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# On Becoming in Translation: Articulating Feminisms in the Translation of Marie Vieux- Chauvet's Les Rapaces

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**ON BECOMING IN TRANSLATION:  
ARTICULATING FEMINISMS IN THE TRANSLATION  
OF MARIE VIEUX-CHAUVET'S *LES RAPACES***

A Thesis Presented

by

CAROLYN P. T. SHREAD

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

September 2008

Comparative Literature

Translation Studies

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the UMass Translation Center is far more than a successful business enterprise: it is a home for many, a cultural crossroads where everyone is welcomed and differences celebrated. I shared many happy moments and frequent hilarity with my colleagues Xuefei Bai (謝謝您), Revan Hedo (*Geanakh Bassemta*), Jorge Jiménez-Bellver (*gracias*), Elena Langdon (*obrigada*), Anna Strowe (*grazie*), Aaron Suko (*gracias*), Loc Pham (*cám ơn anh*), Maura Talmadge (*merci*), and Huda Yehia (*shukran*). Lastly, a special *obrigada* to my dear friend Cristiano Mazzei, with whom I've shared so many ideas and enjoyed so many conversations: long may they continue!

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ABSTRACT

ON BECOMING IN TRANSLATION: ARTICULATING FEMINISMS IN THE  
TRANSLATION OF MARIE VIEUX-CHAUVET'S *LES RAPACES*

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This thesis discusses aspects of feminist translation as exemplified by my French to English translation of Marie Vieux-Chauvet's novel, *Les Rapaces* (1984). Articulating feminist translation as a form of activism, I argue that feminism manifests in translation not only informatively, through linguistic and cultural representation, but also through formative processes that are constitutive of texts. Describing some of the key moments in the creation of *The Raptors*, I show how these relate to Bracha Ettinger's concept of metamorphic processes and to my own elaboration of her theory with regard to the generative aspect of becoming in translation. Viewing translation as a transformative encounter, from the perspectives of both the translator and the translation's Haitian American audience, I underline the contribution of feminine paradigms for innovating translation theory and practice.



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## CHAPTER 1

### THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

*Every revolution has been preceded by an intense labor of criticism.*  
Antonio Gramsci

How do the activist commitments of a feminist affect his or her translation? This is the guiding question through which I engage in a retrospective account of the process of translating Marie Vieux-Chauvet's *Les Rapaces*<sup>1</sup> from Haitian French into English. Is feminism simply a politics that informs, that is, acts through textual representations, or does it go deeper, working at a formative level that is constitutive of the translation? I shall explain how I have come to see feminism not simply as a matter of informative positioning, typically signaled by ideological markers, but also as a formative influence. Making the distinction between formative and informative aspects of translation allows me to untangle the ways in which feminism is not just a politics seeking to inform representations and thereby reform narratives, but is also a critical disposition that forms the art and practice of translation. In order to consider these two interwoven strands of feminist activity in translation, I begin by discussing informative moments in the text, and then go on to explore formative processes of becoming. The following analogy may help imagine this conception of translation: the first five years of childhood rarely leave

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<sup>1</sup> Marie Vieux, *Les Rapaces* (Port-au-Prince: Henri Deschamps, 1986). Marie Chauvet signed her last novel under her maiden name and expressed the wish that all future re-publications be recognized under that name. I refer to her here as Vieux-Chauvet, following the lead of her recently re-published works: Marie Vieux-Chauvet, *La Danse sur le volcan* and *Amour, Colère, et Folie* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose and Soleil-Emina, 2004 and 2005 respectively).

many explicit memory marks, yet this period is critically formative; likewise a feminist translation may or may not be replete with clearly identifiable feminist markers, yet it would not be the same translation without the reading, processing, and writing of the feminist translator.

The articulation of feminisms, in both the informative and formative moments, contributes to an understanding of how narrative shifts are facilitated through the translation process. I shall explain how what I describe as “becoming subjectivities” associated with feminine paradigms may be fostered by textual encounters and provoke narrative transformations that may contribute significantly to feminist goals. In using the term narrative in this context, I am referring to Mona Baker’s re-thinking of translation studies within a narrative theory paradigm. In *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account*<sup>2</sup> and a series of articles including “Resisting State Terror: Theorising Communities of Activist Translators and Interpreters,”<sup>3</sup> Baker defines narratives as the accounts to which we hold, consciously or unconsciously, as individuals or collectivities. Narratives are ideological in their configuration and therefore have important consequences in that they motivate and determine ethical choices. While they may not always be explicit, narratives are dynamic and open to negotiation. Because translators are in the business of crossing and constructing narratives as they negotiate different languages and cultures, I find this framework productive, particularly from the perspective of an activist interest in changing ways of thinking in order to transform

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<sup>2</sup> Mona Baker, *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Mona Baker, “Resisting State Terror: Theorising Communities of Activist Translators and Interpreters” *Globalisation, Political Violence and Translation*, Esperança Bielsa Mialet and Chris Hughes, eds. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

ways of being in the world. Building on the Second Wave feminism claim that ‘the personal is political’, I suggest that ‘the interpersonal is political’ too, that is, the interactive processes of reading and translating are means of generating and enacting new, feminine understandings, or narratives, to guide activist goals, and perhaps help activists to move beyond Manichean positions of ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ to more subtle visions of conflict and more nuanced means of acting in conformity with ideological commitments. This conception of translation as a form of intervention extends notions of activism from action in the field to include the critical moment of textual encounters.

Stepping back to trace the different moments when a feminist perspective inflected my translation of *Les Rapaces*, I shall discuss some of the ways activism may affect a translated text. My hope is that these reflections will help identify certain assumptions about what an activist translation looks like since I suspect that the frequent imprecation to “practice what you preach” implies that critics are looking for signs that would mark work as a readily identifiable “feminist” translation. Drawing attention to this issue as a first step in describing the workings of feminist translation, I start by mentioning two feminist translators who were issued this challenge even from within their own camp. In *Translation and Gender: Translating in the ‘Era of Feminism’* (1997) Luise von Flotow pointed to an apparent contradiction in translations by Suzanne Jill Levine and Carol Maier. The point she makes is that while their ideological commitments to feminism are clearly elaborated, their translations do not fully enact or perform their theory. Discussing Levine’s translation of Guillermo Cabrera Infante’s “oppressively male” texts, she writes “Levine’s partial answer to the question [“Where does this leave a woman as translator of such a book?”] is to point to

the changes she makes in the text. Yet the examples are sparse.”<sup>4</sup> Von Flotow makes a similar comment in regard to Maier’s translations of the sexist poems of Octavio Armand: “Maier’s work is equally sparse on examples: she too says more about her discomfort at the misogyny of the source text than about her actual interventions in it.”<sup>5</sup>

Von Flotow concludes from these examples that:

Feminist influence on translation and translation studies is most readily visible in metatexts [...] it is often considerably easier for a translator to proclaim political action in prefaces and other materials than to actually take action in the translation; this may explain the manifesto-like quality of the more combative statements, a quality that is not reflected in the translated work.<sup>6</sup>

Concerned that my own feminist translation of *Les Rapaces* might be open to similar critiques, Von Flotow’s comments prompted me to look again at the assumptions that lie behind the observation that although a translation may be framed by an explicit activist agenda, it is not always easy to point to instances of this intention in the translation. This disjunction is a common trope: translators are frequently questioned about a supposed gap between their theory and practice, and this critique is all the more acute when a theoretical stance is clearly articulated in a preface or other paratext.

The apparent contradiction in activist translation practices may reveal more about common misapprehensions regarding the workings of activism in translation than its failings. A feminist or queer translation, for instance, does not necessarily have to march down a clearly demarcated path to indicate its intent. Effective activism may be at work in more subtle, less clearly indicated routes, tracing out, exploring, and forming

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<sup>4</sup> Luise Von Flotow, *Translation and Gender: Translating in the ‘Era of Feminism’* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 1997) 26.

<sup>5</sup> Von Flotow 27.

<sup>6</sup> Von Flotow 35.

new narratives, rather than acting solely through the exhibition of identity markers. In other words, writing in the United States where identity politics has such a dominant place in academic discourse, I question the equating of identity politics with activism, along with the associated assumption that activism always manifests through identity markers. Instead, I read identity politics as one particularly powerful narrative among others that activists may mobilize to achieve their goals of social, political, economic or psychological transformation through the creation and adoption of new narratives.

I want to be clear that I am not rejecting identity politics *per se*, but rather recasting the positions adopted by groups of individuals around particular identities as a reflection of shared narratives, rather than shared identity attributes.<sup>7</sup> This alternative conception of identity narratives has the considerable strategic advantage of opening the field of feminist approaches to those who do not share the fundamental marker associated with feminism, i.e. the female gender. Going beyond an intersectional or integrative understanding of identity politics, which takes not just gender but also other differential factors such as race, sexuality, class, physical ability, and nationality into account,<sup>8</sup> narrative theory can divest individuals from the constraints of identity attributes to allow for alignments within relational paradigms that are not individually-bound.

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<sup>7</sup> On this point, see Mona Baker, "Ethics of Renarration." Interview with Andrew Chesterman, *Cultus*, forthcoming August 2008.

<sup>8</sup> On this point, see also Luise Von Flotow, "Dis-Unity and Diversity: Feminist Approaches to Translation Studies" *Unity in Diversity? Current Trends in Translation Studies*, ed. Lynne Bowker, Michael Cronin, Dorothy Kenny and Jennifer Pearson (Manchester: St. Jerome, 1998) 3-13. In this article, Von Flotow points to the productive effect on feminist translation caused by "dis-unity, diversity and complexity," advocating a wider understanding of the many feminist approaches to translation.

Since to be an activist is first and foremost to want to put theory into practice, it is troubling to have the theory associated with an activist approach described as a screen without substance, a theoretical positioning that does not conform with practice. Looking more closely at the critique I am addressing, it implies a particular conceptualization of the interaction of theory and practice: one in which theory precedes and dictates practice. As a framework for considering the interaction of theory and practice, I would replace the application model, in which theory is defined and then applied in practice, with the recognition that theory is often constructed after the fact, emerging and formed by practice, engaging in a dialectical relationship between theoretical articulation and practical instantiation.

Admittedly, the expectation that feminist translation is readily identifiable is quite understandable, given a tradition of highly visible feminist translation practices. In her monograph on gender and translation, Von Flotow characterizes strategies used by feminists as experimental, interventionist, and assertive. Indeed, flaunting feminism has been, and remains, both a necessary and creatively invigorating textual strategy. Since the 1970s lexical and grammatical innovation has served to produce dramatically different texts. For instance, the effort to introduce inclusive language into canonical texts has been, and continues to be, an important initiative to counter the androcentrism and patriarchy enshrined in foundational texts such as the Bible. Likewise, the gender-neutral language now favored by academic publishing signals an important consciousness of the type of male-oriented assumptions. Yet, to cite Audre Lorde's

anticipatory essay “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,”<sup>9</sup> these linguistic approaches are not enough to ensure change. Moreover, to assume that innovation at the micro-level is the only way feminism manifests in translation is to accept too ready a categorization and too marketable a style, marginalizing activism by limiting it to distinctive discursive features. My interest is to imagine other ways in which feminism intervenes in translation through paradigms that produce not only linguistic innovation, but also shape alternative translation processes.

Before discussing the ways in which translating *Les Rapaces* helped me reenvision feminist translating practices, it is important to lay to rest a persistent tendency to make assumptions about the congruency of the gender of an author, a text, and its characters. This issue arises starkly in Richard Watts’s discussion of the gendering of paratexts in *Packaging Post/Coloniality: The Manufacture of Literary Identity in the Francophone World*.<sup>10</sup> Discussing new forms of paratextual presentation that depart from a tradition of hierarchical erudite explication in favor of horizontal dialogue, Watts points to what he calls “a potential aporia in feminist textual theory,” namely, “we make a connection, which we do not justify, between a feminist writing practice – a metaphor for describing a certain form of writing – and the author’s gender.”<sup>11</sup> Watts’s comment is worth considering, if only to point to his subsequent assertion that one should not speak of a text, written by either a man or a woman, as both feminist and postcolonial: “even if it is possible to see feminist, post-colonial, and

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<sup>9</sup> Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (California: The Crossing Press, 1994) 110-113.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Watts, *Packaging Post/Coloniality: The Manufacture of Literary Identity in the Francophone World* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2005).



postmodern writing practices as overlapping, it is important to separate them.”<sup>12</sup> While I disagree with his insistence on separating terms to ensure that “feminist aesthetics – in this case, textual practice – be distinguished from equivalent practices in the works of men”<sup>13</sup> since I see no reason why a man, or a man’s writing, cannot be a feminist or feminine, Watts’s observations act as a reminder to re-iterate again, in the face of accusations of essentialism, that gender refers not to the male or female sex, but rather to the construction of masculine and feminine identities. Indeed, texts offer a stage that is valuable precisely because it allows for the performance of alternate identities; one of the draws of translation is that it allows translators to enact alternate subject positions. Maier expresses the necessity to disassociate the gender of the author/translator/text/characters in her reflections on the mobility of gender in the translation process. In her thoughtful re-formulation of strategies available for translating women’s fiction, Maier describes how her positioning as a feminist translator has shifted away from identity terms:

More and more, then, I have come to think of working not as a women-identified translator, but as one who questions, even interrogates gender definitions – one who can hold ‘natural’ definitions of gender in abeyance, attempting to identify one’s practice as a translator in a way that is open to and can thus interact with whatever gender identity (or other identity) a translator might encounter. It would be appropriate to think of this approach as ‘woman-interrogated’ because it involves an endeavor to work less from confidently held definitions than from a will to participate in re-definitions, to counter the restrictions of a gender-based identity by questioning gender as the most effective or the most appropriate point of departure for a translator’s practice.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Watts 141.

<sup>12</sup> Watts 155.

<sup>13</sup> Watts 155.

<sup>14</sup> Carol Maier, “Issues in the Practice of Translating Women’s Fiction” *BHS*, LXXV, 1998, 95-108, 102.

