

# Lust in Language: The Reading, Writing and Translating of Erotic Literature

Ghislaine LeFranc

A Thesis

in

The Department of

Études françaises

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts (Translation Studies) at

Concordia University

Montréal, Québec, Canada

February 2017

© Ghislaine LeFranc, 2017

**CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY**

**CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY**

**School of Graduate Studies**

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Ghislaine LeFranc

Entitled: Lust in Language: The Reading, Writing and Translating of Erotic Literature

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Arts (Translation Studies)**

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final Examining Committee:

\_\_\_\_\_ Philippe Caignon (Chair)

\_\_\_\_\_ Sherry Simon (Examiner)

\_\_\_\_\_ Krista Lynes (Examiner)

\_\_\_\_\_ Pier-Pascale Boulanger (Supervisor)

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_

Chair of the Department or Graduate Program Director

\_\_\_\_\_ 2017 \_\_\_\_\_

Dean of the Faculty

## ABSTRACT

Lust in Language: The Reading, Writing and Translating of Erotic Literature

Ghislaine LeFranc

Sexuality and language are two fundamental characteristics of human culture, and the relationship between both shows the role language has in expressing such inexpressible feelings as lust, desire and passion. Humans have long been preoccupied with the mysteries of sex, and language has been the vehicle through which to express such curiosities. Erotic literature has become a genre with such distinct characteristics that translating such texts requires a methodology and approach different from traditional translation tactics. By discussing aspects of both French and English language which influence erotic writing as well as applying existing theories of translation to a translator's approach, this thesis aims to ultimately show how the role of the reader as a consumer and the translator as a creative agent influences both the translation and reception of an erotic text. I draw comparisons between Anaïs Nin's erotic short stories, entitled *Delta of Venus*, and Emma Becker's erotic novel, *Mr.*, and analyze their subsequent translations to illustrate the absolute importance of interpretation and sensation over linguistic loyalty when approaching an erotic translation.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest gratitude goes to Pier-Pascale Boulanger, my thesis supervisor who, despite never actually being a professor of mine, has taught me so much and granted me so many opportunities. I would not have been able to finish this work without her confidence in me.

To my friends, here and around the world, I thank you for your encouragement and enthusiasm for my work this past year. I would especially like to thank my dear friend Megan Callahan; we wrote our theses in tandem, and her support and insight was invaluable to my writing process.

Thank you to Anaïs Nin, my eternal muse, whose work inspired this thesis and awakened in me a passion for the nuances of being a woman. Her writing motivated me to look more closely at the language of pleasure.

Last, but never least, I thank my family for the years of endless support in every goal I embark on. There are not enough words, in any language, to express the meaning of your love and encouragement.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my Granny, Judy, who passed away weeks before the completion of this thesis. She was an eternal source of inspiration to me. I dedicate every word to her memory, to her endless excitement for my endeavours and her tireless enthusiasm for the woman I am and the woman I will one day become.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1: THE INS AND OUTS OF EROTICA	
1.1. The Tradition of Erotic Literature.....	10
1.2. Censoring the Sensual.....	13
1.3. Erotica Versus Pornography.....	17
1.4. Writing Erotic Literature.....	23
1.5. Sexuality and its Influence on the Writer’s Text.....	25
1.6. Translation and its Influence on Sexuality.....	30
CHAPTER 2: LANGUAGE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SEXUAL DEPICTION	
2.1. French and English—Languages of Lust? .....	33
2.2. Sexual Linguistics.....	34
2.3. Gendered Language.....	39
2.4. Sex and Semiotics.....	41
CHAPTER 3: TRANSLATION THEORY AND EROTICA	
3.1. Translating Erotica.....	49
3.2. An Erotics of Translation.....	54
3.3. Applying Translation Theory to Erotic Literature.....	55
3.4. Norms in Translation.....	63

CHAPTER 4: TRANSLATING THE EROTIC IN WORKS BY ANAÏS NIN AND  
EMMA BECKER

4.1. The Notion of Habitus.....	68
4.2. Cultural Attitudes Toward Sex in France and the United States.....	70
4.3. Introduction to the Authors and Translators.....	72
4.4. Comparing and Contrasting <i>Delta of Venus</i> to <i>Mr.</i> .....	79
4.5. Analyzing the Translations.....	80
4.5.1. “The Basque and Bijou”.....	81
4.5.2. Excerpts from <i>Mr.</i> .....	87
CONCLUSION.....	99
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	103

## INTRODUCTION

*That is part of the beauty of all literature.  
You discover that your longings are universal longings.*<sup>1</sup>

F. Scott Fitzgerald

Desire possesses nuances and subtleties that render it deeply complex and often difficult to decipher. Language, with its syntax and semantics, is quite the same. Both carry intense meaning and we seek to understand the two in different ways. Language and sex are two human experiences important to cultures across the globe. For centuries, people have expressed sexual desire through mediums of art and literature is no exception. Erotica has been freely published in times of sexual liberation and ushered into backrooms in times of censorious judgment, and, despite the ebb and flow of cultural attitudes, erotic literature has been used to elevate sex to an art form worth recognition. Rejecting the reduction of erotic literature to trashy, one-handed reading, writers of erotica embrace the poetry of desire by accepting both the beauty and humanity of sex.

In its evolution, translation studies has become an interdisciplinary field in which ideas and theories can be applied to concepts as complex as sexuality. This thesis primarily questions if sexuality itself is translatable and how translators should approach a translation of erotica to communicate desire from one culture to another. Translators are often preoccupied with the accuracy or correctness of their work, but this thesis rejects traditional notions of equivalence in translation and instead embraces the translator as an active reader of and participant in the text, encouraging interpretation of feeling as a guiding force for the practice of translation. Further,

---

<sup>1</sup> "F. Scott Fitzgerald quotes," accessed January 8, 2017, [http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/3190.F\\_Scott\\_Fitzgerald](http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/3190.F_Scott_Fitzgerald).

the translation of erotica encourages the recognition of readership as an important factor in the translation.

Currently, the literature on the translation of erotica is not as developed as one might think it would be— academic publications eagerly discuss erotica in the context of semiotics or thematics, for example, but it is rare to find concrete work concerning translation. Pier-Pascale Boulanger, whose work has examined the translation of erotic texts, has been pivotal in the dialogue. Her work has studied lexical choices made by authors of existing erotic literature as well as the efficacy of possessive adjectives in English compared to French and how that affects the overall tone and reception of the erotica. Boulanger’s work also provides concise and well-articulated analyses of published erotica which outline “the constraints of clarity, reality and inventiveness... as the cardinal values translators must seek to render in order to produce a text of *jouissance*.”<sup>2</sup> Her work will serve in part as a framework for the analyses of specific erotic literature in this thesis.

It should be noted that, when studying language and sexuality, particularly in the field of translation, the question of gender studies is often raised. It would make an interesting approach to consider Sherry Simon’s work in “feminist translation theory [which] aims to identify and critique the angle of concepts which relegates both women and translation to the bottom of the social and literary ladder.”<sup>3</sup> In the context of this thesis—which examines two female writers and a female translator— elaborating on Simon’s ideas would have proved fruitful. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I do not approach the erotic text through the scope of gender politics,

---

<sup>2</sup> Pier-Pascale Boulanger, “La sémiologie du texte érotique,” *Recherches Sémiotiques* 29, no. 2-3 (2009): 113.

<sup>3</sup> Sherry Simon, *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission* (London: Routledge, 1996), 1.



rather focusing more intently on translation theory as applied to the act of translating erotic literature.

This thesis begins with a brief overview of the tradition of erotic literature in history and the general reception and rejection of sex in literature over time. The first chapter continues by considering the genre of erotica from many angles, including what differentiates erotica from pornography and general characteristics of an erotic text. I continue by considering sexuality as a cultural construct and how it can influence the way erotica is written and translated and, finally, I explore translation as a cultural negotiation that affects how individuals and cultures regard modern sexuality.

The second chapter of this thesis addresses the relationship between sexuality and the French and English languages; namely, by examining how their language structures influence the way erotica is written and translated. This includes a discussion of gendered language, female voice and the role of semiotics in highly erotic texts.

The third chapter focuses on existing translation studies literature that can be applied to the translation of erotica. Echoing Roland Barthes's work in *The Pleasure of the Text*, I discuss how both reading and translating literature are erotic actions in and of themselves, an idea reiterated in George Steiner's translation model which posits the relationship between translator and text as erotic. Using Douglas Robinson's somatic theory of translation as a foundation, I explain how the translation of erotic literature depends on more than linguistic proficiency to achieve translation equivalence. Robinson's theory allows a translator to go beyond source text replication by encouraging a translation that comes from the experience of reading the original text and the emotional interpretation the individual translator conceives.

Finally, I further my exploration of erotica in the first three chapters by analyzing existing works of erotic literature. Chapter four introduces two works and their authors, Anaïs Nin's book of erotic short stories, *Delta of Venus*, and Emma Becker's erotic novel, *Mr.*, as well as the translators who took on their texts, Béatrice Commengé and Maxim Jakubowski, respectively. Recalling the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Gideon Toury, the final chapter discusses the habitus of both the original authors and their translators and the effect both the habitus and the norms of their societies had on the literature. Lastly, I will provide excerpts from *Delta of Venus* and *Mr.* as concrete examples of the different methods applied by each translator to achieve equivalence to the original text.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE INS AND OUTS OF EROTICA

*Au fond, le sexe, c'est toujours la même histoire racontée différemment.*<sup>4</sup>

Pier-Pascale Boulanger

### *1.1 The Tradition of Erotic Literature*

There is a longstanding tradition in human history of writing desire, and the depiction of sex in its most generic form has “important antecedents in Ancient Greece and Rome,”<sup>5</sup> suggesting that humans have long sought to express their desire through words and images. Before the middle of the eighteenth century, pornography was “most often a vehicle for using the shock of sex to criticize religious and political authorities.”<sup>6</sup> Further, with the emergence of a print culture,<sup>7</sup> the production of erotic material during the Renaissance and French Revolution laid a critical foundation for the “development of a modern notion of pornography.”<sup>8</sup>

The tradition of erotic depiction in history is incomplete without discussing human sexuality as a social behaviour that, over time, became taboo. Understanding this evolution of sexuality, this “historical perspective, is crucial to understanding the place and function of pornography in modern culture. [It] was not a given; it was defined over time.”<sup>9</sup> In the seventeenth century, “a certain frankness was still common... Sexual practices had little need of secrecy; words were said without undue reticence... One had a tolerant familiarity with the

---

<sup>4</sup> Pier-Pascale Boulanger, “Sa langue se glissa dans sa bouche: De la traduction des adjectifs possessifs his/her dans le récit érotique,” *Palimpsestes* 21 (2008): 2.

<sup>5</sup> Lynn Avery Hunt, *The Invention of Pornography* (New York: Zone Books, 1993), 10.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

illicit.”<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, in his *History of Sexuality*, describes “a time of direct gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgressions... a period when bodies made a display of themselves.”<sup>11</sup> Then, with the coming of a Victorian bourgeoisie class, sexuality became restricted to the “conjugal family [who] took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction.”<sup>12</sup> Foucault explains that sexuality was, in essence, taken hostage and limited to a confinement of proper, normal, utilitarian purposes— sexuality was acknowledged outside the home only in the context of procreation.<sup>13</sup> Otherwise, the rest was labeled, simply, obscene, and “obscenity has existed [only] as long as the distinction between private and public behaviour.”<sup>14</sup> With this distinction, “something changed in the balance between obscenity and decency, private and public,”<sup>15</sup> and sexuality became a social concern. As laws suppressing and regulating the obscene took hold in the nineteenth century, erotic literature and pornography became a direct reaction to modern puritanism’s “[imposition of] its triple edict of taboo, nonexistence, and silence.”<sup>16</sup> With the emergence of the bourgeoisie, “sexuality [became] carefully confined; it moved into the home... On the subject of sex, silence became the rule.”<sup>17</sup> This Victorian age of sexual repression forced those who celebrated sexuality to “take their infernal mischief elsewhere: to a place where they could be reintegrated,”<sup>18</sup> from back-room brothels to the pages of a book. It is perfectly reasonable to assume that, amidst this movement to make sexuality “disappear upon its least manifestation,”<sup>19</sup> to drive it out of the light and into the

---

<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 3.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Hunt, *The Invention of Pornography*, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 4-5.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

shadows, this is probably how much of the erotica of this time came to be. Erotica was not published or written as some defiant rebuffing of and rebellion against social rules, but rather as an outlet for our most naturally occurring impulses. In her work on the history of pornography, Lynn Hunt explains how the “written [and] visual representation... developed out of the messy, two-way, push and pull between the intention of authors [and] artists... to test the boundaries of the ‘decent.’”<sup>20</sup>

### *1.2 Censoring the Sensual*

So test the boundaries it did: it is nearly impossible to mention the history of erotica without also acknowledging efforts to censor it. “Erotica possesses one quality that is shared with no other type of literature so completely.... its ‘underground’ nature.”<sup>21</sup> Today, this quality is perhaps less evident, as erotic literature has become more mainstream, but in centuries past, “works published *sub rosa*”<sup>22</sup> (meaning “happening or done in secret”<sup>23</sup>) were certainly underground. In the past, “everything about erotica [was] invariably disguised behind false authors, publishers, dates and places of publications.”<sup>24</sup> Despite its original publication in 1949, Gershon Legman’s *Love and Death: A Study in Censorship* offers a perspective on sexual censorship that still rings true today. Of course, feelings about sexuality have loosened in the past decade, but even with the liberation of sexuality, you will always be able to find those picketing against the portrayal of sex in media. Legman’s work questions the prevalence of violence in media versus that of sex, and why we so glorify the depiction of the former and vilify

---

<sup>20</sup> Hunt, *The Invention of Pornography*, 10.

<sup>21</sup> Patrick J. Kearney, *A History of Erotic Literature*, (London: Macmillan, 1982), 9.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v., “sub rosa,” accessed December 5, 2016, [https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/sub\\_rosa](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/sub_rosa).

<sup>24</sup> Kearney, *A History of Erotic Literature*, 9.

the latter. For Legman, this disparity comes from an attempt by some to relieve sexual frustrations through written fantasy, which American society has always condemned as inappropriate. Instead, the reaction is to promote fantasies of action, murder, violence or horror. Legman argues that, because of this media intervention by law and social convention, readers are unable “to achieve something less than total and actual escape.”<sup>25</sup> He continues:

Like all other forms of dreaming, literature operates under a censorship. And this censorship— in both its legal and internalized expression— does not allow any direct, total attack on the frustration that elicits the dream. It offers a choice. Either the attack must restrict itself to something less than an attack, to partial and symbolic aggressions, or its object must appear in disguise.<sup>26</sup>

As mentioned earlier, sex in literature has a history that cannot be recounted without acknowledging the attempt to silence it. So erotica becomes the disguise, the way for its writers and readers to “attack” their sexual frustrations by creating an outlet for it. Still, despite this underground solution, acknowledging the absurdity of the original problem is important: censorship is a breach against freedom of speech.

Ignoring, for the moment, differing attitudes toward sex in France versus in America (a point that will be addressed later in this thesis), we know that writers in both countries no longer face the threat of life in jail for indecent literature. And while both societies more freely permit the depiction of violence and sex, why is the depiction of one considered more acceptable than the other? Legman addresses this dichotomy:

Murder is a crime. Describing murder is not. Sex is not a crime. Describing sex *is*. Why? The penalty for murder is death, or lifelong imprisonment— the penalty for writing about it: fortune and lifelong fame. The penalty for fornication is... there is no actual penalty— the penalty for describing it in print: jail and lifelong disgrace. Why this absurd contradiction? Is the creation of life really more reprehensible than its destruction?<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Gershon Legman, *Love and Death: A Study in Censorship* (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1963), 27.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-28.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

Again, the impression of hyperbole (“jail and lifelong disgrace”) is simply an issue of the era in which Legman’s work was published, but the root of the problem remains. A survey conducted for the 2015 Parents Ratings Advisory Study “found that more parents (80%) are concerned with their kids seeing graphic sex scenes than with graphic violence (64%). And while only 56% of them are worried about the depiction of realistic violence, 70% are distressed by full frontal shots of people *au naturel*.”<sup>28</sup> Yes, this survey was conducted based on visual media, but it is a safe bet that the same parental attitudes apply to a child’s summer reading list. And the principal problem still remains— why is the censorship of sex employed more often over that of violence? A *Time* magazine article explains:

Many people, at least in Western democracies on most days, can live their whole lives without encountering extreme violence. It’s a fantasy. But sex is something most humans will have to deal with eventually. It is a reality. Engaged parents generally feel they can counteract any glamorization of violence with their own behaviour, and a freak and open discussion of the issues. [Parents] simply don’t believe their child is in danger of committing violence in the same way that they are at risk of making unwise sexual decisions.<sup>29</sup>

It is this exact attitude that perpetuates a censorship that inhibits the liberation of erotic literature and consistently reduces sexuality to a taboo meant for backrooms in bookstores and seedy adult movie theaters.

So the discussion of censorship and erotica depends, also, on the attempt by distributors, traders and collectors of erotic literature to liberate the genre, both in the United States and Europe. The First and Second World Wars were a time of sexual curiosity, and many people sought to profit from and commercialize sex, particularly as laws concerning obscenity became

---

<sup>28</sup> Belinda Luscombe, *Time*, “Why Parents Worry More About Sex than Violence in the Movies,” last modified December 4, 2015, accessed November 3, 2016, <http://time.com/4135760/why-parents-worry-more-about-sex-than-violence-in-the-movies/>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

more lax.<sup>30</sup> “Publishers of erotica and the moralists who attacked them during the early twentieth century had (as they continue to have) a subtle symbiotic relationship.”<sup>31</sup> While this may seem, at first, an unusual observation, it actually makes sense considering the social structure of the time: “Erotica distributors needed ‘to keep intact the association of sex with obscenity and shameful silence’ in order to sell their wares, while they ‘provided anti vice crusaders with the public enemy they needed to show how fascination with sex was indeed a moral offense exploited by people with contempt for purity.’”<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, “despite the pariah status of the distributors, their story is part of ‘the larger story of American literature’... Erotica distributor Samuel Roth could argue that he has offered James Joyce and D.H. Lawrence to the public when they had been unavailable elsewhere.”<sup>33</sup> It has been argued that the rift between those who wrote, collected or profited from erotica and those who sought to criminalize it was a “false dichotomy” created by the book trade.<sup>34</sup> Still, it is difficult to argue that the conflict between distributors and censors did not exist at all— influence from both the Catholic Church and the federal government's attempt to regulate mail order more thoroughly contributed to the “prosecution of the distributors of erotica and... raids on the homes of consumers.”<sup>35</sup> Today, there is no question of erotica's liberation, at least in modern Western societies. With the click of a mouse, most erotic literature is available to read or order online. First edition copies of vintage smut are coveted for thousands of dollars. This modern-day freedom to explore erotica is largely cause for celebration as censorship, by nature, is destructive and hurtful.<sup>36</sup> “The language of the preceding

---

<sup>30</sup> Kevin White, review of *Bookleggers and Smuthounds: The Trade in Erotica, 1920-1940*, by Jay A. Gertzman, *The American Historical Review*, October, 2000.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.



decades is echoed quite precisely in today's culture wars” as contemporary battles concerning both the availability and censorship of sex media wage on. These debates, however endless, arrive at the same conclusion: with the advent of the Internet and modern media, “censorship is now impossible and futile... [and] the repeal of reticence is almost complete.”<sup>37</sup>

The depiction of sexuality has become no less prominent in modern literature, but the testing of decency is less of an issue, as bookstores make room on their floors for shelves clearly labeled “Erotic Literature,” no backroom necessary. Despite endless literary criticism against it, the erotic romance series *50 Shades of Grey* has become the epitome of modern erotica—the first book in the series sold over 125 million copies worldwide<sup>38</sup> and has been translated into 52 different languages.<sup>39</sup> It appears that in recent years erotica has become not only accessible but also acceptable, in a way that fiction labeled as “pornographic” has not.

### *1.3 Erotica Versus Pornography*

In the portrayal of human sexuality, whether written or visual, the words erotica and pornography have functioned interchangeably thus far in this thesis. In academia—as well as many other fields, including law and gender studies—a long-standing debate continues about what exactly differentiates erotica from pornography, and if this difference is significant enough to require distinction. The debates concerning this distinction are multi-faceted and could well provide enough information for an entirely separate thesis. Yet for the purpose of this work and

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Alex Stedman, “Fifty Shades Spinoff ‘Grey’ Reportedly Stolen From Publisher,” *Variety*, last modified June 10, 2015, <http://variety.com/2015/biz/news/fifty-shades-spinoff-greystolen-from-publisher-1201516843/>.

<sup>39</sup> Zach Johnson, “Fifty Shades of Grey Release Date Pushed Back to February 13,” last modified November 13, 2013, <http://www.eonline.com/uk/news/480515/fifty-shades-of-greystolen-from-publisher-1201516843/> just-in-time-for-valentine-s-day

the questions asked in it, it is important to distinguish between the two to underline the fact that erotica is considered through a different scope than pornography.

