Translating the “Covered Bridges” in Barbara Kingsolver’s Short Stories

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The recurring bridge motif in Kingsolver’s short stories reveals implicit connections from one story to another within the collection as well as how those intratextual bridges extend to the many intertextual ones. Indeed, in the story “Blueprints,” the bridge-building character called Walter Whitman Smith evokes the name of the transcendentalist poet, Walt Whitman. Moreover, Whitman and his bridge reappear in the next story, as the reader crosses the paratextual threshold of the title “Covered Bridges” and meets a narrator who claims to be fond of Walt Whitman’s poetry. The story title and the symbol of the bridge thus function metatextually, so as to point to the run-on-lines—or rather the run-under-lines—from one text to another.

Drawing from my experience in translating Barbara Kingsolver’s stories, I will focus on the issues at stake when her palimpsest narratives come to be rewritten in French. Evermore dependent on implicit strategies of meaning, the condensed form of the short story genre requires textual concentration, and thus heightens the difficulties encountered in the translating process. Problematically, the translator runs the risk of leaving out or of adding meaning to the original text, according to the personal encyclopedia with which (s)he deciphers Kingsolver’s somewhat cryptic writing. The translator will indeed consciously recover only the intertextual bridges (s)he will have personally discovered. Consequently, (s)he might choose to uncover references deemed too implicit, or conversely, cover them up for lack of spotting them in the original text. In my analysis of implicit layers of hypotextuality in Homeland and Other Stories, I will refer to the translation by Michèle Lévy-Bram published in 2004 under the title Une île sous le vent, which significantly illustrates the trickiness of Kingsolver’s deceptively smooth writing. I will also refer to my own translations, as well as, occasionally, to my on-going and fascinating exchanges with Barbara Kingsolver herself, who has cast precious light on my interpretation of her work. In a threefold study, I will analyze how the “covered bridges”
in Kingsolver’s stories can lead the translator to simply recover the original intertextuality, to cover it up, or to uncover—and even discover—links to other writings.

**Recovering the “Covered Bridges” in Barbara Kingsolver’s Stories**

3 Intertextual references are at times so self-evident that they hardly represent any difficulty for the translator. When a writer’s name, for instance, is brought into the narrative, the translator may simply keep it as such, as happens with Kingsolver’s overt references to the universally known Jung, Nietzsche, and Freud. As for Whitman’s character in “Blueprints,” it shows how Kingsolver often resorts to onomastics to form hybrid fictional patronymics that read as bridges to other writing: “Of all things, he’s changing his name: it’s Walter Whitman Smith, and he’s legally dropping the Walter, which he doesn’t use anyway.” (BK: 30) In such a case, simply preserving the intertextual name in the translation should save its referential quality.

4 Kingsolver sometimes quotes from texts by other writers, as for example in “Blueprints” (Q1). In MLB, problematically, the swamp symbolism and the intertextual link with Weldon Johnson’s creation poem are lost in translation. Here, for once, the translator has included a footnote after Lydia’s family name (Bogtree). Only, MLB gives an encyclopaedic definition of the tree: “Arbre ombrotrophe, qui pousse dans les marais,” instead of translating bog and tree to make clear the pun on Lydia’s name, as in Chêne des marais ou littéralement arbre-des-marais, ou encore arbre embourbé. MLB altogether omits the two sentences that are to draw attention to the synonymy between Lydia’s name and the poem (Bogtree/cypress swamp) so as to insist on the creation paradigm arising from Johnson’s poem. The quotation from the poem in MLB is moreover truncated, leaving out the cypress tree, “Blacker than a hundred midnight [sic] down… the swamp…” and offering no translation for the French reader to ponder over the interaction between these lines and their co-text. The way Lydia thinks of her name in MLB evokes just a tree growing by a pond instead of a swamp. Finally, when Lydia tells her mother “I’ve always been a Bogtree and always will, don’t blame me,” I believe this is supposed to express what Lydia feels is a necessity, not what she wilfully wishes for. Hence the ending when Lydia has a revelation of free choice and metaphorically disengages from the swamp in which she believed herself bogged. Misinterpreting the epistemic modal **will**, MLB translates: “J’ai toujours été une Bogtree et je tiens à le rester [...].”