Feminists (men and women) are concerned with changing and improving the lives of women by resisting the many forms of prejudice and oppression they suffer; I suggest that in order to achieve this goal, feminine subjectivity as a mode of relating to others must be valorized and affirmed through a recognition that both sexes may access and draw on feminine resources in the self.

In his chapter on “Gender and the Paratext,” Watts also makes some important points about the way in which the aesthetic qualities of Francophone women’s writing were consistently downplayed in the 1960s and 1970s through an appeal to the social utility, testimonial, and anthropological aspects of their texts. Examining the production norms that characterized publishing during this period, Watts offers an effective feminist critique by explaining how “books written by women began to mark the author’s gender and the text’s social utility” through the inclusion on the back cover of “the author’s French *curriculum vitae* [...] unique in its apposition of a photograph and the designation of “*état civil*” or marital status.”<sup>15</sup> The key to Watts’s insightful reading of these paratexts is that the result was: “to remove the work from the realm of creative fiction, endow it with anthropological authenticity, and thrust it unambiguously into the realm of testimony [...] The authority that is being constructed on the back covers of these novels is not creative authority, but documentary authority.”<sup>16</sup> In this way, just as translation has been derided as a derivative activity, women’s writing is attributed a secondary status. In reaction, my purpose is to argue for the creative, artistic potential of translation and texts by women, placing the stakes high and expecting the most of the

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<sup>15</sup> Watts 143

<sup>16</sup> Watts 146.

creative ingenuity of feminist translation, both in terms of the articulation of formative feminist paradigms and the will to inform texts.

Confirming Watts's thesis, at least apparently, the back cover of *Les Rapaces* does indeed include a striking photograph of the elegant author, along with details about her genealogy, birth, and death, although there is no mention of her children.<sup>17</sup> On further examination, however, Vieux-Chauvet's back cover proves to be more ambiguous in that it could be read as subverting conventional usage since it is used as a platform for an assertive authorial speech act: "Le public est ici informé que toute oeuvre de Marie Chauvet qui sera rééditée portera désormais le nom de jeune fille de l'écrivain: MARIE VIEUX."<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, since *Les Rapaces* was published posthumously, we cannot be certain about the identity of the author of these words. Indeed paratextual controversies and the settling of accounts continue even today with the statement "Pour la vérité, pour l'histoire" made by Vieux-Chauvet's family in the republication of *Amour, Colère, et Folie* — under the name Marie Vieux-Chauvet.

Before concluding this opening section on the feminist orientation of this translation project, it is important to acknowledge that although my decision to translate *Les Rapaces* was explicitly grounded in a feminist commitment to expand the range of Francophone literary texts written by women available in English translation, feminism as a named, explicit, and politicized response to oppression was not expressed in the

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<sup>17</sup> Watts argues that the reference to children is again a particular feature of the paratexts of women's writing, commenting wryly: "to my knowledge, no packaging of a work by a male writer from anywhere in the francophone world signals that the author is married with children" 147.

<sup>18</sup> "The public is hereby informed that all works by Marie Chauvet re-published in the future will heretofore bear the maiden name of the author: MARIE VIEUX." All translations mine except where indicated.

same terms in the source text. Sensitive to the critiques of Black feminists and Third World feminists who have seen their movements and literatures sidelined, conscripted or erased by feminists from hegemonic countries, I realize that this is an important issue. In the words of Lucienne Serrano: ““Il est difficile de parler de féminisme dans la littérature haïtienne, je parlerai plutôt d’une présence féminine extrêmement forte et originale en Haïti et dans les Antilles francophones.”<sup>19</sup> While she questions the labeling of feminist for Vieux-Chauvet, in her reading of Vieux-Chauvet’s work, Serrano recognizes a deliberate “intention de parole” behind her “dénonciation du politique” of the Duvalier dictatorships, even when this intention is revealed as “de l’intime, du personnel, du contradictoire et du lyrique.”<sup>20</sup> My articulation of the implications of *Les Rapaces* thus follows the fictional, imaginary creation of a feminine voice, suggesting that writing practice predates theory, so that the “feminism” voiced by Vieux-Chauvet’s fiction is the grounds for a subsequent explication of a feminist agenda within a transnational translational framework.

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<sup>19</sup> “It is difficult to talk about feminism in Haitian literature; rather I would speak of an extremely strong and original feminine presence.” Lucienne Serrano, “Intention d’écriture dans *Amour, Colère et Folie* de Marie Chauvet,” *Ecrivaines françaises et francophones*, March 1997, 162-168, 162.

<sup>20</sup> Serrano 168 “In Marie Chauvet’s political denunciation, a speech intention is manifested and at the heart of this literature, the intention is to speak the intimate, the personal, the contradictory and the lyrical.”

## CHAPTER 2

### READING *LES RAPACES*:

#### A TRANSNATIONAL TEXT IN AMONG CONTEXTS

Marie Vieux-Chauvet (1916-1973) is one of Haiti's most famous women writers, one of Haiti's few women writers, for as Myriam Chancy comments: "In 1987, Pierrette Frickey [...] found that only fifteen women writers had been published in Haiti, as opposed to over four hundred male writers."<sup>21</sup> A prominent member of the group *Haiti Littéraire*, like many intellectuals of her generation, in the early 1970s Vieux-Chauvet became a transnational, exiled from Haiti to New York. Her departure was precipitated by her scathing critique of Papa Doc's dictatorial regime of terror in *Amour, Colère et Folie*, published by the French publishing house Gallimard in 1968. Not only was Vieux-Chauvet forced to go into exile for fear of the repercussions of this damning portrayal of the Duvalier regime, but also all the copies of the text in Haiti were bought up and destroyed and its distribution was postponed elsewhere.<sup>22</sup> The trilogy was thus "étouffé au berceau,"<sup>23</sup> sold only to selected individuals in two bookstores, one in Port-au-Prince, the other in New York.<sup>24</sup> The result of this suppression of Vieux-Chauvet's text was that "pendant plus d'une génération, le triptyque ne circulera qu'en quelques

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<sup>21</sup> Myriam Chancy, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997) 12.

<sup>22</sup> There is some debate as to whether these actions were taken by Chauvet herself or by her family.

<sup>23</sup> "stifled in the cradle," back cover of *Les Rapaces*.

<sup>24</sup> This account is based on the preface "Pour la vérité, pour l'histoire" ("for truth, for history") Maillyse Charlier, Régine Charlier, and Pierre Chauvet in the 2005 re-publication of *Amour, Colère et Folie*.

rare copies qui se vendent très chères ; il sortira même dans une édition clandestine et non-autorisée en 2003.”<sup>25</sup> However, just as Vieux-Chauvet sought refuge abroad, her book took on a transnational existence, as Ronnie Scharfman explains: “the trilogy has become almost a cult object for Haitians of Marie Vieux-Chauvet’s class in exile in the United States.”<sup>26</sup> In 2005, an attractive new paperback edition came out, published again in France, finally making the text available to a wide public. These geographical displacements of Vieux-Chauvet’s acknowledged masterpiece are indicative of the ways literature travels beyond national borders to emerge in multiple transnational spaces.

The book I chose to translate, however, is not Vieux-Chauvet’s trilogy,<sup>27</sup> but instead *Les Rapaces*, the last book she wrote, and the only one written outside Haiti, *lòt bò dlo*, on the other side of the water. Composed in the early 1970s, *Les Rapaces* was published only posthumously by Editions Bernard Deschamps in Haiti in 1986, immediately upon the demise of the Duvaliers’ thirty-year dictatorship. While this short allegorical fable is less renowned than *Amour, Colère et Folie*, there are several reasons why I chose to translate it. My analysis of the translation of this text, which was transnational even in its origins, thus begins with the question of text selection.

Reacting against the conventional notion of translation as representation or metaphor, translation has been re-defined by theorists such as Maria Tymoczko as a

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<sup>25</sup> [www.lehman.cuny.edu/ile.en.ile/paroles/chauvet.html](http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ile.en.ile/paroles/chauvet.html). Accessed 4/6/2006. “For over a generation, only a few rare copies of the trilogy were in circulation, and these sold for a very high price; it even came out in a non-authorized underground edition in 2003.”

<sup>26</sup> Ronnie Scharfman, “Theorizing Terror: The Discourse of Violence in Marie Chauvet’s *Amour Colère Folie*” *Postcolonial Subjects; Francophone Women Writers*. Mary Jean Green, Karen Gould, Micheline Rice-Maximin, Keith L. Walker, and Jack A. Yaeger, eds (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) 229-245, 230.

<sup>27</sup> Rose-Myriam Réjouis and Val Vinokurov are currently preparing an English translation of *Amour, Colère et Folie* for publication by Random house in 2009.

metonymic process of selection, that is, of taking a part to represent the whole.<sup>28</sup> Even before the first word is translated, however, the prior issue of which text to translate must be decided. Text selection is critical in that it is a major factor in the representation of aspects of identity that include culture, religion, nationality, gender, race, and sexuality. Putting aside the further question of which translations are chosen for publication, and the market forces that shape, and misshape, the selection criteria of publishers, more than any other choice a translator makes in this prolonged process of deliberation, the single most important decision is the initial question of which text to translate. In choosing one of Vieux-Chauvet's lesser known works, I deliberately sought to expand the range of texts read and known by one of Haiti's foremost women authors. In coming to this decision, however, as I explain in the next section, I had to weigh potentially negative stereotypes that might be reinforced by a text that exposes Haiti in a state of systemic corruption.

### **Texts Traversing Systems**

Translating with a United States publication in mind, I had to take into account the fact that Haitian Americans are burdened with oppressive stereotypes that often impair their opportunities and experiences. As François Pierre-Louis puts it, Haitians in the United States are “a triple minority – immigrants, black, and non-English speakers.”<sup>29</sup> Haitians

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<sup>28</sup> “Translators select some elements, some aspects, or some parts of the source text to highlight and preserve [...] certain aspects or attributes of the source text come to represent the entire source text in translation. By definition, therefore, translation is metonymic: it is a form of representation in which parts or aspects of the source text come to stand for the whole.” Maria Tymoczko, *Translation in a Postcolonial Context* (Manchester, U.K.: St. Jerome Press, 1999) 55.

<sup>29</sup> François Pierre-Louis Jr., *Haitians in New York City: Transnationalism and Hometown Associations*. (Gainesville: University of Florida, 2006) 2.

have also suffered from a stigmatizing association with AIDS dating back to the 1980s and which continues even today,<sup>30</sup> for as Norma Glick Schiller reminds us “Haitians were the only nationality identified by the U.S. Centers of Disease Control (CDC) as a “high risk groups” for AIDS.”<sup>31</sup> These prejudices have widespread consequences, as demonstrated dramatically in the 1980s when the “arrival and detention of thousands of Haitian boat people, at the same time that tens of thousands of Cubans arriving by boat were being welcomed by the U.S. government, highlighted the inequalities in the U.S. refugee policy.”<sup>32</sup> Treating Haitians as economic rather than political refugees has had long-lasting negative effects on the reception of Haitian immigrants in the United States.<sup>33</sup> There are many analyses about oppressive prejudices held against Haitians in the United States, including Michael Dash’s reading of stereotypes in literature.<sup>34</sup> Other testimonies and personal, autobiographical accounts such as Anthony Calypso’s short story “The Million Man March” show how damaging such stereotypes may be when they are internalized: “I had another layer of blackness. I was one of these Haitians—those boat people, those funny-clothes-wearing people, those cats with AIDS, those

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<sup>30</sup> This maligning of an entire nation continues even today with debates provoked by Michael Worobey’s controversial claims about Haiti’s role in the propagation of AIDS: Michael Worobey, Arthur E. Pitchenik, M. Thomas P. Gilbert, Gabriela Wlasiuk, and Andrew Rambaut, *Reply to Pape et al.: The phylogeography of HIV-1 group M subtype B*, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 2008 105: E16; published online on March 12, 2008.

<sup>31</sup> Norma Glick Schiller, “The Implications of Haitian Transnationalism for U.S.-Haiti Relations: Contradictions of the Deterritorialized Nation-State,” *Journal of Haitian Studies*, 1 (1), 1995, 111-123, 115.

<sup>32</sup> Glick Schiller 116.

<sup>33</sup> This is the case even when, as Anthony Catanese has shown “The popular images of Haitian immigrants in the United States do not match the picture just drawn from detailed 1990 U.S. Census data. For example, Haitian Americans have never been disproportionately found among the lowest paid immigrants, usually are women, provide needed services and tend to be employed in the private sector.” Anthony Catanese, *Haitians: Migration and Diaspora* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999) 108-109.



people who speak funny [...] When I was about nine, I developed an answer if someone asked if I was Haitian: I would say that I was West Indian. I was born here, and had never stepped out of this country, but no one accepted me as an American.”<sup>35</sup> As the narrator’s elusive strategy indicates, negative stereotypes and prejudicial narratives are all the more destructive when they are tacitly accepted by those they describe.

Whether they seek to contest or confirm them, when translations bring texts across languages, and from one system to another, they are always faced with the challenge of responding to the presuppositions and dominant narratives of the new context. The stereotypes, prejudice, and racism discussed above with regard to widespread attitudes in the United States towards Haiti can also be seen as narratives, defined by Baker as “public and personal ‘stories’ that we subscribe to and that guide our behaviour. They are stories we tell ourselves, not just those we explicitly tell other people, about the world(s) we live in.”<sup>36</sup> Baker’s attempt to integrate narrative theory into the field of translation studies guides this analysis, so that one of its principal purposes is to consider the ways in which negative narratives may enter into potentially transformative negotiations with alternative narratives through translation.

