attributing the translator and classifying her project: Isabelle de Montolieu’s 1815 translation of Jane Austen’s Sense and Sensibility is classified as “traduit librement de l’anglais” (iii) and Eugénie Niboyet’s Lucien is “imité de l'anglais,” (ii) yet does not make any mention of the author of the text in English. Translation is a mode of textual production that does not mark a clear difference from original creation, but rather forms part of the creative process itself, as a new text is created via an already existing one, hence the difficulty of an organizing hierarchy (Lambert, D’hulst, & van Bragt 152-53).

1.5 Literary Genre and Gender in Nineteenth-Century France

As I have discussed above, it is not unproblematic to refer to translation as a literary genre in and of itself, and such categorization has both positive and negative results. Yet to reach the conclusion that the negative risks outweigh the potential positive benefits would be to deny translation as an object of study in conjunction with other literary genres. As the goal of this present study is, in large part, exactly that, to examine translation in rapport with the literary genres associated with women writers in nineteenth-century France, treating translation as genre allows its insertion into the array of “women’s genres” of writing at this time. To deny its generic importance would be to
exclude it from serious consideration as a vital activity in the development of women’s modes of writing. In order to place translation within the critical tradition of gender and genre studies of the nineteenth century, I discuss the work of several leading critics in this domain with particular attention to the ways in which translation has been either ignored or marginalized within this critical discourse, and how an inclusion of translation, and a further nuancing of it when it is mentioned, would enrich studies in this area.

Perhaps the most notable critic in the examination of the intersection of gender and literary genre in nineteenth-century France is Christine Planté; her book *La Petite sœur de Balzac* undertakes an extensive examination of the ways in which public discourse shaped women’s literary opportunities as writers, and she pays particular attention to the role of generic divisions in defining and limiting women’s written productions. Yet, while she extensively treats the reasons behind the construction and maintenance of certain genres as appropriate areas for women’s creativity, she systematically erases translation and the possibilities inherent in this activity as being one among those genres. Again, this is perhaps due at least in part to the problem posed by attempting to classify translation in relation to other literary activities. Such an erasure is problematic, though, for it denies the importance of translation as a mode of production considered acceptable for women, in which they were capable of assuming an authorial presence and entering the public domain.

In order to examine the place of translation as a women’s genre of writing, it will first be necessary to contextualize its position in the critical discourse in this domain and the reasons for which it could, perhaps, be conceived of as a genre that lent itself more easily to feminine participation. On this front, the importance of the existence of the very
term ‘traductrice’ cannot be ignored. In her evocation of the general conditions for women writers in the nineteenth century, Planté first points out that the lack of feminization of the word ‘écrivain’ implies that “si un nom n’existe pas dans la langue, c’est qu’il n’y a pas de place dans l’ordre du monde … pour ce qu’il désigne” (La Petite Soeur de Balzac 24). Thus, the incapacity to feminize the word “écrivain” denies the very possibility for women to become writers on equal footing to men. The composite terms used to designate women writers, “femme auteur” and then “femme écrivain,” both construct the woman writer as a hybrid and composite creature removed from normative femininity and present her as “une espèce,” to be defined and confined by the public sphere (28-29). The “femme auteur” or “femme écrivain” was, by the very name that designated her, confined to a reality situated between two terms “dans un jumelage péjoratif où chacun dévalorise l’autre” (Goldin 41). For a woman to write thus devalued not only writing, but her status as a woman, for she was transgressing not only social roles or customs but “la nature elle-même” (Cossy, “Femmes et création littéraire” 58).

Contrary to the terminological problem of designating a woman who wrote, the term ‘traductrice’ has been used at least since the seventeenth century as a descriptor of women engaged in the act of translating. The term made the very act of translation a relatively unproblematic experience for women in terms of public acceptance of their activity and is indicative of a long history of women’s activity in this domain. By the same token, women translators could also fall into the trap of being perceived as hybrid and composite beings that came with the terms designating women writers, for on the one hand they were charged with the creation of literary texts in French, while on the other hand they were bound to notions of fidelity and the presence of an already-established
authorial figure. Thus, while translation was in some senses a more acceptable activity, its nature as both creative and repetitive led those who practiced it to a similar position as that of women writers: neither fully seen as writers nor fully accepted by the public.

Though women’s participation in literary culture was highly problematical on many fronts in the nineteenth century, this does not mean that their writing activities were decreasing or remaining stagnant. Indeed, the early part of the nineteenth century saw a marked increased in published women writers. At the same time, though, hostility toward them was still extremely common over the course of the century and with most all critics (Bertrand-Jennings 28-29). As Planté points out, this hostility was in large part due to the fact that for women to be accepted as authors of original works would imply that they were accepted as human beings in their own right, rather than as individuals with limited participation in the public sphere and limited identities outside of what was prescribed for them. For, “l’auteur des livres est aussi l’auteur de soi-même et de sa propre vie, transformée, à la fois subjectivement et socialement, par l’écriture; et c’est précisément ce processus qui paraît inadmissible à ceux qui ne veulent voir dans la femme qu’un être vivant avant tout dans la relation et le dévouement aux autres” (33). This, perhaps, is in large part why women were so much more readily accepted as translators rather than as writers: translation did not imply the construction of a writing career both separate and rich with meaning outside the strictures that confined women to contingent status, but rather evoked reliance on a source text to create a work that was always perceived in relation to an outside authority and, indeed, a devotion to faithfully retransmitting this text to a new audience. Thus, while translation is not often taken into consideration as an important activity in relation to women’s other literary productions,
the reasons for which it was considered to be an acceptable activity are closely intertwined with the reasons for which women were not recognized as creative authors; the exact causes that made writing transgressive made translation more permissible, though it should not be taken for granted that translation always fit the category of derivative and reliant on an outside authority. As I demonstrate over the course of this study, translation allowed women, all while nominally remaining within the categories ascribed to them, to experiment, to create, to reflect on the nature of writing and on the values assigned to women writers and to step outside the boundaries that enclosed them within the category of “women writers.”

Equally essential in the marginalization of women as writers within the public sphere was the view that their intervention in public life was an inappropriate foray outside of the space by which they were defined: their traditional association with the domestic and private led to widespread censure for women who dared make their name and their production public (Planté, La Petite Soeur de Balzac 30). Thus, as Planté points out, women often published anonymously in order to circumvent this risk. As her example of this Planté cites an incident from Sophie Ulliac Trémadeure’s Émilie ou la jeune fille auteur (1837), in which Émilie is dissuaded from publishing her own works and is instead presented with the project of translating a work of philosophy in which her name would cede the place to “un nom d’homme, un nom connu” (31). While it is certainly true that translation was often an anonymous, uncredited task, this was not always the case. To use translation as a primary example of the importance of women masking their names in order to be published is therefore problematic on several levels, since it implies an anonymity that was not always present in this activity. First of all, it is
true that translators were often erased from a work upon its publication, but it was also common for them to receive credit as translators, negating translation as a completely anonymous activity in which the translator, either male or female, was always unmentioned and unacknowledged. Indeed, because translation linked their names to the famous authors whose works they were translating, many translators gained greater renown through these publications (Findlen 173). Moreover, to give translation as an example of anonymity denies the possibility of translation as an act capable of and necessarily including authorship and the possibility of public presence. As I shall make clear in later chapters, many women certainly did gain public renown primarily as translators and often saw translation as a first step in creating a literary reputation for themselves. To equal translation with anonymity is therefore reductive in that it denies many of the possibilities presented to women through this activity.

Planté notes not only that were women limited in what they could write by their perceived capacities and proper place, but that there was a systematic discrediting of women’s literary activities as a devaluation of literary worth in general, both in terms of literature’s monetary and social values (66). Moreover, the works that they did write were seen as lacking in any overarching interest outside of that which they could hold for other women, because women’s lives, and thus whatever writing they may have produced, were not seen as being imbued with a more global interest that could equally appeal to men. Texts written by men were more universally valued precisely because they had access to a wider range of life experiences and participation in the public sphere and “parce que lui seul accède au statut de sujet, ne reste pas englué dans les données immédiates de la vie individuelle et peut la transcender en œuvre d’art” (82). Such
discourse effectively delegitimized women writers and the texts they produced. As translators, though, women’s works would not fall into the same trap of discreditation simply because of the gender of their author, in large part because translations were already viewed as derivative works with a lower scale of values than those deemed original. Furthermore, as translators women were not claiming to attain a “statut de sujet” precisely because of the perceived non-originality of translations and limited involvement of the translator in the creation of the work. Since translations were very rarely perceived as works of art in and of themselves, their inherent worth was not impugned by their association with female translators; indeed, translators were often faulted for lessening a given text’s value, but this was not considered a reflection on the quality of the source text itself.

One exception that allowed women less problematical access to literature was if their literary engagement came through their connection with a male counterpart, as such an entry into the literary world was seen as being authorized by a greater authority or talent. In such cases, women were always classed in relation to men: as daughters, mothers, sisters of some masculine authority that gave them a greater legitimacy in making their works public (Planté 131-33). Now, while it did not necessarily include the type of personal relationship that Planté is pointing out, translation was, in many ways, a similar type of access via a male authority, for the translation of already-published works implied that the translator was working on behalf of and with the permission of an already sanctioned and approved author, quite often masculine. This scheme likewise necessitated that the female half of this duo retain a subordinate, and therefore feminine, role in the literary ‘couple’ (140). In this way, women’s roles in literary creation were
closely akin to their roles in marriage: as the lesser half of the couple, women were to be formed by their husbands/mentors and support them in return (Bonnemaison-Paquin 220). Similarly, translators were the less valued half of the writer-translator couple and in this position women translators were conforming to the norm of secondary participation established for women’s participation in literature. Finally, both the woman translator and the woman writer who gained access to publication through a masculine authority retained an eternally contingent status: while the female translator/writer would not be permitted public intervention without the male half of this ‘couple,’ the male, on the other hand, would not be affected either way if the female half did not exist.

This reliance on a masculine authority in order to gain legitimacy in public discourse on literature was related to women’s perceived “génie de l’imitation” (Planté 132), meaning that their talent lay not in creating original works, but rather in imitating those that came before. Such a view of women’s creative powers effectively served to remove them from the discourse of genius and talent, for such types of creation would require a certain level of originality and creativity that would necessarily not be present in the derivative, secondary ‘imitations’ women were viewed as producing (B. G. Smith, “History and Genius” 1060). To admit that women could be creative geniuses would be to hold them up as models for future writers, and the idea of literary debt to a woman writer was unthinkable in a schema that did not even fully admit to their creative powers—hence, the continued insistence on the derivative and secondary nature of women’s talents (Bonnemaison-Paquin 225). It is in this perceived imitative nature of women’s works that the appropriateness of translation comes most readily to light, translation being nothing if not imitative in nature in the eyes of the large majority of the
public, as it was necessarily based on a previously written text. Women who worked as translators, then, were in many senses working within the skill set and level of talent ascribed to them; they were not relying on their own talent, but rather on the talent of those already given legitimacy through publication. This does not mean, however, that they readily accepted the limits that were set for them and practiced translation as a mainly imitative act of writing. As I shall demonstrate, translation often became a space that allowed creation and creativity, and the women translators/writers that I am examining were certainly aware of the possibilities inherent in this activity.

As I have demonstrated, Planté presents a variety of factors that must be taken into account when considering the gendering of literature in nineteenth-century France; women were defined creatively not in terms of their output, but in ways that stemmed from larger attitudes towards women’s creative powers that dominated the discourse on masculine and feminine literary production. One of the main ways in which women were limited in both their literary output and reception was through the generic divisions that served to confine them to certain, specific forms of public production. It must be noted from the outset that these limits in no way represented women’s capacities, or their interests, but rather writing “like a woman” was to write “comme une femme telle que les hommes ont défini la femme et son écriture,” (Planté 214) and so all of these preconceived categories tell us more about the creation and maintenance of masculine authority than about women’s capacities for literary production. Women’s public productions were always necessarily viewed by the critical and reading public through the lens of their gender in terms of the genres in which they produced, the subjects they treated, and their style of writing. The reintroduction of women into literary history
requires that we question the categories, suppositions, and hierarchies that have
traditionally defined what it meant to write as a woman. For women to leave their
formally sanctioned places in literature would, in the eyes of critics, represent a danger to
the larger literary establishment. Their input would run the risk of feminizing literature
as a whole and thus devaluing it, because, in opposition to men’s productions, which
were considered both virile and representative of Creation with a capital ‘C,’ women’s
productions were viewed as creation with a lowercase ‘c,’ that is, as “petites productions
féminines” (Planté 223-26). Thus the discourse that regulated women’s production
served to more greatly valorize masculine modes of production, and, at the same time,
maintain women in the position thought to be appropriate for them.

According to this schema that classified women’s literary productions as being
lesser than those of men, Planté identifies specific genres that were associated with
women for a variety of reasons, all having to do with women’s perceived creative
limitations and proper place in society. She notes that feminine genres, which she
identifies as including correspondence, diaries, and novels, are genres that remain in a
space that is “domestique et privé” (226). These three stereotypically feminine genres
were defined as such for a variety of reasons that served to reinforce their association
with the feminine. One of these reasons was the lack of rules associated with these
genres, especially novels and correspondence; this lack of concrete rules supposedly
corresponded better to women’s talents because their inspiration and imagination were
not subject to any formal limitations that could have proved too difficult for them to
manage. At the same time, it allowed them a more or less safe outlet for their emotions.
Moreover, novels were not looked upon as being properly art, but rather as a more or less
trivial form of amusement, appropriate for the limited talents of women (Planté 231-32). Letters, too, were removed from the category of properly artistic production because of their perceived spontaneity, which further distanced them from serious consideration as a literary form. The largest factor, though, that associated correspondence with the feminine was its private nature, for letters were supposedly written as a form of intimate conversation between the writer and the recipient. This model, albeit the dominant one in discourse on the letter, is by no means universally true, however, for many writers of letters were fully aware that their productions would, in fact, be publicly read. The assumed privacy of the letter was deemed appropriate for women in that it mirrored the private spaces to which women were confined and thus retained them within a socially appropriate atmosphere (Planté 234-35).

The private diary was also closely linked with the private and domestic sphere of women. This privacy, as well as the lack of concrete rules associated with this genre, implies its perceived femininity on the same level as novels and correspondence. At the same time, however, private journals were considered even more private, and thus more appropriate for women writers, than letters, for writing a letter implied an opening of oneself to another, as well as the possibility of a public reading; diaries as a mode of writing, on the other hand, represented the complete confinement of women first to domestic, personal spaces, for their writing was not addressed to anyone other than themselves, and second to passivity, for no attempt at communication with another was attempted. Journals, moreover, were a non-artistic means of creation because they were not written for publication (Planté 238-39). Private journals, letters, and novels, furthermore, all conformed to preconceived notions of women’s talents in that they were
widely thought to be mainly preoccupied with the self, and thus largely autobiographical, and it was commonly believed that women as writers could not transcend their private selves and concerns to deal with more universal topics, another means of devaluing the genres most closely associated with women writers (Stanton 20). Also relevant to the assignation of women to these genres in particular is the ‘outsider’ status of both women and the above forms of writing: novels, letters, and journals did not have a ‘style’ in the same way as, say, poetry or theater, and women’s status as literary outsiders and the exterior nature of these genres to questions of style went hand in hand (Diaz, “La Féminité de la lettre” 155-56). Thus the three forms of writing that Planté identifies as feminine par excellence in the nineteenth century have the commonly held points of privacy, a perceived non-artistic nature, and a lack of specific rules that would regulate modes of production within these genres. Such conventions served at once to retain women within domestic spaces and remove them from public forms of discourse and to limit their creative output and participation in literary culture.

In order to more fully define the generic limits on women writers in the nineteenth century, it is also beneficial to examine briefly the domains identified by Planté as masculine genres and subjects. Male writers had access to the higher forms and objects of literature, such as religion, history, politics, poetry, and theater and thus enjoyed the reputation of being the true geniuses of literary creation. Not only were these ‘masculine’ genres considered to be the aesthetically higher forms of creation, but they were also the more public forms of creation; intervention in a domain such as history or politics would entail participation in public life, while writing for the theater implied an entry onto the stage that was unfitting for women. For women to dare write in any of
these genres would be doubly transgressive, since it would require both their insertion into public life and their participation in the most highly valued forms of literary production, removing them from the domestic spaces considered appropriate for them (Planté 226-29). For women to write on and analyze history, or politics, for example, was viewed as being beyond their capacities because women were thought to lack the critical spirit, reasoning power, and judgment required to write cogently about these subjects (Planté 243-45). Women’s intervention in the domain of poetry was also transgressive, though for different reasons. First of all, women’s proper role was perceived as that of muses who inspired male poets to create, but remained mute themselves. Furthermore, the presence of women poets would question and subvert the symbolic power of the poet as the literary creator and genius par excellence. Mirroring the reasons for which certain genres were allotted to women, the more minor forms of poetry—idyll, elegy, and romance, for example—were deemed an appropriate medium for women’s production that posed no threat to the figure of poetic genius, while the more technically demanding and highly valued forms were strictly masculine in nature (Planté 247-51). Such an enclosure of women poets into the genre’s minor forms resulted in a widespread lack of critical attention for women poets of the nineteenth century in general. Their work was encapsulated within the category of ‘poésie féminine’ and long deemed largely unworthy of inclusion within the critical tradition as a whole (Boutin 506). Thus, the same logic that defined specific genres as feminine led to the categorization of certain genres as masculine and effectively curtailed women’s participation and shaped public responses to their works.
The paramount aspect in women’s literary creation was therefore not only, and not even primarily, the quality of what they wrote, but rather their adhesion to literary standards that governed the possibilities for creation. Any value judgment would have its basis not on the individual traits each female writer brought (or did not bring) to her works; on the contrary, her texts would be evaluated under the rubric of “women’s writing” and assigned a worth following their degree of concordance with the genres permissible for women. Though the literary genres described as feminine certainly presented a wide variety of possibilities for original creation, their very perception as feminine would necessarily lead to an enclosure for women writers into specific areas of creativity and thus to a denial of the full scope of their talents (Didier 9). What, then, is the place of translation in the masculine/feminine genre division? Can we include it among the genres qualified as feminine in the nineteenth century and, if so, why does it not form a larger part of the critical discourse in this area?

While Planté readily acknowledges that she is by no means attempting to exhaustively categorize and describe every genre associated with women’s literary production, her claim that the ones she does treat in detail—the novel, correspondence and diaries—are “les plus femmes des genres-femmes” (231) is problematic in that it effectively undermines the importance and proliferation of other literary practices that may not be so highly visible today.5 For, while these genres were certainly minor in comparison to masculine genres, and thus less visible from that perspective, they were still publicly legitimized as genres in which women had the very possibility for creation.

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5 Such genres include, for one, children’s literature. See, for example, Devoirs d’écriture: modèles d’histoires pour filles et littérature féminine au XIXe siècle by Bénédicte Monicat.
Translation, on the other hand, is still only problematically accepted as a literary genre, as I have outlined above, and commonly looked upon as an activity that requires less talent than other means of literary production.

Indeed, the very examples that Planté uses in order to highlight certain arguments point to a lack of consideration of translation as an object of study worthy of the same attention as the others. As I have previously mentioned, she cites Ulliac Trémadeure’s heroine Émilie as an example of women’s anonymity in the publishing world (31), yet unsigned translation work was hardly the norm for either men or women. Her only other evocation of translation in La Petite sœur de Balzac is in her exploration of earning a living as an acceptable excuse for women to write (192). She once again cites Émilie’s translation, and notes that “lorsqu’elle touche l’argent de sa première traduction, ce n’est pas l’émotion artistique qui l’emporte” (31). Planté thus presents translation as an activity that is undertaken solely to guard one’s anonymity or to earn a living and does not appear to view it as rich grounds for literary creation. As I discuss more fully elsewhere, while translation was certainly taken on largely in order to earn money by many women, to classify translation as an activity only valuable for its money-making capacity denies the possibility that translation could have any further value to both its practitioners and its readers. Planté’s dismissal of translation as an object of study is by no means uncommon, though, but rather is symptomatic of more general attitudes regarding the place of translation in relation to other literary activities. The problematic inclusion of translation as a properly literary activity contributes to its lack of critical attention from a surprisingly wide variety of critics. To give only one example, Béatrice Slama, in an article that gives a large panorama of women’s textual productions from the
years 1840 to 1899, classifies translation as being one of the types of non-literary writing in which women engaged, thus effectively removing the 200 translations that she identifies from this era from serious consideration as objects of study ("Un chantier est ouvert" 90). Whereas translation has in many ways been ignored as an object of examination in relation to other ‘feminine’ literary genres, it is an integral part of the logic that went into classifying certain genres as either masculine or feminine.

In order to further nuance the validity of including translation as one of the feminine genres of writing in nineteenth-century France, let us look at Planté’s reasoning in her analysis of why certain genres were feminine and see how translation falls in relation to these reasons and to other feminine genres. First, there is the correlation between women’s genres of writing and maintenance of the domestic, private spaces thought to be appropriate for them (226). Translation fits within this rubric because, for one, of the very nature of this activity: it does not necessarily require participation in public life, nor would it necessitate any type of research that would lead female translators to violate women’s domestic roles. Indeed, translation is closely akin to reading in many senses in that its only material demand would be a source text and a space to translate. Thus, the translator rests within an enclosed, domestic space and domestic meanings (Clarke 282). Translation is also more private than other forms of writing in that it implies the partial effacement, though by no means complete erasure, of the translator to the profit of an already established and legitimized author. It is not the translator’s name that has prime importance, but rather the author’s name upon which most attention will be focused, which permits the translator to remain in the background and defer to a greater textual authority. Moreover, if letters, diaries and novels were also
classified as feminine because they were not often considered properly ‘artistic’
productions, translation, too, was not considered an artistic activity on the same plane as
others and was largely derided as appropriate for the lesser talents of women. Related to
its perceived lack of artistry was what was viewed as translation’s derivative, imitative
nature, and, as mentioned by Planté, women’s abilities were identified as secondary to
men’s creative talent (132). It would therefore be no stretch of the imagination to
 suppose that women’s ‘imitative’ talents would be ideally suited to an ‘imitative’ form of
writing, for it would not tax their skills or take them out from beyond what was
considered to be their appropriate domain. A further reason that associates women’s
perceived literary talents in the nineteenth century with translation is the fact that women
were considered to be lacking in a critical spirit and reasoning skills (Planté 243). Since
translation was largely viewed as derivative, critical reasoning would not be necessary in
order to perform this act. As we can see, the same reasons that defined some genres as
appropriate for women and others as appropriate only for men also apply to translation as
a women’s activity. The study of translation, however, is capable of opening to the
researcher new criteria that contributed to a specific genre’s classification as either
masculine or feminine and leads us to question notions of gender and genre previously
taken for fact.

1.6 Women and Translation

In the broadest of senses, the consideration of translation as a women’s creative
activity forces us to challenge our present understanding of women’s creative reality in
the nineteenth century and to question our assumptions of generic impermeability. As I
noted above, critics often do not take translation into account as an object of study in relation to other literary genres, yet so doing ignores the fact that translation was a very widespread women’s activity that comprised a large part of their textual productions at the time. To discount translation as a literary object worthy of inclusion among other literary texts therefore negates a large section of women’s creative work in the nineteenth century and presents an incomplete portrait both of feminine literary work and of generic divisions. Translation was, in fact, a very important activity that played a large role in many stages of women’s literary careers. Through a thorough examination of women’s translations, we can come to a new understanding of the cultural forces that led women to such work, as well as arrive at a new comprehension of the very nature of generic categorization and assignation and how they overlapped and intersected with each other. For not only was the generic confinement of women into certain genres at work on the large sense, but also within the practice of translation. As I discussed more fully above, most theorizing on translation in the nineteenth century was occupied solely with the translations of classical Greek and Latin texts and certain already canonized authors, such as Shakespeare, yet both the theorizing and translating in this domain was almost exclusively masculine. Thus, the generic hierarchy that already forbid women from public intervention in the more highly valued literary genres was at work within translation itself, and for the most part women were translating contemporary authors, and more particularly in genres such as travel writing, novels and children’s literature, genres, it must be noted, that were already considered appropriate for women. In this way the study of translation can further shed light upon high literature/popular literature divisions in terms of what women were permitted to translate and allow us to view the
important role of translators, both male and female, in introducing new, contemporary works into the national literary consciousness. Furthermore, women were very active in translating other women authors particularly from English, and such widespread activity of women translating women deserves more in-depth study, since it perhaps indicates a commitment to transmitting and popularizing other women authors into their culture, as well as to establishing a feminine literary genealogy of women authors who have gained success in their home countries in order to further the activities and visibility of women authors in France.

The handful of critics who do treat the question of women translators raise a number of pertinent questions about the nature of gender and literary creation, including issues of creativity and imitation, why translation represented a more readily acceptable form of women’s writing, the relationship between authorship and translation, women’s roles in translating influential scientific texts, and the importance of studying translation in relation to women’s more general roles in the intellectual world. One reason for women to translate rather than to write almost universally identified by these critics is the relative safety of translation in opposition to the dangers presented by writing. As Theresa Ann Smith points out, the choice to translate as opposed to writing suggests how tenuous and uncertain women’s positions in the literary world were, and how problematic the establishment of a public persona could be for women, because any publication of original works would transgress the social expectations that dictated women remain in the relative anonymity of private spaces (117, 119). At the same time, it was difficult for women to publish original works because they were not generally accepted as producers of original knowledge, be it scientific or philosophical knowledge. Translation, though,
elided this question of women as producers of knowledge by allowing them to take on the role of knowledge transmitters, but not of original creators; translation thus evaded the question of feminine textual authority because it was viewed as speaking by and/or through the words of another (Findlen 172-73). In this way, women could use translation as a means of public participation in literary debates of their time while not overtly declaring themselves to be authors. Indeed, Marie-Pascale Pieretti posits that the association of women and translation was “a logical pairing of two types of subordination” (474), for individuals seen to be limited by their gender were associated with a reduced mode of authorship, giving women a secondary station in both domains. Thus, translation was quite often a means for women to create literary works, even if they were devalued by their supposedly secondary, contingent nature, while remaining within the schema that dictated that they should shun public recognition and rest within the patriarchal models that regulated their behavior (Stark 37-38).

At the same time, while it is generally acknowledge that women were associated with translation in large part because of its so-called derivative nature, this did not mean that there were not sufficient opportunities to use this genre in a creative, innovative manner indicative of their own desires for a larger role in literary creation. There were many ways that these women used translation to express their own views or knowledge while hiding behind the name of the work’s original author. One means of doing so was to make significant changes in the source text that was being translated in order to insert their own opinions. In such cases translation was a deceptively passive act, as the original text acted as a barrier behind which women protected themselves from public censure all while expressing their own views. Thus, they could simultaneously “veil
[themselves] and unveil [their] ideas” (T. A. Smith 117-19). Smith finds such a process at work in Marìa Romero’s eighteenth-century translation of Mme de Graffigny’s Lettres d’une Péruvienne into Spanish for Romero used the text as an opportunity both to strengthen de Graffigny’s critique of the insufficient education women received, and to reframe the Spanish conquest of Peru to present the Spanish involvement in a much more positive light, namely, as a means of spreading Christianity, thus putting a positive spin on a conquest presented by de Graffigny in an overwhelmingly negative way (123-25, 127-29). Translation therefore became the vehicle for Romero both to critique some aspects of her society and to reinforce the value of other aspects.

This authority that women gave themselves to change the source text points out the often blurred line between translation and original writing and posits the translator as an active participant in the creation of knowledge, and more than simply a passive transmitter (Pieretti 480). By the same token, it is not always the changes the women translators chose to make in their texts that are significant; it is also essential to examine what they chose to conserve, especially in opposition to other translations of the same source text. As Doris Y. Kadish points out in her examination of Louise Swanton Belloc’s 1852 translation of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, previous translations had effectively erased the female voice of the text’s author, present most notably in the book’s preface, in which Stowe refers to herself in the third person as ‘she’ and ‘her’; other, male translators into French instead substituted the gender neutral ‘nous,’ whereas Belloc chose to preserve the specific mentions of the author’s gender, inscribing the novel firmly within the tradition of women’s writing (57-58). Thus, both changing the source text and choosing to follow it more closely can be indicative of the
agency women took in their translations and the active role they envisaged for themselves.

Women also used the paratextual elements surrounding a translation in order to demonstrate both their own knowledge of the subject and their creative role in their translations, and such devices as prefaces and translator’s notes were commonly deployed by women translators to enhance their translations. The shift from a reproductive to a productive stance is often seen in prefaces in which translators explicitly discuss their own roles as cultural mediators and how and why they translated (Stark 39-40). Moreover, prefaces were a place in which the translators could, for the only instance in the text, express their own ideas and thoughts and thus expand their authorship over the text (Findlen 182). At the same time, prefaces could be used for the exact opposite purpose: rather than emphasizing their professional and knowledgeable nature, women translators also used prefaces to stress their lack of professionalization and their secondary status. Marie-Pascale Pieretti identifies a self-deprecating tone in many of the prefaces from women translators that she examines, which indicates that they often attempted to downplay both the significance of their work and the talent and effort that it took. The prefaces that she analyzes also take care to present their work in a decidedly non-professional light, oftentimes as an amusement. We must take care, though, as Pieretti points out, not to take them at their word, but rather to view their protestations of lack of talent and professional ambitions as their own reaction to and way to fit in with the dominant norms for women in the literary domain (475-76). In addition to prefaces, translators often used other forms of paratextual writing in order to better inform their readers of a variety of information they thought important, and women were no exception.
in writing in order to demonstrate their own knowledge of the subject at hand. Indeed, translation often became a form of textual exegesis via introductions and footnotes, and therefore served to interpret as well as to retransmit the information found in the source texts (T. A. Smith 119-20). Such were some of the strategies women translators used in order to reclaim their textual authority and to assert the value of their own knowledge to enhance and expand upon their translations.

Women translators also played important roles as popularizers of texts via their translations, for they made these texts accessible to a much wider audience. In the most general sense, the very fact that texts were made available to a large number of people aided in their circulation, along with the knowledge that they contained. As Paula Findlen points out, women translators in eighteenth-century Italy were essential in the transmission of scientific texts through translation and were key figures as both literal and figurative translators: literal in the sense that they were actually translating and figurative in the sense that they were popularizing these texts and thus new scientific and philosophical knowledge (170-73).

While these critics bring up many important points that I discuss in depth in this project, there are still other areas of interest regarding women translators that must be analyzed in order to have a complete picture of women’s activities in this literary genre, some of a general nature and some more specific to the cultural and literary climate in nineteenth-century France. Most of the critical pieces I have been discussing deal more fully with the translation and transmission of scientific texts, rather than popular literature, yet the translation of popular works, such as novels, travelogues, and children’s literature, was an important area of work for women translators. Such a focus on the part
of the critics is indicative of the generic division which placed greater emphasis on the
analysis of translations of scientific works, and on the more greatly valued literary genres
in general, and largely ignored the means of transmission of the lesser literary genres.
Yet, just as women were instrumental in popularizing scientific texts, so, too, were they
key figures in the popularization of other genres, and their role in this domain deserves to
be thoroughly explored in order to identify both how they perceived of it and how it was
perceived by others.

Moreover, the rise of Romanticism in the nineteenth century brought about
important changes in both literary hierarchies and the public conceptions of authorship
and genius and in the practice and theory of translation. The Romantics’ emphasis on the
figure of the author as overarching genius and creator led to a devalorization of so-called
‘secondary’ literary figures, a group including translators, among others, as I have
already discussed. What were the effects of this decrease in status on translators and their
products? Did such a process align women more with translation as a reflection of their
supposed capabilities? With regard to the means of practicing and theorizing about
translation, the translation ethics of the nineteenth century rejected the tradition of the
‘belles infidèles’ that was the dominant mode of translation in pre-nineteenth-century
France, as I outlined more fully earlier, and instead put a greater emphasis on fidelity to
the source text. What are the implications of such a change for the translators in the
nineteenth century, and how did translation practices change—or not change—along with
this changing ethics? Furthermore, what was the role of women translators in elucidating
this new ethics of translation; did they in fact play a key role in the development of new
standards for translation? Such questions are key elements for understanding the
relationship between women and translation and will be treated in depth over the course of this project.

Another important aspect of women’s role in translation that must be addressed is their own awareness of the limitations placed upon them because of their sex, how they reacted to and dealt with such limitations, and how such reactions are expressed in their translations. As previous critics have noted, the paratextual elements that accompanied translations, such as prefaces and translator’s notes, often played an important part in translations. In addition to the elements of prefaces already alluded to by these critics, prefaces are also essential elements in assessing women’s own reactions to their translations and their places within the literary system. Were women principally concerned with combating the preconceived notions that limited their participation in textual production, or rather with upholding these values through a justification of their work in this area? As Chantal Bertrand-Jennings points out, in order to determine the perception that women writers had of their own condition, we must undertake a reading of their texts that firmly situates them within their historical and ideological context (30). To do so thoroughly, the study of translations and their surrounding discourse must be understood within the existing paradigms for both women and writing in the nineteenth century and translation’s place, or lack thereof, in this discourse. Prefaces are not the only useful resource in determining women’s thoughts on their own literary activities; their autobiographical writings and fictional productions are equally rich in information on how they conceptualized their own place in literary production and publication and thus should be privileged as objects of study alongside translations and their paratexts. As I show through a study of fiction, paratexts, and autobiographical writings, for the
most part women translators had a clear awareness of the constraints upon them and of
the fact that the reception of their texts was based more on their adherence to certain
generic standards than to the quality of their work. Finally, as I turn my focus to
translations themselves in comparison to their source texts, I will demonstrate how the
factors of gender, writing, and the history of translation played into the manner in which
these women practiced this form of writing.
Chapter 2

*Tentée, An Exploration of the Relationship between Translation and ‘Creative’ Writing*

2.1 From Translation to Fiction

While it may not at first seem evident why an analysis of novels by women translators is pertinent to an examination of translation as a women’s activity in nineteenth-century France, it is, in fact, an essential area to study in order to gain a larger picture not only of women’s literary activities in general, but also of how translation and creative writing were conceptualized and practiced in themselves and in relation to one another. For, as I demonstrate in Chapter Five, translation was, and is, not a mechanical activity of reproduction from one language to another, but rather a mode of creative writing that inevitably enacts changes upon the source text and engages with the creative tendencies of the translator. It would therefore be simplistic to believe that translation and the writing of fiction are two separate realms with no correspondence or overlap in the eyes of their creator. In translation studies, it has become a matter of common knowledge to consider translation a space to talk about notions of authorship and creativity and to imbue it with a meaning that far outreaches the former view of translation as an imitative activity. To reverse the situation, then, if translation is a space in which to talk about authorship, why would the space of authorship not be considered a place to talk about translation when referring to those who practice both forms of writing? Such is the case with the writer I am considering in this chapter. To
acknowledge the overlap between translation and authorship only on the translation side of the equation would be to ignore the equally far-reaching effects of translation on works of ‘original’ authorship.

The novel that I have chosen to examine for this chapter is Tentée, by Thérèse Bentzon, published in 1889. I selected this novel in particular because it allows me to enrich my discussion of Bentzon’s prefatory text in Chapter Four and to follow one author through her multifaceted oeuvre. Furthermore, this novel deals explicitly with the theme of women’s place in the literary world and their talents in direct relation to the capacity and right of men as authors. As I also discuss in Chapter Four, Bentzon questions the secondary position of women in literary activities and reclaims for them a greater place in this sphere, while challenging the usual stereotypes of women as both creators and as literary characters. She stresses the need for both typically feminine and typically masculine characteristics as important factors in literary creation. Such an operation is at work in Tentée, as the female characters in Bentzon’s novel struggle to define their relationship to literary creativity and to male creators. Although translation as a women’s activity is not explicitly evoked in this novel, many of the themes that Bentzon develops are pertinent to an analysis of translation, for she deals with ideas such as the nature of women’s literary talents, the relationship of English and French literature, the construction of man as the prototype of the literary genius, and the value judgments placed on creation and reproduction, both literary and otherwise. I thus approach this novel with the hope of teasing out the influence of the act of translation on a novel written by a woman translator/writer—will the same constraints seen in the genre of translation (that is, a limitation to feminine themes and genres and the idea that a woman
who writes, transgresses) be present here? This novel has several aspects that, in my opinion, reveal the stereotypical notions of masculine and feminine writing, and the role of the female intellectual, and that also express the tensions present between the act of writing and the act of translating.

