Lady Mary Translates Marivaux: A Female Perspective?

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This article intends to examine the text of a translation, by a woman contemporary, of an 18th century play written by a man. The purpose is to establish whether the strategies used in the translation process may be analysed in feminist terms and related to those used by modern feminist translators, whether the translation provided nothing more than an opportunity for the translator to reflect on her personal situation, or whether the interventions made by the translator proceed from a combination of both personal and feminist intentions.

Literary translation in the 17th and 18th centuries has historically been evaluated with deference to the source text rather than the target product. Certainly Dryden’s three categories of metaphrase, paraphrase and imitation expounded in the preface to his 1680 translation of Ovid’s *Epistles* take the original creation as their measuring point even though they allow for latitude in the case of imitation (Marriot [ed.], 1995: 508).

Prioritising the original has necessarily lead to the translation, whatever its quality, being regarded as an inferior product and to the act of translation as a subservient occupation in the same way that women have been regarded in past centuries and currently in some cultures as intellectually inferior to men. Feminist writers in Canada in the 1970s and 80s were challenging patriarchal language with their translation strategies (von Flotow, 1991: 69) as well as contesting the sexist language used in the discourse of translation theory (Goddard, 1990). Sherry Simon has pointed out the language of sexism used to describe translation and highlighted the parallel between the status of women and that of translation. One of the most often quoted phrases used to describe literary translations, “les belles infidèles”, coined in the 17th century (Mounin, 1955) has “encouraged an attitude of suspicion toward the seemly but wayward translation” (Simon, 1996: 1). Isobel
Grundy, discussing women writers of the 18th century, speaks of “the gendering of translation as female—because ancillary” (Halsband and Grundy [eds], 1993: vii).

Mainstream modern translation theory has moved away from source text prioritisation and focused either on target audience or target culture systems in the form of skopos theory (Reiss and Vermeer [eds], 1984) and polysystems theory (Even-Zohar, 2000 [1978]) to name but two. The idea of creative translation is no longer such anathema now that we are distanced in time from the anxiety caused by reformation translations of the Bible. In 15th and 16th century Europe the threat of heresy through mistranslation of the sacred text and the burning at the stake of such heretics left a deep impression of the dangers of free translation. Nowadays however, studies in literary history disclose the wide influence of translation as a creative activity and reveal the extensive intertextual borrowings of what are considered to be the great writers of the European canons. This relaxation of the fidelity to the original rule not only opens up opportunities for a variety of translations of the same source text in a variety of styles but also accommodates the rewriting of literary texts into different target language conventions or even into different genres.

For modern feminist translators the question of fidelity turns on the writing project rather than on the source text, the author or the reader (Simon, 1996: 2). Interventions in the process of translation are made so that the voice of the translator is heard as specifically female or at least so that the maleness of the original text is neutralised. There remains tension in a religious context: since the feminist challenge to language norms, the question of patriarchal language in the Christian liturgy and the issue of gender neutral language in Bible translation have been two on-going concerns in the field of Bible and liturgy translation.

The issues involved in translating gender are many and complex, ranging from the challenge of the discourse used to theorise translation to the strategy of neutralising patriarchal language. However, woman’s relationship with translation is not always a negative one. Simon also reminds us that translation effected an entry for women into the masculine world of literature, as translation was considered one of the permissible, even suitable forms of writing for a woman. Translation may also be used as a vehicle to highlight questions of gender inequality or to illustrate female social contexts in other cultures. In drama translation in particular there have been many creative inroads that have served to allow the female translator’s voice to be heard. Liz Lochhead for example has successfully turned Molière’s Le Misanthrope and Tartuffe into Scots (Lochhead, 2002), a domestication/adaptation that discusses universal issues in a modern setting. Was there perhaps a similar but more personal process at work in the 18th century?

This article examines the 18th century contemporary creative translation of Marivaux’s Jeu de l’amour et du hasard by an aristocratic English woman, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1763). Lady Mary was a writer, poet and translator in what was then very much a man’s world and translated the play more as an intellectual exercise than for performance or publication. She was famous in her own circle for her poetry and letters but unable to publish her work widely because of her sex and her position in 18th century English society. She felt strongly about women’s issues, particularly education and marriage, and about the inequality she experienced in the literary world. She wrote articles and essays (mostly anonymously) and was acknowledged as a well read intellectual by her male as well as female peers but restricted in her output by the prevailing social conditions.
Interestingly she takes a slightly different view of the subject matter of the play from the original playwright and her translation strategies reflect her own position with regard to love, gender relationships and the situation of women at the time. Are the alterations made during the process of translation an exclusive result of her own life experiences or are they a reflection of a more general gender related perspective? Rewriting the play out of Marivaux’s Italian commedia-influenced French style into English Restoration comedy conventions allows her to shift the focus of the play to English society. Is this perhaps a conscious attempt to affirm a feminine viewpoint through translation and to influence the society in which she had little voice? And is that viewpoint personal, specifically female or specifically English or a combination of all three?