### **Language in Haiti, National, Transnational**

Conventionally translation is not thought of so much as re-narration, as a change in the languages in which narratives are told. Before discussing the narrative shifts brought

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<sup>34</sup> Michael Dash, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> Anthony Calypso, “The Million Man March” *The Butterfly’s Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States*, Edwidge Danticat, ed. (New York: Soho, 2001) 132-146, 139-140.

about through the translation of *Les Rapaces*, it is necessary to reflect on the language situation of Haiti. First and foremost, as the translator of a Haitian text in French, I must draw attention to an important caveat, namely that despite claims to the contrary, Haiti is not a francophone country. Haiti can only be called francophone in the sense that *la francophonie* is not so much a linguistic reality as a political ploy – initiated in France, and readily accepted in Anglo-American academia.<sup>37</sup> This ploy, which works by appealing to a ‘shared’ cultural heritage in the French language, vigorously promoted by French cultural entities around the world and true to some extent for the generations educated within the French colonial system, systematically obscures the socio-economic realities behind those who actually speak French in any given Francophone country. This is particularly the case in ex-colonies, where almost inevitably French is spoken by the educated elite. In Haiti, French is spoken and written by only a small minority, so that to call it a francophone country is a misnomer that elides the linguistic reality of the majority of the population who are monolingual Kreyòl<sup>38</sup> speakers. As Leon-François Hoffman explains below, one of the most deleterious results of this situation is that the majority of Haitians have been disenfranchised from literacy partly through this language policy:

The linguistic situation in Haiti is unique, in that all citizens are perfectly fluent in Créole, while no more than 10% have a working knowledge of French. Yet French is – and always has been – the only accepted language for use in

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<sup>36</sup> Baker 2005, 2.

<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, Haiti is extremely well-represented in *Pour une littérature-monde*, the recent manifesto against the use of the term *la francophonie* which, in a post-colonial move, advocates instead the use of world literature in French. Three out of a total of 27 authors are Haitian (Dany Laferrière, Lyonel Trouillot, Gary Victor) – more than any other single country in the collection. The Haitian revolutionary tradition? See Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud, *Pour une littérature-monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007).

<sup>38</sup> I use the spelling Kreyòl rather than the more generic Creole to emphasize that I am referring to *Kreyòl ayisyen*, the language spoken in Haiti, as opposed to any other form of Creole.

government, and legal and educational activities. It is also the language of the media and of commercial advertising (although lately Créole has challenged its supremacy in these areas). Manipulation of access to the learning of the official language has effectively kept 90% of the Haitian people illiterate. [...] the truth is that Créole is the language spoken by 100% of the Haitian population, and the only language spoken by 80% of its citizenry.<sup>39</sup>

Kreyòl was only granted status as an official language in 1961, a political stance reinforced in the 1987 constitution and only gradually reflected in the use of Kreyòl in the media and other public venues. The standardization of Kreyòl spelling in 1978 sought to settle dialectal differences between the North, South, and central regions. There are still many prejudices associated with the educational implementation of this dual language policy, since French remains the key to social and economic success. Furthermore, since most schools in Haiti are private institutions, it is difficult to institute any language policy nationally. As a result, many schools in urban areas tend to focus on French education, while Kreyòl dominates schools in rural areas. Historically, this situation has reinforced the power imbalances of Haitian politics, since as one critical sociolinguist has argued these “language policies keep the working masses in their place just as effectively as a gun.”<sup>40</sup>

To complicate its situation as a multilingual French/Kreyòl nation, Haiti is in the process of mutating into a plurilingual transnational entity in which English (to say nothing of Spanish) has an increasingly important place – not just American English, but all the regional variants found in Anglophone countries in a Caribbean, which is

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<sup>39</sup> Léon-François Hoffmann, *Essays on Haitian Literature* (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1984) 31 and 40. This passage remains unchanged in the republished version, *Haitian Fiction Revisited*, (Colorado: Passeggiata Press, 1999) 47 and 58.

<sup>40</sup> Erik Jacobson, “Critical Sociolinguistics in the Adult ESOL Classroom” *Radical Teacher*, Winter 2003, Issue 68, 13-17, 14.

currently forging a transnational identity. The translation of Vieux-Chauvet's *Les Rapaces* from French to English thus responds to the relatively new linguistic situation of a transnational Haiti.

I deliberately use 'multilingual' to describe Haiti's language usage, rather than the term 'diglossic', in response to the position taken by Yves Dejean in his 1993 article "An Overview of the Language Situation of Haiti."<sup>41</sup> Dejean argues convincingly that Haiti is not a diglossic nation on the grounds that 95% of the population is monolingual, speaking only Kreyòl; French and Kreyòl are distinct languages (Kreyòl is not a variant of French); and there is no compartmentalization in use between the two languages. What Dejean does not say, but one might surmise, is that the common assumption that Haiti is diglossic reflects certain stereotypes about the use and place of Kreyòl, although they do not in fact conform to linguistic realities. The assumption that French is a superior language flatters the promoters of 'la Francophonie' and buttresses the privileged perspective of a small, bilingual minority, even as it conflicts with "a reality that is 200 years old."<sup>42</sup> In fact, it might not be too much of an exaggeration to say that if French is spoken in Haiti, it is in a large part because for many years children were beaten if they spoke Kreyòl in school.

Carrol Coates endorses Dejean's analysis and his preference for 'multilingual' over 'diglossic' in his discussion of Dolores A. Schaeffer's translation of Paulette Poujol-Oriol's novel *Le Creuset (The Crucible)*, which interweaves multiple languages

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<sup>41</sup> Yves Dejean, "An Overview of the Language Situation in Haiti" *International Journal of Social Language*, 102, 1993, 73-83.

<sup>42</sup> Dejean 80.

with “elements of Creole, French, Spanish, and Latin.”<sup>43</sup> Coates has written extensively on the languages of Haitian texts, arguing in favor of ‘Haitian’ as a third category for describing the language(s) used in many texts that may appear on first glance to be in French: “Many Haitian novels, appearing to be in French actually contain extensive lexical and discursive elements in Haitian Kreyòl, disguised as French through Gallicized orthography. Jacques Stephen Alexis’s entire novel, *Compère Général Soleil* [...has] a total of six languages inscribed in what is presumably French discourse, published in Paris by the major publisher, Gallimard.”<sup>44</sup> It is worth noting, however, that Coates’s translational view is not undisputed. Linguist Corinne Etienne has argued against the use of such a term: “calling French in Haiti ‘Haitian French’ would be imposing an illusory cohesion on a very divided and unstable linguistic picture, where French/Creole bilingual speakers constantly face an existential and linguistic dilemma. For my participants, what makes French in Haiti Haitian – its contacts with Creole – is what makes it unacceptable as French.”<sup>45</sup> Putting aside these ongoing debates regarding the languages of Haiti, one of the most complex translational issues has been the intersection of languages with respect to the audiences for whom I am translating.

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<sup>43</sup> Carrol Coates, “Translating the Haitian Novel: Problems of Caribbean Discourse,” *Keystones of Communication: Proceedings of the 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the American Translators Association, Oct. 6-10, 1993* (Philadelphia, PA. Medford, N.J.: Learned Information Inc., 1993) 253-257, 253.

<sup>44</sup> Carrol Coates, “Problems of ‘Translating’ Bi-/Multi-lingual Literary Texts: The Haitian French of Jacques Stephen Alexis.” *Proceedings of the 39<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the American Translators Association, American Translators Association* (Hilton Head Island, SC: American Translators Association, 1998) 27-33, 27.

<sup>45</sup> Corinne Etienne, “French in Haiti: Contacts and Conflicts between Linguistic Representations,” *History, Society and Variation: In Honor of Albert Valdman*, 2006, 179-200, 199.

## The Translation's Audiences

There are three groups of readers who define the receiving context of my translation.

The first is the sizeable group of first and second generation Haitians in the United States, otherwise known as Haiti's "10th department,"<sup>46</sup> that is people of Haitian descent living in the United States who are seen as forming an overseas department in addition to the nine administrative districts within Haiti. In communities concentrated "in four states: New York, Florida, New Jersey, and Massachusetts,"<sup>47</sup> there are increasing numbers of Anglophone Haitians. Although Kreyòl is often spoken at home, many in this new generation of Haitians do not speak French. Growing up in an English language education system and Anglophone environment, many Haitian Americans are therefore excluded from their literary heritage in French.

While sociologist Flore Zéphir argued that for non-English speaking first generation immigrants, French not only acted as a way "to reinforce class distinctions among Haitians" but also represented valuable "linguistic capital"<sup>48</sup> in terms of assimilation into American society, these strategies are not available, or even necessary, for their English-speaking children. Indeed, the authors of the cultural summary for

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<sup>46</sup> According to Glick Schiller 1995, the term "10<sup>th</sup> Department" was first used by George Anglade in 1990, but popularized by ex-President Jean Bertrand Aristide. Glick Schiller comments that "when legitimacy and public recognition was publicly conferred on Haitian transnationalism, it came not from within the United States but from Haiti," 117. In other words, Haiti as a nation sees its borders expand through transnational migration. Nick Fouron and Nina Glick Schiller warn however that "as the transnational nation state is imagined, replete with the trappings of a democratic electoral process, the process of recolonization by the United States are obscured" Georges E. Fouron and Nina Glick Schiller, "Haitian Identities at the Juncture Between Diaspora and Homeland," *Caribbean Circuits: New Directions in the Study of Caribbean Migration*, Patricia R. Pessar, ed. (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1997) 127-159, 157.

<sup>47</sup> Garvey F. Lundy, "Patterns of U.S. Migration from a Haitian Sending Community," *Journal of Caribbean Studies* 21: 1&2, 2007, 51-66.

Haitian Americans in the 1998 eHRAF Collection of Ethnography state that “many young Haitians raised in the United States prefer to speak English and often refuse to respond to their parents when spoken to in Kreyòl or French.”<sup>49</sup> This intergenerational linguistic rift within Haitian communities in the United States creates the need and forms the primary audience I envisage for the translation. This is a group whose connections to Haiti, while palpable, may be more ambivalent, given their education and upbringing. As the narrator of Calypso’s short story comments, “in a school chock full of Haitian-American kids, we didn’t learn a thing about the Haitian trinity of revolutionaries Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Toussaint Louverture, and Henri Christophe.”<sup>50</sup> Without access to Haitian texts written in French, this heritage is kept behind a dam; translation is one of its locks.

A second audience is the Haitian diaspora living in Anglophone Caribbean countries, as well as readers from countries such as Jamaica or Trinidad interested in Haitian literature but who do not read French. With a total worldwide Haitian diasporic population of some three and a half million, the proportion of Anglophone Haitians is certain to rise in coming years, expanding the numbers of what may initially appear to be a somewhat restricted audience. In this context, the point made by N’Zengou-Tayo and Wilson in their article “Translators on a Tight Rope: The Challenges of Translating Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Texaco*” is well

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<sup>48</sup> Flore Zéphir, “The Social Value of French for Bilingual Haitian Immigrants,” *The French Review*, 70, 1997, 395-406, 399.

<sup>49</sup> Nina Glick-Schiller, Carole Charles, John Beierle. *Haitian Americans* E-Book in the series *eHRAF Collection of Ethnography. North America* (New Haven, CT: Human Relations Area Files, 1998-) Accessed, 2/22/2007.

<sup>50</sup> Calypso 140.

taken: they argue that “a look at the market for literary translation shows that the targeted readership is not from the Caribbean but from northern countries (the rich industrialized North)”<sup>51</sup> and they advocate practical steps to change this bias. For instance, they suggest that it would be preferable if, during the editorial process, publishing houses “systematically used Caribbean native speakers [...] as readers for Caribbean texts.”<sup>52</sup> Although I seek to counter the bias they identify by translating with a Caribbean readership in mind, my second audience also includes the transnational groups that N’Zengou-Tayo and Wilson do not mention when they contrast the rich North to the Caribbean, for there are an increasing number of transnationals who have ties with both areas. Directed towards Anglophone Haitian populations in the Caribbean with transnational ties, this translational strategy seeks to counter the hegemonic pressure and imperialistic presumptions of the United States and is a direct response to the formation of transnational communities.

Within a global framework, a third potential audience is the amorphous and highly heterogeneous Anglophone “world literature” audience. Thanks to the wide popular acclaim for the work of Edwidge Danticat, an international Anglophone space for Haitian authors has been opened up, not just through her writing, which has caught the attention of the mainstream, but also through collections she has edited, such as *The Butterfly’s Way: Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States* (2001). The opening of this Anglophone space is not only notable for introducing audiences

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<sup>51</sup> Marie-José N’Zengou-Tayo and Elizabeth Wilson “Translators on a Tight Rope: The Challenges of Translating Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Texaco*,” *Traduction, terminologie, rédaction*, 13 (2), 2000, 75-105, 75.

<sup>52</sup> N’Zengou-Tayo and Wilson 99.



unfamiliar with Haiti to this nation, culture, and its remarkable history, it also of particular value for my primary audience – Haitian Americans who do not read French – since it offers them a way in to Haitian literature.<sup>53</sup> The endorsement of the value of Anglophone Haitian literature from within the United States may therefore act as a bridge to an appreciation of Francophone Haitian literature in translation.

Within the world literature audience, I also include the specialized area of academia, both in the United States and abroad, from which this translation emerges. While Vieux-Chauvet is receiving increased recognition in academic circles in the United States on account of the aesthetic qualities and political significance of her work, and as francophone literature, women’s writing, and texts by people of color become established within the curriculum, the trilogy almost inevitably dominates critical responses to her texts. I would like to change this narrow critical focus by drawing attention to *Les Rapaces* as a powerful and highly accessible text that offers an important complement to Vieux-Chauvet’s acknowledged masterpiece.

One of my main motives in selecting *Les Rapaces* to translate is thus to expand the range of Vieux-Chauvet’s texts that are read, hoping that a translation into English will further interdisciplinary scholarship as well as boosting readership in French. An increased readership in French would include not only France and other French speaking areas of the Caribbean, but also and in particular, Haiti, for as Danticat commented in interview: “Marie Chauvet was a big influence for me. When I was in

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<sup>53</sup> Although Martin Munro makes the important point that “The clear willingness of the American literary establishment and reading public to claim Danticat as their own immediately raises some critical questions, and not only that of her popularity, her almost universal media endorsement, what might be called her “Oprahfication,” Martin Munro, *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature: Alexis, Depestre, Ollivier, Laferrrière, Danticat* (Liverpool, U.K.: Liverpool University Press, 2007) 206.

school in Haiti, we only read French writers. This might have changed, but this is my own experience. I was never given Haitian writers to read.”<sup>54</sup> Vieux-Chauvet’s work is even less well-known in other languages than in French. *The Raptors* is only the third of Vieux-Chauvet’s seven texts to be translated into English. In 1959 *Dance on the volcano*<sup>55</sup> appeared in English, and in 1980 *Amour* was translated for a doctoral thesis.<sup>56</sup> *Colère* appeared in Spanish, as a translation thesis in Puerto Rico.<sup>57</sup> Needless to say, none of these translations are readily available, and so they too have a very restricted readership.