If there is one fact scholars agree on, it is the difficulty of giving either pornography or erotica an exact definition. Fenton Bailey, a well-known producer and director, dismisses the effort: “The attempt to define pornography is a trick question, since essentially no thing exists. It is only naming the thing that creates it. The naming of pornography separates representations of sex from everyday life.”<sup>40</sup> By calling something pornography, Bailey believes the naming of sex as such automatically makes it different from just sex. And what about erotica? Patrick J.

Kearney, in his book *A History of Erotic Literature*, writes:

Of the several words used to describe the representation of sexuality in literature, *erotica*, which of them all possesses the greatest measure of respectability, is the most difficult to define. A combination of factors has created this situation, ranging from the debasing indignities of the gutter press, and those who should know better, compilers of dictionaries and encyclopedias, to the personal preferences or prejudices of the individual.<sup>41</sup>

Essentially, “erotic [literature] is seen as a matter of intent in that the authors and publishers had it in mind to provide the reader of their wares with sexual stimulation of one sort or another.” Admittedly, not every work of erotic literature fits the parameters of this definition, but for the purpose of this thesis, it is general enough to express that the goal of erotic literature is to arouse its consumer.

Perhaps the simplest way to distinguish pornography and erotica is simply by their etymology, as the word origins and meanings are quite telling. Along with the emergence of modern pornography, the word “appeared for the first time in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in

---

<sup>40</sup> Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato, dirs. *Pornography: The Secret History of Civilization*, BBC, DVD (1999), quoted in Sarah-Margaret Campbell, “Perspectives on Pornography,” 1.

<sup>41</sup> Kearney, *A History of Erotic Literature*, 7.

1857... [and] emerged in French a little sooner.”<sup>42</sup> The word *pornography* comes “from the Greek word  *pornos* (prostitute) and  *graphos* (to write), meaning to write about prostitutes,”<sup>43</sup> while the word *erotic* comes from the Greek *eros*, the word for passionate (and primarily physical) love.<sup>44</sup> The etymological distinction “between pornography and erotica is fairly clear: it is that between sex and love, the physical and emotional.”<sup>45</sup> The nuances are much like comparing being naked to being nude—the subtlety is nearly imperceptible.

Philippe Di Folco’s *Dictionnaire de la pornographie* is a work which seeks not only to define pornography, but also to examine anthropological, psychological and biological terms and concepts regarding sex. Di Folco’s section on *érotisme* discusses the term and offers a unique perspective about what can be derived from the word. For Di Folco, the etymology of *érotisme* is paradoxical. As mentioned previously, *eros* denotes sentiments of passionate love, while the suffix, *-ismos*, suggests action, “désignant comme en politique ou dans les sciences humaines un ensemble cohérent et réfléchi d’opinions et de pratiques.”<sup>46</sup> In the French word *érotisme*, the juxtaposition of a sensual prefix and a stern suffix, to Di Folco, “est donc un mot équivoque et élastique, prétexte à de nombreuses déclinaisons du lexique sexuel.”<sup>47</sup> He continues, questioning:

Même étayée par des sources mythologiques et sa récente consécration dans la doctrine psychanalytique, cette ambivalence produit une fluidité sémiologique qui favorise les glissements de sens au gré des courants d’opinion. Les incertitudes qui l’entourent ne risquent-elles pas de l’affaiblir, de l’assujettir aux besoins de signes du discours populaire?<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Hunt, *The Invention of Pornography*, 17.

<sup>43</sup> Sarah-Margaret Campbell, "Perspectives On Pornography And Erotica: Nudes, Prudes, And Attitudes," (Master’s thesis, Concordia University, 2012), 2.

<sup>44</sup> Boulanger, “La sémiologie du texte érotique,” 101.

<sup>45</sup> Campbell, “Perspectives On Pornography And Erotica,” 2.

<sup>46</sup> Philippe Di Folco, *Dictionnaire de la pornographie* (Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 2005), 163.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

In other words, Di Folco comments on the difficulty of the word itself, expressing what many other scholars agree with: since the etymological root of the word is contradictory, the definition itself dismantles, and the word is able to suit itself to the needs of its user. Di Folco makes a point of beauty concerning the erotic: “À l’instar de la *foi* ou de la *mort*, l’erotisme est donc un mot sanctuaire, un mot souverain, qui définit une manière d’être en vie, un système de mise en scène des sexualités: l’erotisme est un humanisme.”<sup>49</sup>

What other perspectives should be considered when differentiating between pornography and erotica? When attempting to define pornography in 1964, United States Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart’s reply was, “I know it when I see it.”<sup>50</sup> His response seems perhaps vague or dismissive, but, if anything, it is instinctual. Throughout human history, “the word pornography has been used as a general disparaging descriptor for many objects... including frescoes, statues, texts (including Shakespeare) and other media.”<sup>51</sup> When things are labeled pornographic, “they tend not to be described as erotic also.”<sup>52</sup> The word pornography has been used for so long to describe depictions of sex as both explicit and illicit that our minds tend to create a difference between erotic works and pornographic ones almost instinctively: pornography portrays a more obvious image of sex, while erotica uses what is not shown, the subtleties of sex, to express desire.

Smaro Kamboureli acknowledges the mutual sexual experience of pornography and erotica, but makes the point that “pornography reduces the ramifications of desire to one aspect of sexuality” which could arguably be achieving orgasm, while in erotica, “the sexual act... is

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Nigel K. Ll. Pope et al., “Pornography and Erotica: Definitions and Prevalence,” *Proceedings of the 2007 International Nonprofit and Social Marketing Conference: Social Entrepreneurship, Social Change and Sustainability* (2007): 2.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

not an end in itself; it is only one of the forms that erotica takes.”<sup>53</sup> This reduction of sex to a most basic sensation of pleasure is often why pornography is considered lower brow than erotica, as shown in the following passage:

Through a repetition of the ‘same’ ... the pornographic text loses its potency and becomes drained of eroticism. Desire is overdetermined, gratified and then some... nothing is withheld (which is probably why after an initial titillation pornography becomes boring). Erotica, on the other hand, plays with our desire by giving it depth and breadth (numerous imagined possibilities) while simultaneously holding it in check, in suspension.<sup>54</sup>

Differentiating the two words also serves to illustrate a cultural perception of sexuality. The attempt to define either is made all the more difficult by the fact that “any acknowledgement of moral or artistic sensibilities is necessarily bound by social values... to distinguish [them]... requires the definition to be placed within the changing contexts of society as a whole.”<sup>55</sup> The classification of pornography and erotica varies from consumer to consumer: cultures and sub-cultures are affected by norms (gender or class, for example) which alter their perception of sexual material.<sup>56</sup> Context is key— “what constitutes pornography and erotica varies not only between groups, but also between individuals within the group. It is also like to vary with the passing of time. What was considered pornographic perhaps in the early 1900s may now be considered erotic, or even slightly foolish.”<sup>57</sup>

An interesting perspective considers pornography and erotica as defined by their production— the intent behind their creation and consumption. Legally, defining obscenity “relate[s] to the use of the material and its intended purpose on the part of its creator,” while

---

<sup>53</sup> Smaro Kamboureli, “Discourse and Intercourse, Design and Desire In The Erotica of Anaïs Nin,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 11, no. 1 (1984): 144.

<sup>54</sup> Cathy Schwichtenberg, “The Semey Side of Semiotics,” *SubStance* 10, no. 3 (1981): 27.

<sup>55</sup> Pope et al., “Pornography and Erotica: Definitions and Prevalence,” 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 3

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 2

research in sociology focuses on “the content basis of the material in question.”<sup>58</sup> Pornography implies industry, and a booming one at that. Once the Internet gave pornography a platform to reach millions of consumers, “the industry bloomed into an enterprise so vast that people have a hard time estimating its size.”<sup>59</sup> The content of pornography is classified by some social scientists as “degrading, in which the material debases and dehumanizes without the use of violence.”<sup>60</sup> Erotica, in contrast, still maintains mystery, even romance, with its implications, as a “sub-element of pornography, presenting non-violent, non-degrading, consensual sex.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, “while erotica humanizes sex, pornography dehumanizes it.”<sup>62</sup>

Again, context is key, and often “confusion as to whether material is pornographic, erotic or artistic occurs when the boundaries between art and erotica are blurred.”<sup>63</sup> Other scholars make a more stark differentiation, considering pornography to be defined by “a profit motive [and] lack of artistic value” in contrast to erotica.<sup>64</sup> L.B. Kovetz writes, “The line between erotica and porn isn’t thin or fragile... Erotica is to pornography as a portrait is to a cartoon.”<sup>65</sup> Erotica deals with “desire as the tendency to give aesthetic form to sexual experience. Erotics and aesthetics, then, depend on each other: as desire gives shape to man’s life so does language enact or amplify the semantics of his sensual gestures.”<sup>66</sup> Artists (of work both written and visual) give aesthetic to naked forms, love, desire and sex in the interest of elevating it to a place of beauty.

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 2-3

<sup>59</sup> Joe Pinsker, “The Hidden Economics of Porn,” *The Atlantic*, April 4, 2016, accessed October 10, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/04/pornography-industry-economics-tarrant/476580/>

<sup>60</sup> Pope et al., “Pornography and Erotica: Definitions and Prevalence,” 3.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 4

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 4

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Smaro Kamboureli, “Discourse and Intercourse,” 144.

In contrast, pornography rebuffs the seduction of erotica and “its material is located within a minimal context which... undermines the complexities of sexuality.”<sup>67</sup>

The difference between erotica and pornography is clearly complex, depending on the perspective from which you consider each. For the purpose of this thesis, I will, from this point forward, use the term erotica to refer to work that is a literary and artistic representation of the more explicit depiction of sex seen in pornography. I will use the terms interchangeably as social concepts, but in reference to literature, I will use only the terms erotic or erotica.

#### *1.4 Writing Erotic Literature*

In considering these perspectives of pornography and erotica, I found it pertinent to acknowledge whether the two books I chose for translation analysis are what could actually be considered erotic literature. Nin and Becker have many scenes in their work that are explicit depictions of sex, yet both remain classified as works of erotica, not pornography. Perhaps the simplest response to this is that both writers used artistic language to express their sexuality, despite criticisms of vulgarity against both Nin and Becker, but what makes a work erotic is a bit more subtle.

How does a writer use everyday language in order to create work that arouses its reader? It's somewhat difficult to arrive at this answer, since considering something erotic or arousing is often up to the individual reader. For Roland Barthes, “all reading and writing are in some sense erotic,”<sup>68</sup> because text, as a general rule, is meant to stimulate the reader, whether sexually or not. Barthes insists that text becomes erotic when the reader takes his or her pleasure from it, and that, if a text is boring to the reader, if it “prattles”, then “this prattling text is then a frigid text, as

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> P.M. Cryle, “Erotic Literature: A First Essay In Improper Thematics,” *French Forum* 13 (1988): 83.

any demand is frigid until desire... forms in it.”<sup>69</sup> So, despite the writer’s intention, Barthes insists that the text “must prove to [the reader] that it desires [him or her].”<sup>70</sup> Barthes describes what renders a text erotic:

Is not the most erotic portion of a body *where the garment gapes?* ... It is intermittence... which is erotic: the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing, between two edges; it is this flash itself which seduces or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance. The pleasure of the text is not the pleasure of the corporeal striptease or of narrative suspense... the entire excitation takes refuge in the *hope* of seeing the sexual organ... or in knowing the end of the story.<sup>71</sup>

This “language of suggestiveness functions as a substitution... nowhere more than in erotic language is the gratification of sexual desire a lie. That which is erotic is withheld, desire is suspended rather than gratified.”<sup>72</sup>

What Barthes does in his work is question the relationship between the reader and writer (which can also be framed as the relationship between reader and translator), examining the weight and influence of each in the reading process. For Barthes, erotica (or *texte de plaisir*) actually fails to ‘give’ pleasure to its reader because it is written conventionally. Dr. Jeanne Willette elaborates:

The *texte de plaisir* is the classical readable or *lisible* text, while the *texte de jouissance* resists language and becomes a threat. This latter, or *avant-garde* text works on two surfaces or plays between the two edges, which are the conformist narrative and the subversive *écriture*. The space between the expected and the subversive is a gap between the two and this gap, as Barthes pointed out, is erotic.<sup>73</sup>

An interesting perspective of Barthes’s *Pleasure of the Text* is his personification of the reading a story as a sex act itself. The desire, physical action, and climax of copulation mimic the

---

<sup>69</sup> Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1975), 5.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>72</sup> Schwichtenberg, “The Semey Side of Semiotics,” 27.

<sup>73</sup> Jeanne S. M. Willette, “Roland Barthes: ‘The Pleasure of the Text,’” December 20, 2013, Art History Unstuffed, accessed April 10, 2017.



natural progression of a narrative, and can be compared to the rising action, climax, and resolution of a story. The language Barthes uses to describe a reader's devouring of literature feels almost erotic itself:

We do not read everything with the same intensity of reading; a rhythm is established, casual, unconcerned with the *integrity* of the text; our very avidity for knowledge impels us to skim or to skip certain passages (anticipated as "boring") in order to get more quickly to the warmer parts of the anecdote... we boldly skip (no one else is watching) descriptions, explanations, analyses, conversations; doing so, we resemble a spectator in a nightclub who climbs onto the stage and speeds up the dancer's striptease, tearing off her clothing... it is the very rhythm of what is read and what is not read that creates the pleasure of great narratives. Thus, what I enjoy in a narrative is not directly its content of even its structure, but rather the abrasions I impose upon the fine surface: I read on, I skip, I look up, I dip in again.<sup>74</sup>

This "intensity of reading," its rhythm, its rushing past the uninteresting to seek the finish resembles the anticipation of seduction (the cracking of a book's spine), the hurried undressing (the skipping over passages) and the blissful orgasm (the revelation of a book's ending). However, it's important to remember that, unlike pornography's orgasm, which is considered the fulfillment or ending, the finish is irrelevant in erotica. Barthes explains: "So-called 'erotic books'... *represent* not so much the erotic scene as the expectation of it, the preparation for it, its ascent; that is what makes them 'exciting'; and when the scene occurs, naturally there is disappointment, deflation. In other words, these are books of Desire, not of Pleasure."<sup>75</sup> Erotica is simply not erotica without the use of a certain language and style that suspends desire, suggests sensuality, or entices readers with its subtleties.

The question, then, is if Barthes's ideas of textual suggestion or enticement through the unseen apply to the two texts chosen for this thesis. Nin's writing, which is subtle in its language, overflowing with sexual metaphors and suggestions, has received more academic criticism

---

<sup>74</sup> Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, 12.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

classifying it as pornography rather than erotica, while Becker's novel, though unstudied in the academic world, is far more explicit and considerably less poetic.

In the English titles alone, both works use their subtitles to advertise their content as erotica: *Delta of Venus* is followed directly by *Erotica by Anaïs Nin*, while directly below Emma Becker's *Mr.* is written *An erotic novel*. The titles in French are less explanatory: Nin's work is simply referred to as *Vénus érotica* and Becker's as *Mr.* The titles and their translations will be discussed further later in this thesis, but acknowledging that, at least in English, these works are advertised as erotica speaks to the tendency of erotica to be wholly more accepted, less taboo and more easily marketable today. Both Nin and Becker use artistic allusions and literary references to support their stories, which lend "a greater perspective than is normally given to pornographic writings."<sup>76</sup> Nin's short stories often evoke images of celebrated paintings, such as Goya's *Maja Desnuda*, while Becker's endless references to Bataille, de Sade, and Calaferte serve as a driving force for the plot of *Mr.*, as the two protagonists are brought together by their mutual obsession with erotica. In the novel, Ellie, the main character, receives an email from Monsieur before meeting him for the first time, containing Charles Baudelaire's erotic poem "The Jewels," and Becker has commented on this use of poetry: "I like to think about these moments where we exchange poems as 'singing' moments, shared like lullabies that would accompany us all through our days and nights."<sup>77</sup> Baudelaire, known for his subtly erotic poetry, is an excellent reference to propel Becker's story forward, the exchange of poetry from Monsieur to Ellie creating further tension and deepening their desire.

---

<sup>76</sup> Kamboureli, "Discourse and Intercourse," 158.

<sup>77</sup> Lucy Moore, "Exclusive interview with Emma Becker, author of Monsieur," *Female First*, October 26, 2012, <http://www.femalefirst.co.uk/books/Monsieur-258861.html>.

### *1.5 Sexuality and its Influence on the Writer's Text*

Sexuality is grounded in a biological drive that often serves as motivation behind sexual action, but biology does not dictate where, when and with whom (or how) we engage in sexual behaviour.<sup>78</sup> In other words, the inherent biological drive of humans is irrelevant in erotic literature—we are writing desire, not procreation. If we look at different perspectives in the study of human sexuality, we begin to understand the close relationship language shares with sex and, in effect, begin to understand the importance of adequately expressing erotic literature in more than one language.

There are two contrasting perspectives in human sexuality worth examining: essentialism and social constructionism. Both have addressed sexual attraction within their own philosophical scope. Modern essentialism emerged from Plato's ideas on classic essentialism which basically argues that "an essence does not change and is categorically different from another essence."<sup>79</sup> In other words, a triangle is still a triangle, no matter the length of its sides, as long as it maintains the essential form of a triangle.<sup>80</sup> Modern essentialism takes the idea of essence and "implies a belief that certain phenomena are natural, inevitable, universal, and biologically determined."<sup>81</sup> If we consider sexuality from this perspective, it clearly frames sex as a biological drive and is therefore less significant to this thesis. Social constructionism, in contrast, believes the reality is socially constructed through shared human experience, emphasizing that language is an important means by which we interpret and share such experiences.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> John D. DeLamater and Janet Shibley Hyde, "Essentialism vs. Social Constructionism in the Study of Human Sexuality," *The Journal of Sex Research* 35, no. 1 (1998): 14.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

It cannot be written that all sexual experiences are truly universal, despite the sources cited above. Instead, it should be reiterated that sex is a commonly, widely understood or experienced physical action, rooted in biology, but the discourse and language used to describe, talk about or express sexuality is unique to every individual culture. Anthropologist Donald Tuzin best combines the modern essentialist approach with social constructionism by considering sexuality from a bio-cultural approach. From his analysis, “sexual desire is an essential product of evolution... the expression of sexual desire is channelled and constrained by memories, situational factors, and cultural understandings... although sexual desire may be biologically driven, its expression is socially constructed.”<sup>83</sup> This social construction of sexuality helps us better understand not only a writer’s motivation for creating erotica, but also the translator’s approach to working with it.

The social constructionist perspective serves this thesis particularly well, as erotic literature is a prime example of one of the mediums through which people linguistically construct and share ideas and experiences concerning their own sexuality. Anaïs Nin’s erotica bears striking comparison to her diaries, and shows how our own realities can penetrate our linguistic expression. Consider the following example:

From the *Diary, Vol. III*:

I visited Hugh and Brigitte Chisholm in their East River apartment... As I enter they read me like an *objet d’art*. She shines steadily, under any circumstance. Not intermittedly as I do because I can only bloom in a certain... warmth... I knew no woman as easily persuaded to go to bed who had obtained so little from her playacting. The extent of her frigidity appalled me... <sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>84</sup> Anaïs Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin, Vol. III* (California: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1969), 22, quoted in Kamboureli, “Discourse and Intercourse,” 147-48.

From “Mandra” in *Little Birds*:

I am invited one night to the apartment of a young society couple, the Hs. It is like being on a boat because it is near the East River... She is a natural beauty, whereas I, an artificial one, need a setting and warmth to bloom successfully... [She] has discovered what I sensed long ago: that she has never known a real orgasm, at thirty-four.<sup>85</sup>

The similarities between Nin’s dutifully kept diaries and her erotica only further emphasize the idea of social constructionist sexuality. Nin’s erotica was often almost verbatim language from her real life experiences, and those of her close friends (which she often used as inspiration for her erotic stories), “an act that suggests that she is far from writing a caricature of sexuality; she records in detail sensual settings and recollects the way sexuality manifests itself in her milieu. Reality is embedded in fantasy and vice versa.”<sup>86</sup>

Much is the same for Emma Becker, who has openly expressed in interviews that her story is based on her own personal experience. When asked to expand on the autobiographical nature of the novel, she explains:

I changed various details in *Mr.*, important information like names... anything that could get him in trouble. This is actually the only reason why the book isn’t completely autobiographical. The novel is filled with dreams I had about him, things I would have wanted him to know, things I should have said to him, secrets I kept. It’s actually both a story and a fantasy about this man, and I had the opportunity to create scenes and confrontations that we didn’t have and rendezvous that he didn’t allow me.<sup>87</sup>

By her own admission, Becker’s reality has penetrated her linguistic expression and depiction of her individual sexuality and sexual experiences. These two women used written language to share their stories with readers; translation then becomes the mechanism to further

---

<sup>85</sup> Anaïs Nin, *Little Birds* (California: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1979), 140-144, quoted in Kamboureli, “Discourse and Intercourse,” 147-48.

<sup>86</sup> Kamboureli, “Discourse and Intercourse,” 148.

<sup>87</sup> Moore, “Exclusive interview with Emma Becker, author of *Monsieur*.”

communicate their experiences with a larger audience, enabling this human-constructed sexual reality to broaden and permeate other cultures.

### *1.6 Translation and its Influence on Sexuality*

There are many pertinent questions to ask concerning the language of erotica and how we translate the words on a page, but taking a moment to consider the influence that translation has on sexuality, rather than how sex culture influences a translation, is an interesting point of consideration.