The literary context

Marivaux’s *Jeu de l’amour et du hasard* has been described as “one of the finest comedies to be written in the 18th century” (McKee, 1958: 129). It was produced in 1730, at the height of a career influenced not so much by the events of his life but by his stance as a moralist and a Modern. The Moderns were part of a movement that questioned received wisdom and authority as opposed to the Ancients who relied on the traditional and conservative structures of both literature and society. Marivaux’s allegiance to the Moderns and to the salon of Madame de Lambert signalled not only his tendency to challenge traditional ideas but also his “openness towards education and social justice for women” (Culpin, 2000: xxx). Marivaux was forward looking in many ways, breaking away from the traditions of play writing set in the 1660s by Molière, composing plays which were more successful within the conventions of the *Théâtre Italien* than the *Théâtre Français* and introducing the figure of the liberal father in several of his plays. 18th century society was one in which children had little say in how they were disposed of in marriage, and Molière had several years earlier created some monster fathers in the character of *L’Avare* and of M. Orgon in *Tartuffe*. Marivaux however showed “a tendency to portray fathers in generally benevolent terms” (Culpin, 2000: vii) and in *La Colonie*, the first draft of which was written in 1729, he goes even further towards questioning the position of women in society when a group of wives rebel against the authority of their husbands. His sympathetic stance and his position as a playwright placed him in a unique position to influence society and at least to engender debate on the subject of the treatment of women. Lady Mary saw an opportunity here to use Marivaux as a platform for presenting her own position in English society.

In the years preceding Marivaux’s success with *Le Jeu de l’amour et du hasard*, translations, versions and adaptations of French classical drama and Molière’s comedies were published and performed in London (France, 2000: 263-268) producing the kind of literary interchange that enabled connective activity between cultures. In 1734 a French company presented a production of *Le Jeu de l’amour et du hasard* at a theatre in London which was attended by “persons of quality” (Halsband, 1981:16). The printed version of the text must have been available too, for the play was “recklessly imitated” by William Popple in *The Double Deceit* published two years later, and “freely looted” by Isaac Bickerstaffe in a comic opera in 1762 (Halsband and Grundy [eds], 1993: 316). The play tells the story of a benevolent father, Orgon, who arranges a marriage between his daughter Silvia and Dorante, the son of a family friend, who have not yet been introduced to one another. Dorante is on his way to meet Silvia. Silvia asks to be allowed to change places with her...
maid Lisette, so that she might be in a better position to observe her possible future husband. Her father agrees because he knows that Dorante has arranged to change places with his valet Arlequin for the same reason, but he omits to inform his daughter of this and the comedy grows out of the situation. Mario, Silvia’s brother, helps the deception along and the entire action takes place in M. Orgon’s house in Paris.

11 It is not recorded whether or not Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was one of the “persons of quality” among the audience of the London performance in 1734, but she certainly obtained a copy of the original play shortly afterwards. Frequently at court and well-known for her literary production among her friends and family (the novel writer Henry Fielding was a cousin) and among other writers of the time like Alexander Pope and Joseph Addison, only her gender and her position in society prevented her from becoming a published author.