In practical terms, the recent availability of the visually appealing and affordable French re-publications of Vieux-Chauvet’s *Amour*, *Colère*, *Folie* and *La Danse sur le volcan*, together with plans for *Les Rapaces*, will no doubt have a considerable impact on the appreciation of her work. José Pliya’s stage adaptation of *Amour*, performed first at L’Artchipel, the national stage of Guadeloupe, then in Martinique, and later at *La Villette* in Paris in 2008, together with a conference dedicated to Vieux-Chauvet’s work at the Institut Français d’Haiti in 2007, auger well for the coming years, in which we can expect to see international discussion of Vieux-Chauvet’s work, the adoption of her texts on academic course syllabi, and a resurgence in critical interest.

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<sup>54</sup> Danticat in interview, quoted in Munro, 287.

<sup>55</sup> Marie Chauvet, *Dance on the volcano*, trans. Salvator Attanasio (New York: W. Sloan Associates, 1959).

<sup>56</sup> Marie Chauvet, "A Translation of *Amour*, the first book of the trilogy novel *Amour, Colère et Folie* by Marie Vieux Chauvet, with a critical introduction, 'Haiti: From a Woman's Point of View'". Doctoral thesis, Joyce Marie Cogdell-Travis, Brown University, 1980.

<sup>57</sup> Marie Chauvet, "*Ira*, una traducción de *Colère*, by Marie Vieux Chauvet". Jacqueline Féquière Décatrel Translation Thesis, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Ríos Piedras, 1999.

Moving from a fairly restricted audience of non-French speaking, Anglophone Haitian Americans, to wider regional Anglophone Caribbean communities, and then to a global English-speaking audience, this translation is poised to traverse several different communities, all of which look towards the Francophone Haitian literary scene through the translation. In configuring these new audiences, it is interesting to consider Tymoczko's argument against construing the translator as being 'between' languages or cultures<sup>58</sup> on the basis that this metaphor runs the risk of ignoring an ethical necessity for translators to acknowledge their positionality, and hence their affiliations and ideological commitments. Although Tymoczko's warning against theorizing translators outside of any system is well-taken, there is no need to throw out all spatial metaphors on this account. Translation and transnationalism should simply be rethought in terms of alternative models, and in Part Four I suggest the concept of becoming as one such paradigm. Inasmuch as *Les Rapaces* and its translation into English as *The Raptors* participate in a transnational system that is a summation of different parts (including for instance, Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad, the United States), it might be seen as 'among,' rather than falling 'between' any individual system within that larger set. Thus the traveling habits of transnationals (texts or individuals) force us to re-think positionality in terms of engagement in the encounters that take place within particular locations.

Responding to the need for translations to be understood as implicated texts, I now turn to consider Vieux-Chauvet's fictional tale as an important statement, for readers in both the source and the receiving cultures. *Les Rapaces* exposes the

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<sup>58</sup> Maria Tymoczko, "Ideology and the Position of the Translator: In What Sense is a Translator 'In Between'?" *Apropos of Ideology: Translation Studies on Ideology – Ideologies in Translation Studies*

omnipresence of violence and corruption during Jean-Claude Duvalier's dictatorship, but it is also a powerful allegory about transformation, written by a woman who spoke out bravely and selflessly against "le cynicism, la veulerie et l'injustice."<sup>59</sup> Arguing for the important role of narrative shift in catalyzing social and political change, I analyze the text in order to explain why I believe that its translation is not only a valuable literary contribution, but is also strategically beneficial to the Haitian community in the receiving culture.

### **Who are the Raptors?**

*Les Rapaces* is an allegory structured by deceptively simple symbols. The text is divided into three parts, each focusing on the subjects of different symbolic roles – the cat, the poor, the police – who both circulate and are the recipients of circulating objects. These transference objects participate in an economy, which is not an economy of exchange, but rather one of scavenging, rapacious theft, and extortion: a raptor economy. By highlighting the dereliction created by this dominant economy, Vieux-Chauvet emphasizes injustices that directly implicate several groups who benefit from, or pay for, the transfer by one means or another. In this nefarious exchange system, cats, houses, blood, and even cadavers form links between various agents, raptors who feed on one another in a complex interplay of power and privilege.

To take an example, Mimi is a beautiful black cat with silken fur enjoying all the privileges of the wealthy while it lives with its master Lorius, a torturer. Linked to its

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(Manchester: St. Jerome Press, 2003) 181-201.

<sup>59</sup> "Cynicism, spinelessness and injustice" Preface to *Amour, Colère, et Folie*, 2005.

master's fate, the cat's position collapses with Lorius's downfall, and following its escape, it finds itself with a revolutionary poet, Michel, who gives a temporary home and feeds the starving animal. After Michel is assassinated, the cat loses its new protector and falls even lower, when, in a pitiful state, *le dos ravagé par la gale*,<sup>60</sup> it hides out along with the poor children who move into Michel's shack. After killing one of the rats that plague the shack and prey on the children, the cat's merciless destiny comes to an end when the starving family eats it. As an allegorical symbol, the cat represents a chain of dependencies and usury between individuals, revealing the connections and tensions between the pathetic 'criminals', *les mangeurs de chats*, and the criminals running the country.

While for a few the raptor economy is a matter of great fortunes,<sup>61</sup> for most the workings of this economy manifest throughout society in terms of the most basic and fundamental human needs, such as food and shelter. On several occasions in *Les Rapaces*, one person's house becomes that of another. First, the shack in which Michel lives is left empty when he is killed, offering shelter to the desperate Alcindor and his young family, who have been expelled from their own home. In a series of flashbacks we learn how the peasant Alcindor was expropriated of his house by 'the raptors,' confirming the prediction of the *houngan*, seer and priest, that "Les Rapaces viendront jusqu'ici pour vous enlever de la bouche le pain de chaque jour."<sup>62</sup> Sheltering his family in the shack, Alcindor is haunted by the cycle of violence "Sur le plancher, l'homme

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<sup>60</sup> "its ravaged, mange coat" Chauvet 16.

<sup>61</sup> Carolle Charles refers us to Alex Dupuy's 1989 *Haiti in the World Economy*, and claims that "In Haiti, less than 10 percent of the population received more than 46 percent of the national income" 140.

<sup>62</sup> "the raptors will come even here to steal the daily bread from your mouth" Chauvet 71.

était mort, puis le rat, puis le chat. A qui le tour?”<sup>63</sup> This ominous circulation emphasizes instability, injustice, and an oppressive social and political system.

A third, repellant site of exchange is the economy that develops around human bodies. Integrating two recent scandals from the Duvalier era,<sup>64</sup> Vieux-Chauvet shows a father selling his blood to feed his children. These pathetic scenes recall the notorious sale of blood plasma to companies in the United States. The second scandal Vieux-Chauvet evokes is the deals made between the Haitian government and American companies to procure human bodies for scientific experiments. In *Les Rapaces*, the Haitian leaders agree to deliver twenty cadavers a week, raising funds to pay the army. The government’s deal is served by the cadavers of the most deprived, such as the peasant Alcindor. In this violent climate, Vieux-Chauvet highlights the horrific excess of cadavers: Alcindor muses that the bodies of the peasants expropriated from the hills

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<sup>63</sup> “On this floor a man died, then a rat, then a cat. Who’s next?” Chauvet 64.

<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth Abbott describes the scandals in *Haiti: The Duvaliers and their Legacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), although some of her interpretations are questionable, if not to say distasteful:

“Most callous was [Luckner] Cambronne’s blood-plasma business, which earned him the nickname ‘Vampire of the Caribbean.’ Through his company, Hemo-caribbean, he shipped five tons of plasma a month to American laboratories directed by Armour Pharmaceutical, Cutter Laboratories, Dow Chemical, and others. Haitian blood is extremely rich in antibodies, for survivors of the country’s high disease and infant mortality rates develop much richer supplies of antibodies than necessary in less unhealthy societies. Haitian blood was therefore in great demand, and Cambronne did all he could to satisfy it. He organized clinics that paid donors, indiscriminately chosen, \$5.00 a pint for their blood, then resold it at \$35 a pint to the United States.

Cambronne also dealt in cadavers, in almost as much demand. To save the living, medical students must dissect the dead, and obtaining corpses in sufficient quantity is the perennial problem of medical schools. Haitian cadavers, readily available once Cambronne entered the business, had the distinct advantage of being thin, so the student had not layers of fat to slice through before reaching the object of the lesson.

Cambronne, using the refrigerated container service recently introduced into Haiti, supplied these corpses on demand. When the General Hospital failed to provide him with enough despite the \$3.00 he paid for each body, he simply stole them from various funeral parlors. More than one mourning Haitian family opened a coffin for a final viewing to discover that it was empty.

Rumors even circulated that Cambronne resorted to killing the poor urban homeless when he was having trouble filling his quota” 172.

“auraient servi d’engrais à leur maudit jardin de fleurs”<sup>65</sup> and Alcindor’s family cannot even bury the bones of a cat without the macabre discovery of the body of the dead poet.

This raptor economy, enmeshed in, dependent on, and perpetuating a condition of terror, is the object of Vieux-Chauvet’s satirical critique. She presents the situation of a terrorized society without flinching, targeting not only corrupt leaders who profit from a situation of terror, but also the bourgeois class whose selfishness contributes to the awful excesses, and even the desperate masses driven to a state of depravity. The sustained social and political critique offered by Vieux-Chauvet in *Les Rapaces* supports Chancy’s view that: “The apocalypse the North imagines as far off, or attempts to prepare itself for, is that which it inflicts upon the South.”<sup>66</sup> Opening her tale with a crowd of pitiful beggars, Vieux-Chauvet is unrelenting in describing the apocalyptic misery of Haiti under Duvalier: “L’un d’eux, amputé des jambes et des cuisses, coupé pour ainsi dire à la moitié du corps, le tronc fixe à une natte, sautillait par bonds comme un crapaud.”<sup>67</sup> One of the most powerful aspects of Vieux-Chauvet’s writing is precisely the presence she gives to all layers of society: we never forget that people are starving in the street while others feast at the table. Yet, the omnipresent beggars are an ambivalent force in her tale: though pitiful in their rags, they also form a menacing, volatile crowd, armed by political leaders interested in maintaining a fractured society.

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See also Dr. Paul Farmer’s analysis of this trade in blood and bodies in *The Uses of Haiti* (Maine: Common Courage Press, 1994, reprinted 2006) 44-46.

<sup>65</sup> “would have been fertilizer for their damned flower beds” Chauvet, 71.

<sup>66</sup> Chancy 138.

<sup>67</sup> “One of them, whose legs and thighs had been amputated, whose body had been virtually cut in half, and whose trunk was attached to a mat, hopped along like a toad” Chauvet 10.

In so far as Vieux-Chauvet's novel offers an astute exemplification of power dynamics typical of an intersectional approach, accounting not only for gender but also other differential factors such as race, sexuality, class, physical ability, and nationality, it endorses Watt's comment that literature "anticipate[s] the demands of the particular cultural field in which it will appear."<sup>68</sup> In other words, practice predates theory, so that the "feminism" voiced by Vieux-Chauvet's fiction offers the grounds for a subsequent explication of a feminist agenda within a widened integrative approach. Vieux-Chauvet goes beyond mere representation of sociologist Carolle Charles's observation that in Haiti, "ironically, state violence created, for the first time, gender equality,"<sup>69</sup> to examine how this new circulation of violence plays out within an intersectional framework. Crucially, Vieux-Chauvet shows how individuals may be simultaneously oppressed and privileged. This nuanced perspective, far more subtle than Manichean accounts of oppression, perhaps derives from Vieux-Chauvet's sensibility as a bourgeois mulatto woman who herself knew the destabilizing situation of being at once privileged and oppressed.

Who are the raptors? Then they were the *Tonton Makout*, the armed thugs who kept Duvalier in power. Since then, the *Zenglendou*, *Frapp*, *Koko Rat*, *Grenn nan bouda*, and *Rat pa kaka*, a series of armed groups terrorizing citizens and imposing their

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<sup>68</sup> Watts 139.

<sup>69</sup> Carolle Charles, "Gender and Politics in Contemporary Haiti: the Duvalierist State, Transnationalism, and the Emergence of a New Feminism 1980-1990" *Feminist Studies* 21:1, Spring 1995, 135-165, 139. Charles' article emphasizes ruefully that one of the effects of Haitian women acceding to the vote in 1950 was a transgression of the protection from violence they had previously enjoyed. As full political subjects, women were now equally subject to state violence, although their agency was still often effaced as Bell comments "human rights and media reporting generally characterized military attacks on women as retribution against their male relatives, effacing the women's own militancy that made them targets."



temporary hold on power.<sup>70</sup> The raptors are those with power, those who misuse power to meet their own needs through violence and extortion. In the translation, I highlight Vieux-Chauvet's analysis of power by drawing attention to its mechanisms typographically: insisting on the pervasive need to assess power, the fear it instills among the most vulnerable, and its hierarchical structuring, I capitalize all those who have some measure of power: Man, Soldier, Torturer, Interpreter, and so on. While this strategy has the immediate advantage of highlighting the allegorical nature of the narrative by pointing to the symbolic roles of the characters, it might initially appear somewhat heavy-handed or distracting. However, ultimately I hope that its effect on the reader will be to instill an awareness of the constant fear that a raptor economy produces in its subjects. In a terrorized society, individuals do not have the luxury of bracketing power differentials; the discomfort produced by over-capitalization serves to produce a similar effect among readers.