Furthermore, this novel depicts the interior and exterior tensions experienced by a fictional female creator as she negotiates her position in the literary establishment. I study how she is treated by the author/translator who brought her into being, and how the inherent tension among translation and other, supposedly derivative forms of creation and original creation is manifested in this work. I analyze this novel with an eye towards establishing themes that are found in a variety of texts by women translators and writers; that point to more universal attitudes toward women’s creative realities; and that, as such, are also applicable to other novels by women writers/ translators that deal with women’s relationship with textual production and publication in the nineteenth century.

Though the novel that I am examining does not deal explicitly with female translators, this does not mean that Bentzon’s portraits of creative female characters are without relevance to a study of translation. There are several reasons why the study of this and of other novels can reveal important truths about translation and its relationship to issues of women’s creativity. First of all, Tentée overtly engages with themes of women’s creativity and with how women negotiate their creative impulses and their status as women. Thus, while the female characters may not be translators, they are still engaging in the cultural construction of their creativity into more or less acceptable realms. Translation, moreover, can serve as a metaphor to describe women’s entrance onto the public sphere; their large-scale exclusion from literary creation resulted in the
need to mediate their specifically feminine discourse with the dominant, and necessarily masculine, discourse in order to be valorized (von Flotow 12). If women are always perceived to be ‘translating’ their textual productions in some manner in order to fit in with the dominant, masculine paradigms, then it stands to reason that a text that has as its subject female creators would demonstrate this tension more fully than other texts by women writers. Such a text would also be revelatory both of this figurative mode of translation and how that figurative mode exists in relation to the actual work of translating from one language to another. Novels furthermore act as social documents that portray the social conditions governing a certain epoch, in this case women’s creativity in nineteenth-century France, and that have the capacity to function “as instruments of revelation” (Meyer Spacks, Imagining a Self 90-91). In conjunction with an examination of translation, then, an analysis of this particular translator’s fictional output affords us the opportunity view women’s creative reality to more completely through their own eyes and perspectives.

Indeed, in cases of writers/translators, the link between these two aspects of their creative work in both senses must be taken into account and has perhaps been most thoroughly and notably explored with the case of Baudelaire. Sara Pappas points out that his activities as a translator affected his art criticism, noting that Baudelaire often opposed translation, in the literal or figurative sense, to the act of copying and instead continually shifted and redefined how he situated it in relation to notions of originality and imitation in works of art. In so doing, “the reproductive or literal side of translation is itself transformed into the ultimate sign of originality” (325). Baudelaire’s activity as a translator thus had a profound effect on how he conceptualized the act of translating, in
particular in relation to the commonly held belief that translation was closely akin to imitation, and this effect carried over to other aspects of his creative endeavors. Proust, too, in translating Ruskin came to conceive of translation itself as a metaphor for artistic creation, and thus while his translations hardly form a part of his œuvre as well known as Baudelaire’s Poe translations, this does not negate the importance of translation on his conception of writing and literature as a whole (Gounel 211-12). The opportunity to study texts written by translators/writers, with a focus specifically on texts that deal with themes of female creativity and written production, therefore gives us the unique opportunity to study the intersection of these two activities.

My analysis of *Tentée* focuses largely on how Bentzon, both as an author and as a translator, portrayed creative women and their relationship to literary creation in general. Such an approach is often fruitful because many women authors created female characters with intellectual and creative roles, which both reflected facets of their own situations and introduced a new type of female character into the pantheon of literary types (Rogers 183). As a few studies have demonstrated, analyses that focus on the portrayal of creative women by women writers are often effective in providing a greater understanding of these authors’ views towards the relationship between women and textual creativity. In her study of *La Femme auteur* by Mme de Genlis, for example, Jeanne Goldin shows that, through this novella and her other writings, Mme de Genlis expresses her opinions about the trajectory of her own career and responds to critics on a number of issues relevant to women’s participation in the literary world through the experiences of her characters, such as the dilemma of women’s participation in publishing, and thus the public dissemination of their names, the best choices of genres
for women’s creation, and how women must balance their creative work with their other duties as wives and mothers, among other issues (50, 63, 66). Thus, Goldin’s analysis of Genlis’ novella permits us to gain a greater understanding of how Mme de Genlis’s reception as a woman author shaped her textual productions and her attitudes towards not only her own creative output, but more generally towards the larger issue of women’s relation to literature. Christine Planté, through her dissection of Sophie Ulliac Trémadeure’s Émilie ou la Jeune Fille auteur, has demonstrated that the character Émilie’s reception when she attempted to become a published author was not simply a fictional construct, but rather a reflection of women’s very real experiences in the world of publication and quite probably of Ulliac Trémadeure’s own personal experiences (La Petite Soeur de Balzac 31, 52). An analysis of works that deal directly with women and their relationship to writing and publication therefore helps to enlighten us on the situation not only of these fictional characters, but of the women who brought them to fruition. As I demonstrate regarding Tentée, the ambitions of and discourse on women with literary talents reveal important views on women’s creativity versus their supposed imitative talent, on their right to intervene in literature and on their conceptualization of their own roles in relation to those prescribed for men. With regard to translation specifically, this analysis permits me to place translation in relationship to the other genres of women’s creativity. A study of the themes that deal with women’s literary roles equally clarifies translation’s position in the literary spectrum and enlightens us as to how translation’s classification as ‘feminine’ further corresponds to notions of creation, reproduction and literary proprieties.
One of my main concerns is to explore how literature in a general sense is presented in this text in relation to the female characters: is it portrayed as a masculine domain into which women must venture with care and caution, or rather as an area into which they can be welcomed? How are women’s literary talents portrayed in relation to men’s: on an equal footing, or with large differences in capacity and scope? What, if any, is the tension between imitation and creation?

I also examine the literary objects that these fictional female characters create: do they remain within the prescribed feminine genres or do they write within traditionally masculine genres, and how are such decisions presented by the authors of these texts? Do these decisions demonstrate tensions among the varying roles women can play in literature, the acceptance of lesser roles and of women’s lack of full participation in literary activities and culture, or, on the other hand, a reclamation of greater roles and possibilities? And, taking all of the above questions into account, where does translation fit into the scale of literary activities, and how is this activity evoked and analyzed, either overtly or in a less obvious manner, by an author who is also a translator? Are the acts of writing and translating portrayed as being in harmony with one another, or in opposition, as two activities that require completely different skill sets? The responses to these questions not only enhance our knowledge of women’s attitudes towards literature in general, but also give us access to a greater understanding of translation in a multitude of senses: of how translation was practiced, of how it was conceptualized, and of how it related to the other literary activities with which women were engaged in the nineteenth century.
Another interesting point of convergence to be examined is whether or not the texts that Bentzon translated are of any visible influence on her other fictional productions. Indeed, the very choice of what text to translate can be seen as an authorial decision in and of itself (Uman & Bistué 298). This once again links translation to original authorship and implies a relationship between translation and writing, meaning the choice of a text to translate will invariably exist in relation to the translator/writer’s other written productions. To again bring up the example of Baudelaire’s Poe translations, not only did the act of translating Poe influence Baudelaire’s conception of the activity of translating, but it also affected the substance of his literary criticism, since his critical essays on Poe elucidate his own visions of poetic theory (Block 119-20). It is therefore fruitful to look at how, if at all, women’s translations affect their other written works.

Many of the women translators I have identified were prolific creators in a variety of literary domains beyond the novel, such as travelogues, instructional literature, poetry, and non-fiction, yet I have chosen to focus my analysis of women translators’ other literary productions on the novel for several reasons. One is the traditional association of this genre of writing with women’s productions and the ways in which the reasoning for this assignation often overlaps with the association of women and translation. The dominant view in the nineteenth century was that the novel was not, in fact, art on the same level as literary production in other genres, such as poetry (Planté, La Petite Soeur de Balzac 231-32). The same view was held of translation: that it did not form an integral part of the literary arts. The novel, furthermore, with its focus largely on domestic life and emotions, gave women an authority that rested upon a feminine power
that was “distinct from and complementary to that of the male” (Armstrong 98). Because women’s talents were also viewed as imitative in nature, translation, too, rested upon the notion that women’s talents were different, and, in fact, inferior, to those of their male counterparts and thus suited for certain, well-defined domains. My decision to focus on novels written by female translators is thus in great part informed by the similarities between the designation of these two genres as feminine. This indicates to me that like concerns were at play in the formation of both translation and novels as women’s genres of writing.

Similarly to the way that women represented a large percentage of the translators from modern languages into French in the nineteenth century, so did they represent the majority of novelists for at least the early part of the century. Before such authors as Balzac and Stendhal transformed both the forms of novel writing and its audience, the market was almost overwhelmingly dominated by “sentimental works by women writers” (Cohen 6). And, just as women were producing mostly popular forms of literature, they were also translating popular forms of literature for the most part, rather than the more properly ‘intellectual’ works and languages, like Latin and Greek. Similar to novel writing, the translation of popular literature was not a prestigious activity, although was often very rewarding monetarily (Hayes 141-42). The various ties, then, between novels and translations as forms of women’s creativity make the analysis of representations of female literary productions in novels a fruitful place in which to examine the multiple facets of women’s creative realities, in particular in relation to translation.

It is also important to note that while creative writing, such as the production of novels, is not explicitly linked with imitation, as is translation, this by no means implies
that it is without influence from any other source. Indeed, in either content or form, or both, all written productions in some way make reference to other written productions and thus involve a ‘translation’ of ‘source material’ from one text to another.⁶ Translation and creative writing are therefore linked in the shared process of taking material from a source, whether implicitly or explicitly, and molding it into a new source (Holman & Boase-Beier 4). This reminds us that while translating and writing are in many ways dissimilar, they also have similar elements and as two forms of writing will inevitably have a relation and influence on one another, which will, perhaps, be easier to identify in a novel by a translator that engages directly with themes of writing, of creativity, and of women’s places in the literary world.

2.2 Women, Literary Creation, and Reproduction in Tentée

_Tentée_ is an epistolary novel that tells the story of two childhood friends who come into contact again after a separation of seven years. Odette had married an Englishman and after her husband’s death, she returns to Paris for the first time since her marriage. Her friend Claire had remained in Paris and is at this point a happy mother and an unhappy wife. Her husband is a successful author of both poetry and theater, and Claire finds his artistic productions shocking, disapproves of his literary friends, and has seen herself cast aside for his poetic muse. She is overjoyed that her clever friend will be returning to Paris and looks to Odette for advice and suggestions on how to retain the attentions of her husband. Odette, the more artistic and independent of the two women,

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arrives in Paris and falls immediately in love with Claire’s husband Max, whence the Tentée of the title. The first part of the novel is composed of letters written between Claire and Odette before the latter’s arrival in Paris; the second part is a series of letters that Odette writes to herself, thus a sort of diary that transcribes her impressions upon her return to Paris, her growing, and reciprocal, love for Max, and her struggles both with her conscience and with her desire to form a part of Max’s literary circle. Both the letters exchanged between the two women and Odette’s diary reveal their mutual struggle with their role in literature, their capacities as women and the inherent tension for women between their roles in creation and reproduction in the literary world and beyond.

From the outset of the novel, the status of the male creator is set up as being one of genius that women cannot hope to approach. Max Rénal, Claire’s husband, exemplifies as a poet and playwright the masculine/feminine genre distinction in the literary world and thus the distinction between literary creation as genius and women’s productions, including translations. It is significant to note that not only is Max an author, but that his areas of creation are in two domains closely identified as masculine: poetry and theater. In the realm of poetry, the only truly proper role for women was as muses, who inspired men to create while themselves remaining silent (Planté, La Petite Soeur de Balzac 247). Theatrical writing, moreover, was not considered appropriate for women because of its public nature and its associations with a morally questionable world; involvement in the world of theater would imply a public presentation of oneself that was considered unseemly for women (Newey 189-90). Max’s highly praised talents are therefore set up in direct opposition to women’s possible roles and their capacities as
both creators and interpreters of literature through his involvement in literary realms specifically forbidden to them.

Through the descriptions of the two women Max appears as a god-like figure, a being to adore and admire, but never to be understood. At the same time though, each woman has different reasons for this mixture of fear and admiration that characterizes their rapports with Max. In Claire’s case, being the wife of a renowned poet is not at all desirable: she does not understand his poetry one bit. The first time she reads his poems, on the first night of their honeymoon, her emotions do not correspond to the reaction Max expected:

[…] il produisit sur moi une impression de terreur plutôt que d’admiration.

Je me dis que l’agréable jeune homme que j’avais épousé la veille et que je croyais mon pareil, était en réalité un être d’espèce toute différente, bizarre, mélancolique, athée, cherchant midi à quatorze heures en bien des choses qui me semblaient toutes simples […]. Ses blasphèmes surtout m’affligeaient. (25-26)

Thus, while Claire had believed that she was marrying someone who was her “pareil,” the revelation that her new husband is a poet automatically means that they are not at all similar, implying that she, as a woman, can necessarily not be considered his equal and can neither relate nor aspire to similar creative success in part because literary creation is connected for her to mental and spiritual illness.

This incomprehension, however, does not result in a lack of respect or aversion for her husband, but rather a devaluation of her own intelligence. She calls herself “sa stupide petite femme” (28) and accepts his mockery of her and eventual infidelities without objection. Claire’s consternation and incomprehension grow when her husband
branches out into theater, for she redoubts the pernicious influence of a world that she considers immoral. Yet again, she makes no mention to her husband of her misgivings; her incapacity to understand or to love his poetry turns into an acceptance of the reality that poetry, and poets themselves, belong to a superior, artistic world that she could never hope to attain. This reaction is in accordance with the idea that poetry is a masculine domain and that the poet is, Christine Planté declares, the “créateur par excellence” (251). If a woman cannot hope to comprehend these masculine modes of production, it stands to reason that she could have even less of a right to create within them. Claire’s reaction to her husband’s activities therefore denies both women’s capacity to comprehend and to create literature. This also reinforces women’s association with forms of writing already identified as appropriate for them, such as, for one, translation. Moreover, it emphasizes that their exclusion from the literary world was widespread and institutionalized, indicative not only of the ruling sexism in society at large, but within the hierarchy of literature (Bonnemaison-Paquin 216).

If Claire cannot hope to be a creator of literature, there is one domain in which she, as a woman, can hope to excel: that of reproduction. Indeed, upon the birth of her daughter, Clairette, Claire’s focus and attention turn almost exclusively to child-rearing. As she explains to Odette, “Clairette vint au monde; j’eus un intérêt nouveau, un intérêt puissant […] Maintenant, je laisse mon mari absolument libre de faire ce qu’il veut; j’ai, moi aussi, une occupation absorbante” (33). The only way in which she can hope to have an occupation that could interest her as much as Max’s writing interests him is through her role as a mother. Her focus on the normative activity of motherhood indicates how she has internalized the opinion of both her husband and society at large that she is
inherently incapable of achievement in any other domain, while, at the same time, her comparison of her motherhood to Max’s literary activities sets the two up in relation to one another, establishing the importance of her reproductive focus on an equal plain to Max’s creative focus. To define motherhood, meaning a reproductive role, as equivalent to the creative work of writing can be seen as a subversive move, for conventionally motherhood, along with other typically feminine women’s roles, is not considered as inherently valuable an activity as written creation (Chamberlin 306). The woman’s role as mother is certainly a convention, in literature and in life, yet the use of motherhood, and by extension reproduction, as a means of establishing parity with masculine literary production is an operation of both concealment and revelation in the projection of Claire as she sees herself and as others see her. The seemingly common literary trope of motherhood becomes a much richer way to assert female identity (Meyer Spacks, Imagining a Self 57). This valorization of the reproductive activity of motherhood relates to Bentzon’s own role as a translator, in addition to her role as a novelist, for being a translator was in tension with original creation just as Claire’s role as a mother is in tension with Max’s as a writer; the translator’s job was universally seen as inferior in both its importance and the talent it required to the job of the writer. Yet, by equating the two roles to one another, Bentzon is implicitly justifying not only the importance of motherhood, but also the importance of a “reproductive” role in literature: while the two activities differ in nature and scope, they are still equally valuable and necessary. So, while society might scoff at the notion that reproduction, through either motherhood or translation, was as valuable an activity as writing, Bentzon introduces us to a reality in which the two acts hold equal, though in many was opposite, significance.
While the rapport between translation and motherhood may not at first seem to be an obvious link, there are, in fact, many ways in which the two roles function similarly to define women and their relationship both to men and to creative endeavors. The very term ‘reproduction’ links the two, for translation is often considered the reproduction of a text originally existing in another language. Reproduction, moreover, depends on the notion that the original production is paternal, just as the original text is presumed to have a male author/paternal figure. Such a schema reflects the existing opposition between productive and reproductive forms of work, which “depicts originality or creativity in terms of paternity and authority, relegating the figure of the female to a variety of secondary roles,” a distinction that ultimately marks writing as a “masculine” activity and translation as a “feminine” one (Chamberlin 306-07). This division, moreover, works in tandem with a system in which production is inherently a more valuable activity than reproduction, and thus male participation, whether in the act of procreation or literature, is more greatly respected than female participation. Translation presents the possibility of escaping from this value system by “threatening to erase the difference between production and reproduction which is essential to the establishment of power” (Chamberlin 314). Bentzon, then, in erasing the difference between production and reproduction through Claire’s assertion that she now has something just as important as Max’s writing to occupy her, performs just this confusion of values and upsets the power balance that would normally place Max’s creative endeavors higher in importance and required talent than his wife’s duties as a mother. In turn, this privileging of reproduction in the literal sense privileges reproduction in the metaphorical sense, as in translation.
As for Odette, she is just as dazzled as Claire by this poet/god, but in a completely opposite manner. Upon learning that Claire is married to Max Rénal, a poet whose work is already familiar to her, she cannot comprehend that Claire could in any way complain about her marital situation. She mocks her friend for her lack of appreciation for Max’s poetry and explains to her how she, Odette, would idolize such a husband:

je serais dévouée, je le sens, dévouée avec ardeur, avec intelligence, fière de mon mari, prête à lui sacrifier les enfants, les amies, le monde […]. [J]e louerais Dieu chaque matin, à mon réveil, de m’avoir donné, de toutes les missions, la plus noble et la plus charmante et je recommencerais tous les soirs.

(40-41)

This declaration of devotion and negation of self for the good of one’s husband is once again an affirmation of the superiority of the male poet; the vocabulary with religious connotations—“dévouée,” “sacrifier,” “louer Dieu,” poetry as a “mission”—emphasizes the preeminence of the masculine intellect and the status of women as observers and admirers with no hope of attaining the same genius. At the same time, this attitude illustrates the view that women should restrain themselves to adoration and by no means seek to compete with the male poet through publication of their own. Thus, while they have completely opposite opinions on the value of poetry, Claire and Odette are in agreement on one point: the poet, the man of genius, is not a man among others, but a god to venerate all while recognizing their own lack of intelligence. If a woman has neither the right nor the capacity to understand the poet, she cannot aspire to be a poet herself. Trying to produce poetry as a writer would be a betrayal of poetry itself: without that impossible comprehension any attempt would be false and unfaithful. This discourse
of admiration thus serves the same purpose as Claire’s discourse of incomprehension: both affirm the reality of women’s lack of ability to compete with the masculine creator and link them to lesser forms of creation, such as, again, translation.

Yet Odette’s view of feminine creativity is in many ways more nuanced than that of her friend. First of all, she by no means denies that women should write, instead emphasizing the important role writing has played in her own life. When she first married her English husband and moved abroad, she and Claire had corresponded regularly, but her growing malaise with her own life in England led her to break off the correspondence, for she claimed that she had nothing more of interest to say. Yet this break in both writing and receiving letters is described by Odette as an espèce de suicide auquel je m’étais condamnée en me défendant de t’écrire. Oui le nom de suicide convient seul à un pareil sacrifice […] j’aurais laissé, bon gré, mal gré, déborder des griefs que j’étais déterminée à garder pour moi, car au fond ils étaient injustes, ils étaient coupables, je m’en rends compte en ce moment même où je te les confie. (11-12)

The equivalence Bentzon forms here between not writing and suicide implies that writing represents for women the construction of an independent self—a self that cannot be present in the absence of written production—outside of any relationship to men, to the family, or to women’s prescribed duties. As Claire has demonstrated through her description of her present situation, the absence of writing letters to Odette in her own life has resulted in just that: she defines herself, and is defined by her husband, only in relation to her role as a wife and mother. Thus writing is imbued for women with the importance of forming a self that is not reliant upon outside forces to find meaning.
Furthermore, Odette’s use of the word “sacrifice” to describe her renouncement of writing evokes the religious imagery she uses when describing Max as a poet, reinforcing the idea of writing as a sacred vocation. In this instance, writing is a quasi-religious activity not only in relation to men’s more valued and more public productions, but also in relation to feminine production, however minor or private it may appear. It is therefore not the supposed superiority of masculine talent that defines writing as a vocation, but rather the act of writing in and of itself.

At the same time, though, Odette evokes the negative implications of being a woman writer by referring to the guilt she feels at complaining about her unhappiness, a guilt that has heretofore remained nebulous and that finally becomes concrete with the appearance of written words on the page. The dissatisfaction to which Odette refers in this instance is that of her marriage; her husband was affable and attentive to her, yet she did not and could not love him, whence her feelings of guilt at being unsatisfied in their relationship. Consequently, while writing gave women the possibility of forming an independent self, this came with the possible price of making them aware of both their unhappiness and the lack of justification for this unhappiness in the eyes of society. Odette’s complaints are “coupables” insomuch as they fall outside the realm of women’s ambitions and deny the happiness that every woman should find in domestic life and in marriage to a loving, socially acceptable husband. Writing is therefore presented in direct opposition to the normative role for women as wives and mothers and Bentzon implies that writing is potentially responsible for the distraction of women from these prescribed duties.
Odette’s conflictual relationship with writing also reflects a reality in which masculinity was always ultimately connected with great writing, whereas women’s writing, when it did enter the public sphere, was always ultimately associated with minor feminine productions and thus never detached from ideals of appropriate, normative women’s conduct (Holmes 18). Odette, then, is very aware of both the positive and negative effects of writing on her happiness and presents the double bind that entrapped all women writers: to write, and thus to construct oneself as an individual, was to deny the traditional roles of female happiness, yet to confine oneself to the roles of wife and mother as society dictated was to deny personal fulfillment and introspection. If writing was transgressive and not writing was suicide, then translation, perhaps, represents a middle ground in this situation, in that it is both more and less than a form of writing. Translation does not necessarily require participation in public life and by nature will not result in a public outpouring of personal griefs; it is, in fact, closely akin to reading in that its only material demand would be a source text and a space to translate. The translator remains within the framework that has always already been created by the author and thus rests within an enclosed, domestic space and a negation of personal concerns (Clarke 282). In such a way, then, Odette’s dilemma, a dilemma common to all creative women, can find its solution through the notion of translation as middle ground.

This nuanced view of the effects of writing on women and the possibilities that it opens to them is not the only way in which Odette proves to be essentially different from Claire; through a reaction to Max’s literary talents that directly contradicts that of her friend, she is proposing a second model of womanhood: rather than leaving the creator to his own devices and focusing on a reproductive role, the proper place of the poet’s wife is
to encourage and facilitate his creation by any means possible. Indeed, Odette sees motherhood, meaning reproduction, as an obstacle to this goal. Her main piece of advice for Claire is to spend less time with her daughter in order to devote herself fully to making life comfortable for her husband. She explains that in England, children are largely confined to the nursery and that this has beneficial effects on the husband-wife relationship: “le mari est volontiers at home, mais c’est à condition qu’on lui rende le home agréable, et la présence incessante des enfants a rarement cet effet. Vous gagneriez tous à ce que Clairette eût un domaine spécial […] Mais tu aimes mieux sacrifier et ton mari et toi-même” (57-58). Claire’s reproductive role is thus seen by Odette as the largest contribution to the degradation of her relationship with her husband, and in order to please Max, Claire must, in Odette’s view, sacrifice the role in which she finds such pleasure and fulfillment: that of mother. In giving Claire such advice, Odette is explicitly rejecting the normative, reproductive role assigned to woman, and combined with Odette’s exaltation of literary creation and Bentzon’s own dual roles as writer and translator, such a negation of the primacy of women’s reproductive role in relation to all other aspects of their lives can also be read as a negation of the confinement of women to marginal and, in the case especially of translation, reproductive roles in literature.

Furthermore, Odette once again invokes the religious notion of sacrifice in relation to literary creation: in this case, Claire’s focus on her daughter is a sacrifice in a double sense. First of all, she is sacrificing her husband through this devotion to her daughter because her focus is not completely on the maintenance of a household specifically designed to encourage his literary creativity. Such an opinion on the part of Odette comes as no surprise, given her repeated insistence on the divine role of the poet.
Yet, perhaps more interestingly, this focus on motherhood also implies to Odette that Claire is sacrificing herself. One could read this as simply indicating that Claire is sacrificing a healthy relationship with her husband through her focus on her daughter, but given Odette’s emphasis on the necessity of writing, and thus creation, on the formation of the self, this can also be read as a call to Claire to engage in an activity that goes beyond reproduction and motherhood through a focus on herself. Thus, to continue the metaphor equating translation with a reproductive activity, and therefore motherhood, the notion that Claire is sacrificing herself is akin to the idea that a focus solely on translation as a creative mode of output does not represent the best way for a woman writer, or any writer, to use their talents. A lesser focus on a reproductive role would in this way allow Claire to focus on herself as well as her husband and to cultivate both of their talents for creation.

2.3 Redefining Women in Relation to Creation

As Odette calls for Claire to play a greater role in the creative world inhabited by her husband, the next question to ask is what Odette sees as a woman’s role in literary creation. Although she does not agree with Claire that a woman’s duty is to occupy herself solely with domestic matters, her views on women’s literary roles are not, in fact, so different from the prevailing norm that put women on a lower plane than men. As we have observed, Odette sees writing as a necessary process for women to construct their own identities, yet it must also be remembered that the writing to which she is referring is that of personal correspondence, and thus a writing that remains within the domestic space. The other form of writing in which she engages over the course of the novel is the
personal diary, once again resting within the bounds set for women’s creative powers. As far as women’s intervention in the realm of the public, Odette consigns women to passive roles as, first of all, the muses of male poets, and, secondly, as salonnières who remain silent in order to highlight the wit of the men who surround them.

This first role described by Odette, that of the muse, does not give women an agency in terms of creation, but rather aids in the sacralization of male geniuses. As Odette tries to justify to herself embarking upon a liaison with her best friend’s husband, she tells herself that “… le poète s’élève d’un coup d’aile, pour jouir dans les nus de privilèges qui n’apartiennent qu’à lui seul. C’est son droit, un droit divin, de penser et d’aimer, et de vivre pour sa Muse qui, presque toujours, est une femme” (159). In Odette’s reasoning, the poet is therefore always a masculine figure, and the role of the woman in the creative process is merely to serve as inspiration for the male, not to take up speech herself. Any woman writer, following this reasoning, will never attain the same legitimacy as the male writer: her more proper role as a Muse is to remain silent and to act only as a source of inspiration for the male writer and, in a sense, to aid him in translating his ideas into the concrete reality of literary production.

The silent role of the muse is in many ways related to translation as defined as genre appropriate for women. First of all, both the muse and the translator ostensibly remain silent and in the background, yet are instrumental in bringing literary texts into being, either as inspiration or in the role of ushering the text to a new audience. The association of women with a role as passive muses increased throughout the nineteenth century as salon culture declined, and women thus no longer had the opportunity to practice one of the most prominent, active roles in the intellectual world that they had
played up to this point (Bertrand-Jennings 27). This renewed relationship between women and silent, passive literary participation as muses once more reinforced their roles on the periphery of literary culture, rather than at its center. It did not in any way imply an equal relationship in creativity, but rather the subjugation of women through maintenance of a hierarchical model posited firstly on women’s creative inferiority to men and secondly on their silence (Lenckos 198). Once again, this applies not only to the muse, but to the translator as well, for translation, too, is posited on the supposed superiority of the author to the translator and the silencing of the translator to the profit of the author.

The second role that Odette defines for women within the literary sphere is that of a salonnière. In her reflection on the importance of salons, she addresses the question of how women should behave during a literary soirée, like those that Odette urges Claire to start up in her household to accommodate Max and his friends. Would it be better to speak as cleverly as possible and show off one’s intelligence and wit, she asks herself, or should the intelligent woman efface herself for the profit of her male counterparts? Odette, remembering a female relative who held a literary salon that was well-known in Paris’ intellectual circles, reminds herself, through this example, of the conduct most becoming for a woman who, like herself, would like to acquire a reputation as an intellectual: “je pratique supérieurement un grand art: je sais écouter” (125). She then goes on to explain how she learned this skill from her cousin’s salon:

je me rappelle que ma cousine Rogatienne, qui s’y entendait, n’avait d’autre souci que de faire valoir ce qui se disait autour d’elle. Tout son prestige tenait à cela. Elle n’avait pas de réparties éblouissantes, aucun de ces mots que
l’on cite et qui furent qualifiés, je ne sais par qui, de coups de fusil tirés sur les idées des autres. Elle n’abattait rien, relevait tout au contraire. […] De chacun des hommes de talent qu’elle recevait à sa table, elle connaissait si bien les œuvres qu’on pouvait la soupçonner d’avoir tout lu […]. Je me rappelle donc les excellentes traditions de ma tante, je les modifie à ma manière et j’y ajoute des agréments qu’elle n’avait pas. Bref, je réussis. (126-27)

Thus, the female intellectual must limit herself to listening, to repeating the thoughts and ideas of others and in particular of men, the ‘true’ intellectuals. The focus on the importance of listening rather than speaking reinforces the cultural and literary primacy of men and the notion that women would be best served by absorbing what they had to say, a sentiment echoed by the decline in influence of salon culture, and thus of salonnières, over the course of the nineteenth century in the realms of both literature and politics to the profit of male power (Kale 66, 74). Even witty repartee is equated to masculine virility here, through the metaphor comparing it to “coups de fusil tirés sur les idées des autres,” thus linking it to the masculine activity par excellence of warfare. Moreover, Odette’s observation that her relative “n’abattait rien, relevait tout au contraire” implies that women do not have the critical judgment necessary to evaluate ideas, but rather that they were best served by simply creating a space for these ideas to shine, an opinion linked to the prevailing view of women as being incapable of literary criticism because of a deficit of the sense and strength of intellect necessary for critical thinking (Balayé 18).

Once again, there are rapports between the behavior described here by Odette and translation, most often conceived of as the repetition of someone else’s ideas and devoid
of any of the translator’s opinions. For what does a translator do if not present the ideas of another author in a way designed to bring the author’s talent to light, while negating the participation of the translator him or herself? To follow Odette’s line of thinking, in her view of both salons and of women as muses, it could be concluded that women must limit themselves to translation and other iterations of men’s ideas, such as a knowledge of their works and an advancement of their productions. The female translator is in many ways the exemplary good hostess who welcomes men of genius “at her table,” so to speak, to make them shine while renouncing, at least openly, the expression of her own ideas. The translator plays a secondary, though often essential, role in the transmission of literary texts in much the same way as the woman who holds a salon transmits the texts of the men in her circle. Odette’s assertion that she is successful in such a role highlights her often conflicting views on women’s roles in literary creation: while she presents a powerful argument on the benefit of writing for women, she also remains within the dominant cultural paradigm that emphasizes male production at the expense of the female and assigns women a lesser role in the literary world.

2.4 The Woman Writer and Hybridity

This ambivalent attitude about the act of writing, and creation in general, for women, in particular as a contrast to translation, is seen most pointedly through the letters that Odette writes herself in the second half of the novel. She had originally undertaken this project to help her decide whether or not she wanted to remain in France or to return to England and accept the marriage proposal of an English member of the aristocracy, yet the journal is quickly consumed with a reflection on her love for her best friend’s
husband. As she simultaneously tries to justify her love for Max and come to terms with this betrayal of her best friend, who still believes Odette is aiding her to have a better relationship with her husband, she differentiates between two distinct personas that inhabit her writing. First of all, she presents the Odette of the evenings, “cette folle d’Odette, qui prend la plume, avant de se coucher, l’imagination excitée par l’emploi de sa journée” and contrasts her with the morning Odette, to whom she refers as Mrs. Nevil, her married name, and who is “raisonnable, et qui, l’esprit reposé, rafraîchi par le sommeil, met un peu de clarté dans une situation qui s’embrouille” (118). I see this distinction between Odette and Mrs. Nevil as a very direct contrast between writing and translating, and thus between the two seemingly opposing poles for women in literature.

The evening Odette, “la folle,” is the writer who transgresses society’s rules, who uses her imagination to produce an original work, belonging to her alone. The evocation of this activity’s time of day, evening, just before bed, recalls the status of this type of creative writing as an activity with no place among the responsibilities of a well-behaved woman; it is a fugitive exercise that cannot be practiced in the light of day, for it is not simply a faithful recreation of the day’s events. Odette recreates her day, elaborates upon and interprets it with no guide but her own volition, using her dreams and imagination, just as a writer creates her novels as she wishes, without necessarily having recourse to true life or to right and wrong. The morning Odette, or Mrs. Nevil, is, in contrast, the translator. She is calm and circumspect, always attentive to her duties of exactitude and reason. She “met un peu de clarté dans une situation qui s’embrouille,” in the same way that a translator must worry about the public’s comprehension for foreign customs and values and clarify these questions. This figure of Mrs. Nevil, a chaste and prudent
woman, has no aspirations to creation or invention, just as a translator has no right to
invent or change from the words written by the text’s author. Also implied in this
opposition is that there is an inherent tension and lack of compatibility between the roles
of Odette and Mrs. Nevil: the one is necessarily in conflict with the other, just as
translation was often seen as being inherently opposed to creative writing. As an article
on the theory and practice of translation in the *Revue britannique* from 1833 points out,
“il ne manque à la plupart des traductions qu’une chose: c’est la vie et l’âme, c’est
l’esprit dont un auteur est animé” (Anonymous 12), a sentiment that directly contrasts
writing and translation in much the same manner that Odette contrasts the spirit of her
own writing with to the circumspection of Mrs. Nevil.

This very same tension is expressed once more by Odette, as she struggles with
her desires to be part of Max’s literary circle and her simultaneous shock and disapproval
of some of the ideas (often blasphemous) she hears expressed there. Is she truly a woman
if she wants to consecrate herself entirely to literary activities, and, by the same token, is
she truly not a woman if she feels some misgivings in this regard? In the midst of such
an internal struggle, she describes herself thusly: “petite chauve-souris misérable, animal
hybride et suspect, tu n’as ta place, ni parmi les oiseaux, ni parmi les rats; toujours tu te
sens, au milieu des uns, des secrètes affinités avec les autres” (132). And there, in fact, is
an illustration of the status of each woman who writes and translates: on one hand, she is
charged with an exact repetition of another’s words, in agreement with feminine norms.
On the other hand, she charges herself with a creativity that transgresses these same
norms in composing her own works. Such a woman is this “animal hybride et suspect,”
desiring at the same time to fly with “les oiseaux,” the men of genius, and seeing herself
sent back to the place of the “rats,” the little esteemed work of translation. Christine Planté touches upon this same notion of hybridity that was seen as a hallmark of a woman writer by nineteenth-century society—not quite a woman by virtue of her literary activity, yet never able to completely escape her perceived feminine weaknesses (268). She stresses the link between hybridity and monstrosity, explaining that such women “constituent un avertissement aux humains, montrent aux femmes les dangers qui les guettent à vouloir sortir de l’ordre naturel et social des choses” (269-70). Odette constructs herself as just such a monster, unable to obey her creative impulses, but unequally able to be a woman as society expects. Translation, then, would prove a safer path for a woman with creative aspirations—a hybrid activity of writing and imitation, in and of itself reflective of the perceived tension between being a woman and a writer, seen neither as completely creative nor as completely without artistic aspects.