12 Lady Mary was much influenced in her formative years by her female contemporaries, women like Jane Barker (1652-1732) who wrote political poems, translated from French and shared Mary’s interest in medicine. Writers like Eliza Haywood (1689-93-1756) and Delariviere Manley (1663/1670?-1724) struggled as Lady Mary did for their due literary recognition in times dominated by a patriarchal society. Aphra Behn (1640-1689) who unusually for the time earned her living as playwright and novelist was read avidly by Lady Mary in her formative years. Mrs. Behn embarked on a programme of translation from French in the mid 1680s, concentrating on authors who wrote for “polite circles of gentlemen and ladies” (Cottegnies, 2004: 222). One of the texts she chose to translate was the duc de la Rochefoucauld’s *Réflexions morales*, a collection of maxims resulting from thoughts on morality. Lady Mary needed no translation to read la Rochefoucauld, and wrote as easily in French as she did in English, but the fact that the maxims were in circulation among her literary set may have inspired her to write an essay refuting one of them, namely “Qu’il y a des mariages commodes, mais point des délicieux”. Marriage and the subservient position of women in society was a subject close to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. She was one of the few people in her circle and of her class who had married for love. In 1712 she had eloped with her husband after negotiations with her father on the subject of her settlement had broken down in favour of another suitor who was prepared to offer more. In her essay on la Rochefoucauld’s maxim, written in French, she maintains that it is perfectly possible and desirable to have romantic attachment between husband and wife, contrary to the thinking of society of the time. Marriage, particularly within the confines of high society, was more of a financial contract, a way of disposing of assets, than the result of romantic love. Although her own marriage seems to have begun well enough, Lady Mary later lived abroad for several years while her husband remained in England. They nevertheless corresponded while she was away and remained in touch until he died in 1761.

13 Much of Lady Mary’s literary output was initiated by the events in her personal life. The year after her marriage, her much loved brother died from smallpox. She was particularly shocked and distressed as her father, still angry about her elopement, had prevented them from being in contact (Halsband and Grundy [eds], 1993: 21).

14 Lady Montagu also had considered opinions on the subject of education for women although her views were based very firmly on the practicalities of living as a lady rather than the philosophy or politics of women’s rights. She believed that learning was an excellent way of passing the large amount of leisure time a lady had at her disposal and
that a properly guided education would both prevent excessive sensibility and forestall the dangers of boredom. In a letter to her daughter she writes:

The use of knowledge in our sex, besides the amusement of solitude, is to moderate the passions, and to learn to be contented with a small expense, which are the certain effects of a studious life; and it may be preferable even to that fame which men have engrossed to themselves, and will not suffer us to share (Melville, 2004 [1925]: 186).

Apart from attending the playhouse, Lady Mary’s interest in drama extended to the writing of a critical essay on Joseph Addison’s play *Cato* at the request of her husband. In the essay she demonstrates her knowledge of classical drama and her critical skill of analysis. Addison later acted on some of her suggestions and was happy a year later to accept one of her essays for the *Spectator*, although her essay on his play was suppressed by him. Lady Mary had all the necessary qualities to produce a translation of *Le Jeu de l’amour et du hasard*, fluency in French, a knowledge of the English and French theatrical conventions, an understanding of English and French culture and society and creative writing skills.

**The Translation**

It is not surprising then that Lady Mary, with her interest in the stage, her experience of love and marriage, her literary talent, her facility in French and her attitude towards the way fathers disposed of their daughters, should be drawn to this particular Marivaux play and should choose to translate it. Interestingly her life and the life of the French playwright spanned almost exactly the same period. The manuscript of her translation, in her own hand, lay undiscovered, unrecognised as a translation and unpublished until the 20th century and so may not have reached any audience except that of her close friends (Halsband and Grundy [eds], 1993: 317-379). However the fact that she may have had no aspirations to see it published or performed meant that she had complete freedom as a translator to use what strategies she chose. There are no notes to the translation and no preface, so that the only evidence we have to examine is the translation itself. Even so, there is much we can deduce from her strategies and from other comments she makes in her writing. For example in one letter she advises her daughter that her granddaughter should be allowed to learn languages, but only “to enable her to read books in their originals, that are often corrupted, and always injured, by translations” (Melville, 2004 [1925]: 185). She was aware, then, of the damage that could be done by translation, and she did not need to translate Marivaux for herself as she could read the original. It is tempting then to assume that she saw in translation the prospect of articulating her own situation with respect to her father as well as a platform for social change. Intellectual and creative practice was something that she enjoyed and here is a project of considerable complexity carefully and skilfully undertaken.