## **Narratives of Hope**

In the past there was a general consensus that, as Leon-François Hoffman put it, “Haitian literature has always been a committed literature,”<sup>71</sup> but this claim has recently been contested. N’Zengou-Tayo’s article on “The End of the Committed Intellectual:

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Beverly Bell, *Walking on Fire: Haitian Women's Stories of Survival and Resistance* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001) 95.

<sup>70</sup> Thanks to Fadner Pierre for his explanation of the names given to raptors in particular periods. Referring to recent politics: from 1991 to 2008, criminal groups have been: *Zenglendou* (1991-94) *Frapp* (1997-99), *Koko rat* (2001-02), *Grenn nan bouda*: (2002-03) and *Rat pa kaka* (2005-07).

<sup>71</sup> Nadgège Clitandre quoting from Hoffmans' *Haitian Literature in the past 10 years* in “Reformulating Haitian Literature Transnationally: Identifying New and Revised Tropes of Haitian Identity in Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory*,” *Journal of Haitian Studies*, Vol 9, No. 2, 2003, 90-110, 90.

The Case of Lyonel Trouillot”<sup>72</sup> makes the case against the optimism and activism such commitment implies. This question is significant given that one of my primary motives for selecting *Les Rapaces* to translate is precisely the role Vieux-Chauvet’s allegory attributes to the writer as an agent of change, her faith in the text as a catalyst of moral, social, and political innovation, in a word, her narrative about a transformative text.

Although *Les Rapaces* is a brutally frank exposition of the self-perpetuating circulation of violence, Vieux-Chauvet complicates this portrayal by including the book written by a revolutionary poet Michel, which acts as a means of interrupting the cycle of violence. Michel voices a narrative of hope, the hope of narrative:

Malgré tout, le poète était plein d’espoir. Ce livre qu’il écrivait allait tirer le peuple de sa torpeur. Il retrouverait en lui le souvenir de son glorieux passé et se dresserait en justicier, face au tyran. Et la condamnation publique de ce dernier entraînerait celle de tous les autres despotes qui s’étaient pendant trop longtemps succédé au pouvoir. [...] Au exploités de toujours de revendiquer enfin leurs droits !<sup>73</sup>

Significantly, the manuscript is mediated by Michel’s girlfriend Anne, who takes it into safekeeping and ensures its distribution. Conversations with Anne galvanize the consciousness of oppression of a peasant, who declares, “Pour ce qu’il en est de moi, s’était dit Alcindor, après le départ de la fille du ministre, j’ai fini avec tout ça. Le

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<sup>72</sup> N’Zengou-Tayo “The End of the Committed Intellectual: The Case of Lyonel Trouillot,” *Ecrire en pays assiégé – Haiti – Writing under Siege*, Marie-Agnès Sourrieau and Kathleen M. Balutansky, eds (New York: Rodopi, 2004) 323-344.

<sup>73</sup> “Despite it all, the poet is filled with Hope. The book he’s writing will pull the people out of this state of torpor. Deep within, the Haitian people will re-discover the memory of their glorious past to stand up and judge the Tyrant. Public condemnation of the Tyrant will precipitate the downfall of all the other Despots holding onto power for too long [...] Time for the eternally oppressed to finally claim their rights!” Chauvet 29.

respect des chefs, je ne l'ai plus et je ne crierai jamais vive pour aucun d'eux."<sup>74</sup>

Eventually, Michel's text precipitates the remorse of Anne's father, a government minister who reneged on his ethical convictions when he decided to further his career:

Et voilà que de sa conscience obscurcie par l'ambition et l'égoïsme jaillit comme une gerbe d'étincelles [...] Je dépenserai ma fortune à réparer le mal que j'ai fait à mon pays. J'en fais le serment. Que ce livre soit publié et qu'à ma suite marchent tous les autres rapaces. Ce miracle qu'espérait l'auteur devra s'accomplir.<sup>75</sup>

The manuscript's narrative of hope is thus fulfilled at least at some levels within the text. To my mind, a *mise en abyme* effect is at work here, whereby Michel's vision is also Vieux-Chauvet's manifesto. Apparently, however, my interpretation is not unanimous; indeed, Marie-Denise Shelton concludes quite the opposite: "Chauvet accumulates all the pessimism and despair which she had to some extent suppressed in her previous novels. *Les Rapaces* is the anguished farewell of an author who seemed to have lost, during the years of exile, all hope."<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, Joëlle Vitiello comments that Vieux-Chauvet's representation is outdated, "le rôle de l'écrivain-prophète et de l'écrivain-militant proposé par Marie Vieux Chauvet dans *Les Rapaces* est désuet aujourd'hui, peut-être à cause de sa naïveté que l'écriture peut changer le monde."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> "As for me," Alcindor said to himself, after the Minister's daughter left, "I'm done with all that. Respect for the leaders, I don't have it any more, and never again will I cry out long live any one of them." Chauvet 82-83.

<sup>75</sup> "And so it was then that his conscience, obscured by ambition and selfishness, burst out in a fountain of sparks. [...] I'll spend all my money on repairing the damage I've done my country. I swear I will. That book must be published and the other Raptors will do as I have done. The miracle the author hoped for must come to pass." Chauvet 113-114.

<sup>76</sup> Marie-Denise Shelton, "Haitian Women's Fiction," *Callaloo*, Vol. 15, No. 3, Haitian Literature and Culture, Part 2, Summer 1992, 770-777, 775.

<sup>77</sup> Joëlle Vitiello "L'écriture de Yanick Lahens," *Ecrire en pays assiégé – Haiti – Writing under Siege*, Marie-Agnès Sourrieau and Kathleen M. Balutansky, eds. "the role of the prophet-writer and the militant-writer proposed by Marie Vieux Chauvet in *Les Rapaces* is outdated today, perhaps because of its naïve view that writing can change the world."

Despite the arguments of these critics, I suggest nevertheless that literature has a critical role to play, and that reading texts can have real practical consequences. Reformulating this conviction in other terms, Emma Wilson has argued that “formative fictions” do exist and that “the act of reading might itself redirect reality.”<sup>78</sup> To support this point, let me return to narrative theory, arguing with Baker that because of “the human mind’s reliance on narrative to make sense of the world [...] narratives [that] have implications in the real world.”<sup>79</sup>

One of the reasons why I was drawn to *Les Rapaces* was my encounter with a compelling narrative: the heroic narrative of the Haitian Revolution of 1804. Just as the narrator of Calypso’s short story finds in the “Haitian trinity of revolutionaries” an inspiring history that transforms his self-image as a Haitian American from shame over his origins to pride and self-respect and concludes “I regretted all the time I had wasted believing what other histories and other institutions said about me,”<sup>80</sup> on learning about the immense achievement of the Haitian slaves during the 2004 bicentennial, I too came to adhere to a new narrative that profoundly altered my perception and construction of history and left me with an enduring respect for what Haiti represents as the first independent Black nation. This narrative runs counter to many narratives about slavery that still dominate European and American contexts. For instance, discussions of the abolition of slavery often continue to frame the end of slavery as a gift endowed on

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<sup>78</sup> Emma Wilson, *Sexuality and the Reading Encounter: Identity and Desire in Proust, Duras, Tournier and Cixous* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) 6.

<sup>79</sup> Mona Baker, “Ethics of Renarration.”

<sup>80</sup> Calypso 140.

slaves by benevolent colonialists who saw the errors of their ways, rather than a result of direct action by slaves themselves.<sup>81</sup>

Furthermore, the injustices and impositions Haiti has suffered since that foundational moment, from the vast indemnity paid to the French for recognition of the new nation, to the United States' occupation from 1915-1934 and many other interventions since then, to the ineptitude and violence of so many of its political leaders, encouraged me to try to promote, through translation, an appreciation of what the transformatory moment of the revolution symbolizes precisely as a possibility for transformation in the future. In other words, my translation is intimately connected to the reworking of a world view that places Haiti not as a nadir of poverty and political terror, but as an eminently modern nation that played a key role in the evolution of human history and that achieved an ideal that is a source of inspiration for the struggle against oppression, even when that symbolic role is complicated by a long subsequent history of failures and tragedies in political leadership.

I recognize the significance of the narrative of the Haitian revolutionary achievement even while acknowledging the dangers of what Martin Munro terms “a self-perpetuating circularity in much critical thinking about Haiti,” namely, “Haiti may be a political and social catastrophe, but it has a glorious, epic history, and an endlessly creative culture, which to some extent counterbalance or compensate for daily

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<sup>81</sup> An example of this tendency was an article about documents at the Bodleian library on debates surrounding Britain's abolition of the slave trade in 1807, published in *Oxford Today* magazine (19:2). The fact that the long article made no reference whatsoever to the Haitian Revolution of 1804 moved me to write a letter contesting this reading of history: “To omit the achievement of the Haitian slaves is to perpetuate a historical record which fails to recognize the voice and agency of the ‘objects’ of the slave trade.” “Voice of Slavery” *Oxford Today* (Oxford Blackwell Publishing, Vol. 19, No. 3, Trinity 2007) 63.

indignities and ongoing suffering.”<sup>82</sup> Certainly it would be to fail to grasp the core of Vieux-Chauvet’s work to see the revolutionary narrative as in any way excusing the excesses she exposes; yet her belief that change is possible, that despite the dire social situation, a change of mentality might be brought about through her allegory, is bound to the revolutionary history that did bring dramatic change. As Bell writes, “Transforming beliefs and ideology is not the same as transforming systems and structures, but it is a critical step toward dynamized movement in that direction. Feminist economist Myriam Merlet says, “We must begin seeing things differently because, after all, things change first in one’s head.”<sup>83</sup>

I do believe that literature can have transformative effects; that the necessary shifts in consciousness that precipitate change are often caused by underground rivers that may travel a long way before emerging as a new source, a new way of reading the world. Through these shifts in symbolic representations, real, practical, concrete changes may be achieved; without the narrative, conceptual shifts provoked by literature and other art forms, such change is blocked. As I explain in the following section, translators have the ability, and concurrent responsibility, to bring change through the translation of texts. I should add that in claiming the potential for positive change through translation, I am not effacing the equally strong possibility of furthering conflict and violence via translation. Baker is one of the most outspoken translation theorists to have pointed to the ethical implications of this view, reworking common tropes of translation to draw attention to this facet of translational activity: “I find the ‘bridge

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<sup>82</sup> Martin Munro *Exile and Post-1946 Haitian Literature: Alexis, Depestre, Ollivier, Laferrière, Danticat*. Liverpool, U.K.: Liverpool University Press, 2007, 1.

building' metaphor particularly naïve [...] if I were to opt for a metaphor that avoids this tendency to romanticize translation and that reflects the agency of the translator, I would go for translation as renarration."<sup>84</sup> Clearly, every renarration involves the possibility of both creating new channels of communication and new areas of conflict.

By making *Les Rapaces* available in English I hope that it will contribute to certain narrative shifts. For instance, some Haitian Americans who may have struggled with their Haitian identity as a result of negative images circulating in the United States, may find in Vieux-Chauvet a voice speaking out against corruption of which they may be proud; Haitian women may find a strong figure to identify with in Vieux-Chauvet and enjoy her literary representations of active and clear-sighted women; and the uncompromising voice of her text may draw the attention of Haitian Americans back to the needs and realities of Haiti, inviting transnational solidarity. In short, I see the transformations of *Les Rapaces* as a continuation of the heritage of the Haitian revolutionary ideal of transformation. My hope is that an English translation of *Les Rapaces* will retain Vieux-Chauvet's commitment to engagement through writing precisely by provoking a transformatory effect on those it takes to Haiti either as a return, or as in my case, as a transformatory encounter.

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<sup>83</sup> Bell 209.

<sup>84</sup> Baker 2008.

## CHAPTER 3

### FEMINIST RESISTANCE IN TRANSLATION

*Mwen la:* I'm here  
*kenbe la:* hold the line  
*kenbe fèm:* hold strong  
*kanpe djanm:* stand strong  
*Fòk sa chanje:* This must change

In many ways feminist translation is synonymous with resistance: ideological resistance by means of resistant texts.<sup>85</sup> Feminist translation is described primarily in terms of the many different strategies feminists have devised to signal their non-compliance with established patriarchal assumptions and the multiple social, political, and economic institutions through which women are disadvantaged and oppressed. As I have argued, however, feminist translation is not simply negative and reactive; from an activist standpoint translators have also sought to express feminine consciousness and promote feminist goals by means of text selection and the creation of new aesthetics.

As Sherry Simon and Luise von Flotow have shown in *Gender in Translation* (1996) and *Translation and Gender* (1997) respectively, some of the most assertive and successful models of feminist translation have come from Canadian theorists and writers, including Barbara Godard, Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood, and Nicole Brossard, all of whom draw on the complexities of Quebec's unique history of bilingualism to rethink the place of women in and through translation.<sup>86</sup> Writing about

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<sup>85</sup> 'Resistant texts' is Venuti's term, but could be applied retrospectively to describe many of the early feminist translations.

<sup>86</sup> See also Edwin Gentzler's chapter on "Feminism and Theater in (Quebec) Canada" in *Translation and Identity in the Americas: New Directions in Translation Theory* (London: Routledge, 2008) 40-76.



their translations of Latin American authors, Maier and Levine articulated subversive techniques for dealing with texts whose sentiments they found abhorrent, thereby developing the notion of feminist translation within conflictual contexts,<sup>87</sup> even if this was at the cost of a contradiction in the aggressive methods used to denounce violence, as Rosemarie Arrojo argued.<sup>88</sup> Following on the achievements in feminist translation in the 1970s and 1980s, since the 1990s Gayatri Spivak has played a key role in voicing translation from a post-colonial feminist perspective, nuancing feminist claims by calling for close attention to the cultural specificities and power dynamics at work in translation.<sup>89</sup> Seeking to extend the ground already gained, my intention was to explore other modes of resistance and activism through the translation of *Les Rapaces*.