Just as Odette ultimately deconstructs her adherence to either masculine or feminine roles in literature through a meditation on her essentially hybrid nature, a similar process is also at work on the other characters in the novel. Though we are initially presented with portraits of both Claire and Max that place them firmly within the normative roles of devoted wife and mother and poetic genius respectively, the novel soon works to break down the simplicity of these roles in order to present a more nuanced view of both male and female creativity and to question facts that have previously been presented as givens. Such an ambivalence, initially presented as adherence to the established gender roles defining men as the ultimate literary creators and women as best suited to domestic roles, is a characteristic often identifiable in texts by women writers (Meyer Spacks, *Imagining a Self* 63). It indicates that Bentzon is much more invested in
questioning these roles than in upholding them, an attitude best seen through the opposing images of Claire. Claire is initially presented, both by herself and by Odette and Max, as a wife and mother who has no interest outside of her domestic life and who is, by nature, incapable of understanding or appreciating poetry. At the same time, she contradicts this simplistic portrait of herself through an analysis of the cultural forces that have caused her to become this way, namely, through a critique of women’s education. When describing the wedding night revelation of her husband’s poetic inclinations, she tells Odette that “passer des breuvages lactés et sucrés, dont on abreuve les petites filles, à un vin aussi capiteux… il y avait de quoi étourdir une tête plus forte que la mienne” (26). This statement reveals more than Claire’s unease with her new husband’s poetry; it communicates the cause of this uneasiness. As a young woman, the education she received in no way accustomed her for literature of this nature; thus, through no fault of her own, she is by no means intellectually ready to understand or enjoy it. This discomfort with his poetry, furthermore, is explicitly linked with Claire’s physical discomfort and lack of knowledge of the physical experience of the wedding night. Max’s sexual knowledge, along with his poetry, is therefore a matter that Claire was completely incapable to confront due to her education, not inherent to her nature as a woman.

Claire makes this sentiment more explicit still, in relation to both poetry and sexuality, when, chastised by Odette for her incomprehension of Max’s poetry, she responds: “Qu’y puis-je? Mon éducation ne m’avait pas préparée à comprendre un homme de lettres de ce temps-ci; ma mère, en formant ce que je puis avoir de goût, ne m’a pas initiée aux subtilités modernes” (52). In contrast to her admitted inferiority to
both Max and Odette in terms of literary taste, these two statements demonstrate an insight into the causes of her lack of comprehension: it is not a dirth of intelligence, nor is it an incomprehension native to women as a whole. Rather, it is an education, transmitted by her mother, that has readied her for the roles in life thought to be natural for women: not of literary critic or even avid reader of contemporary texts, but of wife and mother.

Thus, through both her keen insights into the causes of the confusion engendered by her husband’s activities and into the ways in which women’s education did not prepare them to confront or to judge contemporary literature, Claire is defying the portrait, given by both herself and others, of her supposed innate incapacity to understand her husband’s work and instead exposing the cultural mechanisms that brought her to this position.

Bentzon’s judgment on the normative roles for women in literature in this way demonstrates her conviction that women’s place in literature is not shaped by their capacities so much as it is by their education and the view that society transmits to them of their roles. As I have previously discussed, women’s talents were viewed as imitative rather than creative; their strong presence as translators, then, was due not as much to a native talent in this domain as it was to a society that pushed them towards such means of production as acceptable outlets for their talents. Claire’s revelations regarding her own literary limitations imply that women’s adherence to certain genres of literature, including translation, was shaped by education and cultural expectations. Bentzon’s questioning of Claire’s supposed lack of intelligence therefore has wider implications for the construction of women’s talent in the nineteenth century, alluding to the fact that their creative enclosure was a social construct rather than a given and that with changes in education and expectations, much more could be expected of them.
2.5 Deconstruction of Masculine Superiority

Just as Claire’s supposed inferiority is nuanced, Max’s exalted status as a poet beyond reproach is called into question by both Claire and Odette, the very ones who placed him in this position. Claire admits to Odette that “il a pour les femmes en général un certain dédain” (35). Such a statement on her part not only undermines Max’s status, but also places into question the validity of Claire’s own low opinion of herself, an opinion formed in the first place by Max’s criticisms. If Max is disdainful of women on the whole, then his criticisms of his wife’s interests and views of poetry are to a large extent discredited: they are not a product of his reaction to her personally, but to women as a class. This statement thus undermines both the view of Max as the poet-god and of Claire as a simple wife and mother devoid of critical judgment. In subverting the primacy of male literary domination, it also opens the opportunity for a new definition of literary talent, which would include women and their creations, and calls into question his own creations.

Odette, too, later nuances what she initially perceives as the unmitigated superiority of the male poet; like her friend Claire, she comes to see the weaknesses in Max and his circle of friends that contradicts the notion that they, and their creations, are inherently of greater value than those of women. Odette observes that in private, these literary giants do not act in accordance with their public personae, noting that “[ils] ne montrent dans l’intimité, avec un gros appétit, que de grosses jalousies, de grosses rancunes, des piques violentes contre tel ou tel de leur confrères” (128). Far from being
the god-like creatures she supposed them to be, Max and his literary coterie show themselves as petty and vengeful; in short, they reveal that they, too, are merely human. If they are human, it stands to reason that their literary productions are also set back upon the plane of the human, rather than the divine, and Bentzon once again uses the desacralization of the male poet in order to demonstrate that their productions do not have any more inherent value than women’s literary productions. Indeed, Odette concludes that they are “des cerveaux, ils ne sont que cela, des intelligences dont le rouage n’est modifié par aucun sentiment naturel” (129). Her use of the word “rouage” in this description intimates that these men are more machinery than gods, no matter their status in the literary world, and are lacking in sentiment and emotion. Now, sentiment and emotion are just the qualities associated with women’s literary productions, and Odette is thus adversely judging these artists for what is lacking in their work on terms that incorporate the importance of typically feminine qualities into literary creation, and thereby reclaiming the importance of women’s contributions to literature as a whole. We can also pursue the link of translation with this discussion. While it is habitually translations, and by association, translators, that are assigned to the category of the mechanical task, here Odette breaks down the binary system that classifies translation as mechanical and repetitive and ‘original’ literary production as creative by associating authors with the mechanical. In so doing, she questions the dominant paradigm that separates translation and writing and so, at the same time, the perceived separation between the literary aptitudes of men and women.

Odette once more comes to question the supposed superiority of the male genius that she herself set up earlier in the novel when she returns to England. After a long
internal struggle, she has decided that she cannot continue to betray her friend and that she will return to England and accept the marriage proposal that awaits her there. In order to explain her sudden departure to Claire, she tells her friend that it was one of Max’s circle of friends with whom she was having a liaison that she decided not to continue, but to flee. In a letter destined to Claire, a letter that she knows Max will read, she describes the reaction of this phantom lover, in reality Max, to her departure: “Il semblait […] que j’eusse manqué aux devoirs les plus sacrés en refusant d’être à lui: car c’était bien là ce qu’il voulait. Dans sa colère, il jeta le masque. Eh bien, je veux, moi, que l’on donne aux choses leurs vrais noms, qu’on appelle folie une folie et caprice un caprice” (188). As Max has, in her words, thrown off his mask, she comes to see the real nature of their relationship: she was not his muse, essential to his continued creation, and he was not a god-like poet, but simply a man who resents her decision to leave because of his infatuation. Max is thus relegated to the plane of men in search of a new conquest and the “masque” of his superiority reveals the banality of their situation, and of her idealized lover. The presentation of Max as motivated more by carnality than by literature, though he couched his interest in terms of an artist and his muse, leads Odette to the conclusion that literary creators, and their creations, are not on a higher, unattainable level that women cannot fully comprehend, but rather are subject to the same weaknesses and motivations as the common man. This operation of desacralization ultimately leaves room for women to claim their place in the literary world, and additionally questions the superiority of authors over translators, for the breakdown of a system that valued male creators higher than women, and original textual production over ‘imitative’ translation through the revelation of Max’s banality leads us to question other
literary categorizations, such as that placing both women and translation on a lesser level than original, male creation. The false divisions between imitation and creation, between men’s and women’s literary talents, and between the common man and the poet-god are thus all put into question by Odette’s revelations regarding Max and his literary circle and her growing realizations regarding his imperfect, human nature.

Such an interpretation is supported by the book’s closing remarks. Odette ends her final letter to Claire, which contains the news that she will marry and remain in England, with the following postscript:

Dis à M Rénal que j’ai lu dans la Revue sa Salamandre et que j’en fais grand cas. Jamais la coquetterie froide et positive d’une femme du monde n’a été mieux disséquée. Il l’attache au pilori, ce joli monstre, avec tant de délicatesse, comme un naturaliste doit clouer dans sa collection, tout vif et palpitant, le pauvre papillon assez sot pour s’être laissé prendre! (195)

Now, Odette certainly knows that her aborted romance with Max is the inspiration behind this book, for in her last letters to Claire she details the rage and incomprehension, which turn to disgust, with which her former lover treats her upon her retreat to England. She thus has no illusions about the opinion that he has now formed of her actions. Her use of the term “jolie monstre” to describe the character, based upon her, that Max created evokes not only the ways in which he has misconstrued her actions and chosen to believe that she acted calculatingly and in cold blood, but also brings to mind her earlier description of herself as a hybrid, and therefore monstrous, creature with no place in either the world of men or the world of women. This description emphasizes the struggle for women to be accepted as “true women,” by both men and by themselves, when they
attempted to live their lives in a way not in agreement with the norms for feminine
behavior, whether it be because of literary or artistic ambitions or a refusal to accept a
passive role as a muse to their male counterparts. Thus, while Odette saw herself as a
hybrid and monstrous creature for her literary and intellectual aspirations, Max sees her
as such for her refusal to passively remain as his muse so he may have access to literary
creation and sexual pleasure. In essence, then, Odette has become monstrous to Max for
her refusal to continue her participation in a relationship, and indeed a system, designed
to stimulate his own textual and sexual productivity while at the same time stifling her
own.

Yet, in this description that forms the end of the novel, perhaps most telling of the
changes in Odette’s view of Max, and by association male writers, is the scientific and
sterile way in which she now conceives of male writers, for Odette evokes the writer as
scientist in several ways in this passage. First of all, she notes not only that Max has
presented a portrait of a certain type of woman, but that he has, in her view, dissected her.
This vocabulary denotes a scientific, and thus seemingly detached, form of observance,
for he has taken this woman apart in order to examine and ultimately classify her. But
such an approach is by no means equated with an understanding of the motivations or
emotional state of her character, for emotions are necessarily left out of the scientific
procedure of dissection. This description recalls Odette’s earlier characterization of Max
and his circle of friends as machines, meaning as intellects with no sentiments, and
reinforces the idea she has already expressed that their works are lacking in any
emotional impact or truth. Furthermore, Odette takes this comparison of the man of
letters to the man of science even farther when she likens Max’s role as author to that of a
naturalist. Once again, Bentzon implies a talent that looks to examine rather than to understand, and there are specific implications that stem from a description of Max as a naturalist, rather than belonging to another branch of science. Odette’s view that Max’s role is that of a naturalist pinning butterflies, meaning women, in his collection denotes that the role of the male author is to identify, define, and dissect women on terms he will dictate, with women serving only as the passive specimens who are to be inspected with no input or control of their own. The identification of man as the civilized scientist and woman as the natural creature who must be entrapped and examined further strengthens the link between men and civilization and women and emotions unfettered by an attachment to culture. At the same time, though, Odette notes that the woman/butterfly who allows herself to be trapped in such a schema is doing so out of her own stupidity, thus noting how women allow men to dictate these roles to them. Such a wording on her part implies that there exists a choice for women: that they may either allow themselves to be captured and enclosed in the masculine view of their roles or they may evade ‘capture’, so to speak, by the cultural forces that define them in a certain way and instead define their own roles.

The choice to describe the female character created and dissected by Max as a butterfly rather than any other creature also has important implications with regard to Odette’s perceptions of men’s and women’s roles and capacities in literature. The butterfly is inherently a creature of change and metamorphosis, who transforms from one stage of life to the next into a completely different creature. The woman as butterfly, then, is imbued with the possibility for change and the development of the self if she does not allow herself to be trapped by the net of man’s perception of her nature and
capacities. In direct contrast to masculine talent, presented here as both mechanical and scientific, and thus sterile, unbending, and lacking in emotional impact, feminine talent is depicted as one of constant change and evolution and a desire to understand not only the ‘scientific’ facts, but the emotional import of those facts, and the motivations that lay behind them. The link between women and metamorphosis is also relevant to women’s roles as translators, for they assist in the transformation of a text from one cultural context and language to another. Thus, women’s capacity for metamorphosis extends beyond the self and becomes an important factor in their literary work on several levels. The equation of translation with metamorphosis as a positive process also serves to contradict the idea of translation a sterile process, for in this equivalence translation does not relate to the cold and emotionless masculine creation, equated with scientific inquiry, but rather with a process that places emphasis on empathy and emotional understanding. This serves to once again reinforce the notion of translation as a creative process in and of itself that stands in close relation to other literary productions and therefore valorizes one of women’s contributions to literature.

2.6 From Tentée to Translation

As I have demonstrated through my analysis of Bentzon’s Tentée, even while this novel does not explicitly mention translation it raises a number of questions relevant to an examination of translation as a ‘women’s genre’ of creation. Bentzon’s ultimate disturbance and questioning of the normative roles for men and women in literary production, her implication that women’s talent is hybrid in nature, a fact that is both positive and negative, and her delicate treatment of literary creation and reproduction,
both textual and sexual, all contribute to destabilizing the existing view of women’s talent in relation to men’s and, simultaneously, to repositioning translation in relation to other forms of textual production. Bentzon’s own background not only as a translator, but as a writer in a wide variety of both typically ‘masculine’ and typically ‘feminine’ genres gives her particular insight into the distinctions between these various creative forms and the uses of gender to shape this discourse. Nor is such an analysis limited to this text, but rather can be extended to numerous fictional texts by women translator/writers, such as Sophie Ulliac Tremadeure’s Émilie ou la jeune fille auteur and Adelaïde Dufrenoy’s La femme auteur, ou les inconvénients de la célébrité. Both of these texts also bring up ideas of women’s relationship to creative writing in conjunction with men’s roles in this field, the link between creation and reproduction, and the contrast between women’s perceived capacities and men’s.

Particularly in relation to Bentzon’s other textual productions, the themes that she takes up in this novel reveal a running preoccupation throughout all of her works, be they translations, novels or works of literary criticism: a commitment to changing the terms for women’s participation in the literary world. Just as I demonstrate in Chapter Four with regard to her prefatory discourse and in Chapter Five when looking at her translations, in Tentée Bentzon aims to change the standard roles for fictional female characters to allow a more direct reflection of women’s aims in real life. Not content with their roles simply as wives and mothers, whether in fiction or in real life, she explores their options in other professional or creative fields in order to alter how they perceive themselves and how society perceives them.
As I move on to study the strategies and techniques that women used to represent their creative activities in their autobiographical discourse, I further define what it meant to write as a woman in the nineteenth century and how translation was an integral part of the way women conceived of their creativity since it was also an important means of access to the intellectual world.
Chapter 3

Translation, Writing, and Gender in Victorine de Chastenay’s Mémoires

3.1 Autobiography, Translation, and Literary Initiation

In this chapter I examine the autobiography of Victorine de Chastenay, both a translator and a writer who speaks explicitly about her literary activities. This perspective forms an important part of my analysis because it allows me to study how these women viewed their participation in literary culture and the constraints that they encountered, often specifically linked to their status as women writers. It also reveals the dominant mechanisms that served to create and maintain categories of feminine production, since a study of autobiographies provides a key element in understanding the cultural obligations that confined women to certain literary genres, by allowing us to examine how they themselves elucidated these constraints (Meyer Spacks, Imagining a Self 89). For my present study of translation as a female literary genre, women’s auto-discourse on this practice, examined in conjunction with their other literary activities, permits me to gain insight into several aspects of the relationship between women and translation. For example, on a historical and contextual level, how did this particular author come to her career as a translator? On a generic level, did she view translation as a private form of writing or as a professional activity on a par with other forms of literary creation? On a stylistic level, how does she textually represent herself as a translator and writer? On a gendered level, how was she received both as a woman translator and as a
woman writer? It permits me as well to study how she conceptualized the act of translating itself: namely, whether she saw it as the imitative literary genre it was widely thought to be or as a more creative process that engaged her intellect and literary talents.

The presentation of translation as merely a hobby or means of economic gain unmotivated by thoughts of a professional career is a commonly held one, in analyses of translation in general and in analyses specifically dealing with women’s literary activities in the nineteenth century. This is perhaps due in part to the overarching viewpoint that it is problematical to categorize translation as a literary genre in and of itself; indeed, in *Seuils*, Gérard Genette classifies translation as a paratext, thus largely denying its importance as an object of independent study (372). Béatrice Didier claims that “jusqu’à une époque récente, les genres littéraires qui ont été le plus représentés dans la littérature féminine sont incontestablement ceux du ‘je’: poésie, lettre, journal intime, roman” (19). This statement implies that either women did not translate widely during the nineteenth century, which is not, in fact, the case, or that these translations do not form an integral part of their literary productions, for translation represents the effacement of this “je” to the profit of the author of the source text. Such statements serve to deny the importance of translation as a literary activity and simultaneously exclude the possibility of perceiving translation as an act of authorship on equal footing with “original” creation.

Further underscoring this view of translation is its presumed status as a hobby or recourse for women who did not wish to transgress the reigning literary ideology. Amable Tastu, we are informed, turned to translation only when she abandoned her career in poetry because of the negative critical attention she received, and thus chose a “confinement accepté” in which she was forbidden “la liberté de la création” (Schapira
Mme Dacier claimed that she undertook a translation of the *Iliad* for her own amusement rather than any literary ambition (Pieretti 475-76). This cursory reading of translation is perhaps superficially supported by women’s autodiscourse on the subject; yet, as Marie-Pascale Pieretti demonstrates, Mme Dacier’s assertions about the limited nature of her work should by no means be taken at face value, but rather should be analyzed as a conciliatory means of discourse within a literary system that denied women widespread opportunities (474). To go beyond such a facile categorization of this activity through a study of women’s self-representation of translation can, in fact, reveal the transformative power of translation as an authorial activity and the development of a stance that considers translation to be an act of authorship in and of itself.

Upon first glance, Mme de Chastenay’s translations as she represents them in her memoirs might seem to fit perfectly within the category of translation as a private means of amusement. Mme de Chastenay was active in her academic studies from a young age, and she also began writing in her childhood. She describes writing plays and translating Horace’s poetry for family celebrations, all of which met with great success and approval (1: 31). She soon moved on to literary production that was motivated solely by her desire for knowledge, and she explains that “je lisais beaucoup, je faisais des extraits des ouvrages, des plans d’ouvrages, des traductions, des poèmes même” (1: 49). In this way, Mme de Chastenay was an active participant in the production of knowledge in the course of her studies, both writing and translating. Translation and writing, then, were from her earliest youth conceived of as dual, coexisting activities that permitted her to hone her skills and interests in study. Again, these were productions that did not leave the private sphere and she was generally commended and applauded for her efforts.
Her first translation that would become public, of Irish writer Oliver Goldsmith’s pastoral poem *The Deserted Village* in 1797, was another project initially undertaken solely for Mme de Chastenay’s own pleasure, along with translations of Petrarch and some English poets. Such translations were initially intended only for her own amusement, for “l’étude était ma seule ressource” (1: 296). The amusement or approval of other people, then, was not initially a consideration for Mme de Chastenay—personal pleasure outweighed outside opinions and writing was above all an act necessitated by her own desires. At the same time, Mme de Chastenay situates this pleasure in writing for the self through opening herself up to the texts of others, because her chosen mode of writing was translation. This choice made writing at once an act of personal will and of public participation. Translation, then, as conceived of by Mme de Chastenay, was a private act of writing with no other goal than to fulfill her own happiness and yet it was also always inevitably an opening of the self towards another, whether an author or an audience.

She showed her Goldsmith translation to a family friend who showed it to another friend, who was equally impressed and printed the work for publication. Translation was not even originally conceived of as a literary activity per se, with the intention of greater diffusion, but more as a solitary means of study and amusement—an appropriate activity for a young, unmarried noblewoman and not so shocking as to attract undue attention. Mme de Chastenay’s conception of translation, then, seems to fit into the dominant paradigm that aligns translation with a more or less frivolous literary debut. A closer inspection of both Mme de Chastenay’s literary activities and her early education, however, problematizes this depiction of translation and allows us to analyze the
evolution of her academic ambitions in general and, more specifically, her view of
translation. This translation, in fact, was a key element in the professionalization of Mme
de Chastenay’s vision of her own career. Nor was she alone: many women used
translation as an acceptable means of engaging in literary projects and through those
projects gained access to wider means of textual representation (Brown 22). This was
also the case with Mme de Chastenay, as we shall see.

As we analyze the development of Mme de Chastenay’s translation activities and
her general evolution as a scholar, it will be interesting to look at her career trajectory in
the context of conventions in women’s autobiographical texts from the nineteenth
century. In a particularly telling take on the study of women’s autobiographical
productions, Claire Marrone analyses these texts through the lens of the bildungsroman
in order to tease out instances of awakening and movement towards self-realization (2).
Marrone’s use of the bildungsroman model in her study of women’s autobiography
highlights the “awakening” experienced by the female protagonists as a “vertical
movement towards self-knowledge” (16-18). Marrone finds the parallel between
bildungsromans and women’s autobiographies in this very movement towards self-
knowledge, as both the fictional protagonists in these novels and the autobiographers
demonstrate a process of “potential growth and development of the central character”
(23). In my discussion of Mme de Chastenay’s memoirs, I focus on her intellectual
growth as she developed her literary career and thus the awakening of her intellectual
self-knowledge as she cultivated her writing skills and attempted to gain public
recognition for her achievements. Women’s confinement to the private sphere forms part
of this awakening: as she attempted to negotiate male spaces, both the intellectual space
of writing and the physical spaces of knowledge, such as libraries or archives, that are reserved for men, Mme de Chastenay marked a very clear awareness of the transgressive nature of her actions and the opportunities that were denied to her solely because of her sex. The movement towards self-knowledge and development for Mme de Chastenay is both a positive and a negative experience as she portrays it: it is positive insomuch as she traces her growth as a writer and a scholar and her varied domains of study, and negative in that she cannot fully put this growth to use because of her confinement to female literary genres, even as she struggles to break free from these conventions. Self-realization on her part is therefore an expression of and reaction to the limitations that she faced. The key element in this development is her education and its critical role in allowing her to evolve as both a translator and a writer.

In her description of her early studies, a subject that Mme de Chastenay emphasizes on more than one occasion is her love of reading and instruction, a love that began very early and was to shape her education and literary future. She has this to say about her attitudes towards her studies: “J’aimais l’étude avec passion, […] et je passais ma vie dans cet état animé, mais sérieux, que Mme de Staël appelle le bonheur” (1: 35-36). Just as important here as Mme de Chastenay’s assertion of her love of study is her identification with a specifically feminine role model; by citing Mme de Staël, she is, first of all, pointing out to her readers that although her interest in the acquisition of knowledge and participation in public literary life may appear to be abnormal for a woman of her social position, she is, in fact, part of a lineage of female intellectuals who continually highlight the value of study and writing for women. The reference to Mme de Staël specifically is also significant because of the latter’s emphasis on the importance
of enriching one’s own national literature through other national literatures, and thus of translating. As mentioned earlier in this study, translation, in the eyes of Mme de Staël, was an essential means of accomplishing this task, for the infusion of new forms of expression into a national literature could only enrich its literary traditions and give spark to new means of expression (Simon, *Gender in Translation* 61-63). In “De l’esprit des traductions,” Mme de Staël asserted that translation, when envisaged as a creative rather than an imitative process, was the only means by which literary cultures could “transform the energies of other national literatures into something specifically their own” (Simon, “Germaine de Staël and Gayatri Spivak” 127). By making reference to Mme de Staël specifically, Mme de Chastenay therefore asserts the importance of not only women’s literary activity, but also of translation as a form of expression capable of producing a profound impact upon literature in general.

Mme de Chastenay goes on to describe her continuing education, one of the most prominent aspects of which was her apprenticeship in both typically feminine and typically masculine subjects. She had lessons in music and drawing, and, along with her brother, lessons on mathematics and Latin (1: 21, 37-39). The serious study of Latin was unusual for a young woman at this time, for the subject still formed part of a male educational tradition and as such was viewed as a powerful subject indicative of specialized and wholly masculine knowledge (Armstrong 99). Yet, it was precisely in these Latin lessons that Mme de Chastenay took particular enjoyment and outshone her brother, all the while battling against the skepticism with which this endeavor was viewed by tutors who had been brought for his benefit rather than for hers. She remarks regarding their shared instructor that “il prenait avec mon frère plus de liberté qu’avec moi, et
faîsait tomber sur lui toutes les observations qui pouvaient nous être communes” (1: 41).

From early in her life, then, Mme de Chastenay took a lively interest not only in reading, but in learning subjects more often thought of as suitable for males than for females. Such a distinction is very important with the case of learning Latin, for though as a member of the privileged class Mme de Chastenay had more opportunities for education than most young women, education in Greek and Latin literature was still considered transgressive of feminine standards of learning (Finch 12). Mme de Chastenay, moreover, had a clear awareness of the limitations placed upon her solely because of her sex and of her struggle to gain recognition for her accomplishments in these domains. Indeed, her progress in Latin was seen by her tutor and his colleagues as a sort of spectacle that did not fail to amuse and impress, but nevertheless as a performance not necessarily deserving of serious encouragement to further studies. She describes how her tutor brought colleagues by to assess her progress, noting that “une jeune demoiselle latiniste était pour eux une nouveauté qui ne laissait pas que de leur paraître aimable, et j’avais près d’eux de grands succès” (1: 41). This knowledge on her part of the constraints of being a female scholar of typically masculine subjects points to the growth of self-knowledge emphasized by Marrone in her study of women’s autobiographies; the realization of how her gender confined her educational opportunities is a theme that Mme de Chastenay continues to develop throughout her memoirs and is one of the “awakenings” she frequently experiences in regard to her writing career. As long as her interest was contained within the private sphere, she was met with limited encouragement, but as we shall see, this encouragement did not carry over to more public ambitions in the realm of classical studies.
3.2 Translation, Professionalization, and Authorial Originality

Though Mme de Chastenay had a very early awareness of the limitations that were placed upon her, by no means did that stop her from believing that she had a bright intellectual future ahead of her, and so there was a continuing tension between her knowledge of a woman’s place in academic life and her own ambitions. She explains that “plus je grandissais, et moins je m’inquiétais de mon avenir. J’étais un jeune philosophe à qui la parure, les plaisirs légers, les vains amusements importaient peu, et j’avais des succès suffisants pour me flatter […] L’étude, d’ailleurs, dont le goût était en moi si vif, me permettait peu d’égarer ma pensée” (1: 55). From her youth, she always envisaged her studies in a professional manner, as leading to an academic future. Not only did she conceive of them in a serious way, but she also framed them in a strictly masculine way: she is not “une philosophe,” but rather “un philosophe”. Her identity as an intellectual, then, can only be conceived of in masculine terms, and the contrast that she forms between her intellectual interests as “un jeune philosophe” and the typically feminine concern of “la parure” once again highlights the distance between what was perceived to be appropriate behavior for women and Mme de Chastenay’s actual interests; a rejection of “la parure” and “les plaisirs légers” on her part indicates her growing identification with values that fell within the domain of the masculine.

Moreover, it reflects that she believed that in order to claim her identity as an intellectual she had to give up the typically ‘feminine’ elements and could not function as both at the same time. Mme de Chastenay also identifies herself here as a professional; she is no longer an amateur, but rather sees herself as an expert in her studies and as a professional
in her intellectual pursuits. And this professionalization, it must be noted, stems most
directly from her activities as a translator. Translation, then, was one of the driving
forces that led her to consider herself as a professional and to re-evaluate her relationship
to both writing and normative views of femininity.

Along with this growing tension between the proper place for women in the
acquisition of knowledge and Mme de Chasteny’s own view of the possibilities open to
her came an increasing interest in translation and its transformative. Though, as I have
indicated, translation was initially a private literary debut, it soon became, for her, an
activity that allowed her access to the stature of author. Based on the success of her
translation of Goldsmith’s poem that same year she translated and published Ann
Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, a translation most recently reedited in 2001. But
translation now served a very different purpose for Mme de Chastenay. It was no longer
merely an amusing manner in which to sharpen her intellectual skills and wile away the
hours; upon undertaking this translation “l’idée de me faire un nom dans la république
des lettres ranima toutes mes facultés” (1: 299). Such a statement indicates that
translation, far from being conceived of as a private means of amusement as with the
Goldsmith translation, became an activity linked to ideas of authorship for Mme de
Chastenay; it inspired her to further literary creation with the specific goal of becoming a
publicly known author. Rather than being a simple activity of imitation, translation had a
profound impact on Mme de Chastenay, inspiring her to vie for a wider public renown
and allowing her to see herself as an author. The evolution of her perception of
translation is also expressed through her reaction to Radcliffe’s Gothic novel. While
translating, she describes the book’s effect on her: “*Udolphe*, d’ailleurs, me causait un
Translation here was not simply a mechanical activity, but an emotional process that involved strong feelings stemming from the source material itself. While a reader of the novel may have certainly experienced similar reactions, the emphasis that she places upon the strength of her response to the book indicates a connection to the source text that she by no means felt upon her first translation, suggestive perhaps of her evolving view of the possibilities present for her in this activity and her evolving conception of translation as a creative act. It is highly possible—even probable—that her own conception of creative writing was shaped in large part by her experiences as a translator (Vanacker 56). Mme de Chastenay’s view on translation, then, continued to shift from a private activity undertaken for her own pleasure to a professional activity capable of shaping her future career.

Mme de Chastenay informs her readers that this translation did, indeed, set her upon the path to literary fame: “le succès de mes Mystères d’Udolphe […] avait été rapide. […] il m’avait donnée toutefois une réputation d’écrivain” (1: 305). Translation allowed her to be seen as a writer not only by herself, but also by a wider audience, again demonstrating its transformative power in both the transmission of a text from one language to another and a transformation that included the translator herself, in her own eyes and in the eyes of the public. Far from being an activity that simply allowed her to pass the time, as is commonly thought, translation became an authorial process. At the same time as she undergoes this internal transition into a writer, however, she by no means transgresses from the notions of appropriate feminine genres of writing. Apart from the association of translation with the feminine, Mme de Chastenay was translating
a Gothic novel, often considered a genre of writing that was feminine par excellence, both in its readership and its authorship (Didier 21-22). Moreover, her use of the word “toutefois” in describing her newly acquired authorial status in the eyes of the public is indicative of the contradiction seen as inherent to both translation and writing as a woman in a culture of creation that did not allow for their full participation or an acknowledgment of the array of their talents and capacities. Even though she was a translator, she was seen by many to be a writer. Her phrasing here suggests that perhaps she herself still doubted whether or not she could be considered an author, and thus while she is ambivalent about the nature of translation, she demonstrates an evolution in the way she considers it. She may not be sure that it has transformed her into an author, but she certainly notices its positive effects on her status in the literary world. Equally important in the hesitation she expresses is the tension inherent in being a woman writer in the nineteenth century, balancing between ambition for her future and notions of societal propriety.

The view of translation as an authorial activity is reinforced by the next translation undertaken by Mme de Chastenay. After the success of *Les Mystères d’Udolphe*, Mme de Chastenay’s publisher approached her about a new project, this time very different in its nature and scope than the two previous translations. Bertrand de Molleville, the last minister of the Navy under Louis XVI, had written his memoirs in England, and Mme de Chastenay’s publisher proposed that she translate these memoirs into French “non comme une traduction, mais comme originaux” (1: 305). Thus, any traces of the translator would be completely effaced from the text, down to any type of public recognition for her work. Rather than allowing this lack of recognition to stifle her
creativity or sense of authorship, however, Mme de Chastenay embarked upon this project clearly aware of the stakes: “il me parut piquant de prêter le style d’une jeune fille à un ministère, à un homme de caractère, du moins en apparence, et de ceux qui se croient hommes d’État” (1: 305). Even though her name was completely erased from the published text, Mme de Chastenay maintained an awareness of the impact she would have on it, recognizing both her own authorial role and the unavoidable fact that she would necessarily be altering the text in some way with her own sensibilities and writing style. She felt that she was successful in this attempt, explaining “j’ai été flattée, je l’avoue, que ma plume ne m’ait pas trahie, et que jamais M. de Molleville n’ait réclamé contre le style qu’on lui avait prêté” (1: 306). Her repetition of “prêter” twice in her description of this translation reinforces Mme de Chastenay’s perception of herself as an author, with a style proper to her own writing that is to be lent temporarily to the writing of another, and thus the notion of translation as a creative process. Moreover, the idea that her pen could “betray” her expresses awareness on her part of the generic limitations for women that would not allow them to venture into the masculine domain of political history. Success in this endeavor, then, meant straddling a fine line between her original style, and so an authorial role, and fidelity to M. de Molleville’s style, indicative of an imitative role.

This translation presents an interesting case, for it is at once an adhesion to and a transgression of the literary roles ascribed to women in the nineteenth century. On the one hand, Mme de Chastenay remains within the realm of the feminine through the project itself, translation, as well as through the complete erasure of her name and thus public presence to the benefit of the author. On the other hand, she oversteps the place
reserved for women through this very assumption of the role of an author of historical text. There is also the question of how this translation would have been received if it were known that it was a translation, and a translation by a woman at that, and not the original work of M. de Molleville. In *Les Bas-Bleus du premier Empire*, Alfred Marquiset raises this very question: “si la satisfaction envahit l’âme de cette jeune fille de vingt-six ans à l’idée qu’un nom célèbre—quoiqu’il ne fût pas le sien—servit d’étiquette à sa prose, les historiens, les chercheurs de documents, les curieux éprouveront sans doute une certaine appréhension désormais quand ils consulteront les *Mémoires secrets*” (145). By emphasizing not only her youth, but also her sex, Marquiset questions the right of a woman to intervene, even in the limited role of the translator, on behalf of a masculine subject matter and implies that the fact that she is a woman necessarily casts doubt upon the truthfulness of the text she translated. This remark also serves to highlight what Marquiset saw as the overwhelming trait of the “bas-bleus” he discusses in this study: the desire for celebrity above all else. He claims that “presque toutes mégalomanes, ces femmes-auteurs n’ambitionnaient que la notoriété et si quelquefois le bruit les outrageait, c’était encore le bruit qui les consolait” (9). Thus, even translation, with its lack of name recognition on the part of the translator and, as in this case, the complete effacement of the name, is open to the pitfalls that assailed women writers.
3.3 From Translation to History

Though Mme de Chastenay felt that she was once again successful with this translation, her next step in writing would prove to be both a setback and a severe lesson about the genres of writing permissible for women. In 1808, Mme de Chastenay published a book that she had been working on for many years, *Du Génie des peuples anciens, ou Tableau historique et littéraire du développement de l’esprit humain chez les peuples anciens, depuis les premiers temps connus jusqu’au commencement de l’ère chrétienne*. This work of history occupied all of Mme de Chastenay’s time; here is her description of the months leading up to its publication:

> ces mois qui s’écoulèrent furent comblés d’illusions : je relisais mon ouvrage, et j’en étais contente, car en vérité il est bon […]. Je me promettais un éclatant triomphe, car ce triomphe, il faut bien que je le dise, me semblait appartenir à l’un des plus savants ouvrages qu’une femme eût écrit depuis Mme Dacier. J’étais encore très jeune pour un auteur, et, soit justice, soit bienveillance, le monde littéraire devait s’empresser de m’accueillir, et le monde social en être fier. (2: 61)

Mme de Chastenay is both conscious of the status and previous achievements of women’s writing and very clear in her desire for public literary success; in essence, she reclaims the right for women to enter the literary world proper and their right to acknowledgement and esteem equal to that given to men. At the same time, she demonstrates her awareness of women’s lack of success on an equal footing with men: Mme Dacier was most well-known as a translator rather than an author and as such remained within the boundaries of societal propriety for women’s writing. By assigning
high value to Mme Dacier’s translations, she implicitly emphasizes the talent required from the activity of translation, and hence her own literary qualifications. Moreover, her pointed mention of the quality of her own work serves to foreground her ambitions to authorship in a masculine literary genre. Mme de Chastenay’s invocation of both the literary and the social world also highlights her awareness of the stakes upon publication of her history; it would not be critiqued only within literary and academic circles, but also, because of her position, in social circles. The stakes for her reputation, then, as for all women who published, were double. Yet, the most telling word written in this hindsight description of Mme de Chastenay’s hopes upon publishing this text is “ illusions,” for it represents the disconnection between her desires for the critical reception of this text and the actual response of the critics, dictated by the generic division between men’s and women’s writing. In order to emphasize the academic nature of her work and the prestigious literary genre with which it was associated Mme de Chastenay describes the volumes of her work as appearing “couverts d’un manteau brun; c’était l’affiche du genre le plus sérieux” (2: 61). This evocation of the generic categorization of her work reinforces the importance assigned to genre in nineteenth century literature in association with the work’s author; for her own work to be bound in this manner was indicative of its serious, and therefore not typically feminine, nature.