One of the reasons that the play remained unrecognised as a translation is the change of title. A deliberate avoidance of the literal translation of Marivaux’s *Le Jeu de l’amour et du hasard* into *The Game of Love and Chance* suggests that the translator either felt she had changed the emphasis of the play sufficiently to warrant a different title or that she disagreed with the idea of love as a game of chance and had no wish to promote it as such. The other changes in the play’s fabric are small and subtle, and for the most part the translator keeps very close to the original, with only one or two deviations. This would suggest that any change is a considered response on the part of the translator and done
for a particular purpose. The choice of Simplicity for the title is difficult to explain in the context of the complexity of the plot but easier to relate to the innocence or naiveté of Bellinda the heroine and to the uncomplicated idea of marriage based on affection rather than money. Lady Mary’s intention may have been to downplay the game of disguise and to foreground rather the innate simplicity of what had become at the time a complex process of negotiation. The financial arrangements surrounding a marriage and the class implications are all waived in favour of a simple factor, love. Simplicity could also be a satirical comment on the complex situation or, more likely, a reference to the simple country setting into which she transposed the action.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the English version, after the title, is its thorough domestication. The French context disappears completely and the action takes place in Sir John Hearty’s house in the country. Sir John replaces M. Orgon, the name used by Molière in Tartuffe for his most gullible father, and Sir John’s character is exactly what it says i.e. “hearty”—following the Restoration comedy pattern of giving names with meaning to the characters of the play. Silvia the original heroine is replaced by Bellinda. Bellinda was Alexander Pope’s heroine in The Rape of the Lock, a satirical poem about affectation. Lady Mary had been a friend of Pope, but incurred his rancour reputedly when she laughed at his declaration of love for her. This reference to his most famous work of satire may have some intentional implication as the play is after all a comedy that depends for its humour on the interplay between characters. In the English version, Lisette the maid becomes Lucy, and Dorante the suitor becomes Gaymore. Arlequin, perhaps the most stock character in Marivaux’s original version, is replaced with a very solid English name, William, so suppressing any reference to the Italian commedia.

Lady Mary keeps the plot the same as Marivaux’s except that it is Bellinda’s father who suggests that she change places with her maid because he knows already that this is the strategy Gaymore intends to employ. This is more plausible than the coincidence of both lovers happening to think of the same plan. It removes the play some way out of the stock character, stock setting zone from where Marivaux draws most of his comedy. It also gives Bellinda’s father more of a positive role in the proceedings. Other changes are very few, some speeches are shortened or expressed in a less complex way, and it is obvious from some of the explanatory phrases in the dialogue and from the clear and more specific stage directions that Lady Mary has clarity and the English audience in mind. Where Marivaux has generalities, Lady Mary has specifics.

The most telling difference comes at the end of the play and supports the thesis that the translator has been personally intervening all the way through the play. At the end of Marivaux’s play it is Arlequin who delivers the closing speech whereas in Simplicity Sir John, after a short prose speech, provides a short four line maxim about the relationship between parents and children. It is a small change, but a significant one and continues the move away from stock character, stock action towards a more moralistic view of what has taken place. It is a serious, thoughtful ending instead of a clever humorous quip.

The strategy employed by Lady Mary to personalise the action and make it more specific is the naturalising of the language of conversation. The dramatic convention of the exchange of roles of master and servant affords many opportunities for comedy in the dialogue. In Marivaux’s work the plot was no more than a vehicle for verbal comedy and he was often criticised for his use of the language of the salons, for the affected marivaudage. In her translation Lady Mary makes use of a less formal, more personal register. This strategy, together with the reallocating of some lines and the condensing or
omission of others is perhaps what prompts Robert Halsband to refer to the translation as “something between a literal translation and a free adaptation” (Halsband and Grundy [eds], 1993: 315). “Free adaptation” somewhat overstates the translator’s intervention in this case. Everything in Marivaux’s play has been accounted for, yet the English version is not only thoroughly English, it reveals the translator’s engagement with the translation project rather than with the source text or with the audience, heralding what will be done by modern feminist translators by intervening, albeit subtly and albeit in the guise of domesticating to the target language convention (Simon, 1996: 2). In Lady Mary’s case, this engagement stems from a personal perspective which may none the less be seen as announcing a feminist perspective to come. A brief comparative analysis of some sections of the play with its source may support this thesis.

Closer analysis

The ways in which Lady Mary Wortley Montagu reveals her personal engagement with the material she translates are subtle but effective. The lively unaffected dialogue provides a vehicle for many of the markers she lays down indicating a shift in emphasis from Marivaux’s version. Most noticeably the speeches made by the English characters are more personalised and less abstract than those of their French counterparts. For example, the play opens with Silvia/Bellinda remonstrating with her maid Lisette/Lucy because the maid has told Silvia/Bellinda’s father that his daughter will be glad to be married:

Silvia: Mais encore une fois, de quoi vous mêlez-vous, pourquoi répondre de mes sentiments?
Lisette: C’est que j’ai cru que dans cette occasion-ci, vos sentiments ressembleraient à ceux de tout le monde ; Monsieur votre père me demande si vous êtes bien aise qu’il vous marie, si vous en avez quelque joie ; moi je lui réponds qu’oui ; cela va tout de suite ; et qu’il n’y a peut-être que vous de fille au monde, pour qui ce oui-là ne soit pas vrai, le non n’est pas naturel.
(Culpin, 2000: 2)

Lady Mary’s translation concentrates on the sense of the communication with an eye on the dramatic qualities of the dialogue rather than a word for word rendering:

Bellinda: What busyness had you to say all those Impertinencies to my father? I overheard you—
Lucy: Really, Madam, I spoke for the best, and I did not at all doubt that you would thank me for it. I am sure any other Lady of your Age would. Says my Master says he, ‘Lucy, your mistress loves you. You know her thoughts. Young Women tell one another. Is not my Girl heartily glad that she is going to be marry’d?’ ‘Yes Sir,’ says I. What could a body say else? I’m sure ‘No’ would have sounded very unnatural.
(Halsband and Grundy [eds], 1993: 317)

Lucy’s reply is in a much more relaxed register than Lisette’s more measured and balanced utterance. The translator provides her with some entertaining conversational phrases such as “says my master says he” and “what could a body say else?” which define Lucy as a recognisable English character and chattering lady’s maid. Interestingly, Lady Mary is careful to pick up the pattern in Marivaux’s dialogue when Silvia repeats the last phrase that Lisette says “le non n’est pas naturel”.

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Silvia: Le non n’est pas naturel ; quelle sotte naïveté ! Le mariage aurait donc de grands charmes pour vous ? (Culpin, 2000: 2)
Bellinda: Very unnatural! Horrid creature. You think a Husband a fine thing then?
(Halsband and Grundy [eds], 1993: 317)

24 *Husband* here replaces the word *marriage* used by Marivaux and highlights the strategy of the translator in which she personifies as much as possible, replacing the institution of marriage with the person of husband, and making the significance of each utterance as human as she can. Equally she is not afraid to miss out a phrase if it makes for a sharper retort and a more dramatic intervention:

Silvia: Taisez-vous, allez répondre vos impertinences ailleurs et sachez que ce n’est pas à vous à juger de mon cœur par le vôtre. (Culpin, 2000: 2)
Bellinda: Hold your tongue. A fine way of judging, to guess my thoughts by your own!
(Halsband and Grundy [eds], 1993: 317)

25 The colloquial *hold your tongue* and *a fine way of judging* make the whole speech more natural in terms of vocabulary than Marivaux’s more formal expression. Lady Mary also selects *thoughts* in preference to *heart* in this phrase, suggesting that this is a case of good sense over emotion and that the idea that women should be happy to marry whoever is chosen for them by their father is not a logical assumption.

26 In Marivaux’s version, Silvia is able to show her annoyance with Lisette by switching to the “tu” form at this point. Lady Mary, who does not have this option available to her, increases the pace of the argument by making Bellinda interrupt Lucy on two occasions. This has a similar effect and highlights the differences between mistress and servant culminating in Lisette’s exclamation:

Lisette: Quoi, vous n’épouserez pas celui qu’il vous destine ? (Culpin, 2000: 2)
This becomes in Lucy’s register:

Lucy: How, Madam, will you disoblige good Sir John and refuse the Husband he has provided for you? (Halsband and Grundy [eds], 1993: 318)

27 In a single sentence by personalising the pronouns the translator makes the plot clearer, the language more natural and the action more immediate. The *vous* is defined as *Madam*, *celui* is named as *Husband* and *il* is specified as *good Sir John*.

28 Bellinda’s reply subtly differs from Silvia’s:

Silvia: Que sais-je ; peut-être ne me conviendra-t-il point et cela m’inquiète.
(Culpin, 2000: 2)
Bellinda: How do I know whether I shall like him? We are not perhaps made for one another.
(Halsband and Grundy [eds], 1993: 318)

29 Silvia worries that the man won’t suit her, Bellinda that they won’t suit each other. Could this be a reflection of Lady Mary’s idea of mutual love in marriage? It is not enough for one party to be in love, the feeling must be returned.

30 Lisette continues to encourage her mistress by listing the suitor’s attributes and finishes by asking, “Peut-on se figurer de mariage plus doux ? D’union plus délicieuse ?” (Culpin, 2000: 2). The use of the word *délicieuse* in reference to marriage must remind us of the la Rochefoucauld maxim refuted in an essay by Lady Mary, “Qu’il y a des mariages commodes, mais point des délicieux”. Lady Mary reinforces the connection by giving Lucy the words, “I should think such a husband a very delicious present” only to be interrupted by Bellinda’s “Delicious! Was there ever such an Expression! What an idea it gives one!”
(Halsband and Grundy [eds], 1993: 319).
Lisette’s retort “Il n’y a presque point de fille... qui ne fut en danger de l’épouser sans
cérémonie” (Culpin, 2000: 3) is translated straight into Lady Mary’s life story: “I could
not blame you says Lucy if you were getting out of the garret window to him” (Halsband
and Grundy [eds], 1993: 319).

Bellinda’s relationship with her father Sir John differs subtly from that of Silvia with
M. Orgon. M. Orgon and his son Mario are happy to look on and enjoy the humour of the
situation (Culpin, 2000: 6-7). In the translation, Lady Mary inserts a conversation between
father and son that gives another side to the relationship between Bellinda and her
father. Ned tries to convince his sister that “it ought to be very indifferent to you what
sort of Man your Husband is since he will probably be the man you will seldomest
converse with”. Sir John reproaches him with “Indeed Ned, I am not so well pleased with
your Town breeding to desire your Sister should have a share of it” (Halsband and Grundy
[eds], 1993: 321). He goes on to say that he is very pleased to see her in what he calls this
“unfashionable way of thinking” and applauds her wish to know her suitor better. He
emphasises that Gaymore’s father has the same concern for his son’s happiness as he has
for Bellinda’s (ibid.: 322). Bellinda’s response to her father shows more warmth than
Silvia’s in the translation. For example she addresses him as My dear Papa to Silvia’s mon
père, a small change, but small changes to the register from formal to familiar over the
whole play give the relationship a warmer footing. In the parallel scenes in Marivaux’s
play, Mario is not present for the first part, then is asked for practical advice by his father
as to whether they should let Silvia know of Dorante’s deception. The scenes contain no
reflection on the deeper implications of the developing theme of love.

In the following scene, Lady Mary again shows her intervention in her management of
the character of Ned and his relationship with his sister. As mentioned above, in the
English version it is Bellinda’s father who suggests the exchange of roles between
mistress and servant because he knows that the suitor intends to change places with his
valet. Ned witnesses the scene in which Bellinda agrees to this subterfuge and is
uncomfortable with the idea. When she leaves to dress as a maid his father recognises
this:

Sir John: You are out of humour, Ned, and I see you begin to suspect me
capable of dotage already, but I believe I shall bring you over to my opinion
(Halsband and Grundy [eds], 1993: 323).

Sir John then reveals to Ned that Gaymore will also be disguised as his own valet. When
he hears the reasoning behind it Ned says:

Ned: I beg your pardon for my rashness, and own what you have thought, the
most reasonable method to prevent my sister’s being expos’d to his
footman’s impertinencies... (Halsband and Grundy [eds], 1993: 324).

It is interesting to remember that Lady Mary was deeply distressed at the loss of her own
brother shortly after her elopement, an affectionate brother who would have spoken up
for her had he not been so afraid of their father (Halsband and Grundy [eds], 1993: 21). In
Ned we have the good brother who engages with and looks out for his sister, whereas
Mario, while interested in her fate, revels more in the amusement afforded by the
adventure.

Lady Mary exhibits excellent appreciation of the way to draw humour from Marivaux’s
linguistic quips as well as how to capitalise on the visual possibilities. In Act I scene II she
introduces humour when Lucy, keen to convince Sir John that she is able to act the part of a Lady, imitates Lady Languishe’s walk, Mrs Dainty’s waddle and Lady Rompabout’s run. These names would be at home in any Restoration comedy.

Verbal comedy is dealt with equally well. In Act III scene VI when the disguises and exchange of roles are being uncovered, Arlequin tells the audience in an aside that he is reluctant to reveal his name to an angry Lisette because it rhymes with coquin. It has to be remembered that at this point Arlequin still believes Lisette to be Silvia. He continues his conversation with her and tries to avoid actually mentioning his name but she calls him faquin nevertheless whereupon he laments “Je n’ai pu éviter la rime” (Culpin, 2000: 38). Wordplay like this is notoriously difficult to transfer from one culture to another. Lady Mary substitutes another pun. “Shall I tell her my name is Will Swing?” asks William. “No”, he answers his own question, “She’ll bid me be hang’d” (Halsband and Grundy [eds] 1993: 370). In Act III scene 6, Lisette calls Arlequin a monkey, Lucy calls William a puppy. Arlequin remarks, “La jolie culbute que je fais là”; William says “I am kick’d down 3 pairs of stairs”. Lady Mary substitutes what might be termed functional equivalences in a situation where the literal translation would mean nothing and by doing so rescues the exchange from obscurity. Lively dialogue enhances the innate humour as in the beginning of the same scene when William announces “Bright Lady I suffer like a lobster in every moment of your absence”. Marivaux is much less extravagant with “Enfin ma reine, je vous voie et je ne vous quitte plus”. The lobster on the spit is Lady Mary’s invention for the sake of comedy. Similarly she colours the dialogue in other places to give it the kind of liveliness to which the English audience is accustomed and which adds the visual to the verbal. Lisette’s exclamation to Arlequin in Act II scene 3 “à peine êtes-vous arrivé” becomes in Lucy’s mouth, “You have not been three hours in the house” (Halsband and Grundy [eds], 1993: 339). Arlequin’s warning to Lisette “Vous n’attendez pas au fond du sac” translates as “All is not gold that glisters” (Halsband and Grundy [eds], 1993: 370).

It is difficult to say whether the strategy of enriching the language is part of the domestication process to English dramatic conventions or part of the creative instinct of a talented writer. A good example comes in Act II scene 9 where Dorante’s “Ah ma chère Lisette, que je souffre” becomes “My lovely Lucy, you thrust a dagger into my heart” from Gaymore. Lovely Lucy is preferred to my dear Lucy because of the humorous alliteration and the dagger metaphor introduced to make the scene more visual.

As far as linguistic discourse is concerned, one of the major problems for the translator from French is the tu/vous register which can be so significant in French and so difficult to convey smoothly in English. As the plot concerns not only the growing intimacy of lovers but also centres on role reversal and comedy between master/valet and mistress/maid, Marivaux naturally makes free use of both registers to mark changes in relationship. In the penultimate scene of the play Dorante shows the intensity of his feelings for Silvia (still believing her to be the serving maid) by switching to tu. Gaymore cannot do this, but Lady Mary employs other markers to indicate the change in the relationship. To begin with where Gaymore has used you throughout, he suddenly alludes to thy tenderness. Dorante’s “Vous m’aimez donc?” expands into “Then you love me, my charming angel?”. Where the source text cannot be completely covered, she compensates in other ways. Similarly in Act II scene 9 Silvia and Dorante have a conversation in which Silvia asks that they stop using tu to each other. The humour lies in the fact that although they agree to stop, neither does. In the corresponding scene in Simplicity, the subject of
the conversation cannot be replicated, but there are two uses of the familiar thee, one by each protagonist. The translator puts down a marker to acknowledge the problem and adds a sentence to strengthen the depleted exchange by making Bellinda say “I don’t desire to hear your complaints, nor indeed to hear you speak at all”.

The ending of the play shows the greatest sign of intervention by the translator even though the actual changes are relatively few. Traditionally in the Italian commedia Arlequin the stock character has the last word and Marivaux’s play is no exception. There is an exchange between Lisette and Arlequin in which Arlequin tells Lisette: “De la joie, Madame; vous avez perdu votre rang, mais vous n’êtes point à plaindre, puisque Arlequin vous reste.” Lisette is not impressed and replies: “Belle consolation! Il n’y a que toi qui gagnes à cela.” The final line of the play is from Arlequin: “Je n’y perds pas; avant notre connaissance, votre dot valait mieux que vous, à présent vous valez mieux que votre dot. Allons, saute Marquis!” Marivaux’s play ends on that note and they all dance. Lady Mary on the other hand not only omits Arlequin’s final speech but slightly alters Lucy and William’s exchange. William’s first comment remains similar, “For you, Madame, you have lost your rank, but you have got William by this frolic” but Lucy’s reply is subtly different. “Well; and you’ve got Lucy” gives the idea of equality, that both have benefited, whereas Lisette is quite clear that Arlequin is the only winner. The final word in Lady Mary’s version goes to Sir John Hearty, whose concluding comment in prose gives way to a maxim in verse:

Sir John: My dear children, I hope these little adventures will prove the foundation of a lasting happiness, and I have no reason to repent the indulgence I have shown to your Fancies.
Would men when to a riper judgment grown
Kindly Forgive the Follies once their own,
The Name of Parent children would revere
And view with kindness when not forc’d by Fear
(Halsband and Grundy [eds], 1993: 379)

Lady Mary had been writing poetry and retelling stories from Ovid in verse from an early age (Oakley Brown, 2006: 145) and so would find it very easy to adapt her thought into an epigrammatic verse of this nature written in the style of the time. There is nothing in Sir John’s prose that does not synthesise with Marivaux’s portrayal of an indulgent father. What makes the intervention interesting is more to do with the foregrounding of the concept of a parent’s indulgence towards his child and the moralistic couplets that follow. The fact that Lady Mary experienced at first hand intransigence from her father that affected her relationship both with him and with her much loved brother leads one to think that her own experience may have been the prompt for the change. Here is an opportunity at the end of the play to say something meaningful that the audience might remember and to make the audience think about the consequences of the customs of society.

Through her translation of Marivaux, Lady Mary took the opportunity to practise her creative talents in a way which could bring no censure. The ideas were not hers, but Marivaux’s in translation. However, we have seen how she subtly changed the emphasis in places to highlight ideas close to her own thinking and experience. The skill of the translator in identifying where the comedy might fit the English dramatic convention of Restoration comedy and the English poetic convention of satire underpins the success of the work. The naturalisation of the dialogue, the rounding of the characters, the more sympathetic treatment of the brother, all show the craft of the playwright as well as the
translator and presumably gave the same satisfaction to Lady Mary’s creative talents as if she had been the creator of the play. Her position in society and the social conventions that excluded her from writing publicly under her own name nevertheless enabled her to add her own persona and female perspective to the subject matter.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Play Texts


Works Cited


NOTES

1. This situation seems to have been more marked in English society than elsewhere in Europe as Lady Mary relates in a letter to a friend. While she was living in Italy, the Cardinal Guerini, who visited her socially quite often and came to know her quite well, requested her published works for the library in a college he was founding and even sent his chaplain to collect them. The chaplain was unable to believe that such a collection did not exist and seemed to think that Lady Montagu was snubbing the Cardinal by not donating the books (Melville, 2004 [1925]: 192).

2. This event, coupled with her own serious illness two years later with the same disease, made her a firm believer in inoculation. She wrote an account of inoculation in an anonymous article and reflected on the possible loss of her looks from scarring in a poem called “Flavia”, written in 1716 but not printed until much later in 1747.

3. I am indebted to Isobel Grundy for reminding me that there are also Bellindas in plays or stories by Sir John Vanbrugh, Mary Pix, Eliza Hayward and in the Spectator, so that it is almost a generic name for a heroine. (personal communication 21.11.08)


ABSTRACTS

This article examines the translation by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) of Marivaux’s Le Jeu de l’amour et du hasard, in order to establish whether the process could be analysed in feminist terms and therefore described as a gender issue, or whether the translation is nothing more than a free translation that happened to offer the translator the opportunity to reflect on her own situation. Lady Mary was a writer, poet and translator in what was then very much a man’s world and translated the play more as an intellectual exercise than for presentation or publication. Interestingly she takes a slightly different view of the subject matter from the original playwright and her translation strategies reflect her own position with regard to love, gender relationships and the situation of women at the time. Are the alterations made during the process of translation a result of her own life experiences or are they a reflection of a gender-
related perspective? Are they a conscious attempt to affirm a feminine viewpoint through translation? And is that viewpoint specifically female or specifically English or both?

Cet article examine la traduction par Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) de la pièce de Marivaux, *Le Jeu de l’amour et du hasard*, afin de déterminer si la traduction relève d’un projet qui pourrait être analysé en termes féministes, et donc de « genre », ou s’il s’agit d’une traduction libre sans autre but que celui d’offrir à la traductrice l’occasion de refléter, dans une œuvre théâtrale, et donc de façon indirecte, sa propre situation. Lady Mary était auteure, poète et traductrice à une époque et dans un monde où les hommes réglaient tout, et elle a traduit la pièce de Marivaux plus comme exercice intellectuel que pour la scène ou la publication. Il est intéressant de noter qu’elle adopte un point de vue légèrement différent des thèmes du dramaturge original et que ses stratégies reflètent ses propres opinions à l’égard de l’amour, des relations entre les genres et de la place des femmes dans la société de cette époque. Les changements effectués pendant le processus de la traduction sont-ils le résultat de ses propres expériences ou reflètent-ils une perspective « genrée » ? Sont-ils une tentative consciente d’affirmer un point de vue féminin par la traduction ? Et ce point de vue vient-il d’être femme, d’être anglaise, ou des deux à la fois ?

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