5 The intertextuality in this passage is originally explicit enough for the curious reader to feel tempted to refer to Johnson’s poem. It seems unlikely however—from the lack of transparency of the hypertext in MLB—that a French reader would get any of the imagery. The story implicitly feeds on the Romantic symbol of the swamp as a kind of athanor, purifying common material and transmuting it into quintessential matter. The swamp in Kingsolver’s story indeed recalls its function in Romantic poetry as the locus for the poet’s revelation. In the last tableau Kingsolver creates a beautiful scene in which the broken communication between the two characters is finally mended (Q2). Whitman here subverts the Romantic symbol of the swan. He offers an image of self-re-creation, or of the Romantic poet’s rebirth, as evoked by the charade of the swan dive. His “shaking his head ‘no’” signifies his refusal to sing the last song of the poet before he dies. When the story was first published in *Mademoiselle* in May 1989, its title was “The Lost Language
of Love,” evoking Walt Whitman’s poem, “Proud Music of the Storm,” in which the poet hears “the wailing song / Song of lost love—torch of youth and life quenched in despair, / Song of the dying swan.” In MLB, this last tableau acquires a meaning antagonistic to the original. MLB depicts Whitman in a negative light and misses the sublime, ethereal quality of the final scene. In MLB the translation of swan dive by le mouvement du cygne qui plonge deprives the scene of some of its meaning. Of course, the danger in translating swan dive by saut de l’ange lies in losing the swan clue which draws the bridge between the story and Romantic poetry. If authorized by the publishers, the translator could insert a footnote specifying that the English swan dive literally means le plongeon du cygne so as to suggest the swan riddle contained in the original. As epitomized here, Kingsolver’s intertextual writing rests on the implicit value of the slightest, yet significant detail—a golden rule for the modern short story writer, and a rule, first championed by Chekhov, that may prove highly challenging for the translator.

The transcendentalism woven into many of Kingsolver’s stories provides essential clues for paradigmatic readings. Behind the persona of the narrator in “Covered Bridges” (Q3)—a mystic biology teacher—the American reader could recognize Kingsolver herself, with her training in evolutionary biology and ecology, and her deep mysticism grounded in the contemplation of Nature. Hence the frequent echoes of Emerson, whose name is given to one of the secondary characters: “Did you know that Ron Emerson and Gracie are separated?” she asked” (BK, “Covered Bridges”: 51) and of the poet and philosopher’s essay “Nature”: “In the woods we return to reason and faith. The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged.” (Emerson, “Nature”: 6) Kingsolver’s short story indeed reveres Emerson’s writings on symbolism: it essentially revolves around the leitmotif of the narrator’s purple eggplants, which are infused with dense, symbolical meaning. In the description of the fruit and of the transcending vision the narrator has of his wife Lena, the purple color he dwells on traditionally symbolizes temperance, wisdom and revelation. As for the eggplant, the oxymoronic name of the vegetable (egg + plant) makes it implode with the notion of creation. The revitalized dead metaphor functions as a leitmotif connecting all the implicit threads of the text. Although “Covered Bridges” might at first read as a story of aborted creation, the symbolical and intertextual networks woven into the fabric of the text show the characters in the light of Nietzschean superheroes, who recreate themselves in full cognizance of their possibilities. The purple eggplants thus represent a tricky challenge for the translator. First, the color symbolism together with the actual reality of the eggplant’s color call for violet as a translation of purple, instead of pourpre, chosen by MLB (Q4). Second, the translator might include a footnote after the first occurrence of the word eggplant indicating that Kingsolver has used the American word for aubergine, literally meaning plante-œuf. Only thus can the reader grasp the full implications of the highly suggestive, last sentence of the story: “I pulled Lena into my arms and held her tightly, thinking of strange things: of diatomaceous earth and insects and the choices we make, and of eggplants, purple and bright in the sun.” (BK: 63)

