

révisée puisque nombreuses sont les poètes que les autres anthologies avaient omises, et surtout un recueil que chacune de vous savourera.

## RE-BELLE ET INFIDELE: LA TRADUCTION COMME PRATIQUE DE RÉ- ÉCRITURE AU FÉMININ: TRANSLATION AS THE REWRITING IN THE FEMININE

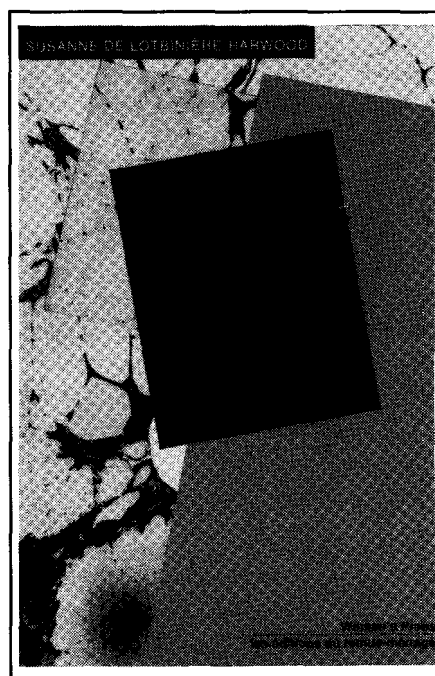
Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood. *Women's Press/Les éditions du remue-ménage*, 1991.

By *Christabelle Sethna*

*Je suis une traduction.* I am a translation. Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood's bold assertion is made at the half-way mark of a richly layered work on feminist translation. It spirals outward from her assertion into a french section, an english section and closes with a short, transcribed conversation in french. The book's very structure mirrors de Lotbinière-Harwood's interior and exterior linguistic universe where *il y a deux mots pour chaque chose*. There are two words for each thing. de Lotbinière-Harwood is a descendant of an 1823 *Nouvelle France*-english marriage, first language french and second language english—bilingual, a québécoise, not indépendantiste, a translator and a feminist. de Lotbinière-Harwood's self-described "doubleness inscribed at birth," in combination with her voice, her location, her profession and her politics, give rise to a corporal and textual body dealing simultaneously with *l'écriture au féminin* and translation, termed a *réécriture au féminin*.

*L'écriture au féminin*, writing in the feminine, can be traced to the work of French theorists such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Monique Wittig. Influenced, in turn, by Simone de Beauvoir, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida, these four women argue that sexual *différence* is rooted in wom-

en's and men's bodies. They contend that in a patriarchal society, in which possessors of the singular phallus rule supreme, women's plural genitalia and sexual desires are perceived as fundamentally "other." Because language supports the phallic order, a counter to phallogocentric oppression is offered: languages which allow women *jouissance*, joyous, orgasmic revellings in the multiplicity of *fémininité*, a concept which encompasses female, feminine, feminist, woman and women. By focusing on women's bodies



as the site of *différence*, *l'écriture au féminin* goes farther than many feminist Anglo-American analyses of language. While theorists such as Dale Spender (1980) elaborate upon man-made language as dominant and female-made language as that which is muted, *l'écriture au féminin* calls for the creation of languages which expose and undermine patriarchy by neither obfuscating women nor defining women in relation to men. Rather than a prisonhouse of language, *l'écriture au féminin* is a poetic, fluid, non-linear m(o)thertongue which provides the key to personal and political liberation.

While appreciating the creative force and strategic potential of the French theorists' work for feminism(s), several feminists have criticized them for retreating into essentialism. For example, Ann Rosalind Jones (1981), suggests that the French theorists "make of the female body

too unproblematically pleasurable and totalized an entity," asserting that "at this point in history, most of us perceive our bodies through a jumpy, contradictory mesh of hoary sexual symbolism and political counterresponse." Nevertheless, *l'écriture au féminin* has been taken up by feminist québécoise writers such as Jovette Marchessault, Louky Bersianik and Nicole Brossard. And like the French theorists to whom their indebtedness can be traced, Marchessault's, Bersianik's and Brossard's words have been made more widely available to english-speaking feminists in Canada via translators such as Barbara Godard, Yvonne Klein and de Lotbinière-Harwood herself. It is within this community of Anglo-American and French theorists, Québécoise writers and Canadian-based translators that de Lotbinière-Harwood perceives *le réécriture au féminin*, as a "tributary" of *l'écriture au féminin*. Translation as a re-writing in the feminine redoubles *l'écriture au féminin*'s attack on phallogocentrism. Like *l'écriture au féminin*, *le réécriture au féminin* is, therefore, an explicitly feminist project, collaborating in the political subversion of patriarchal society by making women visible in language.

de Lotbinière-Harwood claims that in patriarchal society, language is never neutral and "all women are bilingual. We use the dominant man-made code we learn as children. We also communicate in a predominantly unrecorded women's way, where oral expression and body language play a major part." Because of our ability to weave amongst linguistic spaces, women are considered more adept at translation. This is not, however, the only reason why translation is feminized. Traditionally referred to as a "belle infidèle," a translation, like a woman, is either beautiful or faithful. According to Lori Chamberlain (1988), societal concerns with paternity and originality confer upon women—and translation—a secondary status. But by adding the key prefix *re*, to *belle*, de Lotbinière-Harwood demands a rebellion against that status.

de Lotbinière-Harwood's rebellion is experienced from her own position of *différence* which has engendered in her multiple existences of otherness. And true to *l'écriture au féminin*'s emphasis on plurality, de Lotbinière-Harwood does not view her multiple existences as contradictory or oppositional but embodies them all simultaneously. She is a woman who

thinks of both hunger and hurt when she sees PAIN scrawled on a downtown wall. She explains that her body, free in its ability to inhabit two linguistic, cultural and symbolic spaces is “d’expression française.” Thus, she translates french into english with a “french accent” so that the text becomes “foreign and familiar at the same time. This doubleness makes target-language readers aware that they are reading a translation by constantly putting them in the presence of otherness.” The french and english sections of her own text, however, are not translations of each other. They stand on their own but interconnect, as Irigaray would maintain, like women’s lips which touch/speak astride the female cleft/mouth.