### **Women's Resistance in *Les Rapaces***

I came to *Les Rapaces* because, having read the narratives of the Haitian Revolution searching for women, I found, as Charles writes, that “the historical accounts ignore the important participation of Haitian women in the antislavery and anticolonial war of independence,” despite the fact that “resistance took many forms, including suicide, poisoning, participation in “marronage” and rebellions. Black slave women killed their children and performed abortions as a way to set the terms for control of their sexuality

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<sup>87</sup> Suzanne Jill Levine, “Translation as (Sub)Version: On Translating *Infante's Inferno*” *SubStance*, 42, 1983: 85-94; Carol Maier “A Woman in Translation, Reflecting” *Translation Review*, Vol. 17, 1985, 4-8.

<sup>88</sup> Rosemarie Arrojo, “Fidelity and Gendered Translation” *Traduction, terminologie, rédaction*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1994, 147-164.

<sup>89</sup> Gayatri Spivak, “The Politics of Translation,” *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, ed. Michele Barrett and Anne Phillips (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 1992); Mahasweta Devi, *Imaginary Maps*, trans. and Introduction Gayatri Spivak (London: Routledge, 1994).

and reproduction.”<sup>90</sup> Faced with the need to find ways of compensating for this erasure of women’s historical contributions, I followed Chancy’s suggestion that Haitian women writers “‘fill in the gap’ missing from Haiti’s landscape, in its cultural and political history, by re-creating that history from a variety of women’s points of views.”<sup>91</sup> Initially, therefore, I turned to literature to fill a historiographic lacuna; later I became interested in literature, and particularly the engaged allegory put forward by Vieux-Chauvet, as a way not just of reflecting, but also of forming history.

While I have already discussed the critical role of Michel and Anne with regard to the transformative manuscript in *Les Rapaces*, there are many other, albeit subtle, points of resistance by women in the text. These expressions of feminist resistance contribute to Vieux-Chauvet’s intersectional analysis of power differentials and illustrate Bell’s important point in *Walking on Fire: Haitian Women’s Stories of Survival and Resistance* that “there is no *absolute* line between power and powerlessness.”<sup>92</sup> In her ethnography, Bell collects the *istwa*, or oral history, of Haitian women to demonstrate the many ways in which resistance is practiced in the direst circumstances. Her ethnographic work with spoken narratives offers interesting parallels to Vieux-Chauvet’s allegory since they both share a feminist critique of the abuse of power by Haitian leaders and both voice feminine narratives of resistance. Likewise, both have an appreciation for the constraints under which resistance occurs.

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<sup>90</sup> Charles 142.

<sup>91</sup> Myriam Chancy, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1997) 168.

<sup>92</sup> Bell 8.

In Vieux-Chauvet's novel there is a wealth of small but telling instances of resistance, fulfilling the need for the representation of resistant women. The novel opens with a moving scene: "Derrière les portes closes, des mères et des veuves qui pleuraient encore leurs fils ou leur époux, crachaient sur le symbole exécré du despote sanguinaire, avant de le hisser au faîte de leur maison"<sup>93</sup> Doubling the 'public' scene of Papa Doc's funeral with the 'private' actions of women, Vieux-Chauvet emphasizes the importance of understanding how a resistant spirit finds expression even under the tightest constraints.

The significance of the gesture of the women in Vieux-Chauvet's text is acknowledged by Bell who, in her framing of the *istwa*, articulates a refined understanding of resistance outside the heroic male tradition:

the definition of resistance is expanded to include any act that keeps the margins of power from being further encroached upon, even where the protagonist cannot expand those margins. Given the forces arrayed against the Haitian woman, simply to *kenbe la*, hold the line – even without making any advance – is a victory. If she does no more than maintain her resources and rights – in the face of attempts by other people, institutions, or systems to deny her them – then she practices resistance.<sup>94</sup>

This determined resistance to survive and to care for children and dependents is acknowledged by Michel in the flashback in which he recalls his mother's life and work as a washerwoman, as well as in the portrayal of the poorest market women, struggling to sell whatever they can gather and to avoid the thieving tax collectors.

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<sup>93</sup> "Meanwhile, behind closed doors, mothers and widows, still mourning their sons and husbands, spat on that Flag — despised symbol of the bloody despot — before raising it to fly above their homes." Chauvet 9.

<sup>94</sup> Bell 5.

Building signs of resistance upon the portrayals of the desperate lives of women for whom survival is an achievement, the first part of the novel is framed by spitting on the flag and the old woman at the water pipe who speaks out fearlessly to denounce the unfair distribution of water: “si je sais où va l’eau du pays, rien ni personne ne m’empêchera de le dire et de le répéter.”<sup>95</sup> In this sense, Vieux-Chauvet’s story illustrates the point Bell makes in her introduction, namely that:

The iron might of successive Haitian rulers, on one side, is infamous. Yet on the other side, the poor citizenry has been equally obstinate. Two centuries of noncompliance, protest, and revolt have kept the economic and political rulers from ever fully consolidating their power.<sup>96</sup>

The spirit of vigilant resistance is thus an important thematic in Vieux-Chauvet’s text, even when it appears in modest guises that indicate Vieux-Chauvet’s appreciation for the concrete realities of resistance. Yet, in terms of her own voice, Vieux-Chauvet’s action is far from modest, since the publication of *Amour, Colère, et Folie* precipitated her exile.

Most of the criticism addressing Vieux-Chauvet’s novels is concerned with a single topic: violence. Critics have addressed her representations of violence, which are less explicit in the allegorical *Les Rapaces* than in the psychological narrative of the trilogy, in order to thematize her contribution as a writer concerned with violence against women under the Duvalier regime. One of the questions which arises in this context is the violence of Vieux-Chauvet’s writing itself, that is, the aggressive and abrasive effect of her texts on readers. Ronnie Scharfman’s reads this troubling aspect

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<sup>95</sup> “If I know where all the water in this country is going, no one and nothing will stop me from saying so and saying so again.” Chauvet 38.

<sup>96</sup> Bell 9.

of Vieux-Chauvet's writing as springing from an activist will to change that which it is representing:

In a universe where all are susceptible to arrest, rape, torture, disappearance, even murder at any moment and for any reason [...] I would like to propose the hypothesis that this work functions as an act of resistance to the violence from which it springs, but that it can only resist by repeating, by violating the reader as it proceeds, dragging us in as accomplices.<sup>97</sup>

In line with Vieux-Chauvet's assault on her readers, my decision to capitalize those who hold power in *The Raptors* also seeks to unsettle readers of the translation visually, in an unrelenting insistence on the places of power. To accept that the violence of Vieux-Chauvet's writing can have an impact on its readers, altering their narratives about violence against women, is to begin to see how literature plays a formative role with material consequences. Thus, the informative, representative role of women's writing interplays with and precipitates shifts of narrative. In the following section, I explore these textual mechanisms further with regard to translation, focusing not so much on readers of the translated text, as on the first reader in translation, namely the translator. In the translator, we see how the intersection of the formative with the informative produces what Maier describes as the "the often unsettling effect of translation on translators."<sup>98</sup> One of the consequences of translating is entering into new relationships,

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<sup>97</sup> Scharfman, 229.

<sup>98</sup> Carol Maier, "The Translator as *Theoros*: Thoughts on Cogitation, Figuration and Current Creative Writing," Theo Hermans, *Translating Others* (Manchester, U.K.: St. Jerome Publishing, 2006) 163-180, 163.

new modes of being, new narratives; in a word, the act of translating is a process of becoming, involving ethical quandaries and activist possibilities.

## CHAPTER 4

### BECOMING IN TRANSLATION

*Intellectually, I know that 'guten tag' means 'good morning,' but in my gut, I know 'Mwen la' doesn't mean 'I'm fine.' It means 'I'm here and life could be a lot worse, often is, but I'm here, and that's enough, and you, my listener, understand that just being here is enough.'*<sup>99</sup>

To talk of the theory and practice of translation without recognizing the mediating agent, the translator through whom the process is at work, has been recognized as increasingly problematic. Thanks to Lawrence Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility*,<sup>100</sup> translators are becoming increasingly visible and audible, although as Maier has pointed out, with this new presence come attendant responsibilities, which may not be fully appreciated by translators more keen on asserting their rights than with addressing the consequences, notably the ethical issues and implications of being involved in an activity that has an inherent potential for conflict. In Maier's words: "to become a point of contact can involve becoming a point of conflict."<sup>101</sup> The feminist impetus informing my translation of *Les Rapaces* must therefore be understood as an embodied activist orientation, one in which I too am implicated, challenged and transformed through the engagement with the text and its translation.

One of the common responses to calls for translators to take the ethical responsibilities of the task seriously is to engage in self-reflection. This self-reflexive

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<sup>99</sup> Phoenix Soleil, "Waves: My Haitian American Rhythm," *Homelands: Women's Journeys across Race, Place, and Time*, Tumang, Patricia Justine and Jessica de Riviera, eds. Foreword Edwidge Danticat (CA: Seal Press, 2006) 161-172, 166.

<sup>100</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge 1995).

reflex should not be construed, however, within a solipsistic or narcissistic model in which the post-Venuti, newly visible translator, forgets, even as she comes into sight, that the author is dead, for it is not at all the intention of current calls for self-reflexivity in translation to fall back into an anachronistic conception of authorship. Rather, translation effects an interesting shift in the concept of self-reflection since it points to the necessity not of reinforcing the centrality of the self, but of contextualizing the translating self through its positionality and dependencies on others.

When Tymoczko calls “self-awareness almost a prerequisite for ideological, political, and ethical agency”<sup>102</sup> in *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators*, her comments that “self-reflexivity about the translator’s place of enunciation and affiliation is the guide to actual choices in translation” and “only self-reflexivity can alert translators to various constraints – internal and external” speak to the need for translators to be aware of their inter-subjective embeddedness. In other words, we should not be misled by the “self” in “self-reflexivity”: self-reflexivity in a translation model is all about seeing others around you, not just your belly-button.

Jacques Derrida’s re-reading of Walter Benjamin’s foundational essay on “The Task of the Translator”<sup>103</sup> concentrates on the role of the translator in ensuring the survival of the original, a position which turns conventional hierarchies on their head since it makes the original dependent on its translations. Derrida explains this re-

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<sup>101</sup> Carol Maier, “The Translator’s Visibility: the Rights and Responsibilities Thereof,” *Translating and Interpreting Conflict*, Myriam Salama-Carr, ed. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007) 256.

<sup>102</sup> Maria Tymoczko, *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2007) 219.



scripting of the translator's task in *Roundtable on Translation*: "the task of the translator is precisely to respond to this demand for survival which is the very structure of the original text. [...] Translation augments and modifies the original, which, insofar as it is living on, never ceases to be transformed and to grow. It modifies the original even as it also modifies the translating language."<sup>104</sup> Taking Benjamin's notion of the translation as 'afterlife' or 'survival'<sup>105</sup> Derrida emphasizes the way in which a translation supports, rather than fails, an original, and as Benjamin, he views this as an opportunity to enrich the receiving language. The translator thus enters into a formative, genealogical relation with the dependent text.

These perspectives on translation, emphasizing its interactive and dependent nature have the potential to bring what psychoanalyst Bracha Ettinger has described as 'subjectivity-as-encounter' to the fore.<sup>106</sup> Ettinger's concept of *matrix* supplements the Lacanian *phallus* and presents a paradigm based on the encounter between the mother and post-mature infant in late pregnancy. Historically, this interconnected stratum of feminine subjectivity has been suppressed, thereby losing the opportunity for an alternative understanding of inter-subjective relations. A denial of inter-dependency is particularly acute and poignant in the field of translation, as Michael Cronin recognizes

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<sup>103</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator" *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London, Fontana Press, 1968, original publication 1923) 70-82. "The Translator's Task," trans. Steven Rendall, *Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction*, Vol. X, No. 2, 1997, 151-165.

<sup>104</sup> Jacques Derrida. *The Ear of the Other*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, eds. Claude Levesque and Christie McDonald "Roundtable on Translation" (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1982) 122.

<sup>105</sup> Rendall 153. Note that Zohn's translation only uses the term 'afterlife.'

<sup>106</sup> Bracha L. Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). Ettinger's feminist psychoanalytic theory is extremely suggestive and complex. Although her paradigms are critical to my thinking, and I refer to some aspects of her thought in my formulation of feminist translation, I do not expand on them at length in this context. For further developments of her theory with

in *Translation and Globalization*.<sup>107</sup> Cronin counters a prevailing cultural perception that consistently views dependency in negative terms when he points to the *mauvaise foi* of philosophical models that will not recognize “the connection between human affliction and our dependence on others.” Making the point again in a positive light, Cronin suggests that translation “shows the ethical value of dependency” and that it “reveals our multiple dependencies and the connectedness underlying the consoling fictions of absolute autonomy. It may be the sum of our debts that constitutes our true wealth as peoples.”<sup>108</sup> The notion of indebtedness as wealth counters the hegemonic free-market, economy which seeks profit over disinterested gift and derides exchanges which manifest a more generous principle of care. Translation is potentially an ideal field in which to draw attention to this form of wealth, to the generative economies that translations yield, although this potential has rarely been explored or fully appreciated.

To convey this new appreciation of translation, drawing on Ettinger’s suggestion of ‘metramorphosis,’ an unconscious process in addition to metaphor and metonymy, I have suggested the concept of metramorphic translation.<sup>109</sup> The process of metramorphosis is distinctive in that it does not follow the routes of masculine Oedipal castration. This means that metramorphosis is not structured by the on/off binary of presence and absence that is usually taken as the only possible logic for signifying processes. Metramorphosis refers to processes that do not involve single unities acting

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regard to reading relations, see *A Theory of Matrixial Reading: Ethical Encounters in Ettinger, Laferrière, Duras, and Huston*. French doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2005.