There are countless diverse sex cultures around the world and equally as many linguistic nuances used to express them. We know translation is not exclusively a linguistic exercise, rather a “dynamic process by which ideas are produced and transmitted,” a “cultural negotiation” of sorts.<sup>88</sup> Sexual literature has brought “challenges that occur when distinct linguistic, disciplinary, and cultural contexts are brought into critical dialogue” including the “translations and mistranslations that [occur] when bodies and desires [are] conceptualized in terms of ‘sex.’”<sup>89</sup>

If we consider a theme in literature to be “what is pre-known and re-known in the circularity of interpretation: it is the content of culture as tradition,”<sup>90</sup> we can imagine that, after being translated, the theme of erotica— sexuality— remains in this constant circulation of interpretation. Translation is the tool that perpetuates the cycle of sharing, interpreting and reinterpreting, and it is this constant cycle, this passing of time, which tells us most about the changes occurring in sex culture:

---

<sup>88</sup> Heike Bauer, *Sexology And Translation: Cultural And Scientific Encounters Across The Modern World* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), 2.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Cryle, “Erotic Literature,” 86.

Aucun miroir ne saurait peut-être mieux refléter l'esprit du temps, l'âme passagère d'une époque, que celui présenté par les divers visages de l'amour, lequel ne trahissent en effet que trop bien les contradictions et les malentendus inhérents aux désirs des hommes et à leurs idéologies.<sup>91</sup>

It is argued that eroticism is strictly cultural and “erotic mastery is a matter of culture... And just as there are proper erotic practices, there is a proper transmission of them.”<sup>92</sup> Erotic culture “exists as a set of things that is ‘passed’ from one text to another.”<sup>93</sup> The evolution of the tradition of erotic literature and its translations reflects the transmission of sex cultures around the world. Again, translation is one of the key tools to achieve this:

Translation, as a privileged space for representations of non-normative sexuality, is... a major route by which many people have accessed such texts from the eighteenth century onwards, be they sexologists trying to categorize and explain sexual behaviours or those with dissident sexual desires attempting to understand and legitimize their identities.<sup>94</sup>

The phrase “non-normative sexuality” reiterates the idea that a translator is responsible for a cultural negotiation and must tap into non-normative subcultures of sexuality, attempting to explain them to a new audience. The notion that translation is a way of “attempting to understand and legitimize identities” further highlights the obligation and subsequent influence a translator has not only to the source text but also to the culture of that source text.

Both original and translated works of erotic literature are one of many platforms by which “new insights into how sexual ideas were formed in different contexts via a complex process of cultural negotiation.”<sup>95</sup> Considering this negotiation, this intersection of sexuality and translation, it is fair to deduce that the “relationship between... culture and discourse and

---

<sup>91</sup> Ernest Sturm, *Crébillon fils et le libertinage au XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Nizet, 1970), 11.

<sup>92</sup> Cryle, “Erotic Literature,” 86-87.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>94</sup> “The History of Sexuality and Translation of the Classics,” accessed October 10, 2016, <https://www.dur.ac.uk/classics/events/sexualitytranslation/>.

<sup>95</sup> Bauer, *Sexology and Translation*, 2.

experience, shaped modern sexuality.”<sup>96</sup> In other words, ideas on sexuality today have “theoretically reshaped existing scholarship on the histories of sexuality and modernity by demonstrating that the concept of ‘sexuality’ was forged across the modern world... [which] turned erotic desires, sexual acts, intimate relationships... into markers of modernity.”<sup>97</sup> Studies in sexology have allowed “sexuality [to become] a defining feature of global modernity.”<sup>98</sup>

Translation has played a pivotal role in the shaping of modern sexuality, allowing “the development of different national and transnational sexologies and their relationship to each other.”<sup>99</sup> The opportunity to translate erotic literature can be seen on a larger scale as an opportunity to modernize or normalize perspectives on sexuality.

---

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>99</sup> Bauer, *Sexology and Translation*, 1.



## CHAPTER TWO: LANGUAGE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SEXUAL DEPICTION

*I had a feeling that Pandora's box contained the mysteries of woman's sensuality, so different from man's and for which man's language was inadequate. The language of sex had yet to be invented. The language of the senses was yet to be explored.*<sup>100</sup>

Anaïs Nin

### 2.1 French and English— Languages of Lust?

In France, “erotica and pornography have a long and serious tradition,”<sup>101</sup> and Anaïs Nin, who lived in both the United States and in France, admitted the disparity in erotic literature between the two countries:

The joke on me is that France had a tradition of literary erotic writing, in fine elegant style, written by the best writers. When I first began to write [erotica] I thought there was a similar tradition [in America], but found none at all. All I have seen is badly written, shoddy, and by second-rate writers. No fine writer seems ever to have tried his hand at erotica.<sup>102</sup>

When reading Nin’s erotic works, her writing “confronts the established French tradition of erotic writing and the American tradition of pornography that makes no claim whatsoever as literature. She is conscious of addressing an American audience.” In Richard Howard’s forward to Richard Miller’s English translation of Barthes’s *The Pleasure of the Text*, Howard wastes no time reiterating this tradition, framed from the perspective of language:

The French have a vocabulary of eroticism, an amorous discourse which smells neither of the laboratory nor of the sewer, which just— attentively, scrupulously— puts the facts. In English, we have either the coarse or the clinical, and by tradition our words for our pleasure, even for the intimate parts of our bodies where we may take those pleasures, come awkwardly when they come at all. So that if we wish to speak of the kind of pleasure we take— the supreme pleasure, say, associated with sexuality at its

---

<sup>100</sup> Anaïs Nin, *Delta of Venus* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1977), xi.

<sup>101</sup> Kamboureli, “Discourse and Intercourse,” 145.

<sup>102</sup> Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin, Vol. III*, 147, quoted in Kamboureli, “Discourse and Intercourse,” 145.

most abrupt and ruthless pitch— we lack the terms acknowledged and allowed in polite French utterance; we lack *jouissance* and *jouir*... The nomenclature of active pleasure fails us.<sup>103</sup>

This leads to the principal question of this chapter: what characteristics of both French and English language influence the writing of erotica and what linguistic restraints can present obstacles for the translators of such texts?

## 2.2 *Sexual Linguistics*

The French emphasize that in work created by female writers, “the female subject maintains a resonant silence that, in its deployment of ‘blank pages gaps, borders, spaces... holes in discourse’ speaks louder than words.”<sup>104</sup> It is the unspoken, the silence, that which is left out which creates the story, the desire, the arousal, which is the basic formula for successful erotica—what is not shown is what makes it unique.

French and English linguists have settled into two groups which express two different schools of thought in their consideration of female language: feminologists and empiricists. French linguists tend toward a feminology which seeks liberation through “a utopian vision of woman’s language” while English linguists lean toward empiricism which hopes to “reshape language so that it works for, rather than against, women.”<sup>105</sup> Regardless of perspective, both seek to draw away from the dominant, male-centric language that settled by default into practice with the invention of language itself.

As theorists have begun to consider “the idea of a cultural determined body language which translates the articulations of the body into that body of articulated terminology we call

---

<sup>103</sup> Richard Howard, introduction to *The Pleasure of the Text*, by Roland Barthes (New York: Hill & Wang, 1975), v.

<sup>104</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, “Sexual Linguistics: Gender, Language, Sexuality,” *New Literary History* 16, no. 3 (1985): 518.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 519.

language,” linguistic feminists have emerged to question the “sexuality of linguistics and the linguistics of sexuality.”<sup>106</sup> Sexual linguistics has become a topic of debate which has inspired the idea of a new female language, “a revolutionary linguism, an oral break from the dictatorship of patriarchal speech... American, French, and British feminist critics have all [lately] drawn attention to the philosophical, linguistic, and practical problems of women’s use of language.”<sup>107</sup> Lévi-Strauss offers that, though women are defined by men as signs, they must also be recognized as generators of signs;<sup>108</sup> this idea coupled with the notion that “men have expelled [women] from the world of symbols and yet they have given [them] names.” How women are represented in writing is under speculation as theorists wonder if the female body is “a linguistic term in (male) language... Does her body express or repress a (female) language of its own?”<sup>109</sup> The problem becomes, then, that if women “begin to speak and write as men do, they will enter history subdued and alienated: it is a history that, logically speaking, their speech should disrupt.”<sup>110</sup> In this outcry for female language, because the default in semantics is masculine, “uncovering the male monopoly of language that reinforces a more general male cultural primacy”<sup>111</sup> is critical to allowing works like *Delta of Venus* and *Mr.* to not only be published but to also be successful in their reception.

What, specifically, is meant when text is identified as using female language? In studies of the English language, there has been a noticeable “predominance of apology in female discourse and the pre-eminence of obscenity in male discourse” and, often times, “hedging or disclaiming statements, hypercorrect grammar, super polite pronunciation, weak expletives, and

---

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 515.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 517.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 516.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 517.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 519.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

a specialized vocabulary related to women's traditionally domestic sphere.”<sup>112</sup> This perspective, from Robin Lakoff, a noted linguist who focuses primarily on women and the language they employ, could certainly be challenged as outdated, particularly with growing feminist movements, but the root of what she is saying cannot be dismissed as totally untrue. Perhaps women no longer say, “Dear me!” as a sort of coy expletive, but the truth remains that “[women’s] language has been systematically ridiculed [so] they are perceived as less linguistically powerful than men.”<sup>113</sup> Despite criticisms against Lakoff’s work, linguists largely agree that “women are heard to speak a language less forceful than that spoken by men.”<sup>114</sup>

This, of course, is female language as we see study it in English, but there is a clear difference in French, “where French is grammatically gender marked and (comparatively) highly inflected, English is only lexically gender marked and (comparatively) uninflected.”<sup>115</sup> Further, the French seem preoccupied by the notion of “*politesse*, distance, and objectification through... stylizations like the *tu-toyer*, [while] English is more consistently casual in its “high” as well as “low” cultural usages.”<sup>116</sup> In other words, there appears to be greater complexity to the femaleness of French language, “a charisma of French feminist discourse... a kind of intellectual *haute couture*” which is most likely perpetuated by the unending glamorization of French language and culture by English speakers.<sup>117</sup> As with many comparisons between French and anglophone cultures, language is no exception: “while [the] French see women’s language as a joyously emetic emission from a community based on the commonality of women, Americans tend to perceive it as a sedate commodity women have been forced to produce for male

---

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 520.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 520-21.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 520.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 521.

consumption.”<sup>118</sup> The French *parler femme* is viewed as exotic and mysterious, while “the place of the American genderlect is a confining parlour that produces a linguistic pallor.”<sup>119</sup> Words uttered and work produced in French is consistently hailed as exuberant and “prophetic in its anticipation of a new time of sexual liberation, [while] the prophylactic speech associated with American women guards them against the vulgarity of reality.”<sup>120</sup> This is particularly important when we frame these ideas within the genre of erotic literature. If American women are, by the dictations of their own culture, expected to adopt and use more traditionally female speech, does American erotica written by women lack a certain sexuality that perhaps a French writer could more freely, easily embrace? This question adds a layer of complexity to the task of translating erotic work: every translator brings to the writing table a sort of cultural baggage— does this inhibit his or her ability to be linguistically liberal in terms of sex language? These questions will be examined further later in this thesis.

There is, however, a significant similarity that both French feminologists and Anglo empiricists can agree on: “there has not yet been any writing that inscribes femininity,” and women’s “way of referring to experience [has been] suppressed in public discourse.”<sup>121</sup> This point is particularly important when we apply it to erotica, a genre which was, for centuries, dominated by men. Even when women wrote erotica in the past, they often did so under a pen name to protect themselves, one of the more famous examples being *Histoire d’O* (or *Story of O* in English). The novel, published in 1954, portrays “explicit scenes of bondage and violent penetration in spare, elegant prose... Pauline Réage, the author, was a pseudonym, and many

---

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 522.

people thought that the book could only have been written by a man.”<sup>122</sup> Despite the suspicion the novel was a man’s work, French author Régine Desforbes describes how she “always saw it as a quintessentially female work”<sup>123</sup>:

I always knew it was written by a woman. It is absolutely a feminist work, empowering to women. For the first time, a woman is revealing her sex life, and it is the woman who dominates the situation, her feelings, her response, her trajectory.<sup>124</sup>

Here, Desforbes quietly closes the door on debate against the existence of femaleness in language. Language may remain masculine, failing to include women as it should, but Desforbes illustrates that the sentiments and feelings evoked in erotica written by women have a distinctly female sense to it. Anaïs Nin herself wrote in the preface to *Delta of Venus*:

I long felt that I had compromised my feminine self. Rereading [the erotica] years later, I see that my own voice was not completely suppressed. In numerous passages I was intuitively using a woman’s language, seeing sexual experience from a woman’s point of view... It shows the beginning efforts of a woman in a world that had been the domain of men.<sup>125</sup>

The observations made by both Desforbes and Nin concerning the distinctly female sensation of their texts will come into play later in this thesis when discussing translation theory.

Works like *Histoire d’O* encourage women to express their sexual experiences in their own distinctly female words: the erotica produced by both Nin and Becker is rooted very firmly in their own personal experiences.

Their texts cut through suppression, not only of female language but female experience. Becker’s novel is almost entirely from the perspective of its young, female protagonist, and Nin’s erotic stories are often from the perspective of female characters. Despite linguistic

---

<sup>122</sup> Geraldine Bedell, “I Wrote The Story of O,” *The Guardian*, July 25, 2004, accessed January 10, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/jul/25/fiction.features3>.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Nin, *Delta of Venus*, xv.

differences between French and English, both works offer a female perspective of sexuality, in which the language, whether in its blatant vocabulary or subtle metaphors, puts women and their own pleasure at the forefront of the story.

### *2.3 Gendered Language*

As established earlier, French is a grammatically gendered language, a fact which can prove to be a difficult in both the writing and translating of erotica. One of the most striking ways this difficulty can be illustrated is by looking at possessive adjectives, most specifically his/her or *son/sa*, and their role in both French and English. Possessive adjectives are short and efficient markers that signify specific possession in a language. The possessive in French does not indicate the owner's gender, but rather the grammatical "gender" of the object that is possessed; in English, we find the opposite. This difference can affect both the meaning drawn from the original work or its translation as well as the pace and fluidity of the text.

There is an efficiency and accuracy achieved in the English language's use of his or her: the reader is almost always aware to whom what object belongs or who performs an action. In French, the stylistic heaviness and wordiness does not allow this immediate recognition, and the reader is therefore left asking ridiculous questions like, "Who is doing what to whom with what?" In other words, "À la différence de son équivalent anglais, l'adjectif possessif français n'indique pas le genre du possesseur, mais plutôt le genre grammatical de l'objet possédé, d'où le risque d'équivoque."<sup>126</sup>

Stylistically, erotica needs two elements to be successful: narrative fluidity and descriptive clarity. It is then left to a translator to ensure that the translation clearly, distinctly and

---

<sup>126</sup> Boulanger, "Sa langue se glissa dans sa bouche," 2.

seamlessly informs its reader of what is occurring on the pages, which may threaten a translator's ability to be stylistically liberal in their writing—the ambiguity created by possessive pronouns in French can frustrate rather than seduce a reader, so its treatment in translation must be thought out and executed well.

An example of the his/her-son/sa literary roadblock is evident in Anaïs Nin's short story "The Basque and Bijou," in a scene in which a man, the Basque, is seducing a prostitute, Viviane. In Nin's original English version, the Basque's gentle and slow seduction unfolds in flowing, teasing sentences (emphasis mine):

*Her skin* was as dark as a gypsy's, very smooth and clean, and even powdered. *His fingers* were sensitive. He touched her only by accident, brushing by, and laid his sex on her belly like a toy... *Her belly* vibrated to its weight, heaving slightly to feel it there.<sup>127</sup>

Commengé's translation (emphasis mine):

*La peau de Viviane* était aussi mate que celle d'une gitane, lisse et sans tache, même sous la poudre. *Les doigts du Basque* étaient sensibles. Il se contentait de la frôler doucement, ne la touchant que par accident, et il avait posé sa verge sur son ventre pour qu'elle l'admire, comme un jouet... *Le ventre de Viviane* vibrait sous son poids, se soulevant doucement pour mieux la sentir.<sup>128</sup>

Commengé's text is technically effective in its translation of Nin's. But the possessive adjectives so distinctive in English are muddled in the French and therefore require clarification, which can often render the text clunky. In any other genre of literature, we may simply consider these minor snags in an otherwise enjoyable translation, but the genre of erotica requires erotic tension, and this depends directly on narrative tension, which can only be achieved by creating a rhythm that mimics the exchange between two partners. The translation, despite its accuracy, is weighed down by the wordiness of lines such as *La peau de Viviane* instead of *Her skin*. The risk then

---

<sup>127</sup> Nin, *Delta of Venus*, 176.

<sup>128</sup> Nin, *Delta of Venus*, trans. Béatrice Commengé, 193.



arises that the pace of reading will be slowed and thus affect the growth of the erotic tension. Often the issue of translating possessive adjectives in erotica makes the seduction disjointed or unappealing, diminishing the genre's goal of arousing its reader.

There is an exception to this issue and that depends on the narrative perspective. Erotica is most often narrated by a third person, a voyeur of the scene, but if erotica is narrated by a main character in the first person, the gender ambiguity automatically disappears.

While Nin's short stories are most often narrated from a third party, the sex scenes in Becker's *Mr.* are written from the perspective of its protagonist, Ellie, so the reader is safely and consistently assured that, in an erotic scene between Ellie and her lover, Monsieur, there is no misunderstanding of whose hands are doing what exactly. The translator does not need to take care to differentiate at all.

#### *2.4 Sex and Semiotics*

Semiotics, the study of signs, symbols, and how we use or interpret them, is an excellent way to look at the language of erotic literature. As Cathy Schwichtenberg writes in her article, "The Semeiy Side of Semiotics," "language and sex make fine bedfellows for a study of signification and ideology... erotica as a specific sign for sex seems very comfortable within a semiotic system."<sup>129</sup> George Steiner wrote quite plainly, "Sex is a profoundly semantic act."<sup>130</sup> It makes perfect sense that "here erotics and poetics merge... Intercourse is not a mechanical operation but an act both of love and speech. The semantics of lovemaking communicates the lovers' sexuality in language that has a dialectic structure."<sup>131</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup> Schwichtenberg, "The Semeiy Side of Semiotics," 27.

<sup>130</sup> George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), 38.

<sup>131</sup> Kamboureli, "Discourse and Intercourse," 151.

Looking at the function of signs as substitution for another thing is exactly what erotic literature intends to do: express something by not quite expressing it. Umberto Eco's *A Theory of Semiotics* explains this further: "... a sign is everything that, on the grounds of a previously established social convention, can be taken as something standing for something else."<sup>132</sup> In other words, the social conventions of sexuality are transformed in erotic literature by the subtle signs, symbols, or metaphors writers use to express them. "Nowhere in language is the process of substitution more pronounced than in erotic language which is determined to elude its interpretant by using metaphoric, metonymic, euphemistic veils of suggestion."<sup>133</sup>

The interesting thing about semiotics and erotica is exactly how well-paired they are. The two maintain something of a symbiotic relationship: erotica puts semiotics to work and the signs used in the text give weight to the definition of the genre as we have defined it. As previously mentioned in this thesis, a primary difference between pornography and erotica is that which is shown versus what is hidden, respectively. Let us remember that erotica depends entirely on the deferral of desire, a drawing out of anticipation, allusions of sex rather than instant, explicit gratification. Signs and substitution (a sign-function) serve erotic literature by hinting to readers this suspension, these allusions. Schwichtenberg explains further:

An erotic description can tease or hint at a veiled meaning which we can, or are supposed to be able to, read correctly. Aroused by our interpretation of a sexual code which carries with it signs of sexual promise or potential, we wait expectantly for a gratification of our desire. Yet we can never have what we want... The codes and signs which propel our desire place us in a bind... our sexual fantasies (as sign creations) are always that much more than any sexual experience allows. Thus aroused and immobilized at an intersection between the erotic passage before us and its representation and interpretation in our minds, we experience a pleasurable frustration—perhaps an erotic moment. For by withholding, by not telling, the erotic tells.<sup>134</sup>

---

<sup>132</sup> Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979), 7.

<sup>133</sup> Schwichtenberg, "The Semeiy Side of Semiotics," 27.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

This observation is key in understanding the importance of semiotics in erotic literature. Regardless of the text laid out before the reader, the “success” of the erotica (if we determine that to be achievement of arousal) depends heavily on the reader’s interpretation of subtleties, signs, symbols and suggestions. Again, the action of reading erotica becomes much like the action of sex itself— we devour it, hope to derive pleasure from it, allow ourselves to perceive desires and interpret meaning in the experience. By using signs in erotica, the author gives the reader of an erotic text the liberty and privilege of their own sexual experience.