*Du Génie des peuples anciens* did not meet with the universal praise so hoped for by Mme de Chastenay. On the contrary, she found herself roundly castigated for having attempted literary success in a subject qualified as masculine par excellence: scholars “se trouvèrent vivement offensés qu’une femme eût osé fouiller dans leurs archives et sonder le secret de leur savoir” (2: 61). Thus, even before the text itself is attacked, her access to
a place conceived of as a bastion of masculine knowledge, archives, is condemned as an unlawful initiation into ‘secrets’ and ‘knowledge’ reserved as a privileged domain for male, and therefore publicly legitimized, scholars. As for reception of the content of her work itself, it was either belittled as a “recueil d’extrait” (2: 62), completely unspoken of, or reviewed by critics who were “très franc dans le maintien de la prérrogative masculine” (2: 61). The writing of history, with its connection to public, political events and important personages, was specifically masculine territory in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, since it reflected the political and social roles played out by men and women at this time, with women confined to private life and men as actors and interpreters of the public sphere. Moreover, women were perceived as lacking the critical spirit, reasoning power and judgment seen as necessary to write in this genre (Planté, *La Petite Soeur de Balzac* 242-43). Even as the eighteenth-century rise of the novel allowed them greater access to certain forms of literature, women were continually denied political power, and thus the power to write about politics as well, through their continued association with the private sphere (Armstrong 97-98).

Nonetheless, this did not stop women categorically from writing works of history; the nineteenth century showed a marked increase in women’s production in historical writing, as with most forms of writing, though it was not usually met with kindly by critics, who saw it as a transgression of women’s place in literary production (Finch 32). As Barbey d’Aurevilly claimed in regards to women writers of history in *Les Bas-Bleus*, “je ne reconnais pas le droit, démontré par la puissance, d’écrire l’histoire. Les femmes ont la tête et la main trop petites pour cela” (76-77). This may be the reason for the relative lack of historical content in women’s autobiographies of the nineteenth century.
Autobiographies that mainly dealt with political and historical events were normally written by men, such as M. de Molleville, who were the actors in these events (Hart 25). This is perhaps one of the reasons for which women’s autobiographies that did deal in this type of content were often published only posthumously; Mme de Chastenay’s memoirs, after all, were published in 1896 and 1897, almost fifty years after her death. The allusion to Mme de Chastenay’s work as a “recueil d’extraits” further relates to the view that women had an imitative, not a creative, talent.

Mme de Chastenay demonstrates a startlingly clear insight into the reasons behind the poor reception of her work, seen not on the basis of its own merits but rather as a transgression in and of itself of the literary boundaries for men and women. The development of Mme de Chastenay’s self-knowledge in regard to her intellectual capacities and the possibilities open to her, which started in her youthful experiences with her Latin tutors, has come full circle. She once again sees the plenitude of scholarly activity denied to her because of her gender and is able to explicitly link her critical reception with her gender, moving from a positive form of self-knowledge as a budding intellectual and scholar to a negative self-knowledge about the constraints that will always be placed on her due to her sex. Her initial success in translation had led her to believe that she would be able to obtain an equal success in historical work, yet such a foray led only to a reinforcement of existing literary values. She notes that one of her critics chose to describe her work with a translation of this verse from Horace: “vous avez cru faire un grand vase, vous n’avez fait qu’une petite cruche” (2: 62). Such a characterization of her work once again refers back to the notion that women’s writing was necessarily comprised of “petites productions féminines” (Planté, La Petite Soeur de
that could never approach the talent that lay behind masculine creation and puts Mme de Chastenay back into what was seen as the proper place for women.

Marquiset’s discussion of Mme de Chastenay in *Les Bas-bleus du Premier Empire* serves to strengthen the view that its lack of success was due in large part to existing gender stereotypes of men’s and women’s literary genres. Over one hundred years after its initial publication, Marquiset discusses *Du Génie des peuples anciens* in the same terms as her contemporary critics. In his view, Mme de Chastenay’s major effort for this work was conducted “en réunissant des documents” (152), a repetition of the previous critique of her work as a collection of extracts and a reinforcement of the notion that women’s talent lay in imitation. He also throws doubt upon her overall intellectual capacities: “pour accomplir pareille tâche avait-elle consulté assez longtemps son esprit et ses forces? […] Où avait-elle appris le latin?” (152). Now, Marquiset had indeed read Mme de Chastenay’s autobiography, as he makes very clear, and thus knows for certain that she did study Latin much more extensively than most young women of the time, as well as Roman history. Yet, he chooses not to share this information with his readers, leaving them with the impression that Mme de Chastenay had, at best, a cursory knowledge of Latin and was not qualified to write a work of history. Such a presentation of Mme de Chastenay’s capabilities in direct contradiction to the facts relates to the existing determination of history as a masculine category of writing that should not be practiced by women. Any attempt to do so by Mme de Chastenay or any other woman would always necessarily be false regardless of her actual qualifications. When contrasted with the praise that Marquiset reserves for her translation of Anne Radcliffe, where he judges that “le succès fut honnête” (144), the appraisal that he gives of Mme de
Chastenay and the other ‘bas-bleus’ that he examines is revelatory of the ways in which generic categorizations were one of the dominant elements in the critical reception of women’s texts in both the nineteenth century and beyond.

3.4 Autobiography, Translation, and the Development of the Writerly Voice

As elucidated by Patricia Meyer Spacks, the writing of an autobiography had different implications and stakes for women than it did for men, both as an act of transgression of the private sphere that discouraged women from revealing their lives for public consumption and as a literary genre that permitted them to engage overtly in what she terms “the drama of self-defense” (72-73). In her study of autobiographies of eighteenth-century women writers, Meyer Spacks identifies a repeated emphasis on the part of these women on what had been done to them rather than what they themselves had done; thus, the “drama of self-defense” that she sees performed in their writing is a response to the cultural forces that shaped their possibilities as women writers and a justification of their actions. For Mme de Chastenay, this drama is played out in the public literary reception of her work in a typically masculine genre and her attempts to both defend and justify the production and public dissemination of her text; in other words, she engaged in a justification of her production similar to that outlined by Meyer Spacks. Such a self-defensive movement was by no means rare for women writers of autobiography; they very often felt the need to defend their productions in direct correlation with their femininity (Mason 19). For women writers specifically, autobiography demonstrates a self-awareness of the criticism they faced for their accomplishments in the domain of writing and other professional venues and their
justifications for their lack of adhesion to typical standards of womanhood. These women often express ambivalence about their own creation indicative of the tension inherent in being a woman in the public sphere in the nineteenth century. Another common trope in autobiographies by women writers is the need to defend or stress that their intentions in writing are directed outwards: they emphasize what they see as the moral and/or historical obligations for writing, rather than writing simply to please themselves or to gain fame (Winston 93-94, 98). As I demonstrated earlier regarding Marquiset and his attitude that women writers were all simply “mégalomanes” desirous of greater public renown, this was a real concern that they had to address. As we shall see, Mme de Chastenay does so through an affirmation of her continued belief in the value of her work and a negation of the importance of the wider critical feedback she received.

Mme de Chastenay claims that although the dismissal of her work by male critics was hard to accept, she was able to hold her head high by relying on the knowledge that she herself had of the true quality of her work: “Je n’avais point écrit pour un succès de vogue. Bien souvent je le répétais: ‘Je n’écris pas pour être lue; je ne calcule point avec le temps.’[…] Ce travail, cette publication, m’ont mise au-dessus des petites vanités, et m’ont permis de supporter toutes les ridicules importances” (2: 62). Far from shaking her confidence in her own scholarly capabilities, then, the criticism that she received left Mme de Chastenay with a continued belief in the value of her work. Moreover, her categorization of the criticism she experienced as “ridicules importances” is indicative of her awareness that it was not the quality of her work alone that shaped its critical reception, but rather her status as a woman author. Her phrasing here demonstrates her low opinion of a criticism that considers first and foremost the status of the author in
relation to the text he or she wrote as a valid standard of judgment, and while it does not openly call for a change in the genres of writing permissible to women, it does foreground the injustice of such criteria in the reception of literary texts. This lack of a direct challenge to the era’s dominant gender paradigms is a common feature of women’s autobiographical texts of the nineteenth century; even as they showed their conflicted emotions in regards to the criteria that limited them, they refrained from openly challenging these constraints (Hart 30-31). While Mme de Chastenay does not explicitly state her resistance to the widespread mode of examining women’s textual productions, her negative view of the critical community implies such a critique and enables her to express her disdain for such methods of evaluation.

Yet to write with such emotion as she does here about events ten years past indicates that Mme de Chastenay was perhaps not so successful as she would have her readers believe in forgetting the reception of Du Génie des peuples anciens. She did, indeed, publish further works: a Calendrier de Flore, De L’Asie, and Les Chevaliers normands en Italie et en Sicile, and upon her death she left a manuscript for a work entitled De l’Europe. She waited over twenty years before attempting to publish another serious work of history, and De l’Europe, described as a demonstration of “l’immense révolution opérée chez les nations par le triomphe du christianisme” (Marquiset 157), was, like her memoirs, never published during her lifetime. These belated publications would seem to indicate that despite her own expressed indifference to critical reception of her texts, Mme de Chastenay was affected by the criticism aimed at her and accordingly was more hesitant to publish again. The criticism (in her eyes arbitrary) she received due to the fact that she was a woman also affected her attitude towards those who would
search in any way to limit an individual’s intellectual development, and she writes that
“j’éprouvais une sorte d’horreur pour le joug aveugle qui veut comprimer l’essor
intellectuel et moral […] et l’aristocratie de la sottise pédante me cause encore plus
d’aversion qu’il n’est raisonnable de le dire” (1: 63). Thus, while she does not openly
criticize limitations put specifically on women authors, such a sentiment cannot fail to
evoke the intellectual boundaries within which she found herself confined because she
had dared to venture into the terrains of masculine knowledge.

The genesis that Mme de Chastenay gives for her publication *Les Chevaliers
normands en Italie et en Sicile* is also indicative of the effect that her reception from
critics had on her conception of the intended audience of her literary productions. She
explains that “ma belle-sœur me tourmenta pour reprendre une idée que j’avais eue
autrefois, celle de composer une Histoire des Normands en Italie et en Sicile.
L’imagination exaltée d’Henriette vit des héros et des tournois […]. L’idée d’un succès
de vogue finit par me gagner” (2: 183-84). Mme de Chastenay thus decides to embrace a
form of popular success that she had once shunned and uses the same expression to
describe *Les Chevaliers normands en Italie et en Sicile* that she had formerly used to
explain what *Du Génie des peuples anciens* was not: a “succès de vogue”. While she had
composed her first work of history with an aim towards the erudite and professional
reader, this second work represents a shift in her focus that is much more centered on the
casual reader. Her emphasis on her sister-in-law’s insistence as an important factor in the
completion of this project and the novelistic and romanticized vision that Henriette had of
such a work further highlights the different population of readers who would be
interested in this text. Her goal moves from appealing to an educated, scholarly, and as
such mainly masculine readership to pleasing a less educated, more informal readership that, one assumes, would be comprised largely of women. Such a change, after Mme de Chastenay’s disappointment with the reception of her earlier work, shifts her into a realm of literature more closely associated with a female audience and thus removes her from the type of criticism she received upon the publication of *Du Génie des peuples anciens*. Women would be considered to be more likely to read a work such as Mme de Chastenay’s sister-in-law proposed that she write both because of their association with the novel and sentimental literature and because of their relative lack of education in comparison to men left them less prepared to deal with works of “serious” scholarship (Donovan 208-09).

Mme de Chastenay’s preface to these memoirs, which was written in 1817, sheds further light on the question of how she internalized critical reaction to her previous publications; she stresses in three separate instances in this two-page preface that her intention here is not to write an overarching historical examination of the French Revolution, rule of Napoléon I, and Restoration, but to “répandre quelque lumière sur les situations individuelles qui trop souvent échappent à l’Histoire” (1:1). She claims that her goal in this work was “de chercher l’histoire du cœur humain dans celle de la Révolution” and that “je n’écris pas l’Histoire; mais si je remplis mes intentions, j’aurai peut-être écrit pour l’Histoire” (1: 1-2). Such statements, from the outset, partly negate the possible view of this autobiography as an object of study with any overarching historical or academic significance. She also emphasizes that she had no intention of publishing these memoirs in her lifetime: “je n’ai pas le dessein d’imprimer tout ce que je me propose d’écrire; ceux qui me survivront jugeront de l’intérêt que ma relation peut
avoir [...]. J’écris pour être lue un jour, je pense que mon récit pourra devenir utile, parce qu’il sera vrai‖ (1:1). From these lines I conclude that Mme de Chastenay learned only too well from her previous critical reception that women have no place in serious historical analysis. She emphasizes more than once the personal nature of her historical reflections—individual situations, human hearts, and writing for History instead of writing History proper as her goals—and thus staves off in advance any criticism similar to that leveled against her after she wrote Du Génie des peuples anciens.

Yet, in so doing, she also reclaims the value of women’s writing as part of a larger historical reflection, so often ignored by publicly legitimized historians. An examination of human situations and emotions that often get shoved to the wayside is also an examination of the role of those who fall into the category of the private: women, relegated to the hearth and home and removed from public, political life. Such an emphasis on social and cultural life and on individual situations is commonly found in women’s historiographies, as they explored the very space within which women operated on a daily basis (B. G. Smith, “The Contribution of Women to Modern Historiography” 711, 18). Indeed, throughout Mme de Chastenay’s memoirs, she is not the only vibrant, intelligent woman to come to life; her mother, her early tutor Mme de Genlis, various salonnières and literary women whom she came to know, like Mme de Staël, are depicted in both their everyday life and as literary examples and companions.

Thus, while this text demonstrates the negative effects of cultural constraints on Mme de Chastenay’s decision to write, the act of autobiography in and of itself reclaims the value of privileging the feminine voice and offers a space for the theorizing denied elsewhere. As she demonstrates with her reflections on the role of translation and other...
forms of writing in the various phases of her career, she was keenly aware of the role her status as a woman played in the reception of her texts. The move from a typically feminine genre which favors the erasure of the author’s name to a literary genre that puts first and foremost the writerly “I” is indicative, despite the criticism she received earlier when she published in a masculine genre, of the development in Mme de Chastenay’s authorial stance, even as she herself partially denies it with her assertion that she is not writing these memoirs in order to publish them. The largest constraint that defined autobiography as a transgressive textual production was the restriction of women from participation in public life and the view that to tell one’s life story to a public audience would represent an unbecoming departure from this domestic privacy; any woman autobiographer therefore put her reputation on the line through this act of public discourse (Hart 25). This division between the public and the private also accounts for problematic expression of the autobiographer’s first person stance; as Kathleen Hart points out, there is a tension “between [the] gesture of publicly occupying the “I” position reserved for men, and […] awareness of a growing ideology of womanhood which would make that gesture transgressive” (27). Again, such a restriction is due to the ideological confinement of women to the private sphere and their prescriptive lack of participation in public life. Because of these limitations, a woman writing her life in nineteenth-century France was necessarily involved in an act of defiance of the dominant social order and was perceived to disrupt the overarching view of men as active and women as passive members of society, still women’s passivity is relative in these discourses; rather, they are presented as actively other. Thus, just as translation was a literary activity that remained within the designation of women as passive copyists, autobiography violated
these standards and represented in and of itself a departure from common “feminine”
modes of production. Autobiography therefore represented for women a fulfillment of
“the impulse to speak of the self” and an affirmation of their very existence in a
masculine-dominated world (Meyer Spacks 73).

For a translator, the writing of an autobiography was especially significant
because it is a textual space in which to talk about the self and the act of writing, an
opportunity not often present in the act of translating. Indeed, the literary space of
translation encouraged a denial of this self through an erasure of the translator’s very
identity as an author and its emphasis on fidelity to the source text. For a woman
translator to write not just any work of original creation, but an autobiography, then, was
an act that reclaimed the autonomous self and valorized the presence of a creative
voice—a voice that was largely influenced by the presence of translation in a literary
career. As Katherine Astbury points out, translation was often a crucial means of
developing a writerly voice and standpoint (105). As we have seen with the case of
Mme de Chastenay, the act of translation was a key step in the development of this
authorial stance, for it enabled her to enter the world of publication, albeit in a genre
often considered to be sub-literary, and to move from a perception of translation as a
more or less private hobby to the view of it as an activity imprinted with her own style of
writing. Translation, though, more than simply a beginning in a writing career, was also
a strongly influential force in all aspects of women’s creative careers, as I demonstrate in
the next chapter.
Chapter 4

The Gendered Construction of Prefatory Discourse in Thérèse Bentzon’s Preface to *Le Roman de la femme médecin* and Madame Lesbazeille-Souvestre’s Preface to *Jeanne Eyre*

4.1 The Translator’s Preface: Traditions, Conventions, and *Idées Reçues*

The practice of writing prefaces to the translated text is by no means systematic in the corpus I have developed, but it is widespread enough to merit attention in a discussion of female translators in the nineteenth century. One of the prefaces that I study, Mme Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s to her translation of *Jane Eyre*, explicitly discusses the operation of moving from the source language to the target language and what the process entailed for the translator, while the other, Thérèse Bentzon’s to *A Country Doctor*, does not speak openly of the issue of translation at all and takes on a tone of literary analysis. Both, however, use the preface to make more personal statements about the writers’ relationship to the translated text specifically as women translators. Yet, the questions still remain of, first of all, why the translators wrote these prefaces, and, secondly, why studying them enhances the scope of this analysis. In response to the first question, there are many reasons why these translators might have felt it necessary to preface their works, some similar to the reasons any writer would write a preface, some specific to translation. Nicole Mozet, in an examination of the practice of writing prefaces from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century, points out the changes underway in the literary landscape of nineteenth-century France, with the hierarchy of literary genres in flux as prose took its place alongside poetry and theater as a more
highly valued form of literature. Authorial prefaces, she explains, were an avenue in which novelists could justify the value of their own work. In this context, prefaces to translations would have served as a double justification: both of the author’s legitimacy in writing the text and of the translator’s legitimacy in translating the text. Most importantly, and in answer to the second question I posed, the reasons for examining these prefaces, Mozet reminds us that “les préfaces nous disent si peu sur les pratiques réelles d’écriture, mais beaucoup, en revanche, sur les comportements institutionnels qui font également partie du métier d’écrire”(3). Keeping this statement in mind while studying translatorial prefaces permits me to go beyond each individual preface and systematize what I see as symptoms of more general attitudes toward translation, toward women writers involved in literary activities, and toward the notions of acceptability and infractions through which these women were navigating by choosing to place themselves in the public sphere of intellectual activity.

Regarding prefaces to translations specifically, a study of prefatory discourse gives us access to a variety of questions that may not be able to be directly addressed in a study that limits itself to only translations themselves denuded of the paratextual elements that surround them, namely, questions that direct our attention to the translation’s historical context, its intended reception, and its status as a translation (Tahir-Gürçağlar 58-59). For example, as pointed out by Marie-Pascale Pieretti in “Women Writers and Translation in Eighteenth-Century France,” women’s prefaces to their translations often explicitly highlighted their precarious status in literary culture and thus give insight into how they conceived of their work in a way we would not have access to if we limited our study to translations alone (477). The preface also serves as a pact between the translator
and the audience with the aim of assuring the audience that their standards and expectations for a translation will be met and, in so doing, highlights the presence of the translator in what is often the first and only time in the experience of reading a translated text, barring the presence of translator’s notes (Norton 234-35). At the same time, it is imperative to note the importance of questioning the discourse on the practice of translation found in these prefaces, for as Luce Guillerm points out, there are “des décalages inévitables entre une pratique et le discours qui la prend en charge, dont la nature, la fonction et le langage font un objet parfaitement spéciﬁque” (68). One of the “décalages inévitables” that can be identiﬁed in the act of translation through a study of prefaces is the tension between the imitative and thus non-authorial role that was deemed appropriate for women as literary creators in the nineteenth century and the assumption of a more properly creative and therefore authorial role. Prefatory statements were often used by women translators to uphold this distinction and emphasize their adherence to these standards, yet the very act of translating and writing about it inserted them into the professional domain of literature even as they denied their own ambitions (Stark 39). The possible discrepancies between translation and its metadiscourse is thus an area I take into account in both this discussion on prefaces and my later examination of translations themselves in Chapter Five.

I situate my analysis within three theoretical domains that take paratextual practices as their main object of study. First, I examine prefaces from the overarching viewpoint provided by Gérard Genette in Seuils, in which the critic attempts to provide an exhaustive classiﬁcation of the various types of prefaces and the textual strategies that they use. I look at the discourse surrounding allographic and authorial prefaces, as
defined by Genette and problematized by myself. This allows me to place my discussion of prefaces to translations within a broad schema and to examine the ways in which they conform to or transgress the “norms” established for the genre. Secondly, because Genette does not take the case of prefaces written by translators under discussion as fully as he perhaps could have, I bring up an article by Sherry Simon that addresses strategies specific to prefaces by translators. Finally, I take into account discourse on prefatory statements by women writers in the nineteenth century in order to have a gender-specific view of the cultural and literary forces at play in this form of writing. The intermediary space—between allographic and authorial, creator and imitator—occupied by these women translators is in many ways exemplified by prefaces insomuch as it becomes a manifestation of the line between creation and repetition that they continually straddle. It provides an interesting vantage point for both the translators, who are able to write simultaneously as “insiders” and “outsiders” to the text, and myself, as I attempt to examine the issues of creativity, transgression, and ownership that permeate the subject of women’s literary activity in the nineteenth century.

Habitually, a study of prefatory practices takes into account as one of its most important factors whether it is an authorial or allographic preface, that is, whether it was written by the text’s author or by another individual. Gérard Genette in particular has enriched this field of study in *Seuils* through his analysis of paratextual practices, distinguishing several distinct categories of prefaces of different origins that have different purposes and messages, while at the same time acknowledging that the taxonomy he has established “sera parfois transgressée” (182). This analysis of prefaces has proven to be an invaluable tool, providing the literary critic with an enriched
vocabulary and critical background with which to discuss the literary paratext. Still, I take exception to certain categorical determinations made by Genette with regard to prefaces written by translators and thus wish to problematize the question of translatorial prefaces as he classifies them.

I see the study of translators’ prefaces as a point of transgression of the categories of authorial and allographic prefaces made by Genette, for prefaces written by translators escape easy categorization in this domain, just as in the case with translation. For the translator is both author and (non)author to the translated text; certainly the source text is not the product of the translator, but does this lead us to conclude that neither is the translated text a product of the translator? So doing would clearly be an error, since the translator is involved in a series of linguistic and stylistic decisions that (re)form the text for another language and another audience. Such a statement would also deny the creative processes at work in the act of translating. However, it also cannot be claimed that the translated text is a work that is completely independent of the source text and thus completely removed from the author. The translator who prefaces his or her translation in my view is writing neither an allographic nor an authorial preface, which leads me to the next logical question: how does one situate an analysis of prefatory practices to translations within the existing discourse on prefaces?

In *Seuils*, Genette acknowledges no such problem in attempting to categorize prefaces written by translators. He takes as his main point of departure and classification for a discussion of the practices surrounding prefaces the distinction between authorial and allographic, yet he does not find it problematical to lump translator’s prefaces firmly in the category of the allographic; indeed, he claims that the first allographic preface in
French is the one found with the 1526 translation of *Le Roman de la Rose*. Most of the early allographic prefaces he lists are, in fact, prefaces written by translators (244-45). I find, however, that such a classification denies the process of creativity involved in translation and instead posits the translators as mere copyists moving from one language to another with no claim to either creativity or ownership. Genette in no way attempts to raise any doubts or qualifications regarding his categorization of prefaces by translators as allographic, although, as he himself acknowledges, many of the questions he raises are relevant to both forms of prefatory discourse. He points out that

> les distinctions fonctionnelles sont par nature moins rigoureuses et moins étanches que les autres: la date, l’emplacement, le destinataire d’une préface se prêtent généralement à une détermination simple et certaine, tandis que son fonctionnement est souvent affaire d’interprétation, et bien des fonctions peuvent ça et là glisser d’un type à un autre. (182-83)

Genette, it appears, considers the classification of prefaces to translations as allographic as being one of the more “étanche” aspects, the categories of authorial and allographic being fixed determiners, whereas I prefer to interpret it as being among the functional distinctions that are able to “glisser d’un type à un autre,” translations being situated as they are at an undetermined point between creation and imitation. Such a perspective gives me the capacity to look critically at the qualities Genette assigns to both authorial and allographic prefaces with an eye towards teasing out the means through which these prefaces can be viewed as having functions he assigns to either one, or both, of the above categories.
Such an opinion on Genette’s part may be indicative of his larger view of translations themselves as forming a part of literary paratexts, though he mentions this only in his conclusion, explaining that he has chosen not to examine translation as paratext in the present work because of the scope such a project would require (372). Indeed, as pointed out by Şehnaz Tahir-Gürçağlar, the very exclusion of discourse on translation as a paratextual element in Seuils is perhaps suggestive of how problematical it could potentially be to classify translation as paratext and, as she points out, the categorization as Genette establishes it is troublesome insomuch as it “introduces a hierarchical relationship between the source text and the target text, because it foresees more than chronological ascendancy” (46). This view of translation, taking into account Genette’s opinion of prefaces to translations as well, would have the effect of limiting the possibilities of analysis in translation studies, for if the translation itself is a paratext, then its preface is a paratext of an already marginalized literary form. As Tahir-Gürçağlar notes, translation regarded as a paratext will serve only its original and nothing else—not the target readership who enjoys it, not the target literary system that may be so influenced by it as to trigger a series of translations of similar texts, not the translator who may enjoy a reputation for having translated that specific text […] and not the source text itself whose ‘afterlife’ (Benjamin 1968) is ensured by translation. (46)

For these reasons, I consider it paramount to remember the limitations, as well as the strengths, in Genette’s paratextual analysis, as well as to seek out other theoretical viewpoints that are more open to the idea of translation, and the text surrounding it, as objects worthy of independent literary study.
Keeping these cautions in mind, what are the functions Genette identifies as proper to the authorial and allographic preface? I will give a brief summary of the functions he describes in order to apply them, or not, to the prefaces I will be examining. An authorial preface, in Genette’s view, commonly has one or more of the following functions: to both assure a reading of the text and that the reading is good (“pourquoi et comment vous devez lire ce livre”); to promote the text itself without appearing to promote the author; to emphasize the importance of the subject (its usefulness, originality, or novelty, among others); to neutralize criticism in advance by stressing the importance of the subject, even if the author him or herself has not done it justice; to comment on themes found in the text in order to guide the readers or give information about the text; to explain the genesis of the work; to appeal to a specific audience of readers; or to declare the author’s intentions, along with other reasons that Genette classifies as “autres choses” (183-218). Thus, Genette sees authorial prefaces as capable of having a multiplicity of meanings and purposes that would, in large part, be denied to prefaces by translators if they were seen as not falling under this rubric. In allographic prefaces, on the other hand, Genette sees only two primary functions at work: informative functions, which in the case of allographic prefaces he identifies as a presentation that provides the readers with a variety of information about the text and the author; and the promotion of the text and its author, which he specifies is a recommendation (244). In regard to prefaces to translations, Genette particularly stresses the prevalence of promoting the (usually) not very well-known author in an unfamiliar cultural and linguistic context (247). While he does point out that these functions intersect with those
he identifies in authorial prefaces, he does not see the same expanse of possibilities in allographic prefaces.

I see several of the functions Genette considers specific to authorial prefaces, as well as those he sees in both, in the prefaces I examine: an explanation of the genesis of the work and declaration of intentions (why and in what way I chose to translate this, emphasizing either the foreignness or familiarity of the word choice and linguistic structures used), an appeal to a specific audience of readers, an admission on the part of the author (translator) that they cannot do justice to the subject at hand (in the case of translations, specifically why they cannot do justice to the author’s original words), and a promotion that goes beyond simply a recommendation of the work, but instead aims to establish the values that the translators themselves see as inherent to the source (and thus translated) text. So, for a discussion centered on translation and the discourse of translators, I see much of value in Genette’s work, yet also much that must be either more finely nuanced or rejected outright in order to move beyond rigid categorizations. My approach allows for an examination of these texts that demonstrates the plenitude of possibilities available to the researcher in a study of the process of translation and the relationship of women translators to the texts they translated and, at the same time, to literary culture as a whole in the nineteenth century.

In order to nuance Genette’s categorizations and to enrich the theoretical framework within which I perform my analysis, one needs to study these prefaces with reference to works that deal with prefaces by translators. Sherry Simon, in “Volontés de savoir : Les préfaces aux traductions canadiennes,” discusses the topic of prefaces in the context of translation, clarifying the qualities she sees as specific to prefaces of
translations that set them apart from other prefatory practices. Simon notes that all prefaces engage in a “double” language, they both “dire et faire, exprimer des savoirs et conjurer les pouvoirs,” (“Volontés de savoir” 98) then goes on to point out that there are functions exclusive to prefaces of translations. The preface by a translator, she explains, is the only place in the text where the translator speaks explicitly as a translator and publicly becomes part of the translated work. In this way, the preface serves to “mettre en valeur” the translator’s name and give the translator a “lieu de parole” otherwise not available to her/him (98). I find such a distinction very valuable to my own work, for I am examining the procedures by which women translators attempt to transcend their status and explore ways to assume a more properly authorial voice. To see translator’s prefaces as textual locations enabling the translator to take on such a voice, then, clearly intersects with my own points of analysis and enriches discussions of the prefaces I will be examining.

Simon additionally identifies three distinct levels of analysis in prefatory representations which will also aid me as I attempt to systematize the discourse found in the prefaces I am examining. First, she stresses the relationship of translators’ prefaces to the “mécanismes politiques et commerciaux qui soutiennent et contrôlent la production et la diffusion de l’écriture” (102), an association I see as particularly important to keep in mind in my present study, since women’s relationship with translation was, of course, both a political and a commercial manner in which to control the ways that they could produce texts and participate in literary endeavors. Second, Simon claims that “la préface établit des valeurs qui nous permettent d’historiciser les sujets de l’écriture. Elle construit ‘l’auteur’ et ‘le traducteur’ comme des sujets hiérarchisés” (103), an idea that I
again find very useful for my own analysis of the hierarchy of different forms of writing for nineteenth-century women and the ways in which the woman as translator is placed on a lower scale than that of the male author. How, then, is the preface used to either reinforce or destabilize this hierarchy? Finally, Simon believes that the translator’s preface defines the relationship between the translator and the author and in so doing “établit également un rapport au texte. Le procédé de traduction sera souvent spécifique au texte et il est important donc de comprendre l’échelle de valeurs textuelles qui prévaut à une époque donnée” (104). Again, I find that this relationship as defined by Simon is very relevant to my study, where I look at translation in a very specific context—as practiced by women in nineteenth-century France—and take into account both the dominant values regarding translation in general at this time and those regarding women’s modes of literary production.

At the same time, I also feel that it is necessary to position the prefaces I am examining within a more concentrated theoretical viewpoint that takes into account the ways in which the construction of a preface is, like all other aspects of writing, a gendered practice. Bénédicte Monicat, in her examination of prefaces written by nineteenth-century women for their travelogues, emphasizes the relationship between gender and literary genre and demonstrates that a study of prefaces is an essential component in the task of teasing out the cultural and literary forces at work that dictate the acceptable modes of production for women writers in this time. As she points out, the preface functions not only as an introduction to a text dictated by structural necessity, but, more importantly, it “ouvre à la critique une perspective riche et nouvelle qui fait de la préface l’espace générateur du texte en tant que texte au féminin, qui parle de l’écriture
en tant qu’écriture féminine: l’acte rhétorique est inscrit dans une histoire qui est ici celle de la littérature féminine du 19e siècle, ses conventions et ses transgressions” (59). I find the same analytical possibilities present in a study of the prefatory discourse of translations. In and of itself, a translation and its surrounding paratext may not tell us much, but examined as part of the literary discourse and traditions surrounding women in the nineteenth century, these prefaces demonstrate the ways in which the act of translating and writing a preface is revelatory of the historical processes that allowed and forbid certain genres of writing as conceptualized by the translators themselves.

Another aspect of Monicat’s analysis that I find pertinent to the subject of prefaces to translations is the importance she ascribes to the repeated assertions by these women of the “obstacles, contraintes et stratégies qui lui sont liés” (60), for a similar procedure is evident in the prefaces that I study as well. In the context of translations, the obstacles and constraints are related to access to the source text, the authorization—both permission to translate the text and authorization from the masculine literary community—to translate the works and women’s literary opportunities in general. And, as I shall demonstrate further in my discussion of prefaces, there are very clear strategies at work in these prefaces that attempt to provide justifications and to stave off criticism in advance. As Monicat emphasizes, the female writers she studies need to justify the fact that they are both traveling and writing “en corrélation directe et constante avec le fait qu’elles sont femmes” (61). The same process of justification in relationship to the act not only of writing but of reforming the words of established authors is manifest in more than one of the prefaces I have been examining; the women translators express through their prefaces a need to justify why they, as women, consider it appropriate to take up the
pen and why their translations are befitting to the matter at hand and thus do not transgress the reigning literary hierarchies of the epoch.

Rachel Sauvé also situates prefatory discourse within the context of genre and gender in the nineteenth century; her book, *De l’éloge à l’exclusion: Les femmes auteurs et leurs préfaciers au XIXe siècle*, provides an in-depth study of the practice of allographic prefaces to texts by women writers. While she principally examines allographic prefaces written by men to texts written by women, I find her argument pertinent to my own study because of the way she positions her analysis within the prevailing nineteenth-century conventions on forms of writing appropriate for women and the manners in which prefaces were used to both establish and reinforce these conventions. She views a denial of ambition on or for the part of the female writer as a “veritable *leitmotiv du discours préfaciel sur les femmes,*” a process also functioning as a “renoncement au statut d’auteur” (53). The same type of denial is present in the prefatory statements that I have examined made by the women themselves. Such self-deprecatory statements are also commonly found in prefaces to translations by women beyond the nineteenth century, demonstrating the continuity of a mindset that denied women the opportunity for authorship on the same level as men (Pieretti 475). Yet, while Sauvé concentrates exclusively on prefaces written by men that reinforce women’s place in literary hierarchy through a variety of discourse strategies, in my own examination of authorial prefaces I also see the opposite effect at work; women use this space positively in order to justify their inclusion in literary institutions and to call for a greater variety of opportunities for women writers. Such an opposition in prefatory strategies and subject matter serves to highlight the role of men, on the one hand, who served as arbiters and
guardians of literary conventions, and, on the other hand, women, who quickly moved into the realm of transgression if they did not adhere to the limits set for the modes and subject matter of their production.