The translator has to acknowledge Kingsolver’s use of symbolism and mythopoetic writing. When Lena is told for instance: “Your eyes are exactly the color of lapis lazuli,” and the narrator adds that the stone “matched like a third eye” (BK, “Blueprints”: 49), the reader may sense the underlying reference to the symbolic value of the semi-precious stone. Lapis lazuli is indeed associated with the third-eye chakra, or the sixth chakra,
where one is said to attain clear-sightedness, wisdom and inner knowledge. Whereas Lena originally ponders over the stone-matching color of her eyes ("'Really,' Lena said. "That blue.'", BK: 50), thus inviting the reader to do likewise, MLB dismisses the importance of the stone passage: "Bleu, c’est bleu, et c’est marre.’ dit Lena." (MLB: 59) MLB offers many such examples of how the translator covers up intertextual bridges, which become irrecoverable, as with the title "Toxique" in MLB, concealing the original reverberation of the paratext "Covered Bridges."

Covering Up the “Covered Bridges” in Barbara Kingsolver’s Stories

MLB sometimes takes the further liberty of transmuting intertextuality altogether. In “Stone Dreams” the Biblical reference to Jezebel is translated as Messaline (Q5) which carries a different meaning from the better-known Jezebel. Jezebel is condemned by the patriarchs for worshipping false idols, and it is meaningful that she should embody lust and sin according to the authority of the wrathful God from the Old Testament. Significantly, the protagonist’s mother has originally christened her Diana, branding her with a mythical image of chastity, but later associates her with Jezebel when aware of Diana’s precocious sexuality. Besides, the story reveals how Diana has been paralyzed by the moral standards imposed upon her by the representatives of patriarchy. These include her forbidding mother, who has tragically been moulded by the male-dominated rules of Judeo-Christian morality, and is therefore referred to as policewoman of my adolescence and Mother. The dialogic irony worked into the story moreover feeds on women’s reclaiming of their power over discourse, as implied in the comparison between Julie the linguist and Margaret Mead (Q6), whose famous studies were widely taken over by feminists so as to protest against the roles imposed on women according to their gender. The reference to the ethnologist’s studies thus calls for the deconstruction of language so as to reveal—and contest—the social construction of gender stereotypes.

The implied author thus paves the way for a subversion of the myth of Lot’s wife (Q7). The hypotext is left implicit in Kingsolver’s story, although quite easily retrievable. The echo relies on the exact borrowing of phrases from the Bible: “But Lot’s wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.” (Genesis, 19: 26) To be faithful to the writer’s strategy, the translator may simply keep the same degree of implicitness, and likewise echo the language from Genesis. However, the number of French versions of the Bible should provide an incentive to assess the full resonance of Kingsolver’s original use of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorra episode, so as to be faithful to the reasons why the author herself has elected one of many versions of the English Bible. For, in fact, the syncretic ending of the story additionally draws on the awe-inspiring sandstone rock monument in Canyon de Chelly, in Arizona, called Spider Rock, which consists of two megaliths shooting up into the sky, standing erect and alone in the middle of the desert canyon (Q8). In Navajo mythology, Spider Rock is revered as the home of Spider Woman, the Primal Goddess who has thought and sung the world into being, and who has taught the Navajo how to weave. When I asked Barbara Kingsolver, she confirmed this hypertext: “You’re right about Spider Woman—I’ve always been enraptured with her symbolism in mythology, and I included Spider Rock as a reference to the female aptitude for creating new successes out of old failures.” (Dec. 18, 2003) In the end, the human and mineral thus fuse together so as to delineate the figure of the implied author herself, interweaving the
texts from various cultures in an ever-new, creative way. This pictorial hypertextuality might therefore in itself justify translating pillars of salt by colonnes de sel, better apt to describe the mythical landscape than the statue de sel MLB has opted for. Kingsolver’s multicultural narrative indeed debunks images of a human-like God, favoring instead the picture of a non-human Nature-Goddess or Mother Earth Creator. Not only does Spider Rock actually resemble a pillar more than a statue, the word pillar, or colonne, moreover evokes natural monuments rather than man-made and man-shaped art as with the word statue. Eventually, “Stone Dreams” reads as the rebirth of a woman to her initial vocation as a poet (Q9). As signified by her evolution from narrated I to narrating I, Diana gradually reclaims her creative imagination. Hence the surrealistical ending suggesting Diana’s liberated vision, and again twisting the myth of Lot’s wife. The personifying oxymoron stone limbs—somewhat neutralized in MLB by des branches de pierre (Q8)—points to the human essence of the petrified forest in Diana’s narrative, so that the cathartic crashing of the forest metaphorically represents the crumbling of the formerly petrified Diana. The oxymoron in the source-text would therefore better translate to membres de pierre, thus keeping the same puzzling association between human and mineral.