Roland Barthes, mentioned previously in this thesis, is one of the more notable theorists who, in his work on language and pleasure, discusses the importance of symbolism and imagery in erotica:

It goes without saying that erotic language is elaborated not only in articulated language but also in the language of images... Society never utters any erotic practice, only desires, preliminaries, contexts, suggestions, ambiguous sublimations, so that, for us, eroticism cannot be defined save by a perpetually elusive word.<sup>135</sup>

Studying the signs (the sexual text, for example, whether explicit or suggested) and their signifiers (the impression formed when reading the text) in erotic literature presents a series of “codes and signs which propel our desire.”<sup>136</sup> The signs in erotic literature function as a substitution for what is actually desired, and the writer of an erotic text is responsible for “the mediation of signs which suggest rather than tell.”<sup>137</sup>

This mediation is clearly present in Anaïs Nin’s *Delta of Venus*. Nin, more than Becker in *Mr.*, uses a far more metonymical and metaphorical language in her erotica. Not only is the story driven by suggestiveness, but Nin’s vocabulary is an endless dictionary of signs— most every word stands for something else, something far more explicit than what is actually written. “Nin

---

<sup>135</sup> Roland Barthes, *Sade/Fourier/Loyola*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976), p. 26.

<sup>136</sup> Schwichtenberg, “The Semey Side of Semiotics,” 27.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

never uses words like ‘cunt,’ ‘cock,’ and ‘fuck.’ Instead, she expresses the profanity of the sexual organs by describing them in terms of natural and animal imagery... Nin's sexual discourse avoids the vulgarity of hard-core pornography. Her lyrical language emphasizes the poetics of sexuality.”<sup>138</sup> In “Mathilde,” as in many of her erotic stories, Nin uses plants as metaphors that clearly suggest to the reader that she is not talking botany. Instead, Nin uses images of flowers to allude to the female anatomy: “... it was like the gum plant leaf with its secret milk that the pressure of the finger could bring out, the odorous moisture that came like the moisture of the sea shells.”<sup>139</sup> In the story “Two Sisters,” from Nin’s other book of erotica, *Little Birds*, Nin describes the space between a woman’s legs, writing, “the fur had opened to reveal her whole body, glowing, luminous, rich in the fur, like some jewelled animal.”<sup>140</sup> Even in naming her characters, Nin’s choices seem too pointed to be coincidence. There is the story “Lilith,” about a sexually frigid woman, a fitting name choice as it has become a “symbol both mythologized and humanized as a demon-woman.”<sup>141</sup> Then there is the story “Marianne,” about a woman who sexually liberates herself while becoming swept up in her desire for her lover and her frustrations in nurturing their relationship. The name Marianne is a centuries-old symbol for the Republic of France, a woman often described as fiery but nurturing, similar to the character in Nin’s story.<sup>142</sup> The name Bijou, in “The Basque and Bijou,” is a clever sign for the prostitute in the story since, in French, *bijou* is defined as “un objet de parure précieux,” as well as a term of affection.<sup>143</sup> A prostitute, like a piece of jewellery, is expected to entice her client (the buyer

---

<sup>138</sup> Kamboureli, “Discourse and Intercourse, Design and Desire,” 152-153.

<sup>139</sup> Nin, *Delta of Venus*, 15.

<sup>140</sup> Kamboureli, “Discourse and Intercourse,” 142.

<sup>141</sup> Schwichtenberg, “The Semey Side of Semiotics,” 30.

<sup>142</sup> Gouvernement France, “Marianne and the motto of the Republic,” Last modified July 2014, <http://www.gouvernement.fr/en/marianne-and-the-motto-of-the-republic>.

<sup>143</sup> *Dictionnaire bilingue français-anglais Larousse en ligne*, s.v. “bijou,” accessed January 18, 2017, <http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais-anglais/bijou/9177>.

of the jewel) with beauty. Nin writes describes Bijou much like a precious, rare gem, one of the most loved prostitutes, garnering particular attention and affection from the Basque. By naming her Bijou, Nin uses the image of jewels to suggest to the reader that the character is a particularly special one.

In “The Basque and Bijou,” the story which remains one of the primary focuses of this thesis, there are sign substitutions for sex and the body in nearly every paragraph. The following are several examples of Nin’s mediation of signs to suggest to her reader what is happening, rather than explicitly tell them (my emphases):

He was looking for one of those *little red lights* that spelled pleasure.<sup>144</sup>

... she could measure the client, and set about getting him *the perfect glove*, a neat fit. It gave no pleasure if there was too much room, and no pleasure if *the glove* was too tight.<sup>145</sup>

He was a connoisseur, a gourmet, of women’s *jewel boxes*. He liked them velvet-lined and cozy, affectionate and clinging.<sup>146</sup>

Maman’s *delectable flavoring* would appear... *a honey* that smelled of seashell and that made the passage into the *female alcove* between her thighs...<sup>147</sup>

... the stains of love! ... *a jeweled stain*, for it had tiny glittering specks in it, like some mineral that had melted; and a *sugary quality* which stiffened the clothes.<sup>148</sup>

Maman’s *sap* never withered.<sup>149</sup>

...an insolent baton...<sup>150</sup>

Her big eyes... could gauge the size and weight of the man’s *possessions*.<sup>151</sup>

---

<sup>144</sup> Nin, *Delta of Venus*, 168.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 170-171.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 168.

The examples are endless, but those above illustrate Nin's expertise in using beautifully curated signs (word images like “jewel boxes” and “the perfect glove”) to subtly signify meaning to a reader (both of those images as metaphors for female genitalia). By definition, erotica talks about sex by not actually talking about it. But it’s important to acknowledge the distinct difference between the meaning we know in every day language and the meaning we derive from metaphors. Metaphors and symbols involve more complex and prolonged semiosis—Nin’s use of *insolent baton* represents a *penis* which is, in its most general sense, and *organ*.

Beyond the signs in Nin’s stories, “analyzing the title of the work, *Delta of Venus*, as a macro-sign— a primary signifier that functions as an ‘umbrella term’ which refers to and harbor the smaller sign-vehicles (the short stories as units, as parts which construct and refer back to the whole)”<sup>152</sup> allows us to further see sign function in erotic text. Schwichtenberg goes into great detail in her analysis but, essentially, she concludes that the title “names the body (of work) as both ‘feminine’ and erotic.”<sup>153</sup> Examining both words in the title and seeing how they influence each other helps us draw the same conclusion. A delta is “a triangular tract of sediment deposited at the mouth of a river, typically where it diverges into several outlets.”<sup>154</sup> Venus is “the Roman name for Aphrodite, the goddess of love and beauty who was born from the severed genitals of Uranus and the foam of the sea.”<sup>155</sup> Both words seem disconnected, but when we use their definitions to explore their deeper symbolism, a connection takes form:

As a tract of land, ‘delta’ falls under the auspices of ‘scientism’... However, ‘Venus’ when coupled with ‘delta’ elevates ‘Delta’ to an expression-plane [signifier]. For ‘Venus’ as the more abstract interpretant claims the ‘Delta’ as its body part. Thus, ‘Delta’ becomes mythologized when connected with ‘Venus,’ for the triangular-shaped

---

<sup>152</sup> Schwichtenberg, “The Semey Side of Semiotics,” 28.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>154</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “delta,” accessed November 13, 2016, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/delta>.

<sup>155</sup> Schwichtenberg, “The Semey Side of Semiotics,” 29.

tract is transformed into a structural, geometric synonym for Venus' vulvar area. Again, eroticism is a suggestion... [and] Venus' body becomes a map of desire... Venus was born 'of the waves,' hence through an interpretant reversal, her body is transformed into... 'land thrown up by the action of waves.'<sup>156</sup>

This observation perhaps feels like a reach, but at its most basic interpretation, it actually makes a lot of sense. To many, Venus already suggests love, beauty and romance. The shape of an upside down triangle is often used to express femininity or femaleness—the additional symbolism of Venus' birth in the water and a delta being a body of water is semiotic happenstance. These subtle suggestions in the title name Nin's work as erotic.

Despite the fact that Becker's *Mr.* uses a language to depict sexuality that is far more explicit than Nin's metaphors, the title of Becker's novel also functions as a sign weighted in suggestion. As pointed out earlier, Becker made the conscious decision not to name her main male character. For the author, this was a gesture of protecting her lover's identity and reputation, but using Monsieur to name him (rather than choosing any other name that was not his own) is riddled with suggestion and significance. The social convention of the word Monsieur is simply a generic title referring to a man, but to give him the name Monsieur shrouds the character in mystery—Monsieur could truly be anyone. Because a name in most cultures carries such significance in and of itself, rendering her lover nameless creates a sort of distance between Ellie, the main character, and her recounting of the affair. The reader is left wondering, "Who is this man, really?" Further, the name Monsieur allows the man in the novel to become generic enough that the reader may project their own fantasy onto the story and give Monsieur the name or face of their choosing. This is another way that semiotics serves erotica well:

---

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

The act of reading signs of erotica... gives us back ourselves through an imagined transaction and permits our indulgence in a fantasized mastery. As both voyeurs (we search for titillating scenes as we read) and masturbators, interested in our own lack (the work is our supplement) we become complicit in the construction of a semiotics of sexuality. Erotic texts will permit us to write our own texts.<sup>157</sup>

Becker uses Monsieur as a substitution for the real man in the story and, perhaps unintentionally, turns him into any man, every man. Because erotica tends to suggest, not tell, (as Becker suggested to readers her lover's identity, but never told us outright) the reader is able to imagine their own fantasies more vividly, hoping to achieve greater arousal because it is more personal and intimate.

---

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 28.



## CHAPTER THREE: TRANSLATION THEORY AND EROTICA

*Erotica necessarily is about sex (and emotions),  
and that's universal, whatever the language.*<sup>158</sup>

Maxim Jakubowski

### *3.1 Translating Erotica*

We live in a time where, “although desire, sensuality, eroticism, and even the explicit depiction of sexual organs can be found in many, if not all, times and places, pornography as an... artistic category seems to be an especially Western idea”<sup>159</sup> and these depictions of sexuality have become far less foreign concepts. Translation works as a mechanism for introducing new ideas from one culture into another and, in the past, was crucial to a society’s evolution beyond its own particular place on the map, whether by importing key scientific knowledge or exporting religious faith. Today, our access to information is endless, particularly with the use of the Internet, and perhaps no subculture has a greater presence online than erotica and pornography. Sexual acts and images once considered taboo are now, for many, commonplace. The Internet, among other media sources, has closed the gap between subcultures of sexuality and what is considered mainstream. This chapter applies theories in translation less in a linguistic frame and more from a hermeneutic perspective, emphasizing the relationship the translator forms with the source text.

---

<sup>158</sup> Maxim Jakubowski, “Interview with a Translator: Maxim Jakubowski,” by Ghislaine LeFranc, *Derivetranslation.com*, September 5, 2016, <http://www.derivetranslation.com/blog/>.

<sup>159</sup> Hunt, *The Invention of Pornography*, 10.

Translation has, for centuries, been tasked with “bringing new ideas... [acting as] a mediator between cultures and its carriers and the outside world.”<sup>160</sup> The problem, however, is that sexuality is not exactly a new idea— humans have been procreating since they first walked this earth. Ideas about sexuality have evolved, of course, moving from a base, biological drive to a complex world of seduction, romance or fetish. Erotic literature, once published in secret or banned from local libraries, is now one of many mediums through which representations of sexuality are openly available to consumers. So, while sex has never been *new*, translators can give a greater world view to a once taboo subject.

The field of translation studies is lacking literature specific to a methodology for the process of taking on erotic literature. However, Pier-Pascale Boulanger’s work on the process of erotic semiosis lays an excellent foundation for translators of erotica. By outlining clarity, reality and inventiveness as a translator’s “cardinal values,”<sup>161</sup> Boulanger creates a framework for future translators by outlining a methodology specifically for the translation of erotic literature. These three values are imperative to ensuring that an erotic text remains, after translation, distinctly erotic; that is to say, the tension, rhythm and suspension of desire is not lost in the process.

The first value, clarity, is important because:

Afin d'éliminer tout ralentisseur de lecture qui viendrait nuire à la mise en tension du lecteur, l'action des protagonistes doit se prêter à un décodage aisé. Toute ambiguïté dans le déroulement des séquences sexuelles entraîne une hésitation qui érode l'attention du lecteur.<sup>162</sup>

Boulanger here explains that clarity is essential to the writing of erotica (and therefore the subsequent translation) because it ensures the reader’s quick comprehension of the text. As explained in Chapter 2, certain languages, by their syntactic nature, don’t encourage clarity. If

---

<sup>160</sup> Sergey Tyulenev, *Translation and Society: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 31.

<sup>161</sup> Boulanger, “La sémiose du texte érotique,” 113.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

the reader of erotica struggles to unpack metaphors, decode slang or decipher possessive adjectives, the experience is dulled and, most likely, so is the arousal. Like any other field-specific nomenclature, erotic vocabulary develops over the course of the writing (and translation) experience.<sup>163</sup> As with any undertaking, a translator is obligated to expand their vocabulary with every passing sentence or they risk failing to comprehend the text before them and, as a result, failing to produce a clear text. Where the original text may use a more clinical term like *penis* or a symbolic word like *phallus*, the translator may choose slang like *dick* or *cock* instead to achieve greater clarity in their mother tongue. The importance of terminology and register helps achieve clarity, and contributes to creating an effect of reality, which ensures successful erotic narrative.<sup>164</sup>

This brings us to Boulanger's second value, the importance of reality:

En ce qui concerne les gestes posés, les situations et les lieux de l'action, le lecteur de littérature érotique se doute bien que des relations sexuelles fortuites et effrénées sont loin d'être choses courantes dans notre monde productiviste. Les gestes, les situations et les lieux doivent être plausibles selon les normes du monde fantasmé du lecteur. Mais la fiction doit sembler vraie pour que le lecteur y croie.<sup>165</sup>

This observation is tricky, as the breadth of sexual fantasy is endless—a text that arouses one person may fail to illicit even a blush from another. But Boulanger makes an excellent point in spite of that: if the reader of the erotic text fails to believe the fantasy, the fantasy will fail to stimulate him or her. The same applies to the translator; I will discuss later in this chapter the importance of a translator's interpretation of and feeling about the text in order to achieve an equivalent translation. So if the translator, in their reading, fails to believe in the erotic scene, the translation will reflect that failure.

---

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 108.

This necessity for reality is another characteristic that is key in erotica:

Le récit érotique se caractérise par une trame narrative entrecoupée de descriptions qui ont pour fonction d'ancrer l'action dans un contexte concret, c'est-à-dire de créer un effet de réel, un sentiment de véracité, nécessaire afin que le lecteur arrive à se projeter l'action et se projeter dans l'action.<sup>166</sup>

This effect of reality encourages the reader to become a part of the fantasy on the page, to project his or her own self into the story. Pornography, so explicit and lacking in a slow build, does not offer the consumer an opportunity to build arousal. An erotic story titillates and teases the reader by showing flashes of sexual fantasy grounded in a realistic scene. It is imperative that a translator produce a text that maintains this reality.

The narrative voice of erotica often encourages this sense of reality:

Le discours à la première personne, en captant d'emblée l'attention du lecteur, exploite la fonction appellative du langage, qui vise à provoquer une réaction chez le lecteur. C'est en fait le lectorat cible qui dicte le point de vue. Quelques-unes sont racontées à la troisième personne par un narrateur omniscient, point de vue qui comble le lecteur-voyeur... Bien que le point de vue du voyeur relatant l'action à laquelle il ne participe pas physiquement semble *a priori* impersonnel, il bénéficie d'une perspective omnisciente qui répond à la pulsion scopique du lecteur. La description sensorielle contribue plus efficacement à propulser l'action que les dialogues car, chaque fois, il est fait appel à la volonté de voir qui pousse à lire.<sup>167</sup>

Emma Becker's *Mr.* is written from Ellie's first-person perspective and, as Boulanger explains above, the captivation is almost immediate. In reading the erotic novel, the reader *is* Ellie. Her fantasies become our fantasies. Becker further achieves this important sense of reality not only by writing a work based on her own life, but by adding very real elements to the story. Her characters use Facebook to message each other, and Ellie spends a sleepless night scrolling through her lover's wife's Facebook photos. The language of the narrative is more colloquial than poetic, so the descriptions and the dialogue feel more familiar to the reader's day-to-day

---

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 109.

reality. Because the story takes place in Paris, a city to which many readers have either a real or imagined connection, the reader can implant his or her self into the story. Finally, Becker gives her readers a real sense of involvement in the story by writing a complete novel—a story with a pace matching the movements of real life, with its beginning, middle and end. When Ellie’s affair with Monsieur meets its inevitable and devastating end, the reader is with Ellie the entire way. We read her desire, her pleasure and her heartbreak directly through her own eyes, and this first-person perspective becomes our own point of view. The translator of her novel is obligated to the reader to maintain this voice.

In contrast, Anaïs Nin’s erotic short stories are written mostly in a third person voice. The reader of Nin’s erotica engages in a fantasy of voyeurism, peering through the bedroom keyhole. Because Nin writes short stories, readers have less of an opportunity to become invested in the fantasy—she writes literary quickies, if you will. Still, Nin’s erotic prose gives a very different sensation to the reader. Her stories are lush and poetic, taking the reader to exotic locations with mysterious characters. Though Nin’s erotica may seem less “realistic,” she offers a different type of fantasy to her readers. It takes a translator with strong writing skills to produce a text equally as beautiful and imaginative.

The final value the translator must maintain in their reproduction of an erotic text is inventiveness. Boulanger explains:

Le principal défi de l'auteur de récits érotiques consiste à déjouer la banalité car rien n'est plus banal que le sexe, cette pratique vieille comme le monde. Les meilleurs antidotes contre l'ennui sont l'inventivité.<sup>168</sup>

Erotica must entice and arouse its reader—a text that becomes boring in its clichés or repetitions will lose that effect. Boulanger suggests that one of the ways in which the writer of

---

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 110.

erotica (and, eventually, the translator) can be inventive is through humour, which, if woven into descriptions of people or situations, humanizes the sex scene.<sup>169</sup> Writers of erotica can achieve inventiveness by using wordplay, coining new vocabulary or restructuring sentences; this invention does not necessarily incite arousal, rather ensuring the reader remains engaged and invested in the text.<sup>170</sup> It becomes, of course, vital that the translator exercises creative license in order to achieve equivalence to the original.

### *3.2 An Erotics of Translation*

Throughout my research, a common thread among the pages of journal articles and studies has been that translation, as a practice, is erotic. There have been numerous admissions that a certain “complicity between the linguistic and the erotic... [suggests that] the process of literary translation, a process of intense engagement with another’s words, a process of intense reading, can be considered erotic if and when it is construed as the longing for full understanding of another’s speech.”<sup>171</sup> And what is translation, after all, if not a “physical, mental and emotional attempt fully to understand another’s utterances.”<sup>172</sup>

Other scholars have come to associate the act of translating as an erotic act itself. Even critics who deny this connection, arguing, “...reading is not lovemaking, and those who wield words to reason that it is are being self-indulgent” still admit that “many, many have solemnly engaged in this fanciful yoking,”<sup>173</sup> returning credibility to the claim that we can consider translation erotic. First, it is important here to consider the word ‘erotic’ more broadly,

---

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 110-11.

<sup>171</sup> Kevin West, “Translating the Body: Towards an Erotics of Translation,” *Translation and Literature* 19, no. 1 (2010): 2.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Steven G. Kellman, *Loving Reading: Erotics of the Text* (Hamden, CT, 1985), 29.

acknowledging that the term does not always suggest sexuality. Instead, “to the extent that an erotics of this or that can be constructed, the activity in question does participate in the erotic or possess an erotic dimension (understanding *erotic* in the broad sense, as superordinate to the sexual).”<sup>174</sup> To frame this in a concrete example, consider the idea of an erotics of baking, the manipulation of ingredients with our hands, the enticing aromas in the kitchen, the rising of dough like a deep inhale and, of course, the shape of buns or baguettes which hint at the most sexual parts of our bodies.<sup>175</sup>

This observation is not meant to be some cheeky or clever play on words. Instead, it is meant to emphasize that many everyday actions could be framed in an erotic way, so why not translation, too? When discussing translation, we may use words, “examples and instances that allow for or suggest the sexual.”<sup>176</sup> The translator must possess a text in much the way one possesses their bedfellow. The translator creates a relationship with a text much like that with a lover: it starts with a feeling of intrigue concerning the text, a desire to consume and manipulate it, seduce it into a form the translator becomes satisfied with. In “the domain of translation, an ‘erotics of translation’ investigates the various and desirous negotiations of translator and author in the process of translating and being translated.”<sup>177</sup>

### *3.3 Applying Translation Theory to Erotic Literature*

There are many theories in translation studies that can be framed in the context of erotic literature. Perhaps the most “traditional” or exemplary definition of translation to begin this chapter is Roman Jakobson’s tripartite definition. More specifically, two of the three definitions

---

<sup>174</sup> West, “Translating the Body,” 4.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

he outlines— intersemiotic and interlinguistic translation— as applied to the translation of erotic literature. Interlinguistic translation, “or translation proper, [involves] an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language,” and intersemiotic translation, “or transmutation, is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems.”<sup>178</sup>

Interlinguistic translation is called translation proper because it is said to involve “the transcending of the barrier between two different language *systems*”<sup>179</sup> which is the definition of translation at its most basic. Obviously, interlinguistic translation applies to this thesis because I am examining translations between two languages with two different language systems. Béatrice Commengé navigates the English to French interlinguistic translation, as Maxim Jakubowski is tasked with the French to English. In Chapter 4, I will further examine how the translators of Nin and Becker were able to transcend the linguistic barriers in front of them.