Rebellion, for de Lotbinière-Harwood, also means *jouissance*. It is clear from her elaboration of the intertext that this translator depends on a web of women’s work/words/worlds to make women visible. As she puts it, the intertext is “a communicating and resonating collective text scripted in the feminine by feminists rereading and rewriting what other feminists have written and spoken.” This “network” which provides a living dictionary for feminist translators is a loving celebration of sisterhood across time and space. de Lotbinière-Harwood urges us to add to this gynergy by rejecting traditional dictionaries which are most often sexist, racist, classist and homophobic, crediting “feminaries” (feminist dictionaries) and footnoting translation strategies. It is this coming together of intertwined women’s tongues/sex/texts which is seen as a source of support and solidarity for all feminists. That the translated/rewritten text will, in turn, take its place within the intertext approximates the diffuse, open-endedness of women’s sexual desires.

Rebellion is likewise manifest in the new forms of language created by feminist translators. In keeping with women’s historical attempts to establish a more women-centred discourse, de Lotbinière-Harwood participates in the co-creation of a structural and ethical feminist grammar. In making women visible in french and in english, she asserts her position as the text’s co-creator. The portions of the book which trace de Lotbinière-Harwood’s struggles to translate/rewrite women into french and english are fine examples of collective feminist process. She acknowledges that the french language’s obfuscation of the feminine is

considered, ironically, “correct” french. To subvert “correct” french, she recommends several strategies within the french section, such as, placing the feminine before the masculine in a sentence, forming adjectival accord with the feminine rather than with the masculine, using feminine pronouns rather than masculine pronouns to determine the structure of a sentence if the feminine is numerically a majority. In the english section, different tactics are required to overcome textual sexism. Depending on the context, history becomes herstory, his/her becomes her/his, cunt becomes cleft, other becomes other, author becomes auther. Using the french e to signify the feminine presence, one (woman) becomes one. This co-creation of a structural feminist grammar is bolstered by the co-creation of an ethical feminist grammar de Lotbinière-Harwood urges feminist authors, translators, publishers and reviewers to construct. She argues that author and translator should work in political tandem, that translators be given legal co-creator status by publishers and that reviewers acknowledge translators’ work. She urges the feminist community to dialogue about the following issues: could heterosexuals translate lesbian authors? Is an anti-feminist man’s translation of feminists acceptable to feminist readers? Should non-natives translate native authors? May an author of colour entrust her work to a white translator? On the five hundredth anniversary of colonial oppression in the “New World,” these issues touch upon timely considerations of dominance and diversity.

Despite the reader’s possible discomfiture with the essentialist charge levelled against *feminité*, de Lotbinière-Harwood’s work is, overall, an ode to *l’écriture féminine* and feminism. But although de Lotbinière-Harwood acknowledges in footnotes feminist works which have contributed to her thinking, she does not admit until the end of the english section that “[c]learly, this book could not have been written without an acquaintance with feminist language theory, literary criticism, and translation.” Yet, without a firm outlining of that acquaintanceship within the text’s body, a reader uninitiated in *l’écriture au féminin* may find her work to be, at times, unclear, disconnected and somewhat egocentric. Neither would the reader find direction in headings like “About *jouissance*” and “Sexual pleasures.” The headings attempt

to delineate different areas and ideas in the text but appear confusingly in upper case and lower case, as if compressed into the traditional form for chapter and subtitle delineation.

Because both french and english sections stand on their own, I would recommend this work to french-english bilingual and french/english unilingual readers. I urge english-only feminists, in particular, to read this book. As speakers of the dominant language in Canada, english-only feminists must familiarize themselves with not only québécoise writing but with the process by which it is made accessible via *le réécriture au féminin*. The gynergy this book will generate will hopefully lead to the realization of de Lotbinière-Harwood’s three fond wishes: a feminist english-french multicultural and interdisciplinary feminary; a feminist herstory of translation; feminist solidarity. Feminist translators/rewriters like de Lotbinière-Harwood permit feminist communities to re-vision, as she does, a wond(h)erland.

Chamberlain, Lori, “Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation,” *Signs* 13.3 (Spring 1988) 454-72.

Jones, Ann Rosalind, “Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of *l’écriture féminine*,” *Signs* 7.2 (Summer 1981) 247-63.

Spender, Dale, *Man-Made Language* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).

## INTERIOR DESIGNS

Robin Potter. Montreal: The Muses’ Company, 1990.

*By Sharon H. Nelson*

*Interior Designs* is a book of poems about the understanding of sexual politics as a survival technique. The poems explore identity as artifact, the “self” as something less natural than designed. Thus the opening poem, “Conjuration,” speaks of appearance, reality, and of invocation, the ability to call a thing into being by naming it, as a powerful force in constructing and resisting reality. Attempted suicide functions as a rite of passage and