This last example moreover shows how pictorial intertextuality requires knowledge of the landscapes and places Kingsolver brings into her fiction. Another monument of Southwestern American culture misrepresented in MLB’s version of the stories is the Petrified Forest National Park. MLB fails to represent the fragmented landscape described by Diana in “Stone Dreams” (Q10). The pile of broken firewood in MLB makes for quite a different scenery than that of the Petrified Forest, so that try as he might, the French reader cannot get from the text a clear picture of the place. MLB moreover annihilates much of the irony in the preposterous signs addressed to the tourists and consequently fails to highlight the loss of landmarks typical of postmodern society, so saturated with signs it can no longer convey any clear meaning.

Kingsolver’s subtle use of typography also signals the multiplicity of meanings of the petrified forest, capitalized when referring to the National Park and, on the contrary, written without capital letters when used as a metaphor. As the earlier references to Freud and Jung suggest, Diana’s narrative “slips,” so that her exploration of the forest of [her] dreams can read literally and thus betrays the extended metaphor for that of her sedimented unconscious (Q11). MLB incidentally does not reproduce the meaningful typography, but systematically capitalizes the petrified forest. Additionally, instead of rendering Diana’s slip of the tongue (la forêt de mes rêves) MLB deletes the pun: il nous sembla approprié qu’il m’aïdât à réaliser mon rêve de gosse.

Similarly, the apocalyptic ending echoes an earlier passage parodying the Biblical stories of a vengeful God, but again feeding on double-entendre (Q12). The narrative thus implicitly underlines the “vacuum” on which the couple is built. The same pun can be kept in French by faithfully translating the comparison to: “[...] et la maison qui implose sur elle-même à la manière d’une ampoule électrique dont le vide à l’intérieur est dérangé.” (BM). Problematically, MLB’s misreading of the word vacuum—mistaking it for a vacuum cleaner—destroys the subtle subtext and leads MLB to a rather shameful mistranslation: “[...] bref, la maison entière implosant comme une ampoule électrique sous l’effet d’un faux contact dans l’aspirateur.” (MLB: 104)

Ironically, one of the hypotexts MLB misses is an autograph one, constructed by the implied author so as to provide the reader with a metatextual map of reading (Q13). MLB does not copy the significant italics in “pause and reflect”. Her lengthening out to
interrompre son cours et réfléchir anchors the actions within the diegetic situation of the teacher, making it doubtful the reader will perceive the auto-referentiality of the passage and the ironic injunction calling his attention to the symbolic value of the text. The implied author furthermore reappears in the guise of a guide to the Petrified Forest who hands the couple a brochure indicating how to explore the site (Q14). Gradually, the Petrified Forest turns into a metaphor for the text itself, which, like the park, is precisely divided into nine sections, and contains nine stops materialized on the page by way of typographical blanks. Unfortunately, this intratextual game is again erased in MLB, which neither repeats the word brochure (thus destroying the covered bridge between the two sections of the story), nor respects the blanks and the nine sections in the paratextual layout. King solver's text indeed suggests that following the too obvious trails, or linear reading, will only lead the reader to the same disappointment as the characters, incapable of finding the right perspective—or vista as the text has it—giving onto the real petrified forest (Q15). The real petrified forest, or the real text, as we may infer from the missing capitals, will only appear to the reader probing between the lines, looking for covered bridges and paradigmatic readings. Again, MLB’s systematic use of capitals erases the underlying metatextual narrative. Her translation of vista into panorama additionally hinders the autoreferential pun, better said by point de vue or perspective (BM).