Intersemiotic translation is reflected in a lot of ideas discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, particularly concerning the influence translators have as cultural negotiators who can translate general ideas and attitudes about sex in a context larger than linguistic manipulation. Despite the fact that intersemiotic translation involves a translation between two different sign systems (illustrations in a children’s book as representative of the words telling the story, for example), it can be argued that intersemiotic translation actually applies to the translation of erotic literature, too. This thesis has argued, and will continue to argue, that the sentiment, feeling or arousal involved in translating erotica is as important as the words themselves. As abstract as it may seem, the action involved in translating feeling (one sign system) into words (the second sign system) could be defined as intersemiotic: the translator is taking that feeling (desire, sexual

---

<sup>178</sup> Jeremy Munday, *The Routledge Companion to Translation Studies* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2009), 5.

<sup>179</sup> Silvia Hansen-Schirra, Silke Gutermuth and Karin Maksymski, *Translation and Comprehensibility* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2015), 196.



arousal) and attempting to communicate that as much as they are attempting to translate specific phrases in the literature. Further, translators take on the responsibility of translating specific, culturally rooted perspectives on sex and sexuality, often considered taboo, in hopes of making them more accessible to the target culture.

The constant negotiation between translator and text, both original and translated, leads us to theorists whose ideas address a less linguistic perspective in translation in favour of a hermeneutic approach. These theorists are concerned more with how the interpretation of a text, both in the feeling derived from the literature as well as its linguistic impression, affects the act of reading and translating erotica. “The continual movement back and forth between the parts and the whole and between textual detail and context which this type of analysis requires, is known as the hermeneutic circle.”<sup>180</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher’s work on hermeneutics suggests that, for translators, the way in which something is interpreted or understood is an extremely individual and unique experience. If we consider this in the context of translating erotic literature, the following observation becomes extremely important:

Works of art in particular are expressions of creative selfhood which shape language as much as they are shaped by it. To grasp this individuality, one must put oneself ‘inside’ an author and even awaken meanings the author may have remained unaware of.<sup>181</sup>

Schleiermacher’s ideas perpetuate this erotics of translation— the translator must penetrate the mind of the author, entering the text (there is no need to point out the sexual innuendo of these concepts). This entering of a text requires a translator of erotica to interpret an author’s sexual language by regarding both what the author intended to suggest in their text and what the translator interprets individually from it.

---

<sup>180</sup> Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2009), 131.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

George Steiner is one of the notable theorists of translation whose work was greatly influenced by Schleiermacher and who has been called “the key voice in translational erotics... [whose] model of translation eroticizes the relationship between translator and text.”<sup>182</sup> Steiner’s work often contributes to the eroticization of language by suggesting that both language and sex are vulnerable to the constraints of social conventions. Each are forms of communication that Steiner considers “universals of human physiology as well as of social evolution.”<sup>183</sup>

In conjunction with his vision of language and sex as worthwhile partners in communication, Steiner adopted a four-part model of translation, laid out below:

1. *Initiative trust*, the translator’s willingness to take a gamble on the text in faith that it will yield something worth of the effort;
2. *Invasion*, an aggressive move towards penetrating, comprehending and capturing the text, explicitly compared to erotic possession in that it seeks to dissipate and overcome the text’s ‘seductive otherness’;
3. *Naturalization*, in which the appropriated text becomes a part of the translator’s own idiom;
4. *Restitution*, in which the translator atones for his or her aggression by somehow restoring something of the original’s alterity.<sup>184</sup>

Steiner’s translation model asserts that “all interpretation is a form of translation, and all communication is sexual in that it takes place among sexual, embodied beings”<sup>185</sup> because “Eros and language mesh at every point.”<sup>186</sup> I must pause here to draw a connection between Steiner’s assertion and Georges Bataille’s theories on eroticism. West explains:

We experience life largely as disconnected beings but desire continuity, the apotheoses of which are sexual and mystical union and, paradoxically death... Bataille’s theory of eroticism posits the interplay of continuity and discontinuity as its source; translation particularly involves this interplay in that the ‘original’ text and its translation are both

---

<sup>182</sup> West, “Translating the Body,” 7.

<sup>183</sup> Steiner, *After Babel*, 40.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Steiner, *After Babel*, 39.

the same and yet completely different. Eroticism's goal, according to Bataille, is to bring continuity to a world found on discontinuity.<sup>187</sup>

For Steiner and Bataille, acts of reading, interpretation and translation occur among instinctively erotic beings who seek cohesion, understanding and wholeness. In other words, “just as eroticism seeks a fundamental continuity of life beneath our discontinuous, individual beginnings and endings, so translations seek some fundamental continuity of human signification obscured by our discontinuous languages.”<sup>188</sup> There is an inherent, almost instinctive, desire among humans to communicate with one another: “We communicate in hope of understanding, and we communicate in various ways, including sex. We communicate in search of meaning, whether the meaning of an utterance or gesture or the meaning of life itself.”<sup>189</sup> Steiner unknowingly elaborates on Bataille's ideas about our common “erotic goal” of understanding and the relationship between sex and language:

Intercourse and discourse, and copulation, are sub-classes of the dominant fact of communication. They arise from the life-need of the ego to reach out and comprehend, in the two vital senses of “understanding” and “containment,” another human being.<sup>190</sup>

Another notable theorist whose ideas support the idea that translation (and reading) is an erotic act is Douglas Robinson. Robinson's somatic theory of language echoes Fritz Paepcke's holistic approach to translation, which “stressed translation as a personal encounter which called for the translator's emotional and physical as well as intellectual investment.”<sup>191</sup> The somatic theory of translation essentially “highlights the translator as an active, creative and emotional individual while describing the translator's social-psychological process— a process that

---

<sup>187</sup> West, “Translating the Body,” 20.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>190</sup> Steiner, *After Babel*, 39.

<sup>191</sup> Baker and Saldanha, *Routledge Encyclopedia*, 132.

integrates the translator's person and unique (idiosomatic) experience with the translator's response to the community's (ideosomatic) programming."<sup>192</sup>

Throughout this thesis, an emphasis has been placed on the experience of both reading and translating erotica, that both actions in and of themselves are an erotic experience. The somatic theory of translation supports this assertion, giving equal power to translator and reader, since, for Robinson, "the idiosomatics of translation is never about creative anarchy, and the ideosomatics of translation never governs any individual translator's behaviour perfectly."<sup>193</sup> The translator is instead able to work "between the two extremes, presenting an organic integration of idiosomatic (personal and contextual) flexibility and ideosomatic (ideological) regulation."<sup>194</sup>

In describing the somatic theory, Robinson writes:

We roll words around on our tongues looking for the one that has just the right feel for what we want to say. Our bodies often react to language use that seems different, deviant, somehow 'wrong,' with anxiety signals: there is a twinge in the chest, or a slight constriction of the throat. Most people do not know the rule that would allow them to define the triggering usage as 'wrong' in any systematic, grammatical sense. But it *feels* wrong. It clashes with the bodily conditioning that they have for that usage or that context, with the ideosomatics of syntax, semantics, stylistics.<sup>195</sup>

Such is the reader's reaction when consuming erotica. The language and subject matter are already "deviant" and, by nature, inspire a somatic response— try reading erotica without feeling the heat of a blush forming on your cheeks or the quickening of your heartbeat as the narrative scene progresses. How does this somatic response to the reading of erotica apply to a somatic response while translating it? It does not, in the end, apply to the *act* of translating (although, to be sure, poring over erotic text day after day surely excites the translator). It instead applies to the translator's *experience* of translating, and Robinson's goal is to "condone felt sense

---

<sup>192</sup> Zhu Lin, *The Translator— Centered Multidisciplinary Construction*, (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1975), 142.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> Douglas Robinson, *The Translator's Turn* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 13.

as the body's legitimate contribution to translation."<sup>196</sup> Ultimately, Robinson proposes combining what he calls the feeling-theory and the use-theory in order to achieve interpretation by considering feelings and the somatic response evoked by an erotic text.<sup>197</sup> Because both erotic texts and their readers or translators are diverse, the use of feeling as guidance is variable in both the context of the work and the individuality of the person interacting with the text and, of course, limited by the rules of language.<sup>198</sup>

Robinson's proposal reiterates a major point in this thesis: the experience of translating is an erotic act dependent on the back and forth relationship between translator and text. The continuous aim of the translator to balance their creative freedom with expected linguistic/social norms shows how "the somatic theory of translation has much stronger explanatory power [and has] innovative significance for translation studies."<sup>199</sup>

This significance to translation is driven by Robinson's creation of the terms idiosomatic and ideosomatic, explained below by Lin Zhu's *The Translator—Centered Multidisciplinary Construction*:

...which respectively represent the body of the self and the body of the group... With reference to the whole translation process, the translator's somatic experience is a complex combination of idiomatic (*intuitive*) experience and ideosomatic (*regulative*) experience. It is obvious that a translator's reading experience of the source language text and translating experience of the target language text will be partly different (*personally*) and partly overlapped with each other (*collectively*). So the somatic theory of translation... offers a powerful explanation of inevitable personal difference in translation process and effectively disproves the '(absolute) faithfulness' assumption of traditional translation theory. [The somatic theory] highlights the experiential nature of translation and thus depicts the tension of translation between personal creativity and social regulation.<sup>200</sup>

---

<sup>196</sup> West, "Translating the Body," 7.

<sup>197</sup> Robinson, *The Translator's Turn*, 10.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Zhu, *The Translator—Centered Multidisciplinary Construction*, 144.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

The somatic theory could perhaps, then, be described as forgiving or, at the very least, flexible. Removing the strict boundaries of faithfulness, the somatic theory encourages the translator to act based on feeling and experience while still respecting the reality of linguistic or social limitation. Because the translator can tap into the sensations experience while reading the original text, the act of translating becomes more personal. For Robinson, “if you do not feel the body of the SL text, you will have little chance of generating a physically tangible or emotionally alive TL text. The TL text you create will read like computer-generated prose: no life, no feeling.”<sup>201</sup> When translating erotic literature, “knowledge about the grammar and vocabulary of a foreign language is not enough to ensure that one is a good performer in that language.”<sup>202</sup> As with all literary translation, the translator of erotica has an obligation to maintain the semiosis of the original text— the somatic theory of translation allows the translator to accomplish this by encouraging them to translate based on their own intuitive reaction to the text.

The concept of equivalence between the two texts changes with the somatic theory, no longer suggesting exactitude or replication, but instead aiming for similar feeling— “the equivalence is always primarily somatic: the two phrasings feel the same.”<sup>203</sup> There are criticisms against this concept. Traditional theorists consider equivalence irrelevant to the somatic theory, because of their “belief in ‘objective’ and predetermined meaning [and] because of their disdain for the dynamic nature of the somatic response.”<sup>204</sup> The problem with this criticism is that it applies to translations whose readers are imagined or ideal.<sup>205</sup> While faithful translation and traditional equivalence is possible (and sometimes done, as will be illustrated

---

<sup>201</sup> Robinson, *The Translator’s Turn*, 17.

<sup>202</sup> Zhu, *The Translator— Centered Multidisciplinary Construction*, 146.

<sup>203</sup> Robinson, *The Translator’s Turn*, 18.

<sup>204</sup> Zhu, *The Translator— Centered Multidisciplinary Construction*, 147.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

later in this thesis), erotic literature demands more of the translator than word-for-word reproduction. By definition, erotica must arouse its reader, so the translator is obligated to, as has been discussed earlier in this chapter, create a translation “as the real (active) reader,” recreating the image and feeling of the source text.<sup>206</sup>

### *3.4 Norms in Translation*

Plenty of interesting work has emerged in translation studies that apply concepts of norms in society in relation to the field of translation. “Despite much research... translation studies has not developed into a homogeneous discipline”<sup>207</sup>— there are different approaches, processes, angles and terms in the field that render translation an interdisciplinary practice. Gideon Toury and Renate Bartsch are two theorists whose work has framed norms in relation to their effect on translation, maintaining that language and sex are susceptible to the influence of social conventions and that writing and translating erotica is influenced by these norms.

Toury’s work in translation studies is much like the somatic theory because it dismisses traditional top-down or bottom-up processes in translating and instead approaches the translation (and translator) from any and every angle, providing guidelines rather than rules. Research in the field of translation has encouraged the formulating of generic ideologies that are loosely applied to the criticism and description of translations, causing a preoccupation with what is correct or appropriate.<sup>208</sup> Bartsch’s work explains norms as “the social reality of correctness notions,” so each society or community establishes “a knowledge of what counts as correct or appropriate

---

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Christina Schäffner, *Translation and Norms* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1999), 1.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

behaviour, including communicative behaviour.”<sup>209</sup> Through socialization, norms become “conventional, they are shared by members of a community, i.e. they function intersubjectively as models for behaviour, and they also regulate expectations concerning both the behaviour itself and the products of this behaviour.”<sup>210</sup>

So how does this apply to language?

Language and language use can be judged as correct from a phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic point of view. There is also a difference between what is possible in a language, regardless of context (described by rules), and what is considered appropriate in a given context (described by conventions or norms).<sup>211</sup>

After concerning themselves with language structure and systems, translators then work with the creative liberties allowed in the target text, hoping to achieve balance between strict rules in language and the freedoms of interpretation.

As translators often function in society as cultural mediators or representatives, it is absolutely fair to acknowledge the effect that a translator’s upbringing, culture, etc. has on their work. Similarly, the translator should maintain a familiarity with the target culture through either research on or immersion into that culture. The general agreement is that translators should “possess thorough understanding of the source language, versatility in the target language, knowledge of both source and target cultures...”<sup>212</sup> Linguistic cognizance is too vague an asset to qualify someone as a successful, capable translator, and so it does better to ask what roles norms play in a translator’s process. Norms, for translators, are a set of “unwritten rules... personal, flexible, [and] intuitive”<sup>213</sup> which can seem a bit ambiguous, but when practically applied to a

---

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Alice Martin, “A Translator’s View of Translation Norms,” *Helsinki English Studies: Electronic Journal* 1 (2001), accessed September 3, 2016.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.



specific work of translation, norms are “a way of getting at the translator’s working theory without involving overly elaborate concepts.”<sup>214</sup> Of course, norms are simply suggestions which ease the pressure of considering every possible strategy to a translation; it is at the translator’s own discretion to ignore them if and when they become a distraction.<sup>215</sup>

A norm arguably most important to a translator’s work is the norm of loyalty. “It is necessary to develop a professional way of reading in order to analyze the text in as much detail and depth as possible... understanding or at least not misunderstanding is vital.”<sup>216</sup> This point may seem obvious, but failing to interpret even the smallest of phrases in a source text, be it a cultural reference or linguistic rule, can lead to an overall mistranslation. “Understanding also covers matters of style. Metaphors and symbols need to be recognized: metaphors taken literally usually reveal themselves in translation.”<sup>217</sup> The norm of understanding is exceptionally important in translating erotica that, as discussed earlier, relies heavily on those metaphors and symbols to express desire without doing so explicitly. Anaïs Nin’s erotica is brimming with symbolism that could quite easily have been misinterpreted had her translator, Béatrice Commengé, not been familiar with the symbols often used to describe the female body. Maxim Jakubowski, the translator of Emma Becker’s *Mr.*, admits to editing down a lot of her original French because, although fully competent in the language, Jakubowski acknowledged the difficulty the English reader would have in understanding Becker’s writing:

Emma's style in French is fairly complex and involuted which doesn't always come out well in a literal translation, so changing a word or breaking up a paragraph or skipping one or two descriptions (which were very French and over-intellectualized) helped.<sup>218</sup>

---

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Jakubowski, “Interview with a Translator: Maxim Jakubowski.”

Another norm that translators are often motivated by is the norm of equivalence. I briefly addressed equivalence in relation to the somatic theory of translation, but “it is norms that determine the (type and extent of) equivalence manifested by actual translations.”<sup>219</sup> The basic criticism of equivalence is that, while it is unavoidable in most translation work, it becomes an expectation where “theory and practice meet and clash uncomfortably. While it is useful for a translator to question the concepts of faithfulness and loyalty... to deny their importance altogether means going entirely free-range.”<sup>220</sup> Translators need to strike a balance— work within the confines and guidelines, of equivalence (produce a text comparable to the original and satisfactory to the client) while still allowing those creative liberties that don’t diminish the source text.

It is important to acknowledge that there is a “socio-cultural specificity of norms” and that they possess a “basic instability.”<sup>221</sup> Toury explains that there is no need to apply a norm to every aspect within a society or community and “even less necessary, or indeed likely, is it for a norm to apply across cultures... At times, norms change rather quickly; at other times, they are more enduring, and the process may take longer.”<sup>222</sup> This socio-cultural specificity and instability are both evident in societal attitudes toward sexuality which, in turn, influence the creation and reception of erotica (and their translations). As briefly illustrated in Chapter 1 of this thesis, opinions concerning sex have been dynamic over the years, at least concerning Western societies. There have been times of sexual liberation as well as periods of condemnation; erotica that was once banned from library shelves is now available in plain view of most bookstores.

---

<sup>219</sup> Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1995), 61.

<sup>220</sup> Martin, “A Translators View.”

<sup>221</sup> Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies*, 62.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

Translators once faced threat of imprisonment for taking on an erotic novel because of the societal norms concerning sexuality. Today, that sentiment is less prevalent in many parts of the world—the Internet, the evolution of LGBTQ communities, and feminist movements could all be considered effects on norms regarding sex and sexuality.

The contrast between Anaïs Nin’s *Delta of Venus* compared to Emma Becker’s *Mr.* (and their subsequent translations) show concrete evidence of the effect of norms on erotic literature. The final chapter of this thesis will show the linguistic and sociological differences between Nin’s work, written in the middle of the 20th century, and Becker’s, a 21st century image of female sexuality, and how the norms which guided their original works then guided their translators.

CHAPTER FOUR: TRANSLATING THE EROTIC IN WORKS BY ANAÏS NIN AND  
EMMA BECKER

*Be still when you have nothing to say; when genuine passion moves you,  
say what you've got to say, and say it hot.*<sup>223</sup>

D.H. Lawrence

*4.1 The Notion of Habitus*

A sociological theory often applied to translation studies is Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus. Bourdieu's work observes the actions of individuals in relation to social structures that may dictate or influence that individual's behaviour. "All interpretations of social phenomena are inevitably constrained by social structures (group interests, class interests; prompted by respective backgrounds, values, engrained beliefs, habits, attitudes)."<sup>224</sup> Essentially, Bourdieu theorized that no individual action could be without a larger social influence. The social phenomenon of sex and sexuality is absolutely constrained by these social structures and the individual action of translating erotica is inevitably influenced by such constraints.

Bourdieu's ideas address an uncomfortable social challenge—people act under the impression that they are doing so with the freedom of choice yet, realistically, those actions are almost always influenced by "socially determined expectations of how our choices will be perceived by others."<sup>225</sup> We see this in translation when a translator takes on a "questionable" text, whether it poses an ethical challenge or deals with socially discouraged behaviours. Erotica, specifically, could arouse either one—perhaps a translator, impassioned or interested in the

---

<sup>223</sup> "D.H. Lawrence quotes," Goodreads, accessed January 12, 2017, [https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/17623.D\\_H\\_Lawrence](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/17623.D_H_Lawrence).

<sup>224</sup> Tyulenev, *Translation and Society*, 172.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

genre, takes on an erotic text that has a scene which plays out a rape fantasy. Because society as a whole rejects and criminally punishes rape, the translator may be subject to criticism for giving such a text a wider audience. Alternatively, a translator may be moved to translate an erotic text if it challenges close-minded social structures, such as homophobia. By translating an erotic text involving homosexuality, the translator strikes back against a part of a society that condemns it.

Bourdieu introduced fundamental concepts of his ideas, one of which is the notion of habitus. Interestingly, Bourdieu decided on the word habitus because:

On the one hand, it is close to “habit” and on the other hand, it implies something that is acquired, something that is part of the individual thanks to his/her social experiences... stressing how one’s past experiences find their reflection in the socialized individual’s manifestations.<sup>226</sup>

The habitus allows us focus on the translator as a simple individual and consider how their habitus settles into social structures that influence their work and translation process.

The notion of ‘habitus’ captures the relationship of the individual agency and its social anchorage... Habitus orients thinking of social life as a relational phenomenon vacillating between the individual and the collective, that is, while analyzing the individual’s actions, habitus leads up to bear in mind that those actions are unfolding in connection with their social environment. Actions are shaped, formed, by the individual’s past experiences (upbringing, education) and present circumstances (the working conditions and relationship with colleagues), on the other hand, however, habitus is active in shaping the individual’s present practices and, thereby, may contribute to change the social environment.<sup>227</sup>

Considering Bourdieu’s theories, “the practice of translation... is based upon a coincidence of two instances: the external instance of literary texts (what we have customarily called the literary institution and what Bourdieu calls the fields) and the internal instance (... the

---

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

producing agents and their ‘habitus).’<sup>228</sup> In this thesis, the “coincidence” is the decision of both translators, Maxim Jakubowski and Béatrice Commengé, to translate *Mr.* and *Delta of Venus*, respectively (works which are considered the external instance), and the internal instance requires we closely examine the habitus of both Jakubowski and Commengé to hopefully better understand the influence their past experiences had on their creation process as translators. Additionally, by introducing the original authors, Anaïs Nin and Emma Becker, we can see how their social environment or upbringing made a mark on their work.