<sup>107</sup> Michael Cronin, *Translation and Globalization* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>108</sup> Cronin 40.

through the condensation of metaphor or the displacement of metonymy; instead they provoke changes that mutually alter the meaning they create, without supplanting or deferring the signifier. Metramorphosis offers a less totalizing, or complete, form of transformation: it is a transformative process, but one which does not mask or efface its origins; rather, it expands them in a connective border state where “source” and “target” meet creatively, recognizing a shared heritage and continuing ancestral lines.

In proposing that the metramorphic processes that Ettinger associates with matrixial subjectivity be used to describe translational activity, I seek to articulate one field in which her feminine paradigm has practical implications. In focusing on a feminine paradigm that describes processes, I hope also to develop feminist theories of translation, which have previously focused primarily on the informative representation of the feminine, through an understanding of the ways in which feminism is also expressed in formative moments. This productive understanding of feminist translation as process develops the product-based orientation, which to some extent has served to identify and sequester feminist translations theoretically, even when practices, for instance the *réécriture au féminine* of Canadian feminists, do in fact exceed the informative framework.

This is the moment then to return to the theory/practice challenge to which I referred in my opening reflections, for it seems that even fictional translators are not immune to the charge of failing to show their feminism in terms of the informative.

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<sup>109</sup> For further development of this suggestion, see Carolyn Shread “Metamorphosis or Metramorphosis? Towards A Feminist Ethics of Difference in Translation” *Traduction, terminologie, rédaction*, Vol. 20, 2008, forthcoming

When Gentzler discusses Brossard's *Le Désert mauve*, he offers the familiar commentary on the work of the translator Maude Laures:

the “novel” in translation that follows in the third section, is actually not as adventurous or experimental as the reader anticipates after reading the translator's notebooks. Rather than demonstrating the flight of imagination that we were led to expect, rather than adding any supplementary material in a Suzanne Jill Levine fashion or employing any of the feminist techniques to reclaim language in a Susanne de Lotbinnière-Harwood fashion, the translation is remarkably “faithful” to the original [...] What is striking is the similarity, faithfulness, and accuracy of the translation.<sup>110</sup>

Gentzler's analysis makes the call for feminism to be apparent informatively, yet he recognizes that Brossard's novel is innovative precisely because through her performance of the translation process in Laures's notebooks she “allows the reader to enter that cultural space of translators in their own unique element” and he even explains that “Brossard is trying to tell us that while translation appears to be mechanical activity, the amount of work – the imagination and devotion that go on behind the scenes – is enormous.”<sup>111</sup> In other words, Gentzler sees the formative feminist moment in the translation process, but looks for the informative aspects of the translation and privileges them in his analysis, even as he sees clearly the importance of process; I am suggesting it is time to allow for feminist spaces in translation free of identity cards.

Returning to the ethical question of the translator's visibility with which I began this section, I now offer a brief overview of some significant moments in the translation process, with a view to showing not only how they affected the translation, but also how

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<sup>110</sup> Gentzler, Edwin. *Translation and Identity in the Americas: New Directions in Translation Theory*. (London: Routledge, 2008) 62-63.

<sup>111</sup> Gentzler 63.

my encounter with the text in translation involved a process of transformative discovery for myself as mediator “behind the scenes.”

### **On Becoming in *The Raptors***

In presenting a narrative of some of the critical moments in the process of translating *Les Rapaces*, I should emphasize that it should not be read as the conventional, linear account of the translator’s progressive mastery of a text – the challenges met and their happy resolutions. Rather, my journey is circular, consisting of many returns to the text and its translation, movements towards and away from unstable referents. In the course of these movements, I have been changed just as much as the text undergoes its translational metamorphosis, coming into new narratives and shifting in my alliances.

When I decided to translate *Les Rapaces*, I was strongly influenced by my previous experience of translating *Les Co-épouses* (1990) by Algerian author Fatima Gallaire for a production at the University of Massachusetts Curtain Theater.<sup>112</sup>

Following the controversies and debates that production aroused in the Women’s Studies and Muslim Student communities,<sup>113</sup> my concern was to position myself with the utmost sensitivity to cultural difference in relation to this new text. This inter-cultural awareness involved considering the ethical implications of my intervention into a culture I knew primarily through intellectual investigation and imaginary fictional connections. Apart from a handful of Haitian students I had taught, I was not familiar

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<sup>112</sup> Fatima Gallaire, *Les co-épouses* (Paris: Editions des quatres-vents, 1990). Trans. Carolyn and Tom Shread. “House of Wives” *Four Plays from North Africa*, ed. Marvin Carlson (New York, Martin E. Segal Theater Center, 2008) 206-303.

<sup>113</sup> Ken Campbell in *The Massachusetts Daily Collegian*, Thursday December 14, 2000

with Haiti and I was concerned that my lack of what Spivak terms “intimate knowledge” in her foundational article on “The Politics of Translation” might be a serious obstacle to producing an effective translation. I saw it as my ethical obligation to situate myself in relation to the text, acknowledging cultural differences and the unique post-colonial history of Haiti. Eventually, this led me to formulate a question: by what right do I undertake this translation?

Impelled by Spivak’s requirement that a translator have a “tough sense of the specific terrain of the original,”<sup>114</sup> I attended the 8<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Caribbean Literature in Port-au-Prince in November 2006. Although the six brief days I spent in the towns of Port-au-Prince, Pétionville, and Jacmel gave me only the most impressionistic sense of the terrain, it was an essential stage in the translation. For one, I was able to ask people in Haiti whether they wanted this text translated. Asking this question was a deliberate effort to counter the market-driven practice of selecting translations on the basis of the tastes and needs of the target, rather than the source, culture and reflected a feminist privileging of dialogue. Hyper-aware of the question of representation, I was also concerned that the translation not contribute to negative stereotypes about Haiti prevalent in the United States. Needing to develop contacts with my target audience — the Haitian diaspora in the United States — I later attended the Haitian Studies Association conference in Florida to seek the opinions of Haitian Americans regarding the representation this text would offer within the United States.

Thus, as I began the translation I consciously positioned myself as a feminist translator and engaged in a dialogic process of self-reflection in regard to the origins of

the text, myself as mediator, and the destination of the translation. During my initial effort to position myself with regard to the source and target cultures, what I did not fully theorize, however, was the mobile nature of translation for the translator as well as for the text. Contrary to assumptions that as the text changes, the translator is simply the agent of change, I began to see how I was personally implicated in transformative becoming. Indeed, one of the attractions of translation as an activity is precisely that it constantly impacts a translator's identity. My adherence to new narratives through an appreciation of the powerful symbol of transformational change that is the Haitian Revolution, as well as via the powerful analysis of the workings of oppression and vision of social transformation articulated by Vieux-Chauvet, underlay my determination to combat prejudices surrounding Haiti in the United States and drove my initial decision to go to Haiti, despite State Department advisories and serious security concerns, and my current plan to return in November 2008.

These experiences precipitated my insight that from an ethical perspective it is not enough to seek to describe the author – Vieux-Chauvet is a mulatto, bourgeois Haitian woman – with regard to oneself – I am a white, middle-class Anglo-American woman – resorting to fixed identity terms, even if such terms are intersectional, since the contact involved in the translation is transformational in its effect. This then is the limitation of identity terms for the mobile act of translation: the process of translation changes the translator, so that while I may not have been well-equipped to undertake this translation three years ago, since I did not have the identity terms for a ready identification with the author and subject matter of this text, the engagement that the

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<sup>114</sup> Spivak 405.

translation has demanded so far, and that it continues to demand, have carved out a space in which I am able to speak. Turning my initial question of “by what right do I embark on this translation?” around, I suggest that it may be precisely the willingness to engage in and adhere to new narratives that is at least partly responsible for giving a translator the right to translate.

In the on-going process of translating *Les Rapaces*, I have come to question the expectation that a translator come to a text entirely ready, prepared, and equipped with all necessary expertise. I am concerned by the epistemological positioning that asserts that the translator must assume the position of the ‘subject presumed to know.’ The cultural turn in translation studies in the 1990s signaled an important awareness of the cultural dimensions of translation and demanded a valuable sensitivity to cultural, as well as linguistic, aspects of translation, so that in recent years the translator’s assumed knowledge has been extended from language to encompass the cultural components borne by language. This inter-cultural awareness led to a promotion of the packaging of translations together with all the background information necessary for an uninformed reader to understand the text: summaries of the historical, social, and political context; explanations of significant cultural aspects; glossaries. The material support required by new translation protocols may well be valuable and offer interesting ways of expanding readers’ knowledge, as well as drawing attention to the traditionally invisible translator by foregrounding her authority on the subject. Yet the emphasis on erudite paratexts may be somewhat disingenuous, even if quite understandable given the long history of effacing translators from their pages, inasmuch as it conceals the equally significant uncertainties faced by translators. Further reflection on my discomfort regarding the



knowledgeable preface suggests that it is a rejection of the dominance of a masculine type of knowledge that has historically obscured other, feminine forms of knowing. As Patrick Chamoiseau commented in interview, “the idea of opacity is that communication does not necessarily occur in clarity,”<sup>115</sup> and it is precisely the expert’s focus on details of determinate cultural mores that I distrust.<sup>116</sup>

A feminist translational paradigm suggests that the full importance of translation lies not so much in the establishment of an area of knowledge, but rather that its practice involves a complex dialectic of knowledge and ignorance, playing the boundaries of what we do and do not, can and cannot, know, feel, and experience. Departing from the norm of an expert introduction, in which the translator becomes a spokeswoman for the source culture, I am more interested in showing how a translation precipitates and moves within the cultural encounter that is the becoming of translation.

This future, becoming dimension of translation is demanding and compelling, but is not unique to translation. Indeed, I suspect that the translational process of negotiation may be familiar to readers who themselves inhabit transnational spaces. The second generation Anglophone Haitian audience I am writing for lives in a hybrid space between their Haitian origins and the United States contexts to which they also belong, which translation studies is working hard to theorize. In the next section I illustrate my feminist conception of metamorphic translation with regard to this particular audience.

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<sup>115</sup> Rose-Myriam Réjouis, “A Reader in the Room: Rose-Myriam Réjouis Meets Patrick Chamoiseau” *Callaloo*, 22.2, 1999, 346-350, 350.

### Metramorphic Translation in *The Raptors*

Vieux-Chauvet writes in a French that is for the most part a very ‘correct,’ standard French. Indeed, her work was apparently criticized by the *indigéniste* movement<sup>117</sup> on precisely these grounds. Chancy explains that Vieux-Chauvet “made little or no use of Haitian *créole* in her literary works, which led to charges of inauthenticity, of having a “*tournure d’esprit française*” by Haitian intellectuals of the period (Gourraige 1960, 446).”<sup>118</sup> Though indicative of the shift in linguistic and cultural consciousness which coincided with that period, the accusation was somewhat unfair, given that very few writers in Haiti were using Kreyòl at the time when Vieux-Chauvet wrote, and indeed the writing of *Les Rapaces* only just predates the first sustained literary use of Kreyòl, for as Munro explains: “an important linguistic landmark in Haiti came in 1975 with the publication of Frankétienne’s *Dézafi*, the first novel written in Creole.”<sup>119</sup>

Nevertheless, while Vieux-Chauvet did not explicitly or intentionally use Kreyòl except to refer to objects associated with vodou in *Les Rapaces*, the close reading of the novel demanded by its translation suggests that Kreyòl is present, if only in terms of certain expressions, proverbs, and imaginative context. Just as in the translation of Gallaire’s *Les Co-épouses* where I found that I was dealing with an Arabic inflected French text, listening to both the subtext and the context that surround *Les Rapaces*

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<sup>116</sup> My discomfort puts me in line with feminist paratextual trends described by Watts, namely, the search for a: “regendering of the paratext from a site of masculinist (or literally male) domination of the text to a site of feminist (or literally female) collaboration or exchange with the text” 141.

<sup>117</sup> The Haitian *Indigéniste* movement preceded *Négritude*, the world-wide affirmation of black culture and consciousness celebrated in many ex-French colonies.

<sup>118</sup> Myriam Chancy, *Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997) 169.

<sup>119</sup> Munro 210.

revealed a liminal area of Kreyòl.<sup>120</sup> Pursuing a metamorphic approach to the translation of the novel thus led me to an important shift late in the process: I decided to switch language. Or to be more precise, I decided to do as the narrator's niece in Laferrière's short story does, and as many of my Haitian American readers might do: to code switch in the translation, throwing in common expressions in Kreyòl when they emerged in the French, "passant de l'anglais au créole comme on change de vitesse."<sup>121</sup>

Although Kreyòl is not strongly apparent at the surface of the text, a metamorphic translation heard it on the horizon of the French. This resonance alone might not have been a justification for introducing Kreyòl into the text. My rationale for doing so was directly related to the intended audience of the translation: first and second generation Haitian-Americans in the United States who do not speak French, and who therefore have no access Francophone literature. While French is not widely spoken in the sizable migrant population in Haiti's 10<sup>th</sup> Department, many Haitian-Americans speak Kreyòl at home. This linguistic and cultural landscape is attested to in both literature and scholarly accounts. In one of the rare novels translated from Kreyòl into English, a passage describes the social consequences of this linguistic complexity:

*Monchè* Tijan, the other day I called Maman, she kept saying how happy they were that Steve had a long conversation with them on the telephone. That really made them feel good. There are a lot of old people who cannot talk with their grandchildren. The children in Canada speak a fancy French, those in the United

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<sup>120</sup> See Carolyn Shread, "Translating Fatima Gallaire's *Les co-épouses*: Lessons from a Francophone Text" *Translating and Interpreting Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2, Fall 2007, 127-146.

<sup>121</sup> "switching between English and Kreyòl like she's changing gears" When the narrator asks his niece "Et le français alors?" ("what about French then?") her answer is "Je ne vais pas gaspiller mon français avec les amies, je ne l'utilise qu'au travail ou si je veux impressionner un homme." ("I'm not going to waste my French on girlfriends, I only use it for work or if I want to impress a guy"). Laferrière, Dany. "Je voyage en français," *Pour une littérature-monde*. Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud. (Paris: Gallimard, 2007) 87-101, 89.