Another intertextual thread appears in the name of Campbell referring to a town in the diegesis of “Extinctions”, while building a bridge to Joseph Campbell’s writings, whose influence Kingsolver wilfully admits. We may retrieve the American mythographer’s studies from the hypotexts in many of her stories, reflected for instance in Kingsolver’s variations on the garden metaphor, or her vision of the cosmos. The sudden crumbling of the prison wall of the Ego is a recurrent theme throughout the collection (i.e. Jericha’s name, the stone gate, garden, and convent walls in “Jump-Up Day,” the last vision in “Stone Dreams,” etc.). MLB’s failure to grasp the vision of the human psyche that emanates from the stories leads to a complete misinterpretation of a crucial passage in “Covered Bridges.” The characters’ discourse obliquely refers to the passage from Ego to Self in Jung and Campbell’s studies of the psyche, or the phenomenon of revelation as described by Nabokov (Q16). The delusory idea of an Individual Ego entirely separate from a larger Self is implicitly carved into the dialogue between the couple in “Covered Bridges” (Q17). MLB rewrites the discourse in a spirit totally contrary to the original passage. Her focus on money makes for quite a puzzling addition. MLB here invents a pun that conflicts with the transcendental value embodied by the characters in Kingsolver’s story. MLB casts a very different light onto them as she associates them with materialistic concerns. These examples show how, for all their apparent simplicity, Kingsolver’s texts are in depth more “writerly” than “readerly”4 and consequently call for a constant deciphering of her cryptic structures.

Un-covering and Dis-covering Intertextual Bridges in Kingsolver’s Stories

Elaborating on implicit meanings, MLB at times gives the impression that the writer thinks quite poorly of her readers as, for example, with the pun on Peter’s name (Q18). In doing so, MLB problematically discards the very condition of the short story, since implicitness is indeed inherent to the genre, inviting the reader to participate. Tragically enough, MLB tries to uncover a number of intertextual bridges, but tends to invent or
give inaccurate references. In trying to guide the reader more than the source-text does, MLB will misquote or distort the original allusion. In “Homeland” for example, MLB has it that Black Beauty is a female horse and transforms the strong, black stallion of the story into a little mare. The first mention of Anansi the Spider receives a similar addition in the translation, unfortunately getting the country of origin of the tale wrong (Q19). In fact, the tale has its roots not in the Ivory Coast as MLB’s translation has it, but in an Ashanti legend first told in Ghana.

16 The title “Vaudou” in MLB for the enigmatic title “Jump-Up Day” raises many problems. First of all, Voodoo is often associated in Western people’s minds with malevolent sorcery. Second, Voodoo is mostly practiced in Haïti, and was brought with the Dahomeyans from Benin, while Obeah was mostly developed in Jamaica, St. Lucia and Trinidad-Tobago and was brought from Ghana by the Ashanti. The terms la fête du Jump-up, Obeah and Obeahman translate very simply since these are the expressions also used in French to refer to the Carnival and religion in St. Lucia, at one point a French colony. Like Obeah, which has received influences from Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, the syncretic story serves as an emblem of multiculturalism. Voodoo is therefore inappropriate both historically and symbolically.

17 As the Jump-up directs Jericha’s attention to the silk-cotton tree (Q20), MLB adds to his cue L’arbre de Dieu, ou l’arbre du Diable. When the translator introduces God and the Devil, this invention goes against what Benedict precisely stands for. The Obeah Man brings Jericha to a non-dualistic perception of things and he embodies the reconciliation of opposites: “‘That medicine is bad.’ / ‘I want you to study something.’ The Obeah Man looked at her. ‘Nothing is ever all good or all bad. Maybe the sisters tell you that, and the doctor, but it isn’t so.’” (BK, “Jump-Up Day”: 197) The highly pregnant synaesthesia in the central trance passage that follows conveys Jericha’s sensations through the initiation rite and her encounter with the numinous. The suggestive name silk-cotton tree would therefore better benefit from a footnote (or an addition in the Obeahman’s speech) giving the literal meaning of silk cotton as coton de soie or coton soyeux for kapok.