#### *4.2 Cultural Attitudes Toward Sex in France and the United States*

To begin, I found it pertinent to briefly address the cultural attitudes (or social structures) concerning sexuality in France and the United States. Because erotica is fundamentally about sex and sexuality, taking a look at how the cultures of both the writers and translators of *Delta of Venus* and *Mr.* consider sex lays an excellent foundation as an influence on their individual habitus.

There are many existing clichés concerning perspectives on sexuality in France and the United States. We see it time and time again: France is a country of sexual liberation, and the French are unencumbered by rules governing dating or sex, unbothered by blatant representations of sex in media. Americans, on the other hand, with their Puritan foundation, keep sexuality behind closed doors and are culturally far more demure than the French. The truth is, the only real difference is how each culture *thinks* about sex, not how they put it in action. John Gagnon, the co-director of a 2001 research project entitled “A Comparative Study of the Couple in the Social Organization of Sexuality in France and the United States,” attempts to

---

<sup>228</sup> Jean-Marc Gouanvic, “A Bourdieusian Theory of Translation, or the Coincidence of Practical Instances,” *The Translator* 11 (2005): 147.

explain: “Our image of the French is that it’s very sexy and erotic and that men have mistresses and everybody understands that and its O.K. . . . But how people think about sex and what people actually do are really two separate worlds.”<sup>229</sup> Research has given concrete numbers to this statement, but the gist of the results is that sexual behaviour is very similar in both cultures. The most common (and perhaps surprising) behaviour? Both the French and Americans favour monogamous relationships.<sup>230</sup> So where does this notion of the French as a more erotic culture come from? Alain Giami, the other co-director of the study, observes:

The eroticization of social relations has to do with the fact that it seems that the French do not consider “flirtation” and seduction and romance as a direct sexual approach, and that flirtation does not lead necessarily to sexual intercourse. The notion of “complicité” is very important both for French men and women. The language of seduction is not an explicit language of sex. Eroticization has more to do with the double meaning in words and situations. Most French words, and especially most verbs such as “to make” [faire], “to take” [prendre] and “to put” [mettre], are all metaphors for the genital act.<sup>231</sup>

Giami’s statement circles back to the previous observation in this thesis that the French, as a whole, are better equipped linguistically to talk about sex—sex language is found in their every day verbs.

In a *Paris Review* article entitled “The Habits of Highly Erotic People,” Susannah Hunnewell, after attending a three-day seminar on “The Art of Sex and Seduction,” compares the sexual customs of the French in relation to Americans. Her observations both reiterate the above and perpetuate the highly erotic reputation of the French. She concedes to the truth that Americans and French both participate in monogamy as well as adultery. But Hunnewell’s article really runs with French erotic ideals. She writes:

---

<sup>229</sup> In Erica Goode, “On Sex, U.S. and France Speak Same Language,” *The New York Times*, May 29, 2001, accessed January 10, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/29/science/on-sex-us-and-france-speak-same-language.html>.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Debra Ollivier, “France vs. America: The Sex Front,” *Salon*, June 20, 2003, accessed January 10, 2017, [http://www.salon.com/2003/06/20/french\\_3/](http://www.salon.com/2003/06/20/french_3/).

In France, flirting is a civic duty. Flirting is playing with *le fleuret*, the tip of the sword. The French are keenly aware of the brevity of time and the immediacy of pleasure. For the French, love is embedded in the flesh. Americans prefer to imagine love without the body.<sup>232</sup>

While it may not be ‘fair’ to make such black and white observations, they still give us a sense of what to expect from the writers and translators of the erotica analyzed in this thesis. In its final pages, I introduce the original authors and translators in order to give insight into their habitus and its influence on the work. I introduce *Delta of Venus* and *Mr.*, drawing comparisons and highlighting differences in the style and content of their writing. Finally, I examine both translators approach to the distinct voices, stories and styles of both writers, determining if there is great difference in the translations from the originals, or if they remained more faithful to the voice and language of each work of erotica.

#### *4.3 Introduction to the Authors and Translators*

Anaïs Nin was born in 1903 in France and moved to New York at the age of 11.<sup>233</sup> Though she was educated in the United States, Nin returned to Europe where she began her literary career until, with the start of World War II, she returned to New York.<sup>234</sup> The linguistic and cultural influence of living both in France and the United States contributed to her habitus as a writer. Not only did she adopt a *laissez-faire* attitude about sexuality that rose from her bohemian lifestyle in both countries, but you see that influence in her writing— smatterings of French appear every so often in her erotica and there is a general sense of French erotic attitude throughout.

---

<sup>232</sup> Susannah Hunnewell, “The Habits of Highly Erotic People,” *The Paris Review*, February 6, 2014, accessed January 10, 2017, <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2014/02/06/the-habits-of-highly-erotic-people/>.

<sup>233</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Anaïs Nin,” June 23, 2006, <http://www.britannica.com/place/Algeria>.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*



Nin did not achieve much literary praise until the publication of one of her diaries, which lead to discovery, praise and criticism of her work overall:

Nin's literary contribution was a subject of controversy in her lifetime and remained so after her death. Many critics admired her unique expression of femininity, her lyrical style and her psychological insight. Some dismissed her concern with her own fulfillment as self-indulgent and narcissistic. Opinion was further divided by the posthumous *Delta of Venus*.<sup>235</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Nin's erotic works were highly influenced by her diaries. She writes, "I did not want to give anything genuine, and decided to create a mixture of stories I had heard and inventions, pretending they were from the diary of a woman."<sup>236</sup> *Delta of Venus*, a collection of erotic short stories, contains a preface written by Nin herself which gives depth and understanding to the reason why Nin began writing erotica in the first place, as well as a sense of what Nin sought to portray in her work.

The preface to *Delta of Venus* tells us that Nin began writing erotica for an anonymous collector in New York. Her relationship with Henry Miller, who was working directly with the collector, led to this literary diversion. Nin, who was writing mostly poetry at the time but in need of money, conceded to the job. Still, Nin found herself clashing with this collector who, over the phone, demanded "Less poetry. Be specific. It is fine. But leave out the poetry and descriptions of anything but sex. Concentrate on sex."<sup>237</sup> This reduction of erotica to pornography incensed Nin, who rejected the demand for clinical writing, and she "hated him, because he would not allow us to make a fusion of sexuality and feeling, sensuality and

---

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Nin, *Delta of Venus*, ix.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

emotion.”<sup>238</sup> Eventually, Nin composed a letter to this collector, a beautiful manifesto in defense of passion, romance and sex:

Dear Collector: We hate you. Sex loses all its power and magic when it becomes explicit, mechanical, overdone, when it becomes a mechanistic obsession. It becomes a bore. You have taught us more than anyone I know how wrong it is not to mix it with emotion, hunger, desire, lust, whims, caprices, personal ties, deeper relationships that change its color, flavour, rhythms, intensities.<sup>239</sup>

The preface also shows Nin’s dedication to write distinctly female pleasure in a postscript published in 1976, the year before *Delta of Venus* would be published:

I realized that for centuries we had only one model for this literary genre— the writing of men. I was already conscious of a difference between the masculine and feminine treatment of sexual experience... Women, I thought, were more apt to fuse sex with emotion, with love... But although women’s attitude towards sex was quite distinct from that of men, we had not yet learned how to write about it.<sup>240</sup>

Nin goes on to write that her decision to release the erotica in a published book (some 30 years after its original creation) was because she wanted to show “the beginning efforts of a woman in a world that had been the domain of men. It will show that women have never separated sex from feeling, from love of the whole man.”<sup>241</sup> Both in her letter to the collector and her preface, Nin defends her erotica as exactly that: erotica. She abandons shameless pornography in favour of more poetic, metaphoric stories which, despite being clearly and overtly about sex, elevate the sexuality to an art form. Nin’s habitus as a writer challenged the social structures of her time which dictated that sexuality was a concept best left to men, not women.

The poetic style of *Delta of Venus* makes the text difficult to translate in many ways, considering it is bursting with metaphorical writing that does not always translate so directly.

---

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., xiv-xv.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., xv.

Béatrice Commengé, the translator of all of Nin's erotica as well as her diaries, took on the task. Commengé was born in Algeria in 1949. Because Algeria was a French colony from 1930 until 1962,<sup>242</sup> at the age of twelve, she and her family were driven out of Algeria and moved to Paris,<sup>243</sup> and this, along with the influence of French language and culture in Algeria, most likely contributed to her work. The parallel between Nin's childhood in France, adolescence in America and eventual return to France and Commengé's moving out of Algeria to France is purely coincidental, but a happy coincidence. Perhaps it allowed Commengé to tap into Nin's voice more easily because of Nin's not-quite-American, not-quite-French attitude toward the erotic as well as her English-influenced-by-French style of writing.

There is not a lot of literature on Commengé or her work, but from the little available, it's possible to infer the influence Commengé's habitus had on her writing and translations. In an interview, she explains, "When I left Algeria, I thought it was a good age. My childhood was finished. And as a teenager, I wouldn't like my childhood relations as I would be a different person, I'd be someone else. So, it's good that my childhood was in one city and adult life elsewhere."<sup>244</sup> She continues by explaining that, despite making Paris her permanent home, moving around has encouraged her two passions, writing and traveling.<sup>245</sup> It's fair to say that a translator who travels and experiences diverse cultures will have a more developed and broader vision of the world. Commengé attributes her success and passion for writing to Henry Miller, a friend and lover of Anaïs Nin's. Miller, like Commengé, was an expatriate living in Paris.<sup>246</sup> His work rejected one genre, instead covering fiction, social criticism, philosophy, surrealism and the

---

<sup>242</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Algeria," April 30, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/place/Algeria>.

<sup>243</sup> "Béatrice Commengé: An Interview," by Nawaid Anjum, *Writing and Wordsmithing*, November 28, 2008, <http://nawaidanjum.blogspot.ca/2008/11/i-imagine-therefore-i-belong-and-am.html>.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>246</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Henry Miller," July 20, 1998, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Henry-Miller>.

erotic. It's likely that Commengé's work on and passion for Miller's writing lead her to Nin's literature.

The second work examined in this thesis is Emma Becker's *Mr.*, first published in French in 2012, which tells the story of Ellie, a young, bored Parisienne woman who begins a passionate and short-lived affair with an unnamed married friend of her uncle. Ellie and her lover are first brought together by their mutual fascination for erotic literature. Becker, who wrote the novel at the impressive age of 22,<sup>247</sup> is herself fascinated by erotica:

I started reading about sex very soon, by stealing books from my parent's bookshelf. As far as I recall, I was always fascinated and attracted by sex, not the act in itself but everything before and after, how everything finally leads to sex, the thought of it, the crave for it, which are universal. The power of this vital thrust in everyone is completely dazzling to me. So reading erotic literature was sort of logical, being already a reader. A few years ago I got really obsessed with it and gathering everything I could read from Bataille, now I tend more and more to think that eroticism is everywhere in good literature.<sup>248</sup>

Becker's upbringing, a factor in her habitus as a writer, permitted Becker to explore sexuality in a way that surely influenced her attitudes about sex. Becker's habitus is further formed by the literary greats of the genre. She cites Louis Calaferte, Georges Bataille, Émile Zola and Vladimir Nabokov as influences to her own writing style:

I have a thing for well-built melodic sentences, and Zola made me want to acquire this accuracy toward men and women. Nabokov, who is also a great melodist and one of the most sensual, somehow left a print in me. But attracted as I am by this way of writing, I'm really fascinated by the way Bataille and Calaferte use words, with precision and crudeness. I have a true admiration for this kind of writer, able to say the truth in just three words.<sup>249</sup>

---

<sup>247</sup> Hubert Artus, "'Mr' d'Emma Becker, jeune auteur face au défi de l'érotisme," *L'Obs Rue89*, February 17, 2011, <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/rue89/rue89-cabinet-de-lecture/20110217.RUE0740/mr-d-emma-becker-jeune-auteur-face-au-defi-de-l-erotisme.html>.

<sup>248</sup> Moore, "Exclusive interview with Emma Becker, author of Monsieur."

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

Maxim Jakubowski is the translator of Becker's novel. His website offers quite a bit of information about him and is a helpful glimpse into the man doing the translating. He was "born in London and educated in France. From an early age, he was always fascinated by popular culture and his writing and editing has criss-crossed all areas, from science fiction and fantasy to thrillers and, inevitably, erotica."<sup>250</sup> Jakubowski's writing appears to have transformed with time from crime and science fiction to work that has lead the *New York Times* to deem him "the King of the erotic thriller."<sup>251</sup> From his own website, "his erotica has always proved controversial and somewhat dark and idiosyncratic... His new novel is... an unusual twist on the *Lolita* theme... full of his customary obsessions, lust, doom and even supernatural overtones."<sup>252</sup>

During my research on Jakubowski, I discovered an email address on his website and decided the best way to press forward was to take a chance contacting the translator directly. To my surprise, I received a response from Jakubowski himself, mere hours after contacting him.

What followed was a series of emails in which I was able to get to know Jakubowski better and, most importantly, conduct an interview of sorts concerning his translation of Becker's work. The opportunity to directly engage with Jakubowski afforded me a first-hand perspective on one translator's method of working with erotic literature. I first began by asking Jakubowski to describe his habitus in his own words, wondering, "What do you find has, at any point in your life, influenced your capabilities and motivations as a translator?" Interestingly enough, Jakubowski responded by admitting he did not see himself as primarily a translator, but as a writer. He explained that his translations were often specifically commissioned from publishers

---

<sup>250</sup> "Maxim Jakubowski," Coming Together Wiki, accessed November 12, 2016, [http://coming-together.wikia.com/wiki/Maxim\\_Jakubowski](http://coming-together.wikia.com/wiki/Maxim_Jakubowski).

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

or done as a favour to fellow author friends.<sup>253</sup> Jakubowski continued, describing the circumstances in which he became bilingual, a clear influence on his skill set as a translator:

I was born in the UK of a Polish father and a British mother, but was brought up in France from the ages of three to twenty-five... so I am fully bilingual; all my studies have been done within the French education system... I think I'm a bit of an exception as I'm so completely bilingual that I don't know which is my mother or my foreign tongue. We spoke English at home when I was living in Paris and I spoke French from the age of three or four outside of home and at school, so I don't even know any longer in which language I dream, let alone think.<sup>254</sup>

The impact of his completely bilingual upbringing not only iterates his linguistic competency, but also shows that the social environment of a translator is highly important to their work. I continued by asking Jakubowski why he chose to take on the translation of *Mr.* He replied:

I absolutely loved [*Mr.*], for a variety of reasons. Considering her age, I felt it was a wonderful achievement, and sort of counterpart to Nabokov's *Lolita*, albeit from the other side of the pillow, so to speak. In addition, I'd recently come out of a rather sad, doomed from the outset affair with a younger woman myself, so I could actually identify a bit with the male protagonist.<sup>255</sup>

Jakubowski's honest reply is a perfect example of the notion of *habitus*: encouraged by his own personal experience, Jakubowski could more earnestly relate to the text. This experience undoubtedly influenced his translation—instead of grappling with the social structures in society concerning the morality of adultery, Jakubowski embraced the messiness of both his and Becker's personal experiences and used that as motivation to take on the translation to begin with.

---

<sup>253</sup> Jakubowski, "Interview with a Translator: Maxim Jakubowski."

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

#### 4.4. Comparing and Contrasting *Delta of Venus* to *Mr.*

Before analyzing the translations of these two works of erotica, I must briefly and concisely draw comparisons and contrasts of the literature. This thesis has already addressed some of the similarities and differences: Nin's poetic prose versus Becker's modern expression and the references to famous works of art or erotica in each, for example.

An important similarity between the works is that both the authors are women. As I read their erotica, their two different female perspectives of pleasure intrigued me. As I wrote in the previous section of this chapter, Nin, rereading her erotica years after writing it, came to realize the importance of women's language and the uniqueness of their attitude toward sex. Becker is no different: an article interviewing Becker and reviewing *Mr.* suggests the following:

La toute jeune femme apprend que, comme elle, ce "Monsieur" voue une passion à Louis Calaferte et sa *Mécanique des femmes*. Elle prend alors la plume, puis le clavier et, prétextant rédiger une... *Mécanique des hommes*, entreprend l'homme par ailleurs marié. On s'aperçoit alors que si le huis clos est excitant, c'est parce qu'Emma Becker parvient à dédoubler ses situations d'une écriture cérébrale qui intellectualise toutes les scènes sexuelles, façon pour elle de prouver littérairement que "les femmes se regardent énormément quand elles sont en train de faire l'amour, plus que les hommes."<sup>256</sup>

Becker's reimagining of the male fantasy driven *Mécanique des femmes* (written by one of her erotic idols) is bold—it forces a platform for female sexuality. She says it herself: women intellectualize the act of making love more than men.

An obvious difference is the content of the erotica and how each author formatted their work. Nin's short stories in *Delta of Venus* have little to no connection from one to the next (although some characters reappear, even in her other book of erotica, *Little Birds*). The stories are fleeting moments of erotica, screenshots of sensuality, often involving offbeat characters, like artists or prostitutes. Nin explores more 'taboo' subjects like homosexuality, incest, sadism, even

---

<sup>256</sup> Hubert Artus, "'Mr' d'Emma Becker, jeune auteur face au défi de l'érotisme."

rape. The scenes she sets for her readers are more fantastical—one story takes place in the ocean just off a beach in Mallorca. Another scene plays out on a houseboat in Paris.

Becker's *Mr.*, in contrast, is a full-length novel divided into three books. There are only two main characters, Ellie and Monsieur, with a few other unimportant supporting characters. Becker allows Monsieur to have an individual voice in the first half of the novel by giving readers a glimpse of emails and text messages he sends to Ellie. This is a clever way of letting us in on the seduction—the two lovers don't even meet for the first fifty pages. Instead, Becker let's us play voyeur to the slow build of desire. Ellie's ache to see Monsieur becomes our ache; her nerves as she waits in the hotel room to meet him the first time become our nerves. In many ways, Becker's novel feels more human than Nin's work. Becker's erotica, despite the numerous explicit sex scenes, is still a story of a girl caught up in something bigger than herself. There is an obvious finality to Becker's novel: the inevitable heart-wrenching end of an affair.

#### *4.5 Analyzing the Translations*

In the final section of this thesis, I analyze the translations of *Delta of Venus* and *Mr.* By providing concrete examples of how both Commengé and Jakubowski worked with erotic literature, I hope to show their varying approaches to the texts. From *Delta of Venus*, I have chosen the story "The Basque and Bijou" and from *Mr.* I have selected passages from a section of nearly 50 pages of the novel which illustrate the erotic suspension between the two protagonists from their beginning innocent exchanges up until their first face-to-face meeting. These excerpts will illustrate how Commengé employed a more traditionally faithful and literal translation for Nin's *Delta of Venus*, while Jakubowski took liberties with both the style and content of Becker's original French. Supported by my interview with him, I show that



Jakubowski has employed Douglas Robinson's somatic theory of language as an approach to translation. Further, I use Pier-Pascale Boulanger's values of erotic literature to show whether or not Commengé and Jakubowski achieved clarity, reality and inventiveness in their translations.

#### 4.5.1 "The Basque and Bijou"

I loved Anaïs Nin's published journals before I ever knew her as a writer of erotica, but she was always a champion of pleasure. Nin's erotica possess an other-worldliness that gives its reader a feeling of mysterious voyeurism. Despite writing erotica for a collector who demanded explicit pornography, Nin's rejection of such demands is evident—her erotica proves she is a poet of pleasure, above all. Filled with unusual characters and decadent backdrops, Nin's erotica is far from one-handed smut. There is an art to her words and sensuality. Because *Delta of Venus* is a book of short stories, the plot must attract the reader's attention and begin the erotic tension almost immediately. The obligation to adequately interpret Nin's metaphors and metonymy, and do so in far fewer pages than a novel, presents challenges to the translator of her erotica.

A reader may notice that Béatrice Commengé took liberty with the title of Nin's book, naming it *Vénus érotica*. Commengé dismisses Nin's highly metaphorical original, and by doing so creates a hybrid word somewhere between the English *erotica* and the French *littérature érotique*. She retains *Vénus*, whose mythology as the goddess of love and beauty is a widely known symbol. The title remains both feminine and erotic without presenting the difficult metaphor of Nin's original.

In the following excerpts from Nin's short story "The Basque and Bijou", I will show how Commengé approached her translation of *Delta of Venus* with an unyielding loyalty to the text, rather than creating a translation borne of her own interpretation. "The Basque and Bijou" is

a story of a brothel and its prostitutes and patrons, filled with so many diverse fantasies as the women of the brothel entertain all sorts of customers, offering the reader a particularly voyeuristic look into every erotic act.