States speak English so the children cannot talk with their grandparents. Often the grandparents talk only Creole.<sup>122</sup>

Even if second generation Haitian Americans do not learn French in the United States' school system, they are often immersed in the Haitian language and culture at home.

The palpable presence of Kreyòl in Vieux-Chauvet's text, which re-emerges through the translation as an uncanny embedded in the English, may therefore be very familiar to those living in transnational spaces.

My metamorphic intervention was partly inspired by Françoise Massardier-Kenney's discussion of her and Claire Salardenne's translation of Claire de Duras's *Ourika* (1823). Massardier-Kenney explains how "by translating from French into Wolof, rather than from French into English in strategic parts of the text, the translator can momentarily "withhold translation" to make the translation apparent, to restore multilingualism."<sup>123</sup> Although the translation of *Ourika* was a stimulus for my decision, the specific context of my translation introduces an interesting twist, since rather than shutting readers from ex-colonial powers out as in *Ourika*, my importation of Kreyòl acts as an invitation into the text for Haitian-Americans exiled from their literature by language. This opening of the original French text through the translation process is a form of generative expansion that typifies metamorphic translation.

This instance points to an interesting way in which translation studies and transnationalism intersect. The cultural turn in translation studies led to an appreciation

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<sup>122</sup> Maude Heurtelou, *The Bonplezi Family: The Adventures of a Haitian Family in North America*, Trans. John D. Nickrosz (Florida: Educa Vision Inc, 1998). From the original Haitian Kreyòl radio play, *Lafami Bonplezi* (Florida: Educa Vision Inc, 1995).

<sup>123</sup> Doris Y Kadish and Françoise Massardier-Kenney *Translating Slavery: Gender and Race in French Women's Writing, 1783-1823*, eds. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1994) 24.

of the importance of culture in language. But translation studies has not fully examined the way in which the discrete packaging of language-culture-nation has been restructured by transnational practices that make for a far more complex reality. Although I am writing primarily for a group that does not read French, this does not mean that my readers have no knowledge of Haitian culture. In fact, it is quite the opposite: precisely because Haitian Americans still experience Haitian culture through their home and community lives, this literature in French is relevant to them. As Pierre-Louis explains “Haitians, who have been living in the United States for more than fifty years, remain culturally, emotionally, and politically attached to Haiti.”<sup>124</sup> This situation provides an instance in which reflection on the transnational experience contributes interestingly to debates in translation studies, where it is too often assumed that unfamiliarity with a language goes hand in hand with unfamiliarity with a culture. This belief spawned the trend in offering detailed background paratextual packaging, including historical accounts, geographical details, and explanations of cultural mores such as foods, dress, or religion, to equip readers with the cultural information necessary to read a text in translation. However, the example of Haitian American readers who do not read French but who are familiar with Haitian culture, to a greater or lesser extent, belies the dominant paradigm of discussions about culture in translation and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the many varying manifestations and transferals of culture in translation studies. It also illustrates why Venuti’s much touted foreignizing techniques, including the use of foreign terminology, within a resistant translation cannot be taken as a blanket technique but must be seen as a strategy devised for a

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<sup>124</sup> Pierre-Louis 4.

specific context, namely an internal effort to resist the hierarchy of power that exists between the United States and countries under its neocolonial influence.<sup>125</sup>

Another facet of the decision to introduce Kreyòl into the translated text is that it allowed me to challenge powerful taboos and associated racist prejudices in the United States regarding what David Homel calls the “N word.”<sup>126</sup> Homel discusses the translation of Laferrière’s novels, written in the Canada, and concludes that “*Nègre*, of course, just like its English counterpart, means a variety of things, depending on who’s saying it, and how, and when.”<sup>127</sup> Homel’s strategy is “to thread the needle, depending on context for guidance” in determining his use of three choices, namely “Negro, black, nigger.”<sup>128</sup> In contrast, Vieux-Chauvet wrote primarily in a Haitian context, so that while in *Les Rapaces* there is one instance when a tourist uses a patronizing, racist expression, in English in the original French text, “*The most beautiful little negro girl*,”<sup>129</sup> I found an additional translation for her many uses of the French *nègre* in Kreyòl: *nèg*. The power of using *nèg* is that in the Haitian sense it is rooted in the emancipated heroes of the revolution: it is not a racial slur, it is simply refers to a person. Thus, I translated the sentence “Alcindor qui avait payé pour savoir, jugeait le nègre des mornes aussi égoïste que le bourgeois des villes”<sup>130</sup> as “Alcindor believed that *nèg morne*, the hillside peasant, was just as selfish as the *grand nèg lavil*, that city

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<sup>125</sup> Venuti 1995.

<sup>126</sup> David Homel, “Tin-Fluting It: On Translating Dany Laferrière,” *Cultures in Transit: Translating the Literature of Quebec*, Sherry Simon ed. (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1995) 47-54, 49.

<sup>127</sup> Homel 49.

<sup>128</sup> Homel 49.

<sup>129</sup> Chauvet 86.

<sup>130</sup> Chauvet 47.

Bourgeois.” In another instance, I translated the French with both Kreyòl and English, showing how *nèg* doubles as a word for brother: “‘*Vann san w, nèg*. Sell your blood, brother.’ ‘*Koman sa nèg?* Brother, what do you mean?’”<sup>131</sup> This metamorphic solution to a translation dilemma is felicitous, since it serves to rehabilitate and normalize a term so deeply ingrained with the prejudices which oppress readers in the receiving culture, thereby operating its own linguistic revolution.

The inclusion of Kreyòl within the English translation is on a par with the Canadian feminists’ concept of *réécriture au féminin* inspired by French feminists’ *écriture féminine*. In both instances there are changes at the informative level of the text produced by passing through the formative process of a metamorphic relationship with the text which listens for suppressed voices. While this process began as a playful *clin d’oeil* (wink) to my Haitian American audience when I first put an easily recognizable Kreyòl ‘*mèsi*’ into the mouth of the young blind girl Adélia when she is given money by an American tourist, by drawing out more Kreyòl in the French in the ‘English’ translation, the relevance of this text to Haitians in the diaspora is emphasized. In this sense, I see translation not in terms of a migration model, in which the migrant, or language, leaves its home country and immigrates to the new language/country, but rather in terms of a transnational framework, in which the text shifts between multiple contexts, drawn towards English, but displaying an ambivalent instability, through periodic returns to Kreyòl. In my final section I explore the possibilities for creative

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<sup>131</sup> “– *Vends ton sang, frère*. – *Comment ça, frère?*” Chauvet 55.

transformations in translation more extensively through the lens of feminist writing practices.



## CHAPTER 5

### WRITING FEMINIST TRANSLATION

*The writerly translator saves her reverence for the poem still to come.*<sup>132</sup>

Drawing on Barbara Folkart's insight that "there are translations of poems, and then there are *translations that actually are poems*,"<sup>133</sup> I suggest that for a translator to be true to the task of writing a translation that *is* a text, rather than producing a translation *of* a text, both the representational (informative) and the constitutive (formative) moments of the translating process must be engaged. While I recognize the importance of making manifest ideological commitments in the text, I do not want to be accused of dropping mouse cadavers at the reader's door, to take Folkart's image of "murine target texts" that replicate their sources and in that painstaking but naive process leave a trail of rodent poison that ultimately kills the source text.<sup>134</sup> There's enough killing by the raptors as it is, and the last thing I want my translation to do is to kill off Vieux-Chauvet's writing, since in that lies the hope of blooming and further dissemination.

I hope to have suggested, through the concept of becoming as the grounds for feminist translation, that I view translation as a generative activity, a critical space which prepares for the narrative shifts that are a prerequisite for activist directed

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<sup>132</sup> Barbara Folkart, "Said Writer to Reader. Translation as Lignification," *Traduction, terminologie, rédaction*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1999, 83-115, 113. Reprinted in Barbara Folkart, *Second Finding: A Poetics of Translation*, (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2007).

<sup>133</sup> Barbara Folkart, "Poetry as Knowing," *Traduction, terminologie, rédaction*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1999, 31-55, 44. Also reprinted in *Second Finding*.

<sup>134</sup> See Folkart "Said Writer to Reader" 1999, 112 for further elucidation of the mouse metaphor.

changes. To see translation in these terms is to emphasize its creative possibilities, in contrast to the replicative and derivative activities. Translation theorist Michael Cronin contributes to our argument concerning the creativity of feminist translation. Cronin is one of the rare theorists to have criticized the dominant masculine conceit which has had such a nefarious effect in European thought for centuries. Arguing for the need to recognize the place and value of dependency – a trait associated with both women dependent on their men and restricted by their responsibilities for dependent children, as well as translations dependent on the source text – Cronin criticizes the modeling of “moral agents who are themselves presented as though they were continuously rational, healthy and untroubled.”<sup>135</sup> Just as an ethics circumscribed by rationality fails to take into account the human condition, so too any theory of translation that is confined to a rational mould will fail to grasp the complex translational process. For the practice of translation, a conception of subjecthood based solely on reason subtracts the embodiment of the translator and severely underestimates the faculties involved in the translation process: as machine translation demonstrates in the crudest form, reason is not sufficient for translation. Folkart has argued this point along similar lines, with direct reference to translation:

It’s grotesque, I think, to set the esthetic up as an airy-fairy category on its own, and then make hard and fast distinctions between the esthetic and the cognitive. It’s absurd to set the threshold of cognition so high that it excludes all but the rational, linear-logged forms of mental activity: cognition, as the neuroscientists will tell you, is often downright illogical. And it’s hugely erroneous to try and seal the cognitive and the emotional off from one another in leak-proof compartments. What gets called “the esthetic” is merely a special, high intensity case of “the cognitive.” Poetic cognition involves affect and body

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<sup>135</sup> Cronin 39.

as well as the more disembodied kind of knowing that neuroscientists refer to as declarative intelligence.<sup>136</sup>

The expansion in the concept of cognition that Folkart advocates has important implications for theories of translation which, in their emphasis on explicating the selection processes foregrounded by a metonymic view of translation, run the risk of excluding wider cognitive processes. Contrary to the implications of a metonymic model of translation, associated with a theoretical tradition of articulating choices, I may not always know the reasons for my translational “decisions,” just as an author may not be able to explain how they wrote their book. Yet there is undoubtedly a writerly craft that produces great literature, just as there is a translational sensibility that creates great translations. The tendency to focus on the rational in translation practices was exacerbated by the cultural turn’s emphasis on garnering the informational knowledge deemed necessary to read a foreign text, as if a full introduction really prepares you, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally for the uncanny experiences of encountering the foreign.

In contrast to the metonymic model, metamorphic translation processes oriented to subjectivity-as-encounter assume and respond to dependency through collaborative strategies. Through imaginative and affective faculties, a metamorphic translation is attuned to signals not only from the text, but also the subtext and context, that the rational mind might not pick up. My joyful discovery and inclusion of Kreyòl, a language which I do not speak, but which I can sometimes understand through French, especially when I pronounce the written aloud, is an example of this type of attentive

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<sup>136</sup> Folkart “Poetry as Knowing” 1999, 31-32.

listening. While discussion of such ‘decisions’ retrospectively imparts an air of reasoned argument, initially, this type of translating writes itself, as in Adélia’s first *mèsi*, which I heard and could not resist. To give another example, the insistent drum “beat, beat, beat, beat” that reoccurs in *The Raptors* at several key points is not so much a rational translation choice as a compulsion to hear the call of revolutionary echoes in the *mornes*, the Haitian hills where the Haitian Revolution was born. This moment in writing reveals what Baker calls a narrative, as an instinctive way of reading the world, emerging in the text in a formative manner with constructive effects.

Folkart’s insistence on paying attention to all the cognitive faculties required to create an effective, aesthetically satisfying translation, rather than a mimetic replication, is an important call for translation theorists. It is a call that is perhaps not so far from the philosophical understanding of wonder suggested by Maier in her theorization of translation as “a contemplative and possibly transformative activity.”<sup>137</sup> In keeping with the poetic license granted by these theorists, and taking off from the inner title page of *The Raptors* in which I muse over various images of killer birds, I include some an anecdote from translating the text at home in Massachusetts.

My husband was the first reader of the full translation of *Les Rapaces*. On the Sunday morning that he read it, the phone rang. It was my neighbor. Although we’re on good terms and often chat over the fence, in ten years, my neighbor has only called us once or twice. He was calling to tell me now that there was a raptor outside in our yard. I ran downstairs and looked out. There it sat on the thin branch of the cherry tree. A young tawny hawk, impressively large at this level. I was close enough to look straight

into its piercing gold eye. I had planted the tree it was perched on, and it was far too near the ground for a hawk's usual comfort. The hawk's presence, right there in our yard, at eyelevel, was strange, not to say uncanny.

I was not sure how to take this visitation, given the symbolism of raptors in Vieux-Chauvet's text and as a bad omen in Haitian mythology, but it is worth mentioning the story if not for its symbolic poetry, then for the uncanny effect it left. In translating *The Raptors* – unlike any of the other more scholarly or academic texts I have translated – I have developed a heightened awareness of the uncanny activity of translating: the strangeness of making something that did not exist in one language, something that to all intents and purposes does not exist for some people since they cannot read it, suddenly come into being. Bringing the raptors into the yard, if you like.

In the past perhaps I did not notice this uncanny effect because in the end it did not matter as much that the books were translated. Now, even as I'm terrified by the challenge of translating a literary text, intimidated and inspired by the stakes Folkart expresses in such uncompromising terms, I am also struck by the importance of translating literature – of how much it matters and how amazed I am – even as its translator – that people can now read Vieux-Chauvet's fable in English. The raptor in the yard suddenly revealed the wonder, the alchemy of translation: that words can fly out in one place, in one language and arrive somewhere else in another.

In articulating the ways in which multiple forms of feminism manifest in the translation of *Les Rapaces*, I have sought to show that beyond the discursive presence of identity markers associated with feminist practices, a feminist understanding of

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<sup>137</sup> Maier 2006, 168-170.

processes of becoming through joints and connections within subjectivity-as-encounter contribute to the shifts in position and new narratives that are essential for change.

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