18 As for the title “La ‘rouge’” for “Why I am a Danger to the Public,” it creates an intertextual link with communism, which is not at all what the protagonist stands for. The use of inverted commas—frequent in MLB—makes the writing seem clumsy. Also, in English, the narrator’s voice intermingles with that of the persona of the author, implied in the writing and in the creation of Vicky Morales as first-person story-teller. The deictic I in the title also designates the implied author, underlining the moral victory of the story over the corruption it depicts. Obliquely, the title indeed reads as an ironic reference to Kingsolver’s ideological stances, all the more in America where she has been criticized for the political activity inseparable from her writing. The several layers of irony in the title could very simply translate into Pourquoi je suis un danger public. Besides, Kingsolver’s title re-uses the style of “Why I live at the P.O.,” by Eudora Welty—a source of inspiration Kingsolver likes to acknowledge—which further enhances the need to stay close to the original so that a reader familiar with Welty’s writing might spot the echo.

19 When translating Bugs Bunny’s landmark expression, “What’s up, Doc?” (BK: 32), MLB makes up “Kesskispasse Doc?” (MLB: 41), instead of using the words pronounced by the cartoon character in the French version broadcasted on TV, “Quoi de neuf, Docteur?”. MLB is moreover impervious to the fact the abbreviation Doc is not used in French, and generally seems at a loss to translate landmarks of American culture. For example, MLB’s reading of the humorous nicknames Lydia gives the previous tenants shows the
translator’s ignorance of American clichés (Q21). According to MLB then, those characters’ actual names are Betty Crocker and Paul Bunyan. Conversely, MLB sometimes perceives references to clichés of American culture where there are none, as for the vacuum cleaner example quoted above, or when Lydia recalls “Their old friends in Sacramento had gone through names like Kleenex” (BK, “Blueprints”: 30). Instead of recognizing the English equivalent for the idiomatic changer de ... comme de chemise, MLB misinterprets the value of like and mistranslates “De vieux amis de Sacramento ont enduré l’authentique malédiction de s’appeler Kleenex” (MLB: 39). Such misunderstandings of English expressions lead MLB to misconstrue the irony in the source-text. Kingsolver here mocks characters changing names and sometimes choosing the most preposterous names for themselves or their children (Tofu, Bean, Amaranth). In MLB, we almost feel sympathetic towards the characters’ ill luck, instead of deriding their excessive eccentricities.

On the other hand, the reader’s interpretive hypotheses may lead to extrapolation when his antennae for the writerly are excessively solicited. If the metatextual allusion to James Joyce’s modernist short story seems to verify itself from the very name (Miss Joyce) of a secondary character in “Quality Time” (Q22), there are other instances where the presence of a literary allusion is more open to question. The short story specialist, for instance, might read “Homeland” in the light of an oblique, architextual reference to Nadine Gordimer’s essay on the art of the short story entitled “The Flash of the Fireflies” (Q23 and 24). With no further proof for this interpretation than Kingsolver’s acknowledged familiarity with Gordimer’s work, it is tempting to hear the latter’s assessment of the short story, inherently truer to whatever can be grasped of “human life, where contact is more like the flash of fireflies, in and out, now here, now there, in darkness.” (Gordimer, 1994: 264) The hypertextual connection seems to reappear at other times in the story, but as Barbara Kingsolver herself once said to me, “if you work hard enough you can connect anything!” so that the translator’s task can be seen as recovering the same potential for hypertextuality, while refraining from erasing, or adding any textual strata. The narrator’s voice in “Stone Dreams” for instance seems to plagiarize Nabokov’s story “The Passenger,” to the extent that I was convinced this hypertextuality was the key to “the artificial distance between the passenger and the passage” in Peter’s seemingly strange declaration (Q25 and 26). “Stone Dreams” being highly reminiscent of the way Nabokov constantly plays hide-and-seek with his reader