The first thing to note when comparing the translation with its original is how often Anaïs Nin uses French phrases in her story, differing the French from the English with simple italics. Commengé decided to keep those exact phrases, complete with italics, as well as including footnotes that explain, “En français dans le texte (N.d.T.)”. By adding footnotes, Commengé detracts from the reader’s experience by distracting them with unnecessary and excessive information. The following passages show Nin’s use of French phrases in her original English text, and Commengé’s solutions to those:

She suddenly wanted to be taken until she bled, by this big, strong, firm penis dangled in front of her, as her performed a male *danse du ventre*, with its tantalizing motions.<sup>257</sup>

Elle avait soudain envie d’être possédée jusqu’à en saigner, par ce gros pénis dur et ferme qui se balançait devant elle pendant cette *danse du ventre* masculine, aux mouvements provocants.<sup>258</sup>

The student and Bijou would go there, climb the little flight of stairs with the sign marked *lavabos*...<sup>259</sup>

L’étudiant et Bijou se retrouvaient donc là, montaient le petit escalier qui indiquait les *lavabos*...<sup>260</sup>

Both of the French phrases in Nin’s original text serve no real purpose to the story except, perhaps, to give it the impression of being more foreign or exotic. Commengé’s decision to keep them in italics and insert footnotes equally brings nothing to the translation. In fact, by drawing attention to the words, the reader becomes distracted from the erotic scene, left to

---

<sup>257</sup> Nin, *Delta of Venus*, 196.

<sup>258</sup> Commengé, *Vénus érotica*, 213.

<sup>259</sup> Nin, *Delta of Venus*, 189.

<sup>260</sup> Commengé, *Vénus érotica*, 206.

wonder if they're missing something bigger than what is on the page. Commengé would have done better to keep the French in plain text, no explanations necessary.

In another sentence, Nin inexplicably inserts the word *urinoirs* into her story,<sup>261</sup> a word Commengé felt no need to italicise or footnote in her translation. There is one instance where Nin's French, though unnecessary, serves as an erotic metaphor:

It was for his royal *pendentif*, the noble bulk of it, the sensitive and untiring responsiveness of it, its friendliness, its cordiality, its expansiveness. She had never seen such a one.<sup>262</sup>

C'était pour son *pendentif* royal, pour la taille noble de ce dernier, pour sa sensibilité et son infatigable réceptivité, pour sa gentillesse, sa cordialité, sa générosité. Elle n'en avait jamais vu de pareil.<sup>263</sup>

While the reader knows that the Basque is a royal man and would most certainly be decorated with pendants, the language in both English and French makes it explicitly clear (without actually telling the reader) that the *pendentif* is a metaphor for his penis—it's bulky, sensitive and untiring all at once. Commengé's translation is nearly word-for-word, though by replacing *expansiveness* with *générosité*, she takes away the image of his penis growing larger in arousal.

Nin's stories lack a lot of the anticipation and tension that Becker's *Mr.* has, due partly to the demands of Nin's mysterious collector and partly to the length of the text. Instead of teasing us with intensely seductive dialogue or lengthy descriptions of erotic expectancy, Nin does a lot more of the 'showing without showing' we expect from erotic literature, primarily through metaphors. Because of this, analyzing the translation of Nin's imagery (rather than the story itself) emphasizes the differences in Nin's erotica in comparison to Becker's.

---

<sup>261</sup> Nin, *Delta of Venus*, 170.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-70.

<sup>263</sup> Commengé, *Vénus érotica*, 187.

By focusing on how Commengé translated these metaphors, we see that Nin's imagery can be translated more literally. Colloquial sayings and references are so specific to the cultures and subcultures they are born of that a translator who does not participate regularly in such dialogue can become lost in the translation processes. Nin, however, uses a type of metaphor that flourishes in erotic literature:

[The] category is constituted by the large group of traditional or *conventional* metaphors, which are more or less 'institutionalised' in that they are common to a literary school or generation... To modern readers some of these are bold and poetic, while most of the others are faded and quaint. Yet it is beyond doubt that such metaphors can clearly be distinguished from the more institutionalized patterns of the common language. They belong to the restricted area of literature and are only conventional within the period, school or generation to which they belong.<sup>264</sup>

These conventional metaphors, in other words, are those that can be easily recognized.

We see this throughout *Delta of Venus*, and Commengé took care to provide near-literal translations of them. As previously stated in this thesis, Nin's erotica uses imagery of nature and decadence to supplement otherwise clinical or vulgar vocabulary that are indeed bold and poetic. Given that Nin wrote *Delta of Venus* in the 1940s (and Commengé's translation published in the late 1970s), the metaphors do also come across faded, quaint and outdated. The following passages show both the beauty and dated nature of the original, as well as Commengé's approach to their translations:

Maman could produce a truly delectable juice for the feasts of love, which most of the women had to manufacture artificially. Maman could give a man the full illusion of a tender meal, something very soft under the teeth and wet enough to satisfy anyone's thirst. Among themselves they often talked about the delicate sauces in which Maman knew how to wrap her shell-pink morsels, the drumlike tightness of her offerings.<sup>265</sup>

Maman était capable de produire un jus absolument délectable pour les orgies d'amour, substance que la plupart des femmes fabriquaient artificiellement. Maman pouvait donner

---

<sup>264</sup> Raymond van den Broeck, "The Limits of Translatability Exemplified by Metaphor Translation," *Poetics Today* 2 (1981): 75.

<sup>265</sup> Nin, *Delta of Venus*, 170.

à un homme l'illusion totale d'un repas parfait, quelque chose de tendre sous la dent, et d'assez humide pour satisfaire le plus assoiffé. Entre eux, ils parlaient souvent des sauces délicates dont Maman savait envelopper ses morceaux d'un rose tendre, ainsi que de la fermeté de sa chair.<sup>266</sup>

Here, Nin uses words reminiscent of eating like *juices, feasts, meal, soft under the teeth, sauces* and *morsels*, which gives the reader an allusion to oral sex without actually mentioning any action. Her use of the word *offerings* functions as a metaphor for her vagina, “the drum-like tightness” of it hinting that she can provide intense pleasure other women don't know how to give.

In the translation, Commengé maintains the symbolism of eating a delectable and rare meal. Her translation from *feasts of love* to *orgies d'amour* diminishes such imagery, instead alluding to what can only be read as overwhelming pleasure and the promise of debauchery. Her choice to use “la fermeté de sa chair” draws the reader away from the image of the tightness of Maman's vagina, in its place providing a more generic image of her firm flesh.

With two fingers he began to feel her sex, knead it. When he felt the honey that had been quietly flowing, he slipped his head under the skirt...<sup>267</sup>

Avec deux doigts, il commença à effleurer son sexe, à le masser. Quand il sentit le miel couler tout doucement, il glissa sa tête sous la jupe...<sup>268</sup>

Again, Nin uses a delectable treat to describe the wetness produced by a woman's sex, naming it honey, a metaphor replicated by Commengé. However, where Nin's *feel* and *knead* lack a certain seduction, Commengé changes them to the more suggestive and tender *effleurer* and *masser*, which gives the text a greater sense of slow-moving intimacy, his hands grazing Bijou's sex, teasing both her and the reader.

---

<sup>266</sup> Commengé, *Vénus érotica*, 187-88.

<sup>267</sup> Nin, *Delta of Venus*, 193.

<sup>268</sup> Commengé, *Vénus érotica*, 210.

The Basque was crouching over this woman who bloomed under him like some hothouse flower, odorous, moist, with erotic eyes and wet lips, a full-blown woman, ripe and voluptuous.<sup>269</sup>

Le Basque était étendu sur cette femme qui s'ouvrait sous lui comme une fleur de serre, parfumée, humide, avec un regard lascif et des lèvres mouillées, une femme pleinement épanouie, mûre et voluptueuse.<sup>270</sup>

The metaphor of flowers as a woman's genitals is a prime example of a conventional metaphor. The symbolism has shown itself in art from Robert Mapplethorpe to Georgia O'Keefe because, in the way the Basque observes Bijou, "feasting one's eyes on the beauty of flowers is an uncomplicated, easily accessible pleasure... like pornography it has no purpose than the pleasure itself."<sup>271</sup> This passage is particularly interesting because it is one of the few where Commengé's translation, while still taking Nin's metaphors quite literally, takes liberties that render her translation more in keeping with the overall poetic tone of Nin's original text. Nin's use of words like *odorous* and *moist* give the reader the impression of something rank and damp, where Commengé's *parfumée* and *mouillées* are more feminine, more like a flower with its sweet perfume and morning dew. Nin's verb choice of *bloomed*, while perpetuating the image of a flower, is misplaced—Commengé describes first the woman opening like a flower, ending the sentence with her fully blossoming. Nin's imagery would have succeeded more had she used *bloomed* in place of *full-blown*, giving the reader the chance to imagine Bijou slowly opening to the Basque's heat the way a flower opens to the sun.

The reader of Anaïs Nin's erotica must open her book in understanding what kind of erotica they are about to indulge in—while explicit in the nature of the content, Nin's *Delta of*

---

<sup>269</sup> Nin, *Delta of Venus*, 180.

<sup>270</sup> Commengé, *Vénus érotica*, 198.

<sup>271</sup> Michael Juul Holm, Ernst Jonas Bencard, and Poul Erik Tojner, *The Flower as Image*, (Copenhagen: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 2004), 21-22.

*Venus* does not share the same frankness as Becker's *Mr.* The desire may burn a little faster, the erotic scene may unfold more quickly, but Nin is successful in teasing her reader in a way entirely different from most erotica. The stories in *Delta of Venus*, already bursting with sexual imagery, are luxurious and mysterious, a departure from the typical scenarios we imagine or experience in our daily lives. Nin was not preoccupied with writing something hip to the times in which she wrote *Delta of Venus*, but in creating a work of art that indulges all types of fantasies and sexuality. By using conventional metaphors that possess a certain commonality, readers of both Nin's erotica and Commengé's French translation can appreciate the poetic imagery of her work. Commengé's approach to translation errs on the side of more traditional word-for-word replication, although a few of her translation choices improved Nin's text. While Commengé does not utilize the freedom of interpretation encouraged by Steiner or translate based on her own feelings while reading the work, as Robinson's somatic theory suggests, she still ultimately accomplishes a successful recreation of the poetry in Nin's erotica.

#### 4.5.2 Excerpts from *Mr.*

Emma Becker's novel, in stark contrast to Anaïs Nin's, relies heavily on dialogue between characters, rather than description, to create an erotic scene. Her work is unique because it uses modern aspects such as text messaging and email as a platform for her two protagonists to carry on their erotic exchanges. This thesis has repeatedly asserted the necessity of suspension and slow builds in erotic literature, the quality of showing without showing. Because of the more 'modern' nature of her text, the role of slang is more prevalent than in Nin's *Delta of Venus*. Our preoccupation with talking about sex as much as the act itself gives writers of erotic literature an opportunity to use a vocabulary which is renewed over and over again with the changing of

times. Slang serves two distinct purposes in erotic literature: it circumvents clinical vocabulary and gives a sense of complicity between writer and reader.<sup>272</sup> Slang is an informal characteristic of our own formal mother tongue, so slang in a language one has not really ‘lived in’ has a tendency to feel even more foreign to us. This colloquial nature of slang adds another layer of difficulty to the translation of an erotic text:

Les difficultés que soulève la traduction du slang relèvent du problème du sociolecte en traduction et dépassent les limites du texte érotique. Quant aux choix lexicaux en ce qui a trait au vocabulaire sexuel du registre familier, ils découlent de l'incontournable question de [savoir à qui] le texte est destiné.<sup>273</sup>

As the novel’s translator, Maxim Jakubowski had to be familiar (or familiarize himself) with French slang and, of course, have a level of comfort with the slang of his mother tongue. Interestingly, as I will show in the excerpts that follow, I found myself tripping over some of his lexical choices that I realized, upon further research, was because he used slang more common in British English.

The first excerpts are taken from the pages leading up to the first meeting between Monsieur and Ellie and capture the essence of erotica by showing the teasing, anticipation and seduction rather than the explicit act of sex itself. The first excerpt is an erotic poem Monsieur sends to Ellie as an expression of fantasy, the catalyst for pages and pages of teasing and titillating. The poem is the first real, assertive expression of desire offered between the two:

Original French (emphasis mine):

Je mets *mon vit* contre ta joue  
*Le bout* frôle ton oreille  
Lèche *mes bourses* lentement  
Ta langue est douce comme l’eau  
Ta langue est crue comme une bouchère

---

<sup>272</sup> Boulanger, “La sémiose du texte érotique,” 109.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid, 109-10.



Elle est rouge comme un gigot  
Sa pointe est *un coucou criant*,  
Mon vit *sanglote de salive*  
Ton *derrière* est ma déesse  
Il s'ouvre comme ta bouche  
Je l'adore comme le ciel  
Je le vénère comme un feu  
Je bois dans *ta déchirure*  
J'étale tes jambes nues  
Je les ouvre comme un livre  
*Où je lis ce qui me tue.* 274

English translation (emphasis mine):

My *shaft* against your cheek  
*Helmet* grazing your ear  
Slowly lick my *scrotum*  
Your tongue soft as water  
Your tongue raw like a butcher-woman  
Red like meat  
Tip like *a smiling bird*,  
My *shaft* leaking *spittle*  
Your *rear* is my goddess  
Opening like your mouth  
I adore it like the sky  
I worship it like fire  
I drink inside *your tear*  
I spread out your naked legs  
I open them like a book  
*Where I can read my death.*275

Jakubowski's translation is ultimately successful in translating the sense of the text: the reader understands that Monsieur anticipates sleeping with Ellie and has fantasized about what he would like to do to her—we understand his desire as it is described to us in both languages. A few of Jakubowski's vocabulary choices, however, give the reader pause. Some of these choices are less disruptive: *shaft* as a translation of *mon vit* works, despite sounding a little dated or formal. Sexual slang offers ten different words to describe the clinical "penis," so something like

---

274 Becker, *Mr*, 62.

275 Jakubowski, *Monsieur*, 32-33.

*dick* or *cock* may have given a more modern and assertive feeling to the text. The same applies to *rear* as a translation for *ton derrière*. This is a direct translation of the French, but lacks a certain sexuality that a word like *ass* may have given. *My scrotum* used to express *mes bourses* is far too clinical for the casual illicitness of the original text—by choosing the modern slang *my balls* Jakubowski would have achieved a more realistic feeling. The word *tear* as a translation for *déchirure*, while technically correct, reads awkwardly, particularly because the word *tear* in English gives a sense of pain.

Other choices are less subtle and actually detract from the sense of the poem. Using *helmet* as a translation for *le bout* when *the tip* would have sufficed is distracting to the reader—the word *helmet* does not elicit sexual imagery from an English reader. “Tip like a smiling bird/My shaft leaking spittle” is actually an inaccurate translation—Becker’s original French translated literally reads “Its tip like a crying cuckoo/My penis weeping saliva.” Of course, the literal translation does not work for many reasons—I am in agreement that *bird* in place of *cuckoo* makes the line seem less ridiculous, but Jakubowski, using *smiling*, failed to maintain the relation between a *crying* bird and the *weeping* genitalia.

The final line of Monsieur’s poem is a foreshadowing in French. The line, “Où je lis ce qui me tue,” translates literally as “Where I read that which kills me.” Becker’s is suggestive of the demise of Monsieur and Ellie’s affair, subtly telling the reader that their passionate, physical attraction will ruin the two of them. Jakubowski’s “Where I can read my death” functions properly as a translation but its meaning is a little more ambiguous.

The following excerpts are series of text messages exchanged between Ellie and Monsieur in the final days leading up to their first meeting. The passages function to titillate the reader because the protagonists are titillating each other with fantasies. Although Becker’s text is

often more explicit than Nin's, it is still a language of suggestion and desire (nametags and emphasis mine):

MONSIEUR: Pour être honnête, ma pensée est envahie... mardi semble bien trop loin...<sup>276</sup>

My mind's all scrambled... Tuesday seems so far away still...<sup>277</sup>

ELLIE: *L'attente*, ça fait comme des petits coups de dents dans la chair du ventre.<sup>278</sup>

Doesn't *patience* feel like a row of teeth biting into your stomach?<sup>279</sup>

MONSIEUR: *Délectable*... des morsures pour vous explorer... votre chair *tremblante* d'impatience et moi en consultation un peu inconfortable priant pour que *l'incongrue tension à peine cachée par un austère pantalon sombre* ne soit pas visible pour toute ma salle d'attente...<sup>280</sup>

*Beautiful*... Tooth marks exploring your flesh... your skin *shimmering* with impatience... and me behind my desk sitting awkwardly in an attempt to conceal *the incongruous rise beneath my trousers* from the gaze of all eyes in the waiting room.<sup>281</sup>

ELLIE: Arrêtez un peu! Ça me donne presque envie d'avoir la main réduite en miettes!<sup>282</sup>

Enough! You almost make me want to break my wrist!<sup>283</sup>

MONSIEUR: Ce serait dommage que votre petite main soit en miettes, vous ne pourriez pas *dans mon bureau libérer l'étau de ma ceinture*... vos irrésistibles yeux clairs effrontément plantés dans les miens...<sup>284</sup>

Can't have your wrist out of action. You wouldn't be able to free the *stranglehold of my belt*... your light-coloured eyes wantonly seeking mine.<sup>285</sup>

---

<sup>276</sup> Becker, *Mr.*, 73.

<sup>277</sup> Jakubowski, *Monsieur*, 46.

<sup>278</sup> Becker, *Mr.*, 73.

<sup>279</sup> Jakubowski, *Monsieur*, 46.

<sup>280</sup> Becker, *Mr.*, 73.

<sup>281</sup> Jakubowski, *Monsieur*, 46.

<sup>282</sup> Becker, *Mr.*, 73.

<sup>283</sup> Jakubowski, *Monsieur*, 46.

<sup>284</sup> Becker, *Mr.*, 74.

<sup>285</sup> Jakubowski, *Monsieur*, 46.

As with the poem earlier, Jakubowski honours the sense of this exchange without taking the text too literally. In certain parts of the text, he improves the wordiness of Becker's French, while in others his translation fails to express erotic images properly. In text message two, the French text is a declaration of Ellie's uncomfortable feeling of having to wait for their meeting. Jakubowski made the text more conversational by changing it to a question. However, his use of the word *patience* instead of waiting detracts from the nervous anticipation intended—the anxiety (the teeth biting at her stomach) is no longer present and, therefore, the suspension of desire is diminished.

Jakubowski further detracts meaning from Monsieur's response by using *beautiful* in place of *delectable*. The word *délectable* perpetuates the image of the mouth and propels that image of bite marks into the action of Monsieur tasting Ellie's flesh for the first time. His translation of *votre chair tremblante d'impatience* into *your skin shimmering with impatience* is ultimately a failure in translation—not only does skin never shimmer with any particular emotion, the trembling of flesh suggests intense pleasure and anticipation which is not evident in the English text.

Certain parts of this exchange are improved by the translation simply because they are more succinct and to-the-point than the French. Monsieur's cheeky text about attempting to hide his erection from his patients is bogged down by Becker's unnecessary descriptors like “à peine cachée par un austère pantalon sombre.” Jakubowski's translation hits the point more directly, which allows the reader to be as shocked by his confession as Ellie is. The fifth text message finds the reader tripping over the French as well—Becker is again overly wordy in Monsieur's flirtations (“Ce serait dommage que...” and “vous ne pourriez pas dans mon bureau...” are two unnecessary phrases) while Jakubowski drives the desire home, uninterested in sympathizing

with Ellie or setting a scene for the fantasy. Jakubowski's concision additionally improves the reality of the scene—rarely are text messages as poetic as Becker's.

The final few excerpts are from the scene in which Monsieur and Ellie meet each other for the first time and subsequently sleep together. The scene is intensely erotic in both French and English, but there are differences worth noting, particularly in descriptive passages:

Monsieur avait les jambes assez écartées pour que je puisse m'y nicher, et sous les froufrous de mes cils je distinguais la soie brune d'où jaillissait sa queue comme un point d'exclamation. Son goût mêlé au mien dans des proportions aussi secrètes et diabolique que la recette du coca.<sup>286</sup>

Monsieur's legs were wide enough apart for me to find refuge between them, and through the curtain of my eyelashes I could see the brown silk blanket through which his cock surged. His taste blended with mine.<sup>287</sup>

In Becker's original French, the reader again crosses descriptions that are needlessly wordy and toe the line between erotic and inauthentic. While naming his penis "an exclamation point" certainly suggests a level of excitement, the description lacks the sexual imagery that encourages the reader to feel seduced. Becker's overly metaphorical reference the taste of her sex and his "as secret and diabolical as the Coca-Cola recipe"<sup>288</sup> is far too busy and overcomplicated, distracting the reader from the sensations occurring in the passage. Jakubowski's choice to use the simple slang *cock* and cut down the final line to a simpler, more tender description again titillates the reader without dragging them through overly metonymic passages. The reader is able to relax with the words more. The following excerpt stumbles in similar ways in the original text while being more liberated in English:

---

<sup>286</sup> Becker, *Mr.*, 107.

<sup>287</sup> Jakubowski, *Monsieur*, 68.

<sup>288</sup> Becker, *Mr.*, 107 (my translation).

J'ai connu le gout du foutre de Monsieur bien avant de reconnaître enfin son visage, d'ouvrir les yeux et de le voir, de le voir vraiment. Sous l'odeur forte de son sperme j'ai soulevé une paupière douillette.<sup>289</sup>

I had known the taste of his cum before I had seen him properly. Now I opened an eye and he was there.<sup>290</sup>

We see immediately that Jakubowski elected to remove the entire last sentence, perhaps wanting to give the strangely intimate moment that Ellie first truly looks at her lover a chance to resonate. The line “sous l'odeur forte de son sperme” reads clinical in English, the directness of describing bodily fluids denying readers of erotic the subtlety they often crave.