For the purposes of this study, I focus on two different prefaces written by women translators to the works they translated. The first is the preface to Madame Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s 1854 translation of Jane Eyre, entitled Jeanne Eyre ou Les mémoires d’une institutrice, termed an “avertissement,” and the second is Thérèse Bentzon’s preface to her 1890 translation of Sarah Orne Jewett’s A Country Doctor, the French title being Le Roman de la femme-médecin, which is presented as an introduction. First, I discuss how the content of these two prefaces does or does not conform to typical prefatory forms. I find the functions of prefaces as defined by Genette to be particularly important to this aspect of my analysis. The preface to Jane Eyre is, perhaps, the more typical of the two in terms of what is usually found in a translator’s preface. It is short (two pages) and it speaks explicitly about the reception of the text in England, the reasons for translating it into French, and the translation process itself. The preface to A Country Doctor, on the other hand, is less typical of what one might normally see in a translator’s preface. At ten pages, it is a good bit longer than the previous preface, and it is less concerned with the translation process in and of itself and more concerned with a critical presentation of the text. Though Bentzon takes great care to explain why both the text and the author are important, she does not in any way engage the topic of translation.

Second, although the two prefaces demonstrate very different forms of prefatory discourse on the whole, they both openly engage in the topic of what it means to be a women writer in the nineteenth century. The preface to Jane Eyre is explicitly
engaged with the presentation of this novel as a feminine piece of writing that stays within the epoch’s definition of what was allowed to females, an aspect that I find particularly significant for my present study. The preface to *A Country Doctor* also directly discusses the importance of the text in correlation to its status as women’s writing, presenting the text as having a special significance for women and for their access to professional opportunities, specifically their access to literature. While Lesbazeilles-Souvestre, in her preface to *Jane Eyre*, is concerned with demonstrating how the text she has translated remains within the boundaries established for women’s creativity, Bentzon, it appears to me, is much more invested in finding ways to break these boundaries. While these two prefaces are very different in their content, I shall demonstrate through my textual analysis that they both are ultimately occupied with the same subject: women’s places in literature in the nineteenth century and the constraints and possibilities that surround their means of creation. One of the factors in my choice of these two prefaces was that as prefaces to translations of texts by women writers, they not only present the opportunity for an examination of how these two translators view their own literary activities, but of original literary creation by women in a broader scheme. Thus, I will be able to paint a more general picture of their attitudes towards women’s writing in the nineteenth century both within and without the context of translation.

4.2 *Jeanne Eyre ou les Mémoires d’une institutrice* and the Construction of Normative Feminine Discourse

The first text I examine is the preface to the 1854 French translation of *Jane Eyre*, *Jeanne Eyre ou les Mémoires d’une institutrice* by Madame Lesbazeilles-Souvestre. The
short ‘avertissement’ at the beginning of the text is both a reflection on the activity of translation, its motivations, goals, and practices, and a manifestation of prevailing attitudes about women and writing in the nineteenth century. This “avertissement” is very clearly situated within a gendered point of view; it places both the style and content of Brontë’s writing as emphasized by the translator of the text within the realms of masculine and feminine qualities and justifies, in the end, the supremacy of the feminine values by identifying them as the most important aspects of the novel. The discourse on masculine and feminine values has a double importance in this case; first, it serves as an emphasis on the feminine in relation to the text’s author, and second, in relation to the text’s translator. As I mentioned earlier, Bénédicte Monicat finds that in their prefaces, the female travel writers she studies feel a need to justify their reasons for writing in direct relationship with their femininity (60). I see a similar process at work in this preface, for the repeated emphasis on the feminine aspects of Jane Eyre that form its main value, and thus the main center of enjoyment and quality to be found in reading it, functions as a justification for both the author, in writing a book that is consistent with feminine qualities and values, and for the translator, in choosing to retransmit this novel to a new audience.

The first paragraph of the preface lays out several basic principles intended to guide both the reception and the translation of the novel. The very first sentence places the value of translating the text in its success in England: “il nous a paru si digne de son renom, que nous avons le désir d’en faciliter la lecture au public français” (i). Thus, the very first act of the translator is to justify her actions, namely, why she felt it was laudable to transmit this text to French readers. Such a statement, in the context of the
nineteenth century, could very easily be read not simply as a justification, but also as a denial of any sort of ambition on the part of the translator, for it is not her own act that should be called to attention, but rather the enjoyment of readers past and the potential enjoyment of those in the future. This reading is supported by the very next sentence: “faire partager aux autres l’admiration que nous avons nous-même ressentie, tel est le motif de notre essai de traduction” (i). By stressing the admiration she would like to share, the translator constructs herself as a presence who is much closer to the reader than to the author of the text; it is her enjoyment as a reader that motivates her desire to share her admiration, and thus to translate this novel. The translator, then, is by no means an authorial presence seen as having personal stakes in the creation of the text, but as a reader whose interest is limited to the transmission of a pleasurable experience. Furthermore, by stressing that this is simply an “essai de traduction,” Lesbazeilles-Souvestre is making no claims as to the implicit worth of her translation as a literary object, but rather negating both her own attempt and any value this translation may have. As noted by Rachel Sauvé, a denial of ambition was an extremely common element in prefaces to texts by women in the nineteenth century (53). Lesbazeilles-Souvestre places herself firmly within this tradition by constructing her identity as a translator in close relation to the reader of the text and, in so doing, denying herself an authorial or creative role. According to Sherry Simon’s work on prefaces of translations, instead of serving to “mettre en valeur” (98) the name of the translator, a function that Simon sees commonly at work in these texts, the preface in this context becomes another means of effacement of the name, and very function, of the translator.
It is also important to note that it is not only a vague notion of pleasure in reading that is proposed, but a highly personal pleasure—the admiration that we ourselves felt. This reinforces the vision being expressed here of the translator as a reader rather than a writer. What is being passed on to the reader of this translation is a specific, personal reading experience, indicative of a desire not only to transmit the text to a new audience, but to transmit a very particular reading experience that will communicate the same pleasure in the same elements that the translator found enjoyable and valuable. The translator shapes such a similar reading in this preface through a discussion of the merits of the ‘feminine’ attributes of the text—its emphasis on sentiments and character study—and its ‘masculine’ attributes—vigor of its characters and ideas—and the rendering of a value judgment that places the merits of the text in its feminine characteristics rather than the masculine. I find the ways Lesbazeilles-Souvestre chooses to present Jane Eyre to be in direct correlation with the function defined by Genette as proper to authorial prefaces of assuring that readers both read the text and read it properly, “pourquoi et comment vous devez lire ce livre” (183). This attention to how the reader should read bypasses a simple presentation or recommendation, the functions identified by Genette in allographic prefaces, and demonstrates much more of a prescriptive viewpoint on how this text should be read. Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s repeated assertions that the most meritorious aspects of the text lie in its “feminine” qualities and her attempts to negate the importance of its “masculine” qualities show a desire on her part to assure that not only will the text find a new readership, but that it will be understood by these readers similarly to how she herself understood it. The assumption of this control of the reading experience on the part of the translator seems, perhaps, to go beyond the stance of the
reader that she adopts, leading us to question how much faith we can put in her assertions that she is more closely allied with the readers of the text than the author, an element I explore more fully later in this analysis. The reflections on translation as a readerly activity and on masculine and feminine literary qualities, far from being treated as two separate topics in this preface, are essentially interrelated in their reasoning: they express corresponding values of masculine and feminine roles revelatory of larger attitudes about the ‘proper’ functions of women in the literary sphere.

What, then, are the feminine attributes of *Jane Eyre* that Lesbazeilles-Souvestre finds so necessary to point out to her readers? The preface stresses that this text, even though it is a novel, should not be read in the hope of a recitation of extraordinary events or “des combinaisons artificiellement dramatiques” (i), but rather that its beauty lies in its “essor simple et franc des sentiments vrais” (i). This is not to say that there are no dramatic events in *Jane Eyre* (one need think only of Mr. Rochester’s mad wife in the attic and the pivotal moment at which her existence is revealed), but that for the translator, the merit of the novel does not lie in such aspects. In order to fully grasp the novel’s merits the reader is directed towards its portrayal of people and of emotions rather than action and adventure; in this way, qualities associated with the masculine, such as action, are de-emphasized and the reader is focused on the qualities that place *Jane Eyre* firmly within the realm of feminine writing, the portrayal of emotions. The next paragraph reinforces this emphasis through an enumeration of the personal qualities that the translator finds in the character of Jane Eyre: this is the story, she claims, “d’une intelligence avide, d’un cœur ardent, d’une âme puissante en un mot, placée dans des conditions étroites et subalternes, exposée aux luttes de la vie, et conquérant enfin sa
place à force de constance et de courage” (i). Besides augmenting the reader’s focus on the feminine qualities of the protagonist, her “constance” for example, this list of Jane Eyre’s character traits also serves to identify the proper place for a woman: as a governess, Jane is in “conditions étroites et subalternes,” yet when she assumes the role of wife and mother at the end of the novel, she has finally found “sa place”. This preface, then, intends to normalize both women’s roles in literature and in society in general.

Such a justification of the ‘feminine’ qualities of this text perhaps seems necessary to the writer of the preface because of the initial mystery surrounding its author: the novel was first published in 1847 under the assumed name of Currer Bell, and while the question of the real identity of the author was frequently raised in reviews, most critics firmly positioned the novel as a masculine production or, if they admitted the possibility of a female author, they believed her to be outside the normal definition of a woman. This opinion is exemplified in an 1849 article from the North British Review:

We shall not attempt to resolve the much agitated question of the sex of the author of these remarkable works. All that we shall say on the subject is, that if they are the productions of a woman, she must be a woman pretty nearly unsexed; and Jane Eyre strikes us as a personage much more likely to have sprung ready armed from the head of a man, and that head a pretty hard one, than to have experienced, in any shape, the softening influence of female creation. (Lorimer 116)

Yet by the time this translation was published in 1854, the truth about the writer’s identity was well known, though that did not necessarily solve the problem of the so-called “masculine” aspects of Jane Eyre. As the “avertissement” explains, these
lingering doubts as to the author’s true sex were because the writing demonstrated qualities that were considered to be both masculine and feminine. Certain characteristics of *Jane Eyre*, she explains, placed the text within a masculine standpoint, namely its “vigueur des caractères, des tableaux, des pensées” (ii), while its “finesse d’analyse, la vivacité des sensations, semblaient trahir un esprit plus subtil, un cœur plus impressionnable,” (ii) read a woman. The dichotomy of masculine and feminine qualities perceived by Lesbazeilles-Souvestre here is once again attributable to the prevailing cultural standards that dictated the ways in which women were permitted to participate in the literary world.

Indeed, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre then goes on to explain that now that the text’s true author is known and that “cette plume virile est tenue par la main d’une jeune fille, l’étonnement vient se mêler à l’admiration” (ii). The quill is thus presented as a virile object in and of itself and its presence in a young girl’s hand is necessarily a transgression of masculine order that will temper any admiration with shock that it is not a man who produced this text. Any woman writer, then, who exercises an energy that is by definition reserved for men is necessarily transgressing the bounds of appropriate forms of creativity for a woman. As Megan Burnett brings up in her discussion of Madame de Genlis’s writing strategies as seen in her prescriptive texts about female writers, any “énergie” demonstrated by a female writer is a double-edged sword. Burnett explains that “l’énergie féminine peut engendrer le pouvoir créateur chez les femmes (et alors, peut améliorer la perception d’autrui à propos de la créativité des femmes auteurs), mais elle risque aussi de transporter la femme hors de sa place codée socialement […] alors elle n’est utile à la femme écrivain que lorsqu’elle est bien dirigée” (80, emphasis in
original). The contrast established by Mme Lesbazeilles-Souvestre between the admiration and the shock experienced when it was discovered that a woman wrote *Jane Eyre* represents the manner in which Brontë’s feminine energy was seen by the translator, and by the larger public, as having strayed from within the norms of the feminine into more male territory. The use of the term virility in relation to the pen is evocative of a certain type of specifically male energy that could only be out of place in the hands of a woman, an impression reinforced by Lesbazeilles-Souvestre through the expressed modification of her admiration. Henceforth, any praise for the creativity inspired by a feminine energy will be bound by the notion that Brontë went beyond the limits of acceptability for a woman. Such an opinion did not originate with Lesbazeilles-Souvestre, but was already manifest in the reception of the novel by English-language critics when it was first published, as expressed by the following 1848 review from *North American Review*: “the work bears the marks of more than one mind and sex. […] From the masculine tone of *Jane Eyre*, it might pass altogether as the composition of a man, were it not for some unconscious feminine peculiarities, which the strongest-minded woman that ever aspired after manhood cannot suppress” (Whipple 98). For the translator, reestablishment of the proper order, with vigor and action as masculine qualities resting firmly in the hands of male writers, necessitates the reintegration of the feminine, and thus this preface’s insistence on the feminine traits—or feminine energy, put to proper use in the description of people and sentiments—of *Jane Eyre* as the main sources of enjoyment and literary superiority to be shared with the readers.

Again as pointed out by Burnett, one of the main quandaries that marked the nineteenth century in terms of women’s literary production was that: “on a accepté que
les femmes pouvaient écrire de beaux ouvrages, mais la question qui s’est posée était: devraient-elles le faire?” (73). It is just such a question that Lesbazeilles-Souvestre addresses through her enumeration of the masculine and feminine qualities of Jane Eyre: through, for instance, her insistence that it is not “le grand talent” (i) to be found in this novel that is its greatest characteristic, but rather “l’énergie morale dont ses pages sont empreintes” (ii). Her emphasis on the “énergie morale” of the novel to the detriment of any “grand talent” once again refers back to the idea that there is a proper feminine energy for women’s literary creation, countering the image of the “plume virile” and its evocations of a particularly masculine energy. Lesbazeilles-Souvestre is able to come to the conclusion that, yes, women, or at least this woman, should indeed write through her use of a rhetorical procedure that denies the so-called masculine elements of the novel in favor of a celebration of the feminine. She thereby integrates the accepted notions of masculine and feminine literature into a work which at first seemed to elude such dichotomizations.

With Jane Eyre now firmly established by the translator as a feminine product with feminine qualities that provide its main source of value and enjoyment, the preface moves on to discuss the manner in which the translation was undertaken. The translator lays out a double notion of fidelity here: first, a linguistic fidelity, by adhering to the more ‘foreignizing’ structures of English even at the risk of sounding slightly awkward, and, secondly, a personal bond of fidelity to the author. Such a conception of the duty of fidelity relates certainly to the perceived relationship between a source text and its translation and to the dominant views on translation in the nineteenth century, but also evokes the prevailing view that women were imitative rather than creative and had to
remain within the avenues deemed appropriate for female talent. Furthermore, it reinforces the earlier effacement of creativity on the part of the translator and her position as more of a reader than a writer. This translation was undertaken, we are told, in “bonne foi” and with “simplicité” (ii) in order to conserve “une saveur originale, un parfum étranger” (ii) and the emphasis is therefore on an exact repetition of the author’s words, even to the detriment of the reader’s understanding. Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s vocabulary in describing her activity stresses the lack of authorial presence she has already alluded to through her repeated identification with the readers of this text: her stated “bonne foi” and “simplicité” deny any creative role on her part and place any praise or blame that may be directed at this novel firmly in the hands of the author. In this way, translation became a safe venue for creativity, permitting the translator to hide behind the author’s renown (Pieretti 481). Consequently, if readers find the virile energy in *Jane Eyre* to be inappropriate coming from the pen of a female author, the translator has absolved herself in advance of any fault as a passive, and as such suitably feminine, copyist of someone else’s ideas. This novel did indeed evoke negative reactions from a portion of its readers upon its publication in England. *Jane Eyre*, both the character and the book, was often viewed as demonstrating female misconduct and thus as representing a danger to female readers in that it might incite them to rebellion (London 198). Through her repeated allusions to her own lack of creative input in the translated text, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre staves off in advance any criticism and absolves herself of any responsibility for the elements of the novel that may have been deemed inappropriate for a woman writer.

Moreover, there is a duty of fidelity to the author that must be upheld as well: “nous voudrions que l’auteur, qui a eu confiance dans notre tentative, n’eût pas lieu de le
regretter” (ii). In this way, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre invokes the idea of a personal bond of fidelity to the author that goes beyond a mere linguistic and structural faithfulness, while once again negating any ambition or authority on her own part, as I have already established. Protestations of fidelity such as those expressed here are by no means outside the realm of normalcy for a translator, but for a female translator who has translated a work with questionable adherence to the standards that governed women’s literary production, the stakes were perhaps higher for Lesbazeilles-Souvestre than for a male translator. Her insistence on her fidelity on two separate levels—linguistic and structural as well as personal—at once demonstrates her adherence to the standards of translation and bolsters her identification with specifically female means of textual production. Both the values governing translation, then, and those associated with male and female literary genres refer back to the same overarching principles and cultural norms.

As we discuss the discourse on the translation process found in this preface, it is perhaps most useful to return to the three levels of analysis Sherry Simon identifies as important to a study of the preface by the translator. First, she calls attention to the link between the translator’s preface and the political and commercial mechanisms that control production and diffusion of a translated work (“Volontés de savoir” 102). The repeated references to the initial confusion surrounding the author’s identity, when viewed in this light, would serve to spark a commercially driven interest on the part of the reader by evoking the controversy first stirred at the time of the novel’s English-language publication. If we expand upon Simon’s identification of a purely political mechanism to include mechanisms of social control, we can posit this preface as a means
of exercising authority over the ways in which women were allowed to create and diffuse texts in the nineteenth century, for Lesbazeilles-Souvestre is very insistent on containing *Jane Eyre* within the categories deemed appropriate for women. Also, as I discuss below in relation to another of Simon’s levels of analysis, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s insistence on her fidelity is a reflection of the changing value system of translation in the nineteenth century that placed greater emphasis on fidelity than on creativity.

Secondly, Simon reminds us that the preface constructs “the author” and “the translator” as individuals who exist within a hierarchy (103). Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s emphasis here on her complete fidelity to the source text is a reminder of the hierarchy in which the author occupies the position of privilege and power and the translator is reduced to the role of a copyist. As we observed earlier, the translator sets herself up as being more closely aligned with the reader of the novel than the writer, once again reinforcing the scale of values that places her on a much lower plane than a producer of original texts. This accounts for her negation of her own creation and her double bond of fidelity. In addition to establishing her own place in the hierarchy governing author and translator, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre also endeavors to place Charlotte Brontë herself within a hierarchical scale with regard to male and female writers. Through her insistence on the feminine values of the novel, and thus the femininity of the author, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre establishes Brontë as a writer thoroughly associated with feminine values and norms and denies her the possibility of being presented to her new reading public as a creator with the same breadth of textual opportunities as a male writer, to whom all possibilities were open.
Lastly, Simon points out that every translation is a reflection of textual values at a given time and that there is a specificity to each translation that requires a comprehension of the textual values at the time of the translation, a specificity that is often expressed through prefatory discourse (104). As noted in Chapter One, in a clear distinction from the tradition of “les belles infidèles” that marked pre-nineteenth-century translation practices, meaning translations valued more for their style than for any duty of exactitude to the source text; greater emphasis was placed in the nineteenth century on respecting the source text, rather than on altering it to be more in line with the literary values of French culture (Lambert, “La Traduction en France” 396). In contrast with earlier ethics of translation which stressed fidelity not to a text’s words, but to its perceived spirit and interpretation, the nineteenth century is marked by the idea that the only way to be faithful is to translate literally from one text to another (Horguelin 148). In this way Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s insistence on her “bonne foi” and "simplicité” corresponds directly to the reigning values that governed the production of translations, as well as women’s literature, at this time. Indeed, as she goes on to explain, “souvent le tour d’une phrase pourrait être plus conforme au génie de notre langue, des équivalents auraient avantageusement remplacé certaines expressions un peu étranges à notre oreille” (ii), but she chose to conserve the more foreign expressions as part of her duty of fidelity, thereby confirming the link Simon establishes between textual values and translation practices at any given time.

Yet, as cautioned by Lambert, the espousal of such values of fidelity and exactitude in metadiscourse on translation did not necessarily result in translations that adhered to the greater emphasis placed on faithfulness to the source text at this time. He
stresses that it is always important to “confronter d’une part les commentaires et d’autre part les réalisations” when analyzing translation and the discourse that surrounds it (402). In order to demonstrate this point, he refers to the disconnect between Mme de Staël’s discourse on translation and her practice: he notes that several studies of her translations from the German mark no significant change from the style and content of earlier translations of the same texts (398). Thus, while it is important to note Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s claims of fidelity, it is equally important to question them. These claims are, perhaps, more revelatory of the cultural norms for translations than of any practices seen in her specific translation. In Chapter Five, I look more closely at the translation of *Jane Eyre* itself with the aim of examining the proposed duty of fidelity and how it was or was not carried out. The protestations of fidelity made in this preface are also important in that they place the translator firmly within the realm of imitative writing and lay no claim to originality or creativity. These protestations once again relate back to Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s insistence on the feminine values of this text, for they establish not only the text as a feminine production, but also the translation, and hence the translator, as remaining within the acceptable levels of textual production for females.

How can we classify the preface to *Jane Eyre* in relation to the categories of analysis for discussing prefaces set up by Genette? If we take the translator’s protestations of fidelity and lack of authorship to heart, we may be more inclined to place this preface on the side of the allographic. Yet, if we keep in mind the caution offered by Lambert that *discourse* on translation cannot always be trusted as a true reflection of the *practices* of translation, it might be to the benefit of this analysis to question the allographic stance of Lesbazeilles-Souvestre by looking more closely at how this preface
falls in relation to Genette’s categories. As I explained earlier in this chapter, Genette identifies allographic prefaces as having the functions of presentation and recommendation of the author and the text. Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s preface can certainly be seen in both of these lights, since it presents the author as well as the novel and promotes the value of both to a new culture. Thus, one could surely look at these aspects and conclude that Lesbazeilles-Souvestre does indeed see herself as more of a reader than a creator of the text and that such an attitude is expressed in a preface that adheres to the only two qualities that Genette sees as inherent to an allographic preface.

Upon closer inspection, however, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre slips through these boundaries and presents her translation in ways more closely associated with authorial prefaces, as I mentioned earlier in regard to her desire to shape the reader’s interpretation of the text based on her own perception of its masculine and feminine elements. In particular, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre presents her translation methods in a way that is more aligned with the authorial function, as identified by Genette, of an explanation of the work’s genesis and a declaration of intentions. Certainly, this could be seen as just another mode of presentation to be found in allographic prefaces, but Genette specifies that the information presented in allographic prefaces, as he defines them, is limited to information about the text and the author (244). In discussing her own translation, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre shows that she is as concerned with presenting herself as she is with presenting the author; to speak explicitly about her own translation is to insert herself into the process of textual creation and transmission, even as she denies that any creation took place, and implies the assumption of a stance of authority and responsibility regarding the text about to be read. Such a technique of self-denial was not an
uncommon form of discourse for women translators in the nineteenth century, as Susanne Stark points out in her article on German to English translators, “Woman and Translation in the Nineteenth Century.” She sees this self-denial as a technique that served to “erase traces of creative authorship” (39); but, as she points out, through both their activity as translators and their metadiscourse on their translation, the women she examined, “however much they might have wished to distance themselves from what they perceived as a male role, and however much they might have preferred to comply with what they would have considered to be an appropriate female role, they have nonetheless inadvertedly slipped into the mode of literary professionalism” (38). Thus, the protestations of a lack of creative authority that we have seen on the part of the translator should be taken lightly in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of the processes at work in translation, particularly for women writers who had an interest in presenting themselves in ways already identified as appropriate for them and denying any sort of creativity or authorship.

As I have demonstrated throughout my analysis of this preface, the main concern of the translator is to place both Jane Eyre and the translation itself firmly within the framework of feminine writing. The repeated affirmations of the feminine values of the text as the location of its greatest merits and the insistence on the act of fidelity that went into its translation serve a dual purpose: first, they shape the reception of the novel in France as a feminine text that should not shock or upset notions of what is appropriate in terms of women’s literary production, and second, they serve as a self-justification on the part of the translator for this translation and for its moral value and thus suitability as an object of both reading and study for a woman in nineteenth-century France. Meanwhile,
the tensions that I have raised regarding the readerly stance assumed by the translator
problematic her position as an outsider to creativity and authorship and demonstrate the
dual nature present in the act of translation.

4.3 Thérèse Bentzon’s Feminist Vision of Sarah Orne Jewett

I now move on to an analysis of Thérèse Bentzon’s translation of Sarah Orne Jewett’s \textit{A Country Doctor}. Th. Bentzon was the pseudonym of Thérèse de Solms, née
Thérèse Blanc.\footnote{Though Heather Brady makes the somewhat startling assumption that Thérèse Bentzon was one of Marie Bonaparte’s pseudonyms, this is clearly not the case. For one, Bentzon was still publishing after Bonaparte’s 1902 death and, as noted by Anne-Caroline Sieffert, the large volume of Bentzon’s extant correspondence with a number of people makes it quite easy to ascertain that these were two separate individuals (126). Thus, it was not Marie Bonaparte who wrote \textit{Notes de voyages: les Américaines chez elles} under a pseudonym as Brady assumes, but rather Bentzon.} Through her stepfather she was introduced to George Sand and under
her sponsorship began writing for the \textit{Revue des Deux Mondes} in 1872 (Stanton 598). In
this capacity, she mainly wrote book reviews, critical pieces, and translations, particularly
of English and American works by such authors as Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson
and Bret Harte, to give only a few examples among many. In 1890, Bentzon published
her translation of Sarah Orne Jewett’s \textit{A Country Doctor}, \textit{Le Roman de la femme médecin}, a work she had first reviewed for the \textit{Revue des Deux Mondes} in 1885
(Naugrette 86). By the time she published this translation and its preface, then, she was
already well-established as a prolific translator, particularly of North American authors.

The preface written by Bentzon sharply differs from Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s
preface to \textit{Jane Eyre} in both its scope and its view of women’s place in literature.

Bentzon is principally concerned with elucidating the constraints she sees for women
writers in the nineteenth century and vindicating their talents for creation and their rights as writers on equal footing with men. She also lays out what she perceives to be the essential qualities necessary for a woman to place herself on the same level as her male counterparts in the eyes of the reading public. These qualities concern changes in the way women write, but also, and more importantly in her view, changes in the way that readers react to female literary production. This preface also differs from the preface to *Jane Eyre* in that it in no way discusses the process of translation. This is perhaps indicative that Bentzon has no desire to hide behind the anonymous role of the translator and efface her own name, but would instead prefer to highlight her participation in the production of this text and its critical reception.

Rather than writing a preface to her translation of Sarah Orne Jewett’s *A Country Doctor* that simply reflects on the process of translation, or even giving an analysis of the work itself, Bentzon presents the readers of *Le Roman de la femme médecin* with an introduction that takes the subject matter of the book—a woman who chooses to become a doctor rather than marry—as a jumping off point for an analysis of women’s positions in both literature and society in general, and the ways in which women’s situations have changed—or remained stagnant—in French- and English-speaking cultures. She is particularly concerned with women’s access to knowledge and professional careers: medical and scientific careers, as one might expect given the subject matter of the book, and also, more essential for the purposes of this analysis, women’s careers in literature and the professional and personal roles deemed acceptable for female literary heroines. In Bentzon’s view, one can make no clear distinctions among the various areas of women’s advancements; science and literature, personal and professional lives, the
development of physical and creative faculties: all are evoked by Bentzon in order to emphasize the interrelated nature of social changes and the manner in which one area of development will necessarily have an impact on every other. Translation and more “original” forms of writing also form part of this series of seemingly opposing pairs; they, also, constitute an interconnected duo in which each half unfailingly affects the other. After all, it is an “imitative” translation project which permits Bentzon to carry out a more “creative” work of literary and social analysis and thus to change societal expectations of the appropriate roles for women in literature. Bentzon’s translation, then, is the point of access that allows her to undertake a study of women’s roles in England and America. In so doing, she covertly criticizes what she sees as a lack of change and opportunities for women in France and calls for a shift in the literary and societal conditions by which she is constrained.

How, then, can we situate Bentzon’s preface in regard to the three theoretical domains within which I am locating this analysis: paratexts in general, prefaces to translations, and prefaces by women writers? All three are relevant to the questions and issues raised by Bentzon. In Bentzon’s introduction, I find the most important of the classifications made by Genette are those which relate to the primacy of the subject matter being treated, a trait Genette groups with those in authorial prefaces, and the informative function, which he finds as a common ground between authorial and allographic prefaces, though he does create a distinction between the types of information found in the two. As I shall demonstrate, Bentzon is largely preoccupied, first of all, with stressing the importance of a reevaluation of women’s contributions to literature and their capabilities in the field, and, secondly, with informing the reader of the importance of the
themes she discusses for both women in literature and in the larger contexts of daily life. While it is certainly possible to fit Bentzon’s discourse into the domains outlined by Genette, such a procedure may not be the most useful for the purposes of this study. After all, what do such categories really tell us about not only the text itself, but also its place in the corpus of both prefaces to translations and prefaces written by women? It is, perhaps, much more beneficial for my present purposes to more closely examine both the functions Sherry Simon sees in prefaces to translations and those identified by Monicat and Sauvé, respectively, as regard the relationship of women and prefatory discourse in the specific context of the nineteenth century.

As I have previously pointed out, Sherry Simon sees as one of the most important roles of the preface by a translator its position as a “lieu de parole” (98) in which the translator may, for the first and only time within the confines of the translated text, speak explicitly and overtly insert him or herself onto the written page; it is just that that Bentzon does here, coming out from behind the supposedly neutral space thought to be occupied by the translator not only in order to contextualize and stress the importance of the novel, but also to express her own views on nineteenth-century literary culture and how women do, or rather do not, fit into it. This, in turn, leads us to Monicat’s finding that the preface, for nineteenth-century women, is a privileged space capable of generating writing that is specifically “écriture féminine” (59). The analysis performed by Bentzon is rooted firmly in the feminine perspective: her position as a woman and as a literary woman inform what she has to say about both the possibilities for women at the time she was writing and the potential opportunities that could be available in the future. What Bentzon is attempting to do here has intensely personal stakes for her as a woman.
who both wrote and translated; in endeavoring to change the possibilities available for
women as a whole she is above all trying to change her own opportunities for literary
creation. Bentzon also demonstrates a very clear sense of the ways in which literature
can be used to express a revolt and to protest against prevailing literary and social
standards for women, just as many nineteenth-century women used writing in order to
call for emancipation and a change in society’s limitations and expectations (Slama,
“Femmes écrivains” 222). She is careful to point out at great length the ways in which
women writers who have sought to transgress the limits set for both women and their
literary counterparts have met with harsh condemnation, and thus not only is Bentzon’s
preface both part and product of women’s literary history in the nineteenth century and its
deeply intertwined sense of what is appropriate and what is considered a violation, it is
taken up as her main point of discussion.

Bentzon begins her introduction by suggesting that the novel in general is “le
reflet des mœurs et que toutes les révolutions qui se produisent dans notre manière de
penser et de vivre y trouvent un écho” (1), setting the stage for her examination of
women’s places in society through the lens of literary analysis. This statement also
indicates the link between social and literary change that Bentzon sees as integral to the
further development of women’s opportunities, an idea I shall develop later on in this
analysis. She continues on to relate her reflections on social change to Jewett’s text
through a reference to the growing number of female doctors in England and America,
but not in France, though she sees it as no accident that it is the medical field that in many
ways seems most welcoming to women who wish to have careers outside the family
sphere. She sees medicine as a natural area for women to enter because it places
emphasis upon values and character traits already traditionally associated with the feminine: “il nous semble qu’au nom de la pudeur, de la chasteté, du dévouement—vertus féminins en somme—[les femmes] ont le droit de prendre rang parmi ceux qui soulagent l’humanité souffrante, et que la médecine est entre toutes les carrières celle qui, dès à présent, leur convient le mieux” (5-6). All while acknowledging the appropriate nature of a medical career for women, though, Bentzon does not see the changes in women’s opportunities as being limited to what is currently considered acceptable for them. Indeed, she views women’s access to certain areas of science as a development that will soon allow “toutes les excentricités” and may soon lead to “le règne de la virago” (6) and thus she simultaneously appropriates what was formerly seen as a negative trait in a female—a career in the sciences—and language that is typically used as a negative character descriptor in order to highlight the new possibilities available for women in both real life and as fictional characters. Yet Bentzon is not uniformly optimistic in the prospects she sees for women and their fictional counterparts; she asks herself if the same type of freer access will be permitted when it comes to the field of creativity and writing. Through a discussion of the strictures and possibilities in this domain for fictional characters, Bentzon is able to evoke the same restraints that limit the women writers who create these characters, herself included, and the possible ways to overcome them.

For though Bentzon seems positive that changes are occurring for women in the medical field, she has no such surety when it comes to chances for women to find success in literature, especially when writing about fictional women with access to a broad slate of new activities not traditionally associated with the feminine:
[M]ais on ne laisse pas de demander si tous ces droits admis dans la pratique seront accordés de même au point de vue idéal, esthétique, dans le domaine de la fiction, s’ils y rencontreront quelque indulgence. Le public s’intéressera-t-il à l’épopée de la femme qui dissèque, de la femme qui pérore, de la femme électeur, de la femme fonctionnaire, de la femme physiquement modifiée par l’habit et par la gymnastique, comme il s’intéressait à l’idylle de cette créature inférieure, coquette ou naïve, faible ou perfide, qui n’avait d’autre destinée que l’amour ? (6)

The problem that Bentzon points out lies in the associations that link the above careers and activities with the masculine world and its associated qualities, in contrast with the field of medicine and its correlation with typically “feminine” characteristics. Moreover, in contrasting the “épopée" of the more modern woman with the “idylle” of the traditionally feminine roles in literature, Bentzon is referencing a specifically virile form of literary creation that has heretofore been out of women’s reach; changing women’s roles in literature, then, automatically also open new literary genres for them. Bentzon also evokes the usual status of female literary characters as love interests in order to highlight the much broader range of life experiences that they are currently being denied. As has been pointed out by many critics, such as Christine Planté, literary creation in the nineteenth century was associated with masculine qualities of virility and intellectual prowess and with a connection with the public sphere, whereas women’s literary production was associated with private life and seen as “petites productions féminines” (La Petite Soeur de Balzac 226). The activities mentioned by Bentzon in this passage are, like literary creation, associated with the male, and therefore public, world,
whereas romantic relationships were deemed feminine qualities, as they correlated to the realm of private life and emotions. In this way Bentzon stresses the fact that it is not simply literary representations and generic boundaries that must be questioned, but, to a much larger degree, the categories that defined and limited women in all areas of public life.

Yet, there is also an unasked question here which lies heavily behind the one posed by Bentzon: will the public be interested in fiction not only about women who perform such activities, but by women who are in the act of crossing acceptable boundaries through their participation in the masculine domain of writing? For, as Béatrice Slama emphasizes, women writers faced a variety of obstacles in all of the stages associated with literary publication, diffusion, and critical reception: “difficulté d’être publiée, lue par d’autres, livrée à la malveillance, à la dérision, à l’incompréhension, à la condescendance” (220). As Bentzon points out in the above quotation, such a response was not limited to the female writer, but to women who attempted to enter into any professional domain seen as purely masculine. By purposefully blurring the line between the opportunities for real and fictional women and the fates that await those who transgress these opportunities, Bentzon highlights the interrelation between the two realms and the way in which changes in one domain will both depend on and cause changes in the other. Thus, the question of possibilities for fictional women naturally, though indirectly, leads the reader of this preface to a consideration of the possibilities for real women. As Sherry Simon stresses, prefaces written by translators are directly related to the political mechanisms that control writing and its diffusion (102). In this case, it is perhaps more appropriate to speak of social
and/or cultural mechanisms, rather than political, but the idea remains the same: that the discourse correlates to social methods of control of the day, here specifically control of what female writers could and could not do.

How, then, does Bentzon think that this obstacle can be overcome in order to allow female fictional characters who reflect the wealth of new experiences to which women are beginning to have access? The possibility of breaching this boundary, in her eyes, lies not principally in changes within the literary establishment, but changes within the general reading public, and thus the larger part of society. These changes that she would like to see correspond to the changes she desires to meet in female literary characters: “il faudra pour cela que les lecteurs de l’avenir, se transformant avec les héroïnes, ne ressemblent guère aux lecteurs d’aujourd’hui” (6). A statement of this type, where Bentzon is essentially addressing the readers of this text directly, is, I find, in close correlation to the function of authorial prefaces that appeals to a specific audience of readers, as defined by Genette (197-98). Genette does not see this function as appearing in allographic prefaces, so such an appeal on Bentzon’s part once again serves to blur the lines between authorial and allographic with regard to translators. In this case, Bentzon takes direct control of the type of readers who should be interested in this book—namely, all those who feel that there must be an evolution in the opportunities for women—and those who should not—today’s readers who are happy to uphold the status quo—and assumes an authorial stance of control over the text. It goes without saying that the transformations in readership evoked by Bentzon do not exclude the continuing evolution of the prospects allowed to the female writer; indeed, such advancement is a fundamental condition for the changes about which she speaks. In order to have literary heroines with
a vaster spectrum of experiences, someone must be available to create such heroines; who, then, would be more appropriate than a woman writer availing herself of newly attainable literary opportunities? Women’s fictional works were often criticized in the nineteenth century for their repeated emphasis on female characters negotiating a society set up to exclude and limit them, yet, again as pointed out by Slama, “qui d’autre, en leur place, parlerait des femmes?” (226-7). As we shall see later in Bentzon’s analysis, it is just such a female writer she sees as necessary for the advancement of women. First, though, it is worth noting the negative reactions to certain types of fictional heroines she points out in this introduction.

Bentzon supports her claim that in order to change literary heroines there must above all be a changed readership by using first and foremost as her example Mme de Staël’s Corinne. She asserts that, although fictional women are judged more rigorously and held to higher standards than their male counterparts, “même la supériorité trop affirmée des personnages féminins nous refroidit bien vite: témoin Corinne, avec toutes ses beautés” (7). It is this fine line that must be straddled by female protagonists: they must be perfect, but not too perfect; ambitious, but only in ways already deemed appropriate for their sex and always, of course, relatable enough to secure the reader’s sympathy. Bentzon sees these qualities as the real arbiters of the possibilities for literary heroines, with those who harbor ambitions other than those seen as typically feminine being in scarce supply and, when present, relegated to roles as secondary characters and presented in a negative or very limited light. If a female literary character has creative aspirations, she explains, music and certain artistic forms of expression are acceptable, but only insomuch as they serve as backdrops for passion and pretty scenery. In the case
of painting, for example, she points out that flowers and portraits are deemed admissible because they are not indicative of a serious desire for an artistic career. If the female character is a governess, she continues, she must necessarily fall in love with and ultimately marry the son of the household in order to be allowed to escape “la pédagogie dont elle subissait le joug aride sans l’avoir choisi”. If the character is a woman of letters, she will always be “délaissée ou trahie,” and if she is a scientist she is “un monstre de laideur”. Any writer who attempts to break with these conventions and stereotypes, she warns, will soon realize that they are “inébranlables,” not because women, real and fictional, are incapable of surpassing the limitations set for them, but because the reading public is not ready to accept them (7-8). This once again brings to the forefront of Bentzon’s analysis the sharp gender divisions for women in most all areas of public and private life in the nineteenth century and the ways in which these divisions affected the possibilities not only for real women, but for the fictional creations they put to the page.

Crossing the line from fiction to reality, the same could be said of women who nurtured ambitions that surpassed society’s standards for them, including women writers. Such an attitude is clearly seen, to give only one example among many, in critical responses to Mme de Staël’s work of literary criticism *De la littérature*, as in the following review from the *Mercure de France* cited by Simone Balayé:

La littérature, quand elle est cultivée par des femmes, devrait toujours prendre un caractère aimable et doux comme elles. Il semble que leur succès dans les arts, ainsi que leur bonheur dans la vie domestique, dépendent de leur respect pour certaines convenances […] Mais quand une femme paraît sur un théâtre qui
n’est pas le sien, les spectateurs, choqués de ce contraste, jugent avec sévérité celle-là même qu’ils auraient environnée de faveur et d’hommages, si elle n’avait point changé sa place et sa destination. (17-18)

Thus the paramount aspect in women’s literary creation is not only, and not even primarily, the quality of what they write, but rather their adhesion to literary standards that govern the possibilities for creation. Any value judgment will have its basis not on the individual traits each female writer brings (or does not bring) to her works; on the contrary, her works will be evaluated under the rubric of ‘women’s writing’ and assigned a worth following their degree of concordance with the genres permissible for women.

Translation, as an acceptable category of literary activity for women, falls under the same rubric as the female character described by Bentzon with “acceptable” creative ambitions: the woman translator is not being overly ambitious by setting her sights on the literary equivalent of great painting; she is instead staying within the boundaries that limit her to the print version of flowers and portraits. As explained by Jeanne Goldin, “la femme qui publie, qui recherche la célébrité, qui doit affronter tous les aléas de l’institution littéraire ne peut être auteur sans perdre sa féminité, un auteur femme ne peut l’être que par vanité; sa superficialité, son manque de culture, les genres qu’on lui fait privilégier feront automatiquement d’elle un auteur médiocre” (41). Goldin’s mention of genres is particularly important for this discussion for, as she points out, if a woman author remains within the genres ascribed as appropriate for her, such as translation, she will always be deemed mediocre and sub-literary. The perceived loss of femininity on the part of the female author noted by Goldin is likewise taken up by Bentzon: namely,
how to remain feminine while incorporating the masculine qualities considered necessary at the time to be an author?

In order to break through these boundaries set up for literary and real women alike, Bentzon proclaims the need not only for a special type of writer, but for a special type of woman writer. She claims that it is the role of “une femme du talent le plus délicat, le plus pur et le plus modeste d’aborder de front le sujet scabreux et de le faire accepter” (9). It must first be pointed out that it is not qualities associated with the masculine—such as assertiveness, strength, or directness—that are considered essential by Bentzon in order to allow women access to the so-called masculine parts of the professional and creative world, but rather qualities that have always been associated with femininity: delicacy, purity, and modesty. She therefore accentuates the fact that even though she is discussing a masculine activity, feminine qualities are still both desirable and necessary for the task at hand and should not be rejected. Bentzon goes on to claim that Sarah Orne Jewett is precisely this woman, that in uniting all of the above mentioned qualities she “prête beaucoup de poids à la croisade commencée par elle avec autant de franchise que de prudence” (9). Once again Bentzon emphasizes that a combination of the masculine and the feminine is required in order to change public reception of texts about and by women who escape the normal boundaries of the feminine sphere: by specifically mentioning both “franchise,” a typically masculine quality, and “prudence,” a typically feminine one, she asserts the value of the feminine as a continued form of female self-expression and puts it on equal footing with masculine values. As we saw earlier with the example of the critical reception of De la littérature, Mme de Staël was penalized not for the quality of what she wrote, but for the simple fact of having
appropriated what was seen as a masculine domain, a reception not uncommonly met with by female writers who were seen as having encroached upon masculine values.

Thus, a use of solely masculine qualities would do no good to a woman writer hoping to enact changes upon the prevailing hierarchy of the literary world. At the same time, a woman writer who rests purely within the limits of feminine qualities in place for her will remain under the rubric of women’s writing. Therefore, as Bentzon points out, a combination of the two, which she sees present in Jewett’s writing, is able to escape the pitfalls of relying too heavily on either the masculine or the feminine and to present changes in the normal limits for females in a palatable light that will meet with a wider public acceptance. Indeed, Bentzon claims that such an approach is among those “qui obligent les plus récalcitrants à prendre en considération une cause douteuse” and identifies one overarching goal in Jewett’s work: “obtenir la grâce de la femme forte, de la femme libre, montrer ce que lui coûtent sa force et sa liberté, combien de vertus féminines continuent à fleurir sous les mâles facultés acquises au prix de sacrifices qui forcent notre respect” (10). By emphasizing both the masculine qualities obtained in a pursuit of knowledge and the feminine virtues that are by no means effaced through such pursuits, Bentzon once again stresses the importance of balance in seemingly opposed masculine and feminine qualities and the need for women to retain their feminine traits in order to infiltrate domains previously viewed as purely male. By the same toke, she accentuates the sacrifice inherent in an attempt to cross the borders into masculine literary creation. This statement, then, serves as both encouragement and warning; it shows what is possible for a woman who is able to understand the importance of utilizing
both the masculine and the feminine in her writing and the respect that she stands to gain, while cautioning that the process will involve hard work and sacrifice.

Yet, what of Bentzon’s activity here? How does it fall along the lines of masculine and feminine that she draws when speaking of Jewett’s work and the necessary qualities for female writers? All while nominally remaining within the borders of acceptable female genres through her translation, Bentzon manages to both question and cross over them. The translation of *A Country Doctor* is one of the vehicles by which she is able to enter the domain of literary and social commentary usually reserved as a masculine area because of its connection with critical thinking, an area considered to be well outside female spheres of literary creation that were marked, in the eyes of male critics, by a particularly feminine charm denuded of any critical aspects (Balayé 18). I find that her undertaking in this preface is the very combination of the masculine and the feminine that she mentions with regard to Jewett: on the one hand, she stays within the realm of the feminine by the project she has set for herself of translating Jewett’s work, and in this way demonstrates her continued adherence to feminine literary creation, while, on the other hand, she is engages with masculine literary genres through the social and literary criticism I have been discussing. Though it remains unmentioned in the text, Bentzon performs the same creative act that she admires in Jewett and demands from other women writers. This creates the impression that when she speaks of strength and liberty, respect and sacrifice, she is the voice of experience who wishes to impart her knowledge to those who will come after. The preface truly becomes a place in which Bentzon is able to both perform and identify the project of creating a text “en tant que texte au féminin” (Monicat 59).
Bentzon also uses her prefatory space to become a cultural broker of sorts, drawing upon examples from American literature that she sees as capable of having a positive influence on roles for women in French society. As Sherry Simon points out in “Germaine de Staël and Gayatri Spivak: Culture Brokers,” one of the aims of translation in the Western world has always been to mediate between cultures. Through her discussion of Mme de Staël’s views on the role of translation in the development of national literature, she demonstrates the writer’s clear awareness of the overarching effects translation could have: a view of translation as creation rather than imitation, she believed, would permit literary cultures to merge the national literature of other countries with their own and in so doing transform literature in both countries (123-127). While Mme de Staël’s aim differed from Bentzon’s in that she was particularly concerned with reviving the literary culture of southern European countries through translations from northern European countries, the important point of convergence that I find here is Mme de Staël’s general view of translation, as described by Simon, “as an activity that has broad cultural implications” (137). For Bentzon also perceives her work to have clear implications for the society of reception, although she does not identify her work on the level of national cultural influence. Rather than national literature, it is women’s literature that Bentzon attempts to transform through her translation of a work she sees as showing in a positive light the ways in which society can change to be more welcoming of women with careers, and specifically with literary ambitions. Indeed, in an 1894 interview with the *New York Times*, Bentzon further elucidated the importance of translation to her vision of literary diffusion, stating that through the transmission of American literature and a greater knowledge of American culture “the young girl in
France shall be transformed by the influence of the American young girl” (“Impressions of Th. Bentzon” 21); in this instance, she was referring to arranged marriages as a model to be shunned in France. Thus, she saw both her translations and her travel and historical writings as means to change women’s opportunities in France and the two aspects of her career were equally essential to achieve this goal. Through her emphasis on the laudatory aspects of both the protagonist of the book, a female doctor, and the author of the book, a female writer, as positive role models who highlight the opportunities that should be open for women, Bentzon stresses the need for such women, both real and literary, in French society.

As I have previously mentioned, Bentzon’s preface largely goes beyond what is defined as proper to the allographic by Genette and in so doing blurs the line that separates literary creation from translation, author from translator. This preface truly is the “lieu de parole” Sherry Simon evokes in her analysis of prefaces to translations, as it allows Bentzon to depart from the seemingly neutral standpoint of the translator and integrate her own point of view into both the novel she translated and the larger cultural context of women’s writing (98). I also highlighted the ways in which this preface brings to the forefront several of the characteristics noted by Monicat and Sauvé as common to prefaces by women in this time, yet a common characteristic of women’s prefaces pointed out by both Monicat and Sauvé is conspicuously missing from Bentzon’s introduction: unlike Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s preface to Jane Eyre, there is no overt attempt to justify her own actions or why she feels it necessary and appropriate to write. This is perhaps due in part to Bentzon’s writing career, which at this point had already spanned several decades. Her first work of fiction was published in 1872 and she went
on to publish numerous novels, translations and essays until her death in 1907 (Wilson 538-39). As a woman who already had a variety of experience in writing and publishing and an established reputation in this field, she perhaps felt that she no longer needed to justify herself in this manner. At the same time, this prolonged discussion of women’s reception in literary domains demonstrates that Bentzon did not see any female literary activity, her own included, as being unproblematically accepted by society unless it fit certain well-defined guidelines for “women’s writing.” The name of Thérèse Bentzon, in fact, is the pseudonym of Marie-Thérèse Blanc and she signed her publications only as “Th. Bentzon,” leading readers to assume that the author was actually a “Thomas” or a “Théodore” (Wilson 538). This once again serves to emphasize the tensions associated with publication for women, especially when they ventured into territories identified as purely male, as Bentzon did from the beginning of her career through articles of literary criticism.

As I have demonstrated through my analysis of both Bentzon’s preface and Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s, definite conclusions as to the uses of the prefatory statements by women translators cannot be distinctly drawn; rather, through an examination of two prefaces that employ clearly different forms of discourse and have opposing goals, I showed the need to problematize the idea that a homogeneous standard of this type of preface can be identified. Indeed, these two prefaces in many ways exemplify two opposing poles of women’s representation of their place in literature: either an acceptance and attempt to maintain this position, as we have seen with Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s preface, or a challenge to these standards, as we have seen with Bentzon’s. The point that unites these two prefaces, though, is their overwhelming preoccupation with what it
meant to write as a woman in the nineteenth century and their shared deployment of the cultural conventions about women and literature in their society, whether they aimed to uphold or subvert them. Most interestingly, such positions are manifest in both translators’ prefatory discourse and in the translations themselves, as I shall demonstrate in the following chapter.
Chapter 5

Sexual, Textual, and Lexical Expectations in Thérèse Bentzon’s *Récits californiens* and Madame Lesbazeille-Souvestre’s *Jeanne Eyre*

5.1 Critical Steps Towards a Descriptive Analysis of Translation

In the pages that follow, I focus on studying several translations by the women writer/translators I have been looking at over the course of my study. The specific objects I have chosen to examine are Thérèse Bentzon’s translations of several short stories by American author Bret Harte and Mme Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s translation of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*. Though there are a wealth of translators and translations with which I could have worked, rather than present new translators I chose to analyze works by translators who have already been discussed in this project in order to present a sense of continuity in my analysis and further enrich the knowledge of translation’s place in these women’s œuvres. Thérèse Bentzon and Mme Lesbazeilles-Souvestre present a particularly interesting pair in large part because of the opposite trajectories of their careers: Thérèse Bentzon was a professional, active in translation and in many forms of writing, whereas Mme Lesbazeilles-Souvestre never published beyond this translation. One of these women, then, had a professional career, of which translation formed only one facet, and the other did not participate in any known professional literary activities beyond this one publication. In many ways, the two women represent opposing yet complementary sides of the spectrum of stereotypes regarding women writers in the nineteenth century: one used translation as just one part of a long-lived and widely varied
literary career; the other translated, yet did not write in any other genre. Both, then, had different relationships to the act of translating. The question remains whether or not this different relationship is visible in the translations themselves.

The previous chapters, focusing respectively on fictional production, on autobiography, and on prefaces, have already introduced a number of themes that will be further elaborated upon in this chapter, and this thematic continuity weaves the various chapters together and demonstrates the importance of considering all aspects of these translator/writers’ creative careers. I have already explored a preoccupation with women as both producers of texts and as characters in texts, creation in relation to imitation, involvement in the literary world and the importance of paratextual practices. This section of my analysis will develop more fully those previous themes and integrate their importance within the context of the current chapter. I also delve more deeply into other issues, such as women translating women authors. As Julie Candler Hayes points out, there has long existed what she terms a tradition of “gynocentric translation” (156), that is, women translating women’s writing. Such a tradition, as defined by Hayes, includes not only the translation of women authors by other women, but the paratexts surrounding these translations, such as dedications and prefaces. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, norms of femininity and the expectations of women writers formed a large part of the prefatory discourse of both Bentzon and Lesbazeilles-Souvestre. Strategies such as these that aim to make more visible the roles of women within the literary system are not limited to the paratexts, but instead inevitably carry over to the translations themselves. This chapter, then, aims to take the notion of studying gynocentric translations to the next
level by examining the textual strategies these translators chose and their relation to their prefatory discourse.

Yet, I also feel that the definition of gynocentric translation can be expanded to include not only women translating women, but women translating men’s texts, particularly when the texts or translations deal in some pertinent way with female characters and women’s involvement in literary activities and when the women translators are concerned with shaping the portrayals of women that they find in men’s texts. As I shall demonstrate, even when the translation is of a text written by a man, this does not necessarily make it any less “gynocentric” than the translation of a text written by a woman and it would perhaps be foolish not to consider the possibilities of locating a tradition of “gynocentric translation” the translation of men’s texts. As Suzanne Jill Levine relates in her analysis of the process of translating texts that she found hostile to women, her own awareness of herself as the “feminized translator” did not fade over time; rather, she gained a sense of herself as “self-betrayer fallen under the spell of male discourse” (181). In order to counterbalance this self-perception, she explains, “I can only question the belief system that uses these terms to define women and translation” (182). Even though she was translating texts by male authors, she still always remained aware of her own, and the author’s, inevitably gendered position as she worked, and we can be justified in referring to such acts of translation as part of a gynocentric tradition. I bring this perspective to my own analysis, questioning the ways in which the historical association of women and translation affected the very process of translation for these women as a necessarily gendered act.
I determined my texts for this chapter through several criteria and circumstances. The first category that must regulate my choice is, of course, availability of the texts for study. While availability certainly was limited in some cases, I nevertheless had a large range of options from which to choose. In making my decisions of which texts to evaluate I also resolved that for the sake of continuity it would be preferable to treat texts by translators already studied in previous chapters, namely, Thérèse Bentzon, Madame Lesbazeilles-Souvestre and Victorine de Chastenay. Unfortunately, I was not able to do so in all three cases, for although Mme de Chastenay’s translation of Anne Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* has been reedited and republished many times over the years, it is not available in the same form in which she initially published it and I could not, therefore, perform a valid analysis of Chastenay’s translation choices. In the case of Mme Lesbazeilles-Souvestre, her translation of *Jane Eyre* is her only published work, and since it is readily available it will form part of my study in this chapter. As for Thérèse Bentzon, I have already discussed her preface to her translation of Sarah Orne Jewett’s *A Country Doctor*, and for this chapter I analyze her translations of several short stories by American author Bret Harte. Rather than continue with *A Country Doctor*, I chose to focus my attention on her Harte translation for several reasons. First, while it is certainly the case that Bentzon’s translations and writings did often have a strong feminist bent, as I demonstrated regarding my analysis of her preface to *A Country Doctor*, this was by no means universally true. Indeed, Bentzon was well-known largely because of her translations of, for example, Robert Louis Stevenson and Mark Twain. Thus, I felt that a continued attention to Jewett’s work would create the false impression that she mostly translated and focused on other women, whereas enlarging my scope to
include her Harte translations opens up my focus and represents a more complete reality of her corpus of translated works. This examination also gives me the opportunity to expand upon my own conception of gynocentric translation as including the translation by women of texts by men through a close reading of her treatment of the various female characters in Harte’s work.

One more issue that must be addressed in my choice of translations is their relative fidelity to their source texts. While at first glance it may seem as if the greatest interest in this part of my project would lie in choosing dramatically unfaithful translations, I find that just as great, if not greater, an interest rests with choosing relatively faithful texts. Such a study demonstrates that a system of changes is not present only when major differences occur, but in more subtle ways as well. Moreover, I demonstrate the fidelity of these translations in direct opposition to viewpoint of modern critics, in particular as pertains to Thérèse Bentzon, that these translators took many liberties, but at the same time to show that fidelity is not an absolute term and does not mean lack of creativity or authorship. This approach thus allows me to question the very concepts of fidelity and creativity in translation.

The next step in the textual analysis of translations is deciding on a methodological approach that is both pertinent to my aims and analytically fruitful and able to benefit my study by allowing me to apply the same criteria across the board to a variety of texts. Most importantly, though, a concrete methodology allows me to escape the binary ‘good’ or ‘bad’ translation analysis that far too many seem to slip into as they evaluate a translation. While very prevalent, such a means of studying translations is both fruitless and harmful to the genre of translation criticism and commentary as a
whole. Ultimately, it tells us nothing about a translation as a literary and cultural object. Most often critics fall prey to such an approach out of ignorance of the text’s source language, a lack of a systematic tools of analysis specific to translation, or an overarching unwillingness to consider a translation as a literary text in and of itself and more than just an object that exists in service to the source text. Yet, in direct counterpoint to such means of talking about translations, as Umberto Eco stresses, both translators and critics must aim not for a point by point assessment of fidelity, but for “the intention of the text,” which is “the outcome of an interpretative effort” put forth by the translator and the critic alike (Mouse or Rat? 5). The act of translation and the act of criticism are therefore processes of negotiation, as defined by Eco, and as such call for a more nuanced approach that emphasizes the process of translating within a literary system rather than a binary result.

Yet, most analyses of translations do fall into such a trap. The results of these criticisms, though, tell us nothing substantive about the translations in question. In order to illustrate the damaging effects of a study of translation that is mostly concerned with judging translations, and therefore translators, as ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ I would like to touch briefly upon an analysis of the French translation of Jane Eyre that remains within this limited and binary form of discourse. This recent article by Margaret Lesser, ostensibly devoted to a more thorough exploration of translation, instead downplays both the translation’s importance and its quality. In “Domestication v. Foreignness: Early French Translations of Edgeworth, Gaskell, Brontë and Eliot,” Lesser begins by posing what I consider an erroneous question: “How close was the experience of a Frenchwoman reading a translation of, say, Jane Eyre, in the 1850s or Adam Bede in the 1860s to the
experience of readers in the original language?” (109). First of all, it is even doubtful that two readers in the same language would have the same reading of the same novel, for reading as well as translating is an act inevitably guided by the expectations and background of each reader (Furman 49). Furthermore, by posing a question about a translation’s reception only in relation to the experience of reading the source text, Lesser completely discounts translation as a separate object in and of itself, equating it with the imitation of an original that is somehow bound to replicate a previous reading experience. This question is fallaciously posed in that it implies that a reading of a text can be exactly reproduced in another language: that a translation can ever offer the same reading as the source text. Lesser thus begins her argument from a tenuous position, and moves on to an interpretation of the act of translating that ultimately leaves no room for any positive portrayal of this act.

All nineteenth-century translations of these authors, and any others, were, as a matter of fact, always deficient according to Lesser, first of all because of their unreliability, due to some combination of the nineteenth-century’s lax translation standards, subpar translators, and poor remuneration for translators (110-11). Secondly, translations were also always lacking because of their translators’ misunderstanding of the authors’ use of dialects and “non-standard language in general” (114, 116). Lesser concludes that all early translations were in some way deficient and, overall, were hopelessly domesticating (117). Such a characterization of translation is problematic on several levels. First, it posits all translations, and thus all translators, as bad and unreliable, which justifies those who would seek to discount translation as constituting an important and revelatory creative aspect of these translators’ literary careers. This
reductive study, moreover, falls into the simplistic trap of evaluating translations as either good or bad without delving more thoroughly into the complete context of their production and transmission. As Antoine Berman notes, the tendency to judge a translation is by no means rare, but is highly problematic in that it both ignores the existence of a system of differences in translation and the causes of such a system. For Berman, analyses of translations that fall into such a trap do so because “elles ne visent pas […] à se donner une forme rigoureuse qui marquerait leur spécificité, ni à se doter d’une méthodologie” (Pour une critique des traductions 44). It is just such a pitfall that I look to prevent in my own work.

And, indeed, it is to Berman that I turn in order to avoid this lack of rigor and specificity. In Pour une critique des traductions: John Donne, he not only points out the methodological weak points in most studies of translations, but proposes a methodology that aims to correct these deficiencies and to supply a more rigorous tool of critical analysis. He believes that the use of such a methodology will lead to higher standards of translation criticism that will avoid the good/bad dichotomy so often reverted to. In setting up a critical tradition of translation, Berman attempts to move away from the tradition of translation criticism in which the term ‘criticism’ implies a judgment or evaluation and instead shift toward a definition that approaches an “analyse rigoureuse d’une traduction, de ses traits fondamentaux, du projet qui lui a donné naissance, de l’horizon dans lequel elle a surgi, de la position du traducteur” (13-14). Berman also aims to move away definitively from an evaluation of translations as good or bad; the important thing, he claims, is to seek out the whys of any particular translations: why it is either ‘good’ or ‘bad’ in a certain critic’s eyes (37). As I have already noted, in my own
project I look to avoid this black and white mode of thinking, thus my initial attraction to Berman’s methodological perspective and its goal of going beyond such a simplistic reading.

Berman identifies two reasons in particular for this tendency to judge a translation in a binary mode of either good or bad, reasons that are due to fundamental traits of any translation: first, translation’s status as always secondary in relation to the primary source text that is thought to be the ‘true’ text and, secondly, translation’s inherently defective nature, because it is always in the position of being compared and judged against a source text that is inevitably seen as the original (41). Thus, he posits, translation is in a unique critical position in that it is preponderantly associated with a negative and judgmental critique. For Berman, these negative symptoms manifest themselves in a lack of rigor, form, and methodology, and it is just such qualities with which he will attempt to endow his own method of discussing translation (44-45). Berman’s rigor and determination to create a more meaningful way of talking about translations makes his analysis appealing to me and leads me to believe that his method of approaching translations, in combination with my own focus on the importance of gender in this context, will enhance both my understanding of these translations and my ability to perform a meaningful analysis on them.

Berman articulates his methodology in four distinct steps, all while being certain to caution that he is not proposing a model as such, but rather a “trajet analytique possible” that can “se modeler suivant les finalités particulières de chaque analyste, et se mouler dans toutes sortes de formes textuelles standardisées (article, communication, étude, ouvrage, recension, thèse, etc.)” (64). As such, a complete adherence to the steps
he lays out is not necessary in order to make use of his methodology. Rather, what is important is an adherence to his project itself: that of moving away from a Manichean look at translations, classifying them as either inherently ‘good’ or ‘bad’ with no reference to context, to cultural norms in both the source and target cultures, to the project of each individual translator, and to translation’s ever-shifting place within the literary system. I will now briefly outline each of these four steps and then discuss how I plan to incorporate his methodology into my own project and the use that I see in each aspect of his trajectory. I also discuss several other fruitful domains of translation analysis in order to enrich my critical perspective and enlarge my area of study.

Berman’s first step in his proposed course of study is the reading and rereading of the translation; he stresses that this should be done completely independently of the source text and without trying to make any comparisons between the two. A reading such as this, Berman explains, leads to the identification of problematical textual zones—linguistic contamination, for example, or words/phrases that recall the original language—as well as inventive textual zones that show the work’s translated status and demonstrate “une écriture d’étranger harmonieusement passée en français, sans heurt aucun (ou, s’il y a heurt, un heurt bénéfique)” (66). Berman’s second step is the reading of the source text, which should leave behind the translation, but not the ‘textual zones’ where the translation seemed problematic or impressive. In this textual analysis, the critic should note the traits that individuate the writing and style of the original, recurrent/key words; in essence, “ici, le critique refait le même travail de lecture que le traducteur a fait, ou est censé avoir fait, pendant la traduction” (67). A selection of
pertinent and meaningful stylistic examples in the original should also be made, just as
they were for the translation.

In the wake of these two steps that focus the critic’s attention on the translation
and the source text respectively, Berman turns to the translator; the question, he says, is
who is the translator: what is his or her nationality, other profession, other literary
activities (73)? These questions should be posed, says Berman, with the aim of
establishing the “position traductive” (74) of the translator. He defines the “position
traductive” as the perception on the part of the translator of the very activity of translation
and, more specifically still, the position of the translator vis-à-vis the text. The
translative position is inevitably linked to such factors as the relationship of the translator
to foreign languages and to his or her own language and the translator’s relationship to
writing, and specifically to the works he or she is translating (75). When the translative
position has been examined, the critic must then turn to the translation project, which is
comprised of the translative position and the translator’s choices of either autonomy and
liberty or strict adherence to the source text, by his or her preliminary analysis of the text,
and by the manner in which the translator chooses to present the translation (76-77).
Equally important as an object of consideration is the translator’s horizon, which Berman
defines as including the translative position and the translation project, as well as the
collection of linguistic, literary, cultural and historical parameters that determine the
“sentir, agir, penser” (79) of the translation. In other words, the translator’s horizon is
formed by his or her cultural norms and expectations for the author and genre of literature
being translated, previous translations of the same work, if any exist, and the text’s place
in the literary canon of translator’s culture. The three moments of this third step of an
analysis of translations are thus a study of the translatative position, a study of translation project, and a study of translatative horizon. An examination of these three steps brings important depth to my work, for it allows me to continue my focus not just on the translations, but on the discourse that surrounds them, such as prefaces, autobiography, and the other literary productions of the translators.

The fourth and final step in this process is the confrontation between the translation and the source text. This analysis, comprised not of extracts of these two works but their totalities, involves a quadruple mode of confrontation. The first mode of confrontation is that of selected elements and passages in the original with corresponding ones in the translation, followed by the inverse: a confrontation of textual zones that are problematic or “accomplies” in the translation with corresponding passages in the original. Next, the translation must be confronted with its stated project, as identified by the translator, and, if and when possible, with competing translations of the same work (85-86). The reception of the translation, too, must be taken into consideration, but this is always a difficult prospect given that most reviews will be of the foreign work, not the translation.

As I have laid out, Berman’s method of translation analysis permits the scholar of translation to discuss translations without recourse to the fruitless positive/negative dichotomy that so often characterizes such discourse. This, in turn, opens up greater analytic fields, as it allows for a richer spectrum of possible topics. Berman’s “trajet analytique possible” also permits each researcher the freedom to change or shape his steps to suit the needs of his or her particular project, all while giving them the necessary tools to talk about translation in a meaningful and productive manner. As Valérie Cossy
demonstrates, Berman’s methodology is broadly applicable, permitting Cossy to take a wide variety of factors into account about the translations, the original texts, and the translators that form her objects of study. Cossy finds that one of the most helpful aspects of Berman’s methodology is his insistence on the close relationship between translation and criticism, for her analysis “focuses on Austen’s translators as readers and decoders who deliberately manipulate her novels” (Jane Austen in Switzerland 23). This approach, endorsed by Berman’s methodological focus on not only the translations, but on the ideology and project of the translator, permits Cossy to do more than simply assess each translator’s fidelity or lack thereof and instead to demonstrate their deliberate and programmatic textual permutations as part of a system of change. Berman’s approach also allows Cossy to take into account the backgrounds of the various translators she examines, the cultural climate in which the translations were received, and their target audiences (25). All of these considerations permit a broad and far-reaching study that goes beyond the limitations afforded by an analysis that discounts these factors and solely seeks to compare the translation to its source text.

Berman’s trajectory appeals to me and is useful in my current project for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the freedom he imparts to those who choose to incorporate his methodology into their own work; Berman, as I stated above, does not advocate a strict adherence to the steps he proposes, but rather recognizes that projects of different types, length, and focus are better served by following the spirit of his methodology, rather than the letter, in order to evaluate translations meaningfully. And, indeed, it is not so much the specific steps of Berman’s approach that I find so appealing and helpful, but his trajectory as a whole, for it allows the analyst of translations to
bypass the positive/negative dichotomy that has been, and so often still is, the default mode for many discussions of translation; it accounts for the goals and background of the translator; and it treats both the source text and the translation as literary objects in and of themselves, thus affirming the critical autonomy of the translation. Most important, for me, is his emphasis on the translator and on moving towards a descriptive criticism of translation.

While Berman’s methodology forms a major part of how I speak of these texts, I do not limit myself to his process alone, but also incorporate other schools of thinking on translation studies that specifically take such factors as differing notions of fidelity and gender and writing into account. I find that this is an important piece of the study of translation because, of course, of the nature of my own project, but also, in a larger sense, because the various aspects of translation inherently concern issues of gender, race, social class and nationality and the translator, whether a woman or a man, must negotiate between his or her own ideology and the ideology of the text to be translated (Massardier-Kenney 14). As such, an approach to analyses of translation must be iterated “that strives to integrate the multifarious forces of gender, race, and class as well as the broad range of linguistic, literary, and historical determinants that come into play” (Kadish 35). This approach must include focus on the source text, the translated text and the translator him or herself. Thus, while drawing on Berman’s multifaceted methodology, I take into account the factor of gender and its possible effects on the process of translation, the finished product, and its reception in another culture. I find this focus on gender by no means incompatible with Berman’s methodology because, while not invoking gender specifically, Berman does advocate a close attention to the
translator and his or her position as a very important factor in the creation of the
translation. The inclusion of gender as a factor of analysis is thus a logical extension of
Berman’s line of reasoning and of the importance he gives to the translator.

Berman is by no means alone in his ambivalence to the importance of privileging
the idea of fidelity and a right or wrong approach to evaluating translations. As
Lawrence Venuti points out, there is no such thing as absolute fidelity, for
a foreign text is the site of many different semantic possibilities that are fixed
only provisionally in any one translation, on the basis of varying cultural
assumptions and interpretive choices, in specific social situations, in different
historical periods. [...] [A] translation cannot be judged according to
mathematics-based concepts of semantic equivalence or one-to-one
correspondence. (The Translator’s Invisibility 18)

If we accept the inherent truth of this statement, then an analytic point of view
with the aim of measuring a translation’s absolute fidelity to the source text would
necessarily be an exercise in futility and would not present any real results of interest to
those who study translation. Rather, Venuti explains, the aim of a reading is not to
ascertain whether or not a translation is faithful to the source text “but rather to uncover
the canons of accuracy by which it is produced and judged [...]. This does not mean that
translation is forever banished to the realm of freedom or error, but that canons of
accuracy are culturally specific and historically variable” (37). Venuti thus advocates
what he terms a “historicist” approach to evaluating translations “that aims to situate
canons of accuracy in their specific cultural moments” (38). Venuti’s “canons of
accuracy” in many way mirror Berman’s concept of the “position traductive” of the
translator, for both insist on the necessarily historical nature of any translation and its relationship to the cultural context in which it was produced. In accordance with Venuti’s insistence on the cultural specificity of any translation, I therefore take care to place my own analysis within a cultural context and consider the original reception of the source text at its publication in both the source and target cultures.

A large part of the consideration of both the source text’s and the translation’s reception stems from the gendered roles women played in the literary world and, in particular, their relationship to both authorship and translation. Sherry Simon asserts that gender differences are present within practices of translation “in the specific social and historical forms through which women have understood and enacted their writing activities” (Gender in Translation 2). In combination with Berman’s methodology, with its emphasis on the contingent status of fidelity in translation and the importance of understanding the approach and viewpoint of the translator, Simon’s awareness of the role of gender in the practice of translation provides an important tool that can only enrich my analysis of the translations I undertake. Simon, too, points to the deficiencies of traditional understandings of fidelity in translation and proffers a critical perspective similar to that of Berman and Venuti, in which fidelity is a relative concept. But, going further than either of these two critics, she also puts forth the notion that along with the questioning of perceptions of fidelity, we must pay greater attention to the figure of the translator in order to arrive at a more complete understanding of their project. She states that

Fidelity can only be understood if we take a new look at the identity of translating subjects and their enlarged area of responsibility as signatories of
“doubly authored” documents. At the same time, a whole nexus of assumptions around issues of authority and agency come to be challenged. When meaning is no longer a hidden truth to be “discovered,” but a set of discursive conditions to be “re-created,” the work of the translator acquires added dimensions. (13)

It seems to me that in this instance Simon goes further than Berman, with his emphasis on the importance of the “position traductive”. She considers not only the individual situation of the translator, but their status as authors and urges us not to deny the importance of fidelity, but to rethink its very meaning in order to arrive at a more complete definition of the term, a definition that does not strive to be absolute and all-encompassing, but one that recognizes its own contingent status. In so doing, the critic of translation will be able to perform a much more meaningful analysis and place the concept of fidelity within a culturally determined construct.

Simon also points out the ways in which the study of translation intersects with other forms of literary creation. She states that the study of translation “allows us to investigate the historically diverse points where gendered social roles intersect with gendered writing roles” and goes on to further highlight the importance of considering all aspects of written production in conjunction with translation, noting that “the productions of women translators are to be studied for what they can tell us about their intervention in cultural and intellectual movements of their times, and for the ways in which they themselves construe their gendered identities as relevant” (42). For, particularly in the nineteenth century, women writers had to develop and deploy diverse writing strategies in order to engage in authorship, whether of translations or other works (Gubar 77). Therefore in women’s œuvres translations and other writings are closely entwined, and
this idea is particularly important with regard to my own work, given my analysis of the other forms of writing in which these translators engaged. As I intend to demonstrate, the concerns that I found in the other dimensions of their writings are very much present within their translations.

The inclusion of gender as a factor in my analysis will, as I have mentioned, only serve to enrich my application of Berman’s methodology and allow me to arrive at a more complete comprehension of the ideology and process behind these translations. With a firm understanding of the methodology I propose to follow and the factors that influence my reading of these translations, I will now lay out the manner in which I propose to study these texts. Because of the constraints of space, there is, unfortunately, not enough room to analyze either the entire translation of Jane Eyre or the collection of Bret Harte short stories in their entirety. This does not mean, though, that I have not read each of these works as a whole; indeed, as outlined by Berman, the consideration of each work as a complete text is essential. From my more global reading, I then, in the case of the short story collection, select two of the stories and, in the case of Jane Eyre, select several chapters that I consider representative of the larger themes I uncover in each translation. I analyze each passage in detail and summarize the larger issues that arise and synthesize them with the issues I have already discussed in my previous chapters.

5.2 Thérèse Bentzon’s Re-imagining of Bret Harte’s American West

Before I begin my analysis of Bentzon’s Harte translations, I will first explain several of the concepts I deal with in depth in this section. One of the most immediate considerations in Harte’s short stories in any translation is the portrayal of the western
dialect spoken by all of the characters. How, if at all, does Bentzon portray this dialect in
her translations? If it is not through altering standard French, then how does she portray
the non-standard English of Harte’s characters? I therefore explore the ways in which
Bentzon chooses to represent, or not, this dialect and to evoke the American West.
Secondly, and in direct relation to the issue of portraying Western dialect, I focus on
Bentzon’s use of notes in her translations: how often does she use this device and what
purpose does it serve within the text as a whole? Are they explanatory notes about
American customs or institutions that would be unfamiliar to her French readers? Would
her translation be legible without these notes? And, third, I examine Bentzon’s treatment
of the female characters in Harte’s text: how does Bentzon interpret and transmit Harte’s
portrayal of female characters? In what way does she alter their presentation in the text?
Through the lens of these topics, our understanding of Bentzon’s method of translating is
illuminated and we are thus more informed on her positions on textual creation and
authorship. Because I cannot treat each story in the Bentzon’s collection of translations
in the given space, I instead focus on two of the translations: “The Outcasts of Poker
Flat” and “Miggles.” Both stories were originally published in the California literary
journal Overland Monthly in 1869, and then in book form, along with other Harte short
stories, as The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Sketches in 1870; Bentzon’s translation
of this collection, published in 1873, was entitled Récits californiens (Scharnhost 45, 49).
I chose these stories in particular because of several criteria, including length, diversity of
characters, and focus on women’s places in Western society. Rather than analyze each
story one by one, I follow a thematic analysis in order to maintain a sense of continuity
and connection between the two translations.
Bret Harte’s stories take place in the American West during the time of the gold rush and predominantly deal with miners, cowboys, gamblers, and other iconic figures of the late nineteenth-century American frontier. Because of his focus, his stories primarily depict male protagonists, though women characters are often featured as well, albeit in more limited roles. Mirroring the social mores of the time, Harte’s female characters are largely either prostitutes or wives and thus confined to the brothel or the domestic world. In both roles, the females “seem largely intended to reaffirm the Western male’s own (hetero)sexuality” (Stevens 572-73). The two stories that examine reflect this division of female roles: in both of them, the females are defined by their places as either prostitutes, wives, or wives to be. As I noted in Chapter Four, in her preface to the translation of A Country Doctor, Bentzon is mainly concerned with reclaiming a greater variety of professional and social roles both for women writers and for the characters they create. The limited roles proscribed for women in Harte’s fiction, then, present a direct contrast to Bentzon’s own views on women who write and appear in fiction. This conflicting portrayal of women’s roles is of particular interest in an examination of how Bentzon translates the females in Harte’s stories.

The first text that I examine, “The Outcasts of Poker Flat” tells the story of a group of citizens expelled from the town of Poker Flat for public immorality—a gambler, a thief, and two prostitutes—who meet up with a young couple who are eloping to Poker Flat. A blizzard stops their progress and after several days of taking shelter, they die on the road. I focus my analysis on the depiction of the younger prostitute, the Duchess, and the young fiancée on her way to Poker Flat, Piney or Phina, as she is called in Bentzon’s translation, in order to demonstrate the divergent treatment in Bentzon’s
translation as opposed to the source text. As I demonstrate, Bentzon remains largely faithful to Harte’s story in most definitions of the word: she does not change any major, or for that matter minor, plot points, she neither adds any new elements to the story nor suppresses any that were there previously. At the same time, Bentzon carefully manipulates Harte’s vocabulary in order to subtly change the ways in which certain characters are portrayed by the narrative voice. Harte’s continuous use of Western dialect, moreover, is inevitably lost in this translation and thus Bentzon, as we shall see, comes up with several strategies in order to compensate for this loss.

As the story opens, the narrator explains the reason for each character’s expulsion from the town, in the case of the women noting that “it is but due to the sex, however, to state that their impropriety was professional, and it was only in such easily established standards of evil that Poker Flat ventured to sit in judgment” (112). The professional impropriety to which the narrator refers is, of course, prostitution, yet the word is never mentioned in the story and the women’s profession is only evoked indirectly. The narrator, moreover, is making it very clear with his expression “easily established standards of evil” that he is sitting more heavily in judgment of the town than those forced to leave it. Bentzon translates this passage as “je dois au beau sexe d’ajouter qu’elles avaient fait de l’immoralité une profession, ce qui laissait carte blanche à la justice de Poker Flat” (154). Bentzon retains Harte’s reticence in not directly mentioning these women’s careers, yet also changes the tenor of his description somewhat with her decision to translate “impropriety” as “immoralité.” This alteration could be construed as a harsher judgment upon these women and their profession, making it even clearer that they were indeed an undesirable moral element in Poker Flat. Yet, alternatively, this
change may be interpreted as a more direct way with which to evoke their profession while still maintaining Harte’s allusion, the word “immoralité” leaving no doubt as to their manner of employment. The alteration from “impropriety” to “immoralité” thus serves the double function of initially making the judgment against the women of Poker Flat more morally acceptable to the reader, for the narrator implies that they are in the wrong, and clearer, because their careers as prostitutes are more directly invoked, at the possible expense of creating a stronger negative association with prostitutes. Bentzon also alters Harte’s narrative voice slightly in this sentence. In the source text, the narrator is clearly sitting in judgment more on the town than on the prostitutes, noting that their definition of evil was limited to public perception, whereas Bentzon’s translation is more ambiguous; her translation professes no explicit opinion as to the justice, or lack thereof, of the women’s expulsion from Poker Flat. Bentzon also alters the text and adds “je” at the beginning of the sentence, perhaps to mark more explicitly that the narrator is from Poker Flat and thus has personal knowledge of the situation and character of those who were expelled. Yet, as her translation will make clear, her view of these women is more complex and sympathetic than it initially seems to be.

As the travelers leave Poker Flat they meet up with a young couple from a neighboring town who are eloping to Poker Flat because the father of the young woman, Piney/Phina, will not give her permission to marry Tom Simson. In the original text, the character’s name is Piney Woods, yet Bentzon negates this by rechristening her as Phina. Although this does not conserve Harte’s play on words, it also introduces a new one, for Phina could very well be a nickname for Seraphina, derived from the word “seraphim.” Bentzon’s name change, then, only serves to increase the character’s association with
angelic behavior and contrast her more sharply with the prostitutes. Just as Bentzon slightly alters our initial introduction to the prostitutes, she also creates a differing impression of the young fiancée than that which we receive in the source text. Harte makes it eminently clear that the lovers’ decision to run off together was mutual: Tom explains that “he had run away with Piney Woods” (115). Bentzon translates this passage as “il enlevait Phina Woods” (159), thus shifting all the blame to Tom and absolving Piney/Phina and preserving her innocence and lack of culpability in the situation. This change also creates a parallel between Phina and the prostitutes, who were run out of town forcibly, though with the notable difference that the prostitutes had to leave for immorality, while Phina left to preserve her morality through marriage. All of the women, then, are in a similar circumstance in Bentzon’s translation: they did not decide to leave their respective towns, but were rather forced into it in both cases. The prostitutes and the innocent young girl are therefore at the same time both opposite and complementary characters. Bentzon’s changes function as a commentary on the overall lack of choices for women and the ways in which they must submit to fate in the form of men’s life choices for them, whatever their station in life. It also creates a bond between the seemingly opposing young innocent and the prostitute, a bond that suggests their ultimate similarities. As I mention above, in Harte’s fictional West, the only functions allowable to women are as either wives or prostitutes; Bentzon takes this commentary on women’s roles one step further by emphasizing in her translation the lack of choice that leads to their becoming one or the other and their dependence on men in both roles.

Bentzon’s narrator once again emphasizes Phina’s innocence and lack of agency more than Harte’s by writing that, upon meeting the group expelled from Poker Flat, she
emerges from her hiding place “en baissant les yeux” (160), while the Piney in Harte’s
text simply “rode to the side of her lover” (115) with no display of maidenly modesty.
Phina’s inability to meet the eyes of her new traveling companions in Bentzon’s text
reinforces her passivity and a strict adhesion to traditional gender roles not present in
Harte’s original text. Bentzon’s insistence on Phina’s innocence serves again to
juxtapose her to the two prostitutes of Poker Flat: while she represents innocence and
maidenly purity, the prostitutes are morally indefensible and, as I indicated earlier,
Bentzon’s translation quasi-justifies their expulsion from town. Yet, to conclude that
Bentzon made these changes in order to make both Phina and the prostitutes
more closely to gender norms would, at this point, be a premature conclusion. As we
shall see with a continued analysis of Bentzon’s portrayal of the female characters of
“The Outcasts of Poker Flat,” her aim is none so simplistic, but rather part of a more
complicated commentary on gender and agency.

Bentzon’s translation also inflates the differences between Phina and the
prostitutes through changes in vocabulary; in Harte’s text, “Piney slept beside her frailer
sisters as sweetly as though attended by celestial guardians” (117), while in Bentzon’s
translation “le sommeil de Phina n’eût pas été plus pur si au lieu de deux pécheresses
publiques elle eût senti à ses côtés deux anges gardiens” (163). Harte’s “frailer sisters”
directly evokes a kinship between Piney and the two prostitutes and suggests that despite
their surface differences, they are essentially similar in nature. Bentzon, on the other
hand, in changing the reference to “péchêresses publiques” instead emphasizes the
differences between Phina and the prostitutes: they are not sisters, frail or otherwise, but
undisputed sinners with nothing in common with the young girl. This contrast is made
even sharper by referring to “anges gardiens” instead of “celestial guardians”: the image of prostitutes as angels only calls to mind the decidedly non-angelic reasons for their expulsion from Poker Flat. Her alteration of these two key terms serves to play up the absurdity inherent in considering prostitutes the angelic ones in this relationship, as well as Phina’s innocence.

Bentzon’s translation aims to juxtapose the virtuous Phina with the immoral prostitutes, while Harte’s text tends to downplay the differences between them and instead emphasize that which draws them together. The ending of the story, though, illuminates the reasons for Bentzon’s approach and makes it clear that her tendency to judge the prostitutes harshly was not done out of a need to establish moral correctness, but rather for a literary purpose of her own. At the story’s end, the men have gone through the blizzard seeking help and the two young women, Duchess the prostitute and Piney/Phina the virgin, are left on their own in the cabin in the woods with neither supplies nor wood to start a fire. The two women know that they are destined to die and, as Harte tells us, “and so reclining, the younger and purer pillowing the head of her soiled sister upon her virgin breast, they fell asleep” (122). Once again, Harte’s use of the term “soiled sister” evokes the kinship of two women, despite their differences. In her translation, Bentzon chooses for the first time to conserve this sense of kinship; contrary to the last instance in which she chose to translate “frailer sister” as “pécheresse publique,” Bentzon translates the sentence thusly: “Couchées toutes deux ainsi, la plus jeune et la plus pure soutenant le front de sa soeur déchue sur son sein virginal, elles s’endormirent” (172). Now, while “soeur déchue” is much closer in equivalence to “soiled sister” than Bentzon’s previous translation of a similar phrase, there is still, I
believe, a telling difference: the word “déchue” does not mean soiled exactly, but rather “fallen” and thus evokes the idea of an “ange déchu” or fallen angel. As I noted above, Bentzon already changed one Harte reference from “celestial guardians” into “anges gardiens,” and thus I consider it no accident that she once again, though this time indirectly, mentions an angel referring to a prostitute. This rhetoric subverts her earlier, and harsher, moral judgment. Moreover, on the last page of this story, she for the first time chooses to preserve the appellation of sister/sœur in describing the Duchess’s relationship with Phina/Piney.

And, indeed, in the final description of the two young women’s deaths, Bentzon follows Harte’s text very closely. Harte writes “when pitying fingers brushed the snow from their wan faces, you could scarcely have told from the equal peace that dwelt upon them which was she that had sinned” (122). Bentzon translates this passage as “lorsque des mains compatissantes essuyèrent la neige que les couvrait, il eût été difficile de dire, tant leurs pâles visages exprimaient de paix, laquelle de ces deux femmes avait été une pécheresse” (173). After having juxtaposed the differences between the two women throughout the story, Bentzon in the end grants them the same equivalence that Harte had emphasized from the very outset. Polarizing the two women makes the end reveal even more bluntly the lack of real differences between them, and thus the falsity of the moral judgment Poker Flat imposed on the Duchess and the other expelled members of the town. Interestingly enough, while Bentzon seems to have been working at cross purposes with the author, in particular in depicting the two women, she ultimately leads us towards the same conclusion as Harte, by using the literary device of contrast rather than comparison in order to make the same point.
Bentzon’s method of contrasting the two women sharply only to assimilate them in the end makes the comparison, and by extension the judgment on the moral hypocrisy of Poker Flat, even stronger than Harte’s. Indeed, Bentzon’s narrator seems to follow a similar path to the townspeople who first harshly judge and then come to change their opinion of the Duchess: both her narrator and townspeople first have no problem with professing judgment on the Duchess and her companions, yet ultimately withhold judgment in the end upon the discovery of her and Phina’s dead bodies, acknowledging the lack of difference between the two young women in death. Harte’s narrator, on the other hand, maintains a critical distance throughout the story and cannot be identified with the residents of Poker Flat, for from the beginning he judges their actions more than the prostitute’s. This narrator is omniscient and has a direct knowledge of what has and will take place in the story, whereas Bentzon’s narrator shows no such prior knowledge. Bentzon’s choice to ally her narrator with the people of Poker Flat reinforces both the universality of their negative judgment of the prostitutes and the fallacy of such a judgment. It also constitutes more of a critique on the options available to women in the West than Harte’s version by showing both women—the Duchess and Phina—constrained to leave their respective towns due to the decisions of a man or of men and suffering and dying for these decisions.

The Harte short story “Miggins” also demonstrates similar changes on Bentzon’s part in the treatment of female characters. “Miggins” tells the story of a group of stagecoach travelers who cannot continue along their route because of heavy rains and who are advised to take shelter with an unknown character named Miggins. To their surprise, they discover not only that Miggins is a young woman, but that she is a former
prostitute who now lives a life of isolation in the middle of the wilderness tending a paralyzed former client, Jim, who can no longer care for himself. This story in many ways demonstrates an almost complete breakdown of gender stereotypes, for Miggles, in her men’s garb, living basically alone in the wilderness and being the household’s sole breadwinner, “will subvert not only the stereotypical female/feminine identities reproduced by the narrator but also the male/masculine identity” (Stevens 577). As we shall see through Bentzon’s translation, she does not radically depart from Harte’s depiction of Miggles, yet chooses to alter the voice of the narrator himself (for it is made clear in the story that the narrator is a man) in order to reflect a different opinion of women that falls into less stereotypical and more nuanced territory.

Bentzon’s narrator is far less sure than Harte’s of the proper behavior for a woman and the ways in which men regulate, or should regulate, women’s behavior. In Harte’s text, Miggles’s dinnertime conversation is charming yet inappropriate for a woman, for “at times she employed expletives the use of which had generally been yielded to our sex” (“Miggles” 160). This statement indicates several things: first of all, the inclusion of “generally” implies that there are still some women who do employ these inappropriate terms, and one can certainly form an opinion on what kind of women would continue to use them in spite of typical feminine propriety. Secondly, the fact that the narrator says that the use of the delicate expressions “had been yielded to our sex” indicates that women, or at least socially correct women, willingly decided not to use such words and thus the restriction of “rough language” to men, was if not introduced, at least accepted and supported by women. Harte’s narrator therefore sees it as a case of women restricting their own access to language. Bentzon’s translation, on the other hand,
creates a different impression; she states that “elle employait des expressions dont notre sexe se réserve généralement l’usage” (186). Keeping in mind that the narrator is masculine, this gives quite a different impression than the statement in the source text. Though the reflexive verb is ambiguous, it gives the impression that it was not women who decided it was improper for them to use certain expressions and words, but rather that men made and enforced this decision. Moreover, the use of “généralement” is not equivalent to Harte’s use of “generally,” since Bentzon’s translation implies that it is men, not women, who have the power to decide who these exceptions are; one can assume that certain expressions are permissible in the mouth of a prostitute, but not so in the case of a proper wife. Thus in Bentzon’s version of this sentence women have neither the agency nor the desire to police their own language: it is, rather, men who have restricted women’s access to certain words and who regulate who can and cannot use “men’s language”. Bentzon, then, leads Harte’s narrator in a new direction that is, perhaps, also a statement on men’s restrictions of women’s access to language in a variety of forms, including writing in certain areas.

Bentzon also changes the commentary of Harte’s narrator on women in another instance; once more commenting on Miggles’s manners and conversation, Harte’s narrator observes that “her very frankness suggested a perfect sexual equality that was cruelly humiliating to the younger members of our party” (161). Bentzon’s narrator, on the other hand, states that “sa franchise et sa liberté d’esprit, égales avec tous, humiliait cruellement les plus jeunes de notre bande” (187). By taking out Harte’s specific mention of sexual liberty and referring simply to liberty in general, Bentzon enlarges the areas of Miggles’s differences from other women: the translation implies not only that
Miggles’s sexual mores are freer than other women’s, but that in all ways she is freer and more honest, for she does not have to worry about public opinion. Thus, by removing the “sexual equality” from the equation and referring more broadly to “sa franchise et sa liberté d’esprit,” Bentzon removes any blame or moral opprobrium that could be placed upon Miggles for being sexually liberated and instead celebrates her freedom as a positive trait. Therefore, while it might be understandable to readers that the younger members of the group, presumably men, would be embarrassed by her sexual freedom, so that the reader could sympathize with their humiliation, in Bentzon’s version the blame is on them for being humiliated by a more general freedom and sense of equality.

There is one further element to Bentzon’s translation that leads me to discern that her narrator has a less stereotypical vision of women than Harte’s and thus that Bentzon was aware of Harte’s masculine voice and sought to alter it in her own text. When Miggles is sharing her story with the travelers taking shelter at her home, Harte’s narrator explains “with a woman’s intuitive tact and poetry, she had, as she spoke, slowly shifted her position” (163), whereas in Bentzon’s translation this first part of the sentence is completely omitted; there is no mention of a woman’s inherent intuition, tact, or poetry. This is mostly striking because this is, on the whole, a very faithful translation free of omissions on the translator’s part, with any changes being limited to the small turns of phrase I have already noted. Thus, while Bentzon certainly showed a willingness to play with Harte’s words in her own translation, she did not make it a practice to either take sections out of his stories or to add sections into his stories. Why, then would Bentzon delete this particular part of the sentence? It is very likely that she chose to do so because of the banal and stereotypical opinion expressed in that phrase: just as Harte’s narrator
believes that women restrict themselves from using certain language without seeing that it was, in reality, men who restrict them, he cannot perceive the commonplace stereotype of women’s intuition for what it is and instead makes it an important feature of Miggles’s character that gains her the sympathy of both her male interlocutors and the story’s. Bentzon, though, rejects such a romantic portrayal of Miggles as she recounts the story of her life of prostitution and then as the unmarried companion to the paralyzed Jim, depicting her in a more realistic light, not as naturally graceful and intuitive because of her gender. Her rejection of this idealized vision implicates a refusal to fall back on cultural myths about the inherent nature of woman.

As I have demonstrated, while Bentzon does not add or subtract any sections to or from Harte’s stories, with this one exception, she does play with his vocabulary and phrasing, especially as it pertains to the portrayal of female characters. In “The Outcasts of Poker Flat,” Bentzon’s narrator gives a differently nuanced representation of both the innocent young woman and the prostitutes in an interpretation that strengthens the narrative condemnation of the townspeople of Poker Flat and questions the wisdom of their morality; in “Miggles” her version of the several “truths” spoken by the narrator about women’s nature and relationship to language leads not to an acceptance of conventional wisdom, but to a questioning of it. Harte’s stories were known in large part for their popularization of certain types who were to become stock figures in Western literature, such as, in the case of female characters, the fallen woman and the innocent (Scharnhost 43). Bentzon’s rejection of Harte’s idealized and limited view of female characters recalls Hayes’ notion of a “gynocentric” tradition of translation. Though Hayes uses this term to refer specifically to women translating women, I propose that
Bentzon, too, in her Harte translation is practicing a gynocentric vision of translation, for her focus on changing the depiction of female characters and masculine reaction to them is based upon her own vision of expanded roles for women in literature. Bentzon’s translation systematically questions Harte’s stock female characters and presents a more nuanced view of their realities in a largely masculine society that has taken it upon itself to define and control both their behaviors and their access to language.

The second part of my analysis of Bentzon’s Harte translation is devoted to an examination of her portrayal of the Western dialect used by Harte’s characters. Almost all, if not all, of Harte’s characters speak a non-standard English meant to be representative of the American West; the challenge remains of how, then, to represent this non-standard language in translation and maintain a sense of being in the West. Margaret Lesser claims that French translators of the nineteenth century were incapable of representing non-standard dialects because of a lack of comprehension of the meaning and purpose of these manners of speaking, and that their translations suffered as a result (114, 116). As I shall demonstrate, however, Bentzon found a number of strategies with which to represent Harte’s non-standard English and maintain the sense of difference and foreignness that many American readers from the Eastern states must have felt when reading Harte’s stories. She does so through changing Harte’s imagery, including original English words in her translation, and employing footnotes. While such strategies cannot fully compensate for the loss of dialect, they resist the assimilation of Bentzon’s translation with standardized French and create a sense of cultural difference and specificity.
In no way does Bentzon attempt to imitate the Western dialect English in her translation through the use of non-standard French; she instead tries to convey the Western setting through other means, one of which is leaving certain words in English with no attempt to explain their meaning. In “The Outcasts of Poker Flat,” Harte informs the readers that one of the outcasts, Uncle Billy, was expelled from the town because he was “a suspected sluice-robber” (113). Bentzon translates this as “soupçonné de vol de sluice” (155, emphasis in original), thereby keeping the particularly Western image (sluicing was a procedure used in searching for gold), and sacrificing meaning for her French readers, for the word sluices would have no connotations for speakers of French. Thus, Bentzon’s italics indicate an unfamiliar use of a familiar word, and, with no explanation, leads the reader to believe that it refers to a particularly Western and/or American procedure, though leaving doubt as to what exactly. Bentzon follows a similar path with the translation of the word canyon, which she renders as “Cañon” (161), both capitalized and italicized. Cañon did not enter the dictionary of the Académie Française until the 8th edition of 1932-35 as “une Gorge ou un ravin étroit dans une chaîne de montagnes.” At the time of Bentzon’s employment of the word in her translation, then, it was not considered standard French, but rather a more exotic term, derived from the Spanish, and used almost exclusively in reference to the geography of the Americas. This may indicate why she chose to capitalize and italicize it, thus highlighting its exoticism and representation of a purely American natural phenomenon. Therefore, while Bentzon did not attempt to transfer American Western dialect into French, her choice of conserving several unfamiliar words was essential in representing a terrain that was unknown to her French public and contributed to a particularly Western feel in her
translations. This choice also highlights translation’s role in linguistic innovation, and it was uses such as Bentzon’s that paved the way for the inclusion of cañon in the dictionary.  

In addition to simply conserving several English terms without explanation, Bentzon made use of footnotes on two occasions in the translation of “The Outcasts of Poker Flat” in order to clarify other terms that she felt would have been lost in translation. One of the characters in Harte’s text explains that “when a man gets a streak of luck—nigger-luck—he don’t get tired” (119). Bentzon translates this as “quand un homme a une chance de nègre, il ne se fatigue jamais,” pointing out in a footnote that “[n]iggerluck signifie en slang bonne chance, on ne sait trop pourquoi, à moins que ce ne soit l’équivalent de notre chance d’ivrogne. Le nègre passe en effet pour pouvoir tomber du haut d’une maison sur la tête impunément” (167). Clearly, given her explanation, Bentzon could simply have translated this expression as “chance d’ivrogne,” yet instead retained the original term. Still, she was evidently concerned about the comprehension of this phrase, and therefore saw the need to include a note. Her preservation of the original wording, even though it necessitated a footnote, indicates that Bentzon was more concerned with conserving the original, particularly Western flavor of the writing than with finding exact equivalents to replace the unfamiliar phrases. The doubt that she registers as to the exact equivalence of the two expressions shows that she herself is not convinced as to their equal register and thus does not uncategorically believe that equivalences between languages can be located and employed in translations. As I have

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8 Bentzon’s name does actually figure in the Dictionnaire étymologique et historique des anglicismes for an entry under the word “creek,” (68) though not from this collection, but from her travelogue Les Américaines chez elles.
demonstrated in reference to Berman and Venuti in particular, questioning the idea of fidelity is one of the main tenets of translation theory in the twentieth century, and Bentzon’s own doubts demonstrate that this concern did, indeed, predate modern theorists and play a part in earlier translations. To borrow a term from Venuti, Bentzon remains faithful to the text according to the “canons of accuracy” (38) governing Harte’s source text, rather than using language more familiar to her readers that would bring the text to approach their standards and their own “canons of accuracy”.

Bentzon’s second footnote in the text comes at the end of the narrative, when she uses the word “couteau” (173) as a translation for bowie-knife in Harte’s text, and then proceeds to indicate “Bowie-knife” in her footnote. Why would she translate the term simply as “couteau” and then give her readers a footnote with the exact term, yet with no explanation as to the origins or meaning of that term? It might seem, given her previous footnotes, that the more logical solution would be to translate the term directly and then explain what, exactly, a bowie knife is to her readers. Upon more thought, one cannot establish an equivalence between the two situations for several reasons. First of all, the words in the expression “nigger luck” can both be translated directly into French, whereas bowie, stemming as it does from the proper name of an American folk hero, does not have any possible translation into French. Secondly, even though she was not exactly sure of the meaning of the expression, Bentzon was able to make an educated guess as to the meaning of “nigger luck” and to find a similar French expression to make the footnote comparison for her readers. It is, however, highly likely that she was not familiar with the term “bowie knife” or the story behind its name and was unable to supply her readers with any more information. It is more logical that she would choose
to stray from her previous translation strategy and give just a plain translation of the word “couteau.” At the same time, adding the footnote clarifying the term as “Bowie-knife” demonstrates her awareness that her own translation does indeed lose something of the term’s specificity to the culture of the American West, and thus in this way attempts to remedy it.

Bentzon also uses a footnote on one occasion in “Miggles” in a similar circumstance as the two footnotes in “The Outcasts of Poker Flat.” When Miggles speaks of living on her “ranch” (164) Bentzon conserves this term in her translation, remarking in a footnote that the word is “dérivé de l’espagnol pour ferme” (192). Now, knowing that “ranch” was essentially an equivalent to “farm,” Bentzon could very well have substituted the word “ferme” in her text with no great loss of meaning. She also knew, however, that while meaning would not be lost, the particular context of the story would be sacrificed, for a “ranch” was indeed Western terminology and would never be used to refer to a French establishment of the same nature. Both her preservation of the original word and her explanatory footnote demonstrate her awareness that “translation is always a shift, not between two languages, but between two cultures” and that “a translator must always take into account rules that are not strictly linguistic, but, broadly speaking, cultural” (Eco, *Experiences in Translation* 17). Accordingly, her decision to keep the original word and to explain it with a footnote corresponds to the strategy she also used in “The Outcasts of Poker Flat” in order to compensate for the loss of terminology and still evoke the setting of the stories in an authentic way.

In certain instances, Bentzon slightly alters Harte’s imagery in ways that more fully evoke the particularly Western context of the stories and, in so doing, makes up for
the loss suffered by the inability to translate the dialect into French. In the first few sentences of “Miggles,” Harte describes the different passengers on the stagecoach, saying of one sleeping passenger that he was “a limp, helpless looking object, as if he had hanged himself and been cut down too late” (155). Bentzon conserves this image of a hanged man, yet alters it to read, “il formait ainsi un objet flasque et informe semblable à un pendu détaché du gibet” (175). Thus, while the basic imagery is the same, Bentzon changes it from a man who hanged himself to a man who was hanged on a gallows. I find this difference significant in that frontier justice and lynchings were a large part of the mythology of the American West, which means that Bentzon’s version was a culturally specific one designed to place the reader solidly in a certain geographical area and cultural climate. This alteration was therefore part of Bentzon’s program to deflect the loss of dialect and reflect the world in which these stories took place.

Bentzon also changes one more image at the beginning of this story, once again in reference to the description of the stagecoach passengers. Harte’s narrator informs his readers that one of the passengers is “[t]he Washoe traveler” (155), while Bentzon chooses to translate this as “le voyageur virginien” (176). There are several reasons why Bentzon could have chosen to do so. First of all, while Washoe, a county in Nevada, was well known as a boomtown during the gold rush, it is highly unlikely that the fact would be familiar to French readers. Thus, whereas American readers would understand the reference to a Western city, it would be lost on French readers. Bentzon’s decision to change from Washoe to Virginia was therefore based on possible comprehensibility to her French readers, yet, at the same time, her decision to replace it with another American
place name conserves the regional flavor of Harte’s work and its specifically American cultural setting.

While Bentzon did not attempt to incorporate any type of dialect into her works to represent the Western dialect present in Bret Harte’s short stories, she was by no means ignorant of the effects of such dialect on her readers and instead chose alternative ways in which to represent the “otherness” of the culture of the American West to her French readers. The various strategies that she employed demonstrate her awareness of the possible diminishing of this Western “flavor” in her translations and her commitment to the importance of preserving this sense of difference and foreignness in her own work. While there certainly was loss in the failure to represent Western dialects, Bentzon mitigated it through her use of other strategies that aimed to represent this different culture. Furthermore, Harte’s own portrayal of Western dialect was perhaps not as authentic as he attempted to portray it. He was, in fact, writing more for audiences in the East and in Europe, with romanticized ideas of the Gold Rush and Western culture, than for those who actually lived in these areas, and other Western authors later rejected his mode of portraying the West for a more truthful approach (Scharnhost 42-43, 147). Thus, while Bentzon certainly lost something of the image of the West Harte was trying to portray, she did not lose authenticity as much as could be feared and, in fact, her attempts at compensating for the lack of Western dialect are no more artificial than Harte’s dialect itself in many cases.

In her short preface to *Récits californiens*, Bentzon explicitly marks both her concerns with women’s roles in Harte’s fiction and her translation of Western dialect. She readily admits that in Harte’s fiction, as in the West itself, “l’élément féminin” was
“trop rare” (7-8). Nevertheless, she finds much to laud in his portrayal of Miggles, “la belle pécheresse de Marysville qui se transforme soudain, par un élan de cœur héroïque, en ermite et en garde-malade” (6). As I have demonstrated, her translation tended to play up this element while downplaying stereotypical versions of femininity, and therefore the concerns she expresses here are irretrievably linked to her translation style. Bentzon also brings up the issue of slang and dialect in her preface. She refers to Harte’s characters’ manner of speaking as “slang intraduisible” (“Préface” 2), which would seem to indicate that she did not find it possible to translate Harte’s words, yet, as we have seen, she did attempt to render this slang. In order to do this, Bentzon writes, “nous avons essayé, en traduisant, de conserver cette saveur de terroir dont on fait tant de cas en Amérique” (8, emphasis in original). Thus, all while acknowledging that her translation would not necessarily capture every nuance of the particularly American speech and expressions, Bentzon asserts her effort to do so. This effort did not consist in trying to find equivalent expressions or dialects in French, but rather in bringing a sense of the foreign to her translation, and thus to her readers.

Nor was Bentzon alone in an approach to translating that made extensive changes to terminology; as Judith P. Zinsser explains of the Marquise du Châtelet’s perspective on translating in the eighteenth century, Mme du Châtelet’s view of translators as entrepreneurs meant that translators “could make extensive changes to others’ texts in the process of transposing the words and phrases from one language and one culture to another” (609). Indeed, du Châtelet did not see herself as a secondary participant in her activities as a translator, “but rather created her own version of the text in her own style and presented her own as well as the author’s ideas” (608). Bentzon therefore follows in
much the same tradition through various stylistic and ideological changes to Harte’s text, all while following his own story very closely.

5.3 The Reconstruction of “Feminine” Values in Mme Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s Jane Eyre

I will now focus my analysis on Mme Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s translation of Jane Eyre, by Charlotte Brontë. As I demonstrate in Chapter Four, in the preface to her translation Lesbazeilles-Souvestre was largely concerned with demonstrating the appropriateness of Jane Eyre for a feminine writer and a feminine translator, as well as for a feminine audience. She rejected any elements of the novel that might have placed it outside the sphere of proper feminine productions and instead emphasized those qualities that allied it with stereotypical women’s literary creations. Lesbazeilles-Souvestre claims that the character of Jane Eyre triumphs due to “une intelligence avide, […] un cœur ardent, […] une âme puissante en un mot […] conquérant enfin sa place à force de constance et de courage” (i) in order to demonstrate that it is the character’s feminine qualities—her constance, her heart, and her feelings—that comprise the book’s literary and moral value. She uses this reasoning as a justification for both the author, in writing a book that is consistent with feminine qualities and values, and for the translator, in retransmitting this novel to a new audience. The main concern of the translator is therefore to place Jane Eyre and the translation itself firmly within the framework of feminine writing. The repeated affirmations of the feminine values of the text as the location of its greatest merits and the insistence on the act of fidelity that went into its translation shape the reception of the novel in France as a text that should not upset
notions of what is appropriate to women’s literary production. They serve as a self-justification on the part of the translator for this translation and its moral value, and thus for its suitability as an object of both reading and study for a woman in nineteenth-century France.

If Mme Lesbazeilles-Souvestre was largely concerned with establishing *Jane Eyre* as a proper feminine text in her preface to the translation, what of the translation itself? Does this concern come through within the translation as well, and does she alter the text in ways that make the plot and/or characters more in line with mainstream feminine values? As I shall demonstrate, while Mme Lesbazeilles-Souvestre did not alter the plot or major events in any substantive manner, she did enact subtle changes upon Brontë’s text in order to make the character of Jane Eyre conform more closely to the rules of feminine behavior and be more relatable to women readers; her Jane is thus less angry, less passionate, more timid, and more occupied with outwards perceptions of her behavior. The translator is also more concerned with the moral status of *Jane Eyre*: Lesbazeilles-Souvestre consistently places a greater focus on the morality of Jane’s choices and speech, with the effect of suppressing emotions that might be considered questionable to the detriment of her self-actualization. While these alterations do not affect the plot of the novel nor its outcome, they contribute to making *Jane Eyre*, the book and the character, more in line with feminine norms and less transgressive, thus protecting the author, the translator, and the readers from possible criticism.

Numerous critics have commented upon the problematic nature of classifying *Jane Eyre* as a feminine production, both at the time of the book’s publication and today. As I noted in Chapter Four, many reviewers at the time of the novel’s initial publication
were convinced that the author could not be a woman and, if she were, she would have to be “a woman pretty nearly unsexed” (Lorimer 116). As Caroline Levine points out, the unfeminine nature of her work itself may have led Charlotte Brontë, as well as her sisters, to publish under a male pseudonym, a strategy that seems to have worked, since most critics of Jane Eyre accepted it unquestioningly as a masculine work, most notably for its characteristics of “clarity, decisiveness, profanity, brutality, heat, passion, animal appetite, and slang” (276-77, 280). Such characteristics, then, would have been unfathomable for a female author. Yet, once the truth of Jane Eyre’s authorship was well-known, the problem remained: how to replace this book within a feminine tradition of writing and reading? For Lesbazeilles-Souvestre as a translator, the solution to this problem was to undertake a double program of omission and substitution in order to render Jane Eyre the novel and, in particular, Jane Eyre the character, more suitable for public feminine consumption. By omitting certain details about Jane and by substituting her own interpretation of Jane for Brontë’s, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre manages to take Jane Eyre from transgressive territory into more suitable terrain for her French female readership.

In this process of omission and substitution, one of Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s main goals is negating the overwhelming anger and even hatred that come through in the early portions of Jane Eyre, as the protagonist rebels against the cruel and unfair treatment she receives at Gateshead, the home of her relatives, and then at the charity school to which they send her, Lowood. This process effectively counteracts Jane’s hostility as a narrator, for, as critics have noted, the beginning of Jane Eyre presents a narrator who is angry with society at large and whose unhappiness is due to the actions of those who surround
her (Lane 199-201). Indeed, Jane Eyre begins with an authentically angry narrator who is largely incapable of dissembling or toning down her bitterness, as she will learn to do later in the novel (Vanden Bossche 47, 52). As Lesbazeilles-Souvestre lessens Jane’s anger and instead focuses on her confusion and sorrow at her unfair treatment, readers lose the sense of simmering fury that overlays the first portions of this novel. This change is significant in that upon publication, Jane’s unrelenting anger was one of the most shocking and repellant aspects of the book for many Victorian critics, for it struck them as an “anti-Christian refusal to accept the forms, customs, and standards of society” (Gilbert & Gubar 338). As I noted earlier, in her preface Lesbazeilles-Souvestre emphasized the positive qualities that aided Jane in overcoming the obstacles in her life—her courage, her constancy, her strong spirit. Clearly, then, anger does not fit within this described paradigm of feminine triumph over adversity and would instead undermine Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s careful listing of Jane’s feminine virtues. Working in line with contemporary criticisms of the work, her downgrading of Jane’s qualities is an attempt to negate the heroine’s most inappropriate character traits and have her conform more clearly to Christian ideals.

One strategy that Lesbazeilles-Souvestre used in order to make Jane Eyre more compliant to the ideals of feminine characters was that of omissions: while as a whole the text of the translation contains no great gaps in terms of plot points or events, there are, however, certain phrases that have been neglected in the translation with no attempt made to render them. As I shall demonstrate, these omissions are neither mistakes nor accidental exclusions, but part of Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s systematic program designed to transform the character of Jane Eyre into a more passive and feminine one.
Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s process of transforming Jane into a more appropriately feminine character begins early in the novel, when in the first chapter Jane is having a dispute with her cousin that ultimately leads to her being locked in a room as punishment. As Jane’s cousin attacks her, she describes her rage, saying that “he had closed with a desperate thing. I really saw in him a tyrant, a murderer” (5). Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s translation ignores this remark completely and instead concentrates on the damage done to Jane by her cousin. In passing over Jane’s passionate hatred of her cousin that leads her to compare him to a murderer and her description of herself as a “desperate thing” to concentrate instead on her suffering, she remakes Jane in the image of a victim with no thoughts of vengeance, one who accepts his abuse in a more passive manner. Again reinforcing the more active Jane in Brontë’s text, in the aftermath of the altercation one of the characters comments on Jane’s behavior in fighting back against her cousin, remarking, “Did ever anybody see such a picture of passion!” (5). Lesbazeilles-Souvestre chooses once more to suppress this line, which portrays Jane as standing up to her cousin, and instead leaves us with the impression that she was more passive in the encounter. It is telling that these are the only two omissions in the novel’s first chapter and that both smooth the rough edges of Jane’s character and neutralize her anger in order to portray her as a victim through no fault of her own. Such omissions are in keeping with Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s view of the book, as stated in her preface, as being much more imprinted with feminine values, such as constance and passivity, than masculine values, which would favor action. The portrait that emerges of Jane, then, is one in which she performs a more stereotypical version of passive femininity, instead of the passionate rebellion and fierce anger of the source text.
It is not only through omitting certain portions of the text that Lesbazeilles-Souvestre attempts to modify Jane’s character to be more normatively feminine, but also through changes in wording that do not alter the greater meaning of the text, but portray Jane in a softer light. When Jane is locked in the red room as a punishment for fighting back against her cousin, she contemplates her actions and her outcast status in her aunt’s household, for she has never before responded equally to her cousin’s abuse. She reflects “how all my brain was in tumult, and all my heart in insurrection! Yet in what darkness, what dense ignorance, was the mental battle fought! I could not answer the ceaseless inward question—why I thus suffered” (9, emphasis in original), a statement that reflects both her confusion at her treatment and her rebellion against continuing in such an unjust situation without attempting to fight back. Lesbazeilles-Souvestre, however, has Jane think “quel désordre dans mon esprit, quelle exaltation dans mon cœur, quelle obscurité, quelle ignorance dans cette lutte mentale! Je ne pouvais répondre à cette question de mon être intérieur: pourquoi étais-je destinée à souffrir ainsi?” (9). The changes in this passage, while minor, all contribute to making Jane less of an active force in her own life and more of a hapless victim of immutable circumstances. First of all, by switching from “insurrection” to “exaltation” Lesbazeilles-Souvestre effectively removes Jane’s feelings of rebellion at her situation. Thus, while she is stimulated at her first attempt to rebel against her treatment at the hands of her family, she is not declaring herself to be in a constant state of struggle and conflict, and thus anger, as she is in the source text. Moreover, though retaining the image of Jane’s feelings as a battle, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre omits the verb “to fight.” Through the suppression of this verb, Jane’s active struggle with her situation and desire to overcome it are left in the background, and the
reader is instead focused on Jane’s self-professed ignorance. In Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s translation, Jane’s interior question is no longer “ceaseless” and her suffering is portrayed as her destiny, which would be hopeless to try to change. Lesbazeilles-Souvestre also alters this passage by removing the emphasis on “why”—Jane’s question is not so pointed or passionate without this emphasis; once again her passion is downplayed to the profit of her feelings of injustice and helplessness. The Jane of the translation is therefore prey to an unhappy destiny, whereas Brontë’s Jane is actively challenging herself to better her situation. Because it is not presented as her destiny, it is, the text implies, in her power to change it.

In continuing her reflection on why she is treated so poorly by her relations, Jane concludes that “they were not bound to regard with affection a thing that could not sympathize with one amongst them; a heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities” (9). This statement is important in that it reflects the dehumanization of Jane in the eyes of her relatives, for it is made clear that they look at her as more of a beast than a human. Her use of the word “heterogeneous” to describe herself also reveals how she looks at herself within this household: as completely apart, different from them in every way possible and, once again, a “thing” who does not even have a proper place among them or anyone else. Lesbazeilles-Souvestre translates the passage: “ils n’étaient pas forcés de montrer de l’affection à un être qui ne pouvait sympathiser avec aucun d’entre eux, à un être extraordinaire qui différait d’eux par le tempérament, les capacités et les inclinations” (9). Changing Brontë’s “thing” to “être” humanizes Jane and partially erases the distance Brontë erects between her and her aunt and cousins; in this translation, she is no longer an outsider in
the household to the extent that she does not even consider herself as one human among them, but rather a thing, deprived of her human status by her overwhelming anger (Gilbert & Gubar 349). Moreover, changing “heterogeneous” to “extraordinaire” also contributes to the attempt to render Jane more human and less of an animalistic “thing”: by terming her extraordinary, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre is marking how and why she is special, whereas “heterogeneous” does not necessarily indicate that Jane is special in a positive way, but rather signifies difference, distance, and a lack of belonging. Lesbazeilles-Souvestre thus smooths over the too jarring portions of Jane’s anger and outcast status and transmits the impression of confusion and sadness rather than anger while simultaneously re-humanizing her.

From her stay at the school Lowood, Jane then moves on to her position as a governess at Thornfield, where she meets and subsequently falls in love with her employer, the enigmatic Mr. Rochester. In her translation of this portion of the novel, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre aims to undercut any of Jane’s actions or speeches that could be, and that had been by its contemporary critics, deemed morally questionable. Indeed, Jane, in both her actions and her speech, “disrupts orthodox conceptions of femininity” (C. Levine 283) through her refusal to conform to the standards of behavior for a young woman of her position. A large part of this may have stemmed from the ambiguous social position of the governess in Victorian England; governesses occupied a tenuous position in society, not quite servants, yet not quite socially acceptable, and Jane’s own position reaffirms this ambiguity (Gilbert & Gubar 349). As Esther Godfrey points out, the position of governess was itself a “subversion of gender, since governesses served as a hole in the invisible wall between working-class androgyny and middle-class gender
identities” (857). Jane’s assumption of this position is therefore a threat to her feminine identity and to her reception by critics and readers as normatively feminine.

Furthermore, the governess represented a sexual threat in her position in the household as a young, unmarried female, a threat that stemmed in large part from “the more explicit sexual threat […] wielded to the middle-class men they encountered” (Godfrey 859).

Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s translation neutralizes this danger by undercutting the force of Jane’s emotions and her power of speech to express them.

Lesbazeilles-Souvestre uses the strategy of omission and replacement to emphasize Jane’s femininity in her relationship with Mr. Rochester. Her translation alters Jane’s rapport with him in order to show greater trepidation, timidity, and uncertainty than is found in the source text. During one of her first encounters with Mr. Rochester, Jane describes his appearance as “grim” (121), a description that, while perhaps indicating some amount of caution in his presence on Jane’s part, does not imply that she is either nervous or frightened; rather, she is more interested in observing and describing his looks and behavior and does not record any fear. Lesbazeilles-Souvestre, on the other hand, substitutes “effrayant” (130) for grim, leaving the reader with the impression that Jane is scared of and intimidated by her employer. Whereas her reaction in the source text is an almost scientific observation and reconstruction of his appearance and actions, the reaction recorded in the translation suggests that Jane has, or will have, reason to fear Mr. Rochester, and thus moves away from a spirit of observation and toward what might be considered the more typical reaction of a sheltered young governess encountering her older, male employer for the first time.
In this same encounter between Jane and Mr. Rochester, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre continues with her strategy of omission and substitution in order to alter Jane’s behavior and render her more timid and submissive, and perhaps more in line with the stereotypical portrayal of a young governess who for the first time has left the school where she grew up. When Jane unthinkingly answers Mr. Rochester’s question of whether she finds him handsome with a quick negative, Mr. Rochester remarks:

there is something singular about you. […] you have the air of a little nonnette; quaint, quiet, grave, and simple, as you sit with your hands before you, and your eyes generally bent on the carpet (except, by the by, when they are directed piercingly to my face; as just now, for instance); and when one asks you a question, or makes a remark to which you are obliged to reply, you rap out a round rejoinder, which, if not blunt, is at least brusque. (122)

Contrary to her exterior, Mr. Rochester finds Jane honest and direct to a surprising degree, a character trait that belies her conservative and nun-like appearance. His inclusion of such qualifiers as “piercing” to describe her gaze and “blunt” and “brusque” to describe her manner of not simply answering, but “rapping out” a response signal Jane’s force and directness in contrast to her appearance. Lesbazeilles-Souvestre chooses to modify Mr. Rochester’s speech and instead writes:

savez-vous qu’il y a quelque chose d’étrange en vous ? […] vous avez l’air d’une petite nonne, avec vos manières tranquilles, graves et simples, vos yeux généralement baissés, excepté lorsqu’ils sont fixés sur moi, comme maintenant, par exemple; et quand on vous questionne ou quand on fait devant
vous une remarque qui vous force à parler, votre réponse est sinon impertinente, du moins brusque. (130)

Thus, while Jane’s eyes are still fixed on Mr. Rochester, they are not “piercingly” so and she simply answers questions rather than “rapping out a rejoinder,” thereby losing a great part of the frankness that makes her so unique in Mr. Rochester’s eyes. Moreover, in the translation Jane is “impertinent” rather than “blunt,” another substitution that smoothes over Jane’s perhaps unfeminine directness. These changes indicate that Lesbazeilles-Souvestre was invested in transforming Jane into a more submissive model of womanhood in accordance with her desire, expressed in the preface, to focus on the stereotypically feminine aspects of the novel to the detriment of what was not normatively appropriate for a woman writer or a woman character. Many critics of *Jane Eyre* have noted the heroine’s resistance to “the verbal and social niceties associated with femininity” (Godfrey 864), particularly in her encounters with Mr. Rochester, and so Brontë’s refusal to portray her as feminine characters of her class and social situation were typically portrayed. Lesbazeilles-Souvestre, then, was once again responding to the novel’s original critics with her softening of Jane’s interactions with Mr. Rochester. An additional change comes with altering the formulation of Mr. Rochester’s remark about Jane’s manner of answering a question: in the source text he says “when one asks you a question,” yet the translation uses the verb “questionner,” phrasing that places Mr. Rochester in the powerful position of an inquisitor: he questions her, and therefore she must respond.

I will use one more scene in order to illustrate Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s consistent pattern of omission and substitution with the aim of transforming the character of Jane
Eyre into a more suitably demure heroine: the scene in which Mr. Rochester declares his love for her and they become engaged. By continuing to alter Jane’s speech and actions, and those of Mr. Rochester, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre succeeds in muting both of their passions and in large part in suppressing any actions or feelings of Jane’s that could be interpreted as improper by her readership, particularly in her socially nebulous role as governess. Furthermore, in taking the focus off of Jane’s emotions, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre places it more firmly on the morality and social correctness of her actions.

When Jane first encounters Mr. Rochester walking in the garden, believing that he will soon marry another, she feels uncomfortable being alone with him and attempts to leave, though he persuades her to stay and she feels guilt and confusion at her own uneasiness:

“I became ashamed of feeling any confusion; the evil—if evil existent or prospective there was—seemed to lie only with me; his mind was unconscious and quiet” (236).

Jane’s shame and confusion lie not precisely with the situation itself—being alone in the garden with her employer—but in her unexpressed love for him, a love that she believes is hopeless and one-sided. The hypothetical “evil,” with its implications of sexual impropriety, thus stems from her own strong emotions, and even she is not sure if they are a cause for blame, as her doubt indicates. Moreover, Mr. Rochester’s countenance is so calm that she believes him oblivious to any possibly inappropriate emotions on her part, contributing to her doubts that there was any “evil” at all in walking in the garden alone with him.

Lesbazeilles-Souvestre, however, both decreases Jane’s possible guilt and the suspicion that Mr. Rochester might, in fact, harbor emotions for her, translating, “j’eus honte de mon trouble: la pensée que ce que je faisais là n’était pas bien ne préoccupait
que moi; la conscience de M. Rochester semblait parfaitement calme‖ (31). Brontë’s “evil” is toned down to “pas bien,” which negates the strong sexual implications of Jane’s thoughts. Her formulation also assigns all blame to Jane: instead of a nebulous “evil” of unspecified origins, but that “seemed” to be only on her part, as in the original, the translation clearly states that it is Jane who is doing something wrong. Thus, while it might indeed be improper for a young governess to walk alone with her unmarried male employer at night, any blame could be assigned only to her part: she was the one performing an action that was “pas bien.” At the same time, while in the source text Jane has no doubt as to Mr. Rochester’s lack of awareness of her feelings or the potential impropriety of their situation, the translation’s use of the verb “sembler” casts doubt upon his ignorance and manages to imply that Jane does indeed feel some doubt as to his intentions and his “calme.”

Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s substitution of “la conscience de M. Rochester” for the source text’s “unconscious and quiet,” moreover, gives a ring of religious guilt to the passage: it implies that Jane’s own conscience was not quiet, further adding to the depiction of her actions as “pas bien.” The religious tone of this translation in the evocation of an uneasy conscience implies that Jane is morally transgressing in being alone with Mr. Rochester, while the source text is more concerned with Jane’s struggle in loving someone who is seemingly oblivious to her feelings. Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s substitutions in this section of the text, then, are intended to take the focus from Jane’s emotions and place them more firmly on the moral correctness—or lack thereof—of both her and Mr. Rochester’s actions. Her love, then, plays backseat to the translator’s view
of how a proper young governess should react in such a situation and how she should behave with her employer.

Further in the same passage, Jane tries to control her emotions when she thinks she must leave Mr. Rochester, but at a certain moment, they get the best of her and she feels that she must speak: “the vehemence of emotion, stirred by grief and love within me, was claiming mastery, and struggling for full sway, and asserting a right to predominate, to overcome, to live, rise, and reign at last: yes—and to speak” (239).

Jane’s emotions are so strong as to be spoken of as living things in and of themselves: after a struggle, they become alive and rise up, gaining power over those parts of Jane that would dictate caution and logic. Brontë’s escalating list of verbs to describe the progression of the force of Jane’s emotions suggests that the power to speak is the most important one of all and can only arrive as the final step of an eventual mastery of emotion over common sense. Lesbazeilles-Souvestre, however, renders this passage in different form, writing “la souffrance et l’amour avait excité chez moi une violente émotion, qui s’efforçait de devenir maîtresse absolue, de dominer, de régner et de parler” (34). First of all, whereas Brontë makes Jane’s vehemence the subject of the sentence, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre changes the sentence’s construction in order to make “la souffrance et l’amour” the subject, and therefore the main focus of the sentence. Such a procedure effectively de-emphasizes Jane’s vehemence and puts the focus on her love and suffering, much more normal emotions for a female character than vehemence, which suggests a strong passion, perhaps akin to her earlier anger, also in part negated in this translation. Lesbazeilles-Souvestre likewise neglects to translate the phrase “asserting a right,” which evokes the legitimacy of her emotions and the natural need to express them,
even as she struggles to keep them in check. Furthermore, her omission of three of the six verbs Brontë uses to describe the escalation of Jane’s need to express her emotions diminishes the urgency of the moment and the crucial buildup to the most important step in this intensification of Jane’s emotions: that of speech. For, in *Jane Eyre*, the power to speak one’s mind is consistently portrayed as the greatest power of all, as Jane demonstrates from the novel’s very first pages when she finally gains the strength to stand against her tyrannical family members (Freeman 686). While Lesbazeilles-Souvestre does indeed finish with the verb “parler,” the failure to continually augment the strength of Jane’s feelings deprives the final “parler” of the power with which it is endowed in the original. The lack of progression also changes the sway of these strong emotions that hold Jane in their grip: while the source text implies that they are a living thing in and of themselves, and quasi out of her control, the translation presents no such view; these emotions are not living things independent of her, but rather aspects of herself that she can ultimately bring back under her power and subdue.

And, when Jane does speak, it is to affirm both the importance of her feelings and her sense of equality to Mr. Rochester: “‘I tell you I must go!’ I retorted, roused to something like passion. ‘Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you […] You think wrong!—I have as much soul as you—and full as much heart!’” (240). Jane’s language here—she “retorts” rather than replies, she feels “something like passion” — once again affirms the strength of her emotions once they obtain freedom through speech. Her assertion that she has just as much heart and soul as Mr. Rochester, moreover, puts her on a plane of equality with him, despite their differences in sex and status in life. Lesbazeilles-Souvestre does not translate this passage as a whole, using both omission
and substitution in order to render the power of Jane’s speech more appropriate to both her gender and her subordinate position. In the translation, Jane says: “‘Je vous dis qu’il me faut partir,’ répondis-je, excitée par quelque chose qui ressemblait à la passion. ‘Croyez-vous que je puisse rester en n’étant rien pour vous?’” (Jeanne Eyre, ou les Mémoires d’une institutrice 35). In Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s version, Jane does not “retort,” but simply responds. This change lessens the rancor she feels toward Mr. Rochester and at the same time negates the powerful urge to speak and the emotions coursing through her. Moreover, while in the source text Jane does not want to stay and “become nothing” (emphasis mine) to Mr. Rochester, the translation’s Jane does not want to stay “en n’étant rien” to him. To become nothing implies that she is at present something to him—and is well aware of this. This would support the view that a governess was a specifically sexualized threat to her male employer. The translation, on the other hand, means she never was anything important to him, but only hoped to be. Perhaps even more tellingly, the second part of this passage is entirely omitted, and therefore Jane no longer presents herself as the equal of her employer and stays more firmly in a subordinate position to him.

The power of speech is once again reaffirmed in Jane Eyre—and once again partially negated in its translation—when Jane, having at last spoken her mind to Mr. Rochester, tells him, “I have spoken my mind and can go anywhere now” (240). For Jane, then, speech has set her free from her emotions, and she is now capable of leaving Mr. Rochester if necessary, when before she spoke she felt that she was not. Lesbazeilles-Souvestre, on the other hand, for this line translates, “je me suis rendue maîtresse de moi, maintenant je puis aller n’importe où” (36). This line is different from
that of the source text in that it implies that Jane’s triumph here, and what would allow her to leave if necessary, is not so much speech itself and the expression of her emotions, as the mastery of these emotions. By mastering herself, so to speak, she would have succeeded in controlling her emotions and her speech, whereas the source text suggests that it was in the very failure to control her speech and her emotions that Jane succeeded in triumphing through her words.

As I have demonstrated throughout the course of my analysis of *Jane Eyre* and its French translation, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s greatest concern was to downplay those sides of Jane that could be construed as inappropriate for a female character: her anger, her rage, her relationship with Mr. Rochester, and her belief in the power of her own speech. In conjunction with her preface to this text, which asserts *Jane Eyre* as an appropriate feminine novel, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s overwhelming strategy, then, was to divert attention from those elements of the novel that did not fit in with her depiction of this book as appropriate for female readers. In her preface, it was the novel’s “vigueur des caractères, des tableaux, des pensées” (i) that Lesbazeilles-Souvestre identified as the novel’s most masculine elements, and it is just these elements that she effectively undermines by softening Jane’s anger and willingness to speak her mind.

In comparison with Bentzon’s strategy, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre takes the exact opposite position: while Bentzon wanted to lead Harte’s female characters out of the territory of stock or stereotypical females, Lesbazeilles-Souvestre aimed to lead Brontë’s characters to just that point. Thus, even though these two women were using translation for differing purposes, both demonstrate a strong consciousness of the power of their renditions, recognizing the influence that they as translators have to transform the texts
within their control. Not only did both women alter these texts, but they shaped them in ways largely defined by their positions as translators, and, most importantly, as women translators. As a freer and less regulated form of writing, then, translation in both of these cases served to advocate for a certain vision not just of femininity, but of the feminine within the literary world.
**Conclusion**

The importance of translation as a women’s activity in nineteenth-century France lies in its multifaceted nature as demonstrated by the various elements I have discussed throughout this dissertation. Its contradictory identity—as both creative and repetitive, at once a means of breaking with a tradition of feminine writing and continuing on with it—reveals the complexity of this discursive act and its analytical richness, a richness I have explored as fully as possible given the limits of the present project. Challenging existing norms about the nature and practice of translation therefore has broad implications for both the field of translation studies and that of women’s writing and paves the way for the inclusion of translation within future studies of women’s writing in the nineteenth century. Moreover, this permits us to problematize the bifurcated view most often taken of the literary careers of nineteenth-century women, where translation and other forms of writing are looked upon as unrelated, and to further nuance the relationship of translation to other genres of literary creation deemed most appropriate for women at this time. As I demonstrated through an examination of translation that took into account other modes of literary production in the context of women’s writing, this allows us to approach questions of generic propriety and transgression, authorship, imitation, and creativity that enhance our understanding of the conditions of both production and reception of texts by women writers.
As we saw in Chapter One, women already had a long history as translators in France and elsewhere in Europe before the nineteenth century, and studying this history, as well as the history of translation, allowed me to situate my research within both of these critical traditions. At the same time, though, this portion of my research also helped me locate translation as an “outsider” among the other genres of writing thought to be appropriate for women in the nineteenth century. As I demonstrated, most critics tend to ignore this aspect of women’s writing. This gave an added dimension to my research for it enabled me to historicize my own conclusions within the spectrum of already established areas of research on women and translation. This element thus permitted me to situate my own research within a tradition from which it had previously been excluded—a tradition of women’s writing that takes on added dimensions when we begin to seriously consider translation as one of its facets.

As one of the main points on which I focus my dissertation is the relationship between creative writing and translation, Chapter Two was essential in that it established a link between translation and fiction. Through an examination of Thérèse Bentzon’s fictional production, I was able to demonstrate the creative relationship between both of these textual forms and how translation inevitably exercised an influence over other forms of textual production. I was equally able to bring to the forefront some of the problems inherent in writing as a woman in the nineteenth century, such as the underlying tension between creation and reproduction and the relationship of women as literary creators to men in the same roles. Chapter Three allowed me to examine how women explicitly established their own relationship to textual production and transmission in a variety of forms and in particular the role of translation within that
positioning. As we saw, translation was not conceptualized by Mme de Chastenay as a repetitive form of writing devoid of any creativity or talent, but rather as the first step in a literary career that allowed her to develop her own style of writing. The examination of autobiographical discourse also allows us to problematize women’s relationship to other forms of literary creation not categorized as “feminine” in nature. My discussion of prefatory discourse to translations by women in Chapter Four demonstrates how gender came in to play in their very conception of translation and also in their choice of which texts to translate. As we saw in this chapter, normative discourse about women and writing played a large role not only in these women’s choice of what to translate, but also how to translate it. This, in turn, led us to Chapter Five, in which I demonstrated how all of the forces and choices represented in the previous chapters actually come into play in translations: issues of women and intellectual activity, creation and imitation and norms and transgression are all present, and this chapter shows how all of these various elements were active forces in the choices these women made in their translations.

Though I have been able to cover a large amount of ground regarding translation as a women’s activity in the nineteenth century, there remains much to be explored in a more in-depth fashion in order to further enhance our understanding of this activity. One facet of enlarging my studies is the comprehensive database of women translators in the nineteenth century that I am in the process of establishing, as this information will permit additional analysis and further research in several directions. First of all, I will be able to definitively discern how many women were both writers and translators; at present, I have compiled a list of seventy-six translators and over four hundred translations, and this only represents the tip of the iceberg in terms of women’s activities as translators. Of this
group, forty-four were also writers in a variety of literary genres, not using translation merely as a debut, but as an integral part of their career in conjunction with other creative endeavors. When I have completed my compilation of this database I will have definitive statistics on how many wrote as well as translated, how often and at what point in their careers they translated, and what authors and genres they translated. I will also have more detailed information about what women were translating, and why. For example, in translation did women experience the same genre restrictions as they did in other forms of creative writing and remain mostly within the so-called “feminine” genres? Also, did they write in similar genres as they translated? All of this information will be useful in order to form a more complete portrait of the material realities of this activity as it was experienced by this group of women.

I also plan on furthering my studies of women and translation through an examination of elements that I was not able to include in my dissertation. One aspect that would benefit from close analysis would be the various ways in which translators are acknowledged on the cover pages of books: sometimes the credit simply reads “traduit de l’anglais par,” while other times we may see the more intriguing notations “traduit librement de l’anglais” or “adapté de l’anglais”. In these latter cases, when the author of the source text is named, as is often the case, the process for examining the two texts in relation to one another would be similar to that which I did in this work, but with a greater focus on the disparate elements and the reasons for which they were not simply classified as translations. In still other cases, the book is not directly attributed as a translation, but is later, in a preface for example, revealed as an adaptation of an English book. One example of such a categorization is the writer and translator Sophie Ulliac...
Trémadeure’s *Secrets du foyer domestique*, where she is listed as the author, but in the preface informs her readers that “ce livre est l’imitation très librement faite d’un ouvrage anglais” but that “cette forme étant trop anglaise pour être acceptée par le goût français, nous avons cru que mieux valait *imiter* que *traduire*” (emphasis in original) (i). In such a case the interest lies largely in deciphering which elements, exactly, were not considered suitable for a French audience and how this is manifested in the translation. Furthermore, what is the difference between imitation and translation—can it even be clearly defined? Can there be one definition or will it always be a fluid notion that differs with every author? In still other cases, the translation/adaptation does not give any reference to the origins of its source text. For example, *Le Château de Bois-Vipère* is listed as an “adaptation de l’anglais par Th. Bentzon” (*Le Château de Bois-Vipère* i) yet does not even indicate from what work or author the text was adapted. This is not an uncommon practice, and I have found many examples of books that were either adapted or freely translated from the English without any indication as to the original author or title.

All of these instances are particularly interesting in the case of women writer/translators because of the oftentimes problematic nature of their literary activities in the nineteenth century. In all of these differing ways of identifying the translator within the translated text, what is ultimately at stake is hiding and/or revealing different forms and levels of authorship. The fluid and changing nature of translation, imitation and adaptation is a game of both protection and revelation that leads to a blurring of the line of authorship and a questioning of the very categories of author and translator. Therefore, in the future, I plan on delving further into this aspect of the question of
women and translation with the aim of identifying both the meaning of translation and adaptation and what effect it had on notions of authorship and responsibility.

Another area of interest stemming from my dissertation project is the question of re-translations: how do they fit within the paradigm of translation and writing? How do translations change over the course of several decades, or even several centuries? As noted by Antoine Bermain, retranslations are often an important source of information about the shifting place of a translation in the target culture’s literary system (Pour une critique des traductions 86). Re-translations are thus revelatory of changing attitudes about normative views towards both women writers and female characters. To look at only one example of the interest a study of retranslations can have, let us take the case of Jane Eyre, the first translation of which, appearing in 1854 and being reissued three or four times over the course of the nineteenth century, I analyzed in this project. Two other translations also appeared in the nineteenth century, but it was the twentieth century that saw a boom of Brontë translations, with Jane Eyre being retranslated twice each in 1946, 1947 and 1948, twice in the 1950s, and at least twice per decade up until the most recent translation, in 2008, which lists Mme Lesbazeilles-Souvestre as the translator and Marie-Hélène Sabard as the editor. These various translations are classified as translations, imitations, and adaptations, and while reading and commenting on all of them would require a herculean effort, there is a great interest in examining how translations of this novel have changed over the course of the last century and in what ways they depart from or remain close to the source text. As I demonstrated in my analysis of Mme Lesbazeilles-Souvestre’s translation of Jane Eyre, this translator was specifically concerned with having the novel and the main character conform to
restrictions for women’s writing and behavior; as the book was retranslated, how did later translators deal with Jane’s often non-normative femininity? Did they try, as did Mme Lesbazeilles-Souvestre, to conceal it, or, instead, did they choose to translate it as presented by Charlotte Brontë? Such a project is interesting not only in regards to *Jane Eyre*, but in regard to any number of novels that have been retranslated.

Not only has my study of translation as a women’s activity led me to further issues directly relating to translation, but it has also opened the path for new areas of research. Translation, because it necessarily requires a contact between two cultures and literary traditions, naturally leads to an interest in transnational perspectives and influences in literature and to questioning the role these women played as cultural brokers between French and American/English literature. As Sherry Simon points out in “Germaine de Staël and Gayatri Spivak: Culture Brokers,” one of the aims of translation in the Western world has always been to serve as a mediator between cultures. Simon demonstrates Mme de Staël’s clear awareness of translation as a creative procedure that permitted the encounter of literature from various cultures that ultimately transformed literary traditions (“Germaine de Staël and Gayatri Spivak” 123-27). Did these women have an equal awareness of their own roles as cultural mediators, and, if so, how did this shape their translations and their other literary productions?

In the case of Thérèse Bentzon, to take only one example, this was a role that she explicitly elicited through her translations and her other forms of writing. Bentzon was not only a prolific translator, but she also travelled extensively in North America—in the United States and French- and English-speaking Canada—and wrote about her experiences in travelogues, such as *Notes de voyages: les Américaines chez elles* and
**Nouvelle-France et Nouvelle Angleterre.** As the first title indicates, Bentzon largely focused on women’s roles and opportunities in the United States and used this as a space to denounce France’s lack of progress in this matter. In *Nouvelle-France et Nouvelle Angleterre*, Bentzon elucidates her own conception of Francophonie with, once again, a particular focus on women’s roles. Thus, Bentzon’s role as a cultural mediator did not begin and end with her work in translation, but rather extended to her travel writing. How, then, does her role as a translator relate to her role as a traveler, and can we use both of these poles of her work to lay out a conception of translation’s relationship with other areas of literary creation and a transnational perspective on literary relations? And, it is not only women such as Bentzon, who explicitly negotiated between two cultures in her travel writing, who can be identified as conscious cultural mediators, but also a multitude of women writers/translators who were inspired in their writing by the very works they translated.

This question also leads to the possible connection between the way women practiced translation in nineteenth-century France and the twentieth/twenty-first century practice of feminist translation, most notably in Quebec. As Melissa Wallace points out, the influence of the feminist school of translation theory “is probably most readily visible within its metatexts—that is, the multitude of statements, footnotes, prefaces, introductions, commentaries, and explanations found in recent feminist translations—all of which represent a concerted move away from invisibility” (69). How can we consider nineteenth century women translators, when viewed through this lens? Can we find that they, too, practiced a specific form of feminist translation when they brought visibility to their acts through the focus of their status as women? Thus, to look
at the work, and in particular the metatexts, of nineteenth-century women writers through the perspective of contemporary feminist translators and translation theorists can shed a new light upon their productions and how they conceptualized their own activities.

Even beyond the topics that I have already mentioned, there are many more rich possibilities for research within the area of women and translation in nineteenth-century France. This fact only serves to demonstrate its importance as a form of ‘women’s writing’ and it is my ultimate goal that my work on translation will have a broad impact on its inclusion among other genres of women’s writing. This will change our perspective both on translation’s place in nineteenth-century literary culture and its role for women in particular and inevitably transform how we view both translation and the entire spectrum of women’s creative endeavors.
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