At the end of their morning together, Ellie confesses:

Monsieur était dans son entier une invitation à se tortiller comme une chatte sous son regard.<sup>291</sup>

All of Monsieur invited me to purr like a cat in his presence.<sup>292</sup>

There is an awkwardness to Jakubowski's translation of “Monsieur était dans son entier une invitation”—simplifying the line to “all of Monsieur” diminishes the power that Becker continuously gives her male protagonist. Throughout the novel, the dominance Monsieur has and exerts over Ellie (in and out of the bedroom) is important to the movement of the plot forward. The reader needs to understand Ellie's powerlessness—it is not just Monsieur's presence that stirs her (as Jakubowski has translated the line). Becker makes Ellie powerless to his entirety, right down to his gaze. Becker's use of the verb “tortiller comme une chatte” is more suggestive than Jakubowski's translation in two distinct ways: the verb *tortiller* insinuates wiggling of the hips or squirming in pleasure, images more erotic than the sweet, tender, even romantic

---

<sup>289</sup> Becker, *Mr.*, 109.

<sup>290</sup> Jakubowski, *Monsieur*, 69.

<sup>291</sup> Becker, *Mr.*, 110.

<sup>292</sup> Jakubowski, *Monsieur*, 69.

suggestion of purring. Becker's use of the feminine *une chatte* rather than the more common *un chat* is a subtle play on words—*une chatte* in French is not only a female cat, but slang for a woman's sex,<sup>293</sup> most appropriately translated as *pussy*.<sup>294</sup> While Jakubowski's translation is by no means incorrect, it is certainly less inventive than Becker's original.

Where Jakubowski may have struggled with the metaphorical nature of a poem, the above excerpts show he is ultimately successful in translating the prose of an erotic scene. This perhaps comes more naturally to Jakubowski as he has had experience in writing erotica and, during our interview, admitted to taking liberties with the text by exercising his own judgment:

I have written and published so much literary erotica of my own over the years that the solutions I adopted in the translation felt obvious and natural, from the choice of specific words, to the treatment of delicate subjects and scenes. I just wrote as if it were my own style of writing as long it remained faithful to the spirit of Emma's book. I feel it was a faithful but free translation. Actually, when Emma read it prior to British publication, she said she loved it but also felt as if it was another book altogether. Emma's style in French is fairly complex and involuted which doesn't always come out well in a literal translation, so changing a word or breaking up a paragraph or skipping one or two descriptions (which were *very* French and over-intellectualised) helped.<sup>295</sup>

This priority of preserving sense over literal meaning exemplifies the ideas of both George Steiner's and Douglas Robinson's theories of translation and language, which is evident in his explanation of why he was drawn to the text in the first place:

When reading [*Mr.*], I truly tried to place myself in Emma's mind (and body) to experience what it could have felt like. It was a fascinating experience to read it and identify with the character, as I knew how autobiographical the book was for her.<sup>296</sup>

Jakubowski's approach to the text can be outlined by applying Steiner's four-part translation model. We have already learned of his willingness as a translator to take on the text,

---

<sup>293</sup> *Dictionnaire bilingue français-anglais en ligne*, s.v. "chatte," accessed January 18, 2017, [http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais-anglais/chat\\_%C2%A0chatte/14765#14766](http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais-anglais/chat_%C2%A0chatte/14765#14766).

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>295</sup> Jakubowski, "Interview with a Translator: Maxim Jakubowski."

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*

including his belief that it was a text worth translating in the first place. This is the *initiative trust* step in Steiner's model. Secondly, *invasion* is Jakubowski's movement toward understanding and manipulating the text, followed by *naturalization*, the step during which Jakubowski used his own natural expression to convey Becker's story ("I just wrote as if it were my own style of writing"). Finally, *restitution*, which essentially reminds us that, despite any liberties he may have taken, Jakubowski's loyalty to Becker's story remained, evidenced in his praises of her during my interview with him.

Through the interview, it is fair to say that, as far as an approach to translation goes, Jakubowski subscribes to ideas expressed by theorists of the hermeneutic circle. It is the interpretation of a text *beyond* its linguistic characteristics that are most important. His admission that he tried to place himself *inside* the author's mind shows that Jakubowski was ultimately concerned with a creative expression that captured the feeling of the original text over its linguistic characteristics. Jakubowski is that "active, creative and emotional individual"<sup>297</sup> described in Robinson's somatic theory of translation and his desire to match his own experiences with Becker's (in both writing and life stories) is what allows the reader of his translation to forgive or even overlook subtle errors in language. Ultimately, Jakubowski achieves the ideal balance of power between his personal (idisomatic) style choices and the ideological (ideosomatic) regulations of language.

Reading published reviews (as well as unsolicited commentary) of the novel gives a view into the reception of Jakubowski's translation. *Publisher's Weekly* described *Mr* as an "exquisite and explicit debut [with] heartbreaking honesty," furthering that "some of Becker's sexual details may shock readers unfamiliar with Henry Miller [but] Ellie's poignant openness gives the

---

<sup>297</sup> Lin, *The Translator—Centered Multidisciplinary Construction*, 142.



novel depth.”<sup>298</sup> The fact that this is a translation is mentioned only once as Jakubowski’s name is listed right after Becker’s—essentially, the review is written as if *Publisher’s Weekly* sees the translation and the original as one and the same, a perspective often taken as translators tend to be secondary in our discussion of a text. Still, they sing the praises of Jakubowski’s work. Reading comments on the website *Goodreads*, which allows readers to share their own literary reviews, the perception of *Mr* is less favourable. Of the many reviews in English, only one of them mentions Jakubowski’s name and the fact that this is a translation. Instead, most readers appear to go after Becker herself. Many reviews praise Becker’s references to historically celebrated erotica, as well as ‘her’ beautifully written passages (which we can potentially attribute to Jakubowski’s success in translation) but there are minor commentaries that criticize missteps in his work. For example, one reviewer writes “I now have a new word I can put under ‘Words I Can’t Stand,’ and that is ‘arse.’”<sup>299</sup> This reiterates earlier points about Jakubowski’s clumsiness in vocabulary choice—arse is distinctly British, quite dated, and does not elicit necessarily arousing imagery. Reading reviews of the novel not only gives us a chance to enjoy a breadth of impressions of the erotic, but also see the place translations still have in the literary world—teetering somewhere between anonymity and praise.

Ultimately, if we consider Jakubowski’s English rendition of *Mr*. in terms of Pier-Pascale Boulanger’s three values of translation (clarity, reality and inventiveness), the above excerpts and analyses show that the translation both struggled and succeeded in this methodology. Jakubowski was extremely loyal to the story, which preserved the reality of the plot and dialogue. Mistranslations in the text occurred mostly when Jakubowski was faced with highly

---

<sup>298</sup> “Monsieur: An Erotic Novel,” *Publisher’s Weekly*, reviewed September 10, 2012, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/978-1-61145-761-2>.

<sup>299</sup> Heather, July 30, 2013, comment on *Goodreads*, “Monsieur by Emma Becker.”

metaphorical phrases, so the clarity of the text struggled at times, but what the English text appears to lack in inventiveness is actually one of his greater accomplishments in the translation—he took Becker’s overly wordy, busy descriptions and simplified them into erotic passages that maintain the pace of the story and arouse the reader without weighing them down in language.

*Mr.* is an extremely modern work of erotica, a fact many readers enjoy because it allows them to insert themselves into the story more easily. What Becker lacks in Nin’s inventiveness and poetry, she more than makes up for in her candour. Becker’s erotica speaks to both the emotional experiences and sexual fantasies of many women, which makes her work desirable. Thankfully, despite being a man many years her senior, Maxim Jakubowski did absolute justice to Emma Becker’s erotic interpretations in *Mr.* by focusing on her story, her characters and the intimate experiences between the protagonists (who, after all, are just the author and her former lover in disguise). By accepting from the start that he would not obsess over the words and instead honour the meaning, Jakubowski was able to create a work of erotic fiction that stands on its own as an alluring piece of literature.

## CONCLUSION

... *la fouterie est le lyrisme du peuple*<sup>300</sup>

Charles Baudelaire

This thesis examined the relationship between two of the more important foundations of human culture, sex and language, framing both in the context of erotic literature and considering the way in which we may translate it. The human preoccupation with sex has led to some of the most controversial and erotically charged works of literature in history, and the relationship between the original writer, reader and translator is perhaps no more intertwined than with the genre of erotica.

In a broader sense, particularly in the context of our modern times, the translation of erotica is important to the liberation and progression of sex culture. Translation, a global exchange of information, is a mediator for all sorts of cultural characteristics, and sex is no exception. Translating erotic texts plays a role in allowing an audience of readers to explore their sexuality and fantasies, as well as normalizing misunderstood sexual subcultures and removing stigmas against certain communities.

By choosing two female writers of erotica for consideration, the added characteristic of distinctly female sexuality and language portrays how women write sex from an entirely different perspective than men— and even comparing Anaïs Nin to Emma Becker, it is clear each woman wrote her sexual fantasies radically differently from the other, a fact which made analyzing the translations even more revealing. This thesis questioned if sexuality itself is translatable and how translators should approach a translation of erotica to communicate desire

---

<sup>300</sup>Baudelaire, *Mon coeur mis à nu*, 91.

from one culture to another. Both translators presented in this thesis did not always accomplish uninterrupted arousal in their interpretations of the original texts but what matters, ultimately, is that each were successful in rendering a text that makes your heart beat faster and your cheeks flush crimson. Jakubowski himself admitted:

Any translation presents its own challenges and sex is still such a great, wonderful mystery. What attracts me so much to the “right” sort of erotica is when emotions and sexual acts can be combined, rather than the sad hydraulics of sex merely being listed and described.<sup>301</sup>

Further, comparing Béatrice Commengé’s translation of “The Basque and Bijou” with Maxim Jakubowski’s translation of *Mr.* reiterates that there is no correct way to translate erotica—while the former replicated Nin’s work with a loyalty to its language, the latter instead approached the translation by focusing on the storytelling and the sense of the text instead. Both created translations function successfully as arousing and seductive pieces of literature without relying on their originals for reference. This is ultimately why both translations are successful—they each translated beyond language, giving the readers of their mother tongue the opportunity to experience sexual arousal and immerse themselves into these erotic scenes without feeling as if they were reading a messy translation of someone else’s fantasies.

Relying on George Steiner’s translation model and Douglas Robinson’s somatic theory of translation, I showed that translators appear to be active readers of and participants in the text. The translation of erotic literature depends on more than linguistic proficiency to achieve translation equivalence. Reading and translating literature are erotic actions in and of themselves, an idea which posits the relationship between translator and text as erotic and one that encourages interpretation of feeling as a guiding force for the practice of translation.

---

<sup>301</sup> Jakubowski, “Interview with a Translator: Maxim Jakubowski.”

Because erotica seduces with subtlety, its writers and translators are skilled at manipulating traditional language and exploring ever-changing trends in slang and sexual progression. Still, acknowledging the reader of erotic literature is as important as a translator's replication of the original text's sentiments. Currently the literature on the translation of erotica is not as developed as one might think it would be. This thesis contributes to the field of translation studies by suggesting we broaden the scope through which we approach a text by emphasizing the readership in the translation process. Erotic literature is meant to arouse its audience, a characteristic which is ultimately subjective. It is thus my conclusion that by rejecting more traditional approaches to translation, a relationship between the reader, translator, and the text can be fostered and permitted to play a role in the translation process.

What I sought to do was frame erotic literature in the context of translation studies, but this topic could be explored and elaborated on in many ways. Ultimately, the nature of this thesis—and the subjects discussed within—is far more complex and nuanced than can be expressed in only 100 pages. I considered the genre of erotica from many angles, including a discussion on the differences between erotica and pornography and general characteristics of an erotic text. I examined sexuality as a cultural construct and how it can influence the way erotica is written and translated through a cultural negotiation. I also touched upon the relationship between sexuality and the French and English languages, including a discussion of gendered language, female voice and the role of semiotics in highly erotic texts. It would have been interesting, for instance, to explore sex positivity in relation to female-written erotica, citing Susie Bright and her pioneering work in erotica, feminism and sexual politics. In the context of language, exploring Michel Foucault's work further would have been key in discussions of the power of language in relation to sexuality, acknowledging that even the most liberated sex

culture is still a product of disciplinary power. It would be my hope to one day take the work expressed in this thesis and elaborate it much further.

When approaching the translation of an erotic text, the translator must allow the act to unfold as erotic, allowing him or herself to take possession of the original work and recreate the feelings experienced while reading. The translator of an erotic text must act in the interest of his or her own creativity, while still respecting the limitations of language. As with most approaches to a text, there is no “right” way to translate erotica, but by outlining key characteristics of erotic literature and asserting a methodology which embraces creative interpretation and loyalty to sensation rather than syntax, translators are permitted the experience of becoming part of the text and given the opportunity to reflect his or her own fantasies onto the page with respect to the original text. Translators of erotica have the unique pleasure of being able to create a translation that can stand independently from the original. Readers do not need the original text to understand or enjoy the fantasy dangled seductively in front of them in the translation—erotic text can tolerate so much more interpretation and manipulation than other literature because of all the ways in which we’ve come to experience, fantasize and write about sex.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bailey, Fenton and Randy Barbato, dirs. *Pornography: The Secret History of Civilization*. BBC. DVD. 1999.
- Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Translated by Richard Miller. New York: Hill & Wang, 1975.
- Barthes, Roland. *Sade/Fourier/Loyola*. Translated by Richard Miller. New York: Hill & Wang, 1976.
- Baudelaire, Charles. *Mon coeur mis à nu*. 1867. Accessed January 21, 2017, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k206339d/f98.item.zoom>.
- Bauer, Heike. *Sexology And Translation: Cultural And Scientific Encounters Across The Modern World*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015.
- Becker, Emma. *Mr*. Paris: Denoël, 2011.
- Bedell, Geraldine. "I Wrote The Story of O." *The Guardian*. July 25, 2004. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/jul/25/fiction.features3>.
- Boulanger, Pier-Pascale. "La sémiologie du texte érotique." *Recherches Sémiotiques* 29 (2009): 99-113.
- Boulanger, Pier-Pascale. "Sa langue se glissa dans sa bouche: De la traduction des adjectifs possessifs his/her dans le récit érotique." *Palimpsestes* 21 (2008): 2-8.
- Campbell, Sarah-Margaret. "Perspectives On Pornography And Erotica: Nudes, Prudes, And Attitudes." Master's thesis, Concordia University, 2012.
- Coming Together Wiki. "Maxim Jakubowski." Accessed November 12, 2016. [http://comingtogether.wikia.com/wiki/Maxim\\_Jakubowski](http://comingtogether.wikia.com/wiki/Maxim_Jakubowski).
- Commengé, Béatrice. "Béatrice Commengé: An Interview. By Nawaid Anjum. *Writing and Wordsmithing*. November 28, 2008. <http://nawaidanjum.blogspot.ca/2008/11/i-imagine-therefore-i-belong-and-am.html>.
- Commengé, Béatrice. *Vénus érotica*. Paris: Hachette, 1978.
- Cryle, P.M. "Erotic Literature: A First Essay In Improper Thematics." *French Forum* 13 (1988): 83-96.
- DeLamater, John D., and Janet Shibley Hyde. "Essentialism vs. Social Constructionism in the Study of Human Sexuality," *The Journal of Sex Research* 35 (1998): 10-18.

- Di Folco, Philippe. *Dictionnaire de la pornographie*. Paris: Presse Universitaires de France, 2005.
- Eco, Umberto. *A Theory of Semiotics*. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
- Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. "Sexual Linguistics: Gender, Language, Sexuality." *New Literary History* 16 (1985): 515-543.
- Goode, Erica. "On Sex, U.S. and France Speak Same Language." *The New York Times*. May 29, 2001. Accessed January 10, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/29/science/on-sexus-and-france-speak-same-language.html>.
- Goodreads. "F. Scott Fitzgerald quotes." Accessed January 8, 2017. [http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/3190.F\\_Scott\\_Fitzgerald](http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/3190.F_Scott_Fitzgerald).
- Goodreads. "D.H. Lawrence quotes." Accessed January 12, 2017, [https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/17623.D\\_H\\_Lawrence](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/17623.D_H_Lawrence).
- Gouanvic, Jean-Marc. "A Bourdieusian Theory of Translation, or the Coincidence of Practical Instances." *The Translator* 11 (2005): 147-166.
- Gouvernement France. "Marianne and the motto of the Republic." Last modified July 2014. <http://www.gouvernement.fr/en/marianne-and-the-motto-of-the-republic>.
- Hansen-Schirra, Silvia, Silke Gutermuth, and Karin Maksymski. *Translation and Comprehensibility*. Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2015.
- Holm, Michael Juul, Ernst Jonas Bencard, and Poul Erik Tojner. *The Flower as Image*. Copenhagen: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 2004.
- Howard, Richard. Introduction to *The Pleasure of the Text*, by Roland Barthes, v-viii. New York: Hill & Wang, 1975.
- Hunnewell, Susannah. "The Habits of Highly Erotic People." *The Paris Review*. February 6, 2014. Accessed January 10, 2017. <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2014/02/06/the-habits-of-highly-erotic-people/>.
- Hunt, Lynn Avery. *The Invention of Pornography*. New York: Zone Books, 1993.
- Jakubowski, Maxim. "Interview with a Translator." By Ghislaine LeFranc. *Derive Translation*. September 5, 2016. <http://www.derivetranslation.com/blog/>.
- Jakubowski, Maxim. *Monsieur*. New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2012.



- Johnson, Zach. "Fifty Shades of Grey Release Date Pushed Back to February 13." Last modified November 13, 2013. <http://www.eonline.com/uk/news/480515/fiftyshades-of-grey-release-date-pushed-back-to-february-13-2015-just-in-time-forvalentine-s-day>.
- Kamboureli, Smaro. "Discourse and Intercourse, Design and Desire In The Erotica of Anaïs Nin." *Journal of Modern Literature* 11 (1984): 143-158.
- Kellman, Steven G. *Loving Reading: Erotics of the Text*. Hamden, CT, 1985.
- Kearney, Patrick J. *A History of Erotic Literature*. London: Macmillan, 1982.
- Legman, Gershon. *Love and Death: A Study in Censorship*. New York: Hacker Art Books, 1963.
- Lin, Zhu. *The Translator— Centered Multidisciplinary Construction*. Berlin: Peter Lang, 1975.
- Luscombe, Belinda. "Why Parents Worry More About Sex than Violence in the Movies." *Time*, December 4, 2015. Accessed November 3, 2016. <http://time.com/4135760/why-parents-worry-more-about-sex-than-violence-in-the-movies/>.
- Moore, Lucy. "Exclusive interview with Emma Becker, author of Monsieur." *FemaleFirst*. October 26, 2012. <http://www.femalefirst.co.uk/books/Monsieur258861.html>.
- Munday, Jeremy. *The Routledge Companion to Translation Studies*. United Kingdom: Routledge, 2009.
- Nin, Anaïs. *The Diary of Anaïs Nin, Vol. III*. California: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1969.
- Nin, Anaïs. *Delta of Venus*. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1977.
- Nin, Anaïs. *Little Birds*. California: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1979.
- Ollivier, Debra. "France vs. America: The Sex Front." *Salon*. June 20, 2003. Accessed January 10, 2017. [http://www.salon.com/2003/06/20/french\\_3/](http://www.salon.com/2003/06/20/french_3/).
- Pinsker, Joe. "The Hidden Economics of Porn." *The Atlantic*. April 4, 2016. Accessed October 10, 2016. [http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/04/pornographyindustryeconomics\\_tarrant/476580/](http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/04/pornographyindustryeconomics_tarrant/476580/).
- Pope, Nigel K. Ll., Kevin E. Voges, Kerri-Ann L. Kuhn, Ellen L. Bloxsome. "Pornography and Erotica: Definitions and Prevalence." *Proceedings of the 2007 International Nonprofit and Social Marketing Conference: Social Entrepreneurship, Social Change and Sustainability* (2007): 1-10.

- Robinson, Douglas. *The Translator's Turn*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.
- Schäffner, Christina. *Translation and Norms*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1999.
- Schwichtenberg, Cathy. "The Semey Side of Semiotics." *SubStance* 10 (1981): 26-38.
- Simon, Sherry. *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Stedman, Alex. "Fifty Shades Spinoff 'Grey' Reportedly Stolen From Publisher." *Variety*. June 10, 2015. <http://variety.com/2015/biz/news/fifty-shades-spinoffgrey-stolen-from-publisher-1201516843/>.
- Steiner, George. *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. London: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Sturm, Ernest. *Crébillon fils et le libertinage au XIIIe siècle*. Paris: Nizet, 1970.
- Toury, Gideon. *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1995.
- Tyulenev, Sergey. *Translation and Society: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Van den Broeck, Raymond. "The Limits of Translatability Exemplified by Metaphor Translation." *Poetics Today* 2 (1981): 73-87.
- West, Kevin. "Translating the Body: An Erotics of Translation." *Translation and Literature* 19 (2010): 1-25.
- White, Kevin. Review of *Bookleggers and Smuthounds: The Trade in Erotica, 1920-1940*, by Jay A. Gertzman. *The American Historical Review*. October, 2000.
- Willette, Jeanne S. M. "Roland Barthes: 'The Pleasure of the Text.'" *Art History Unstuffed*. December 20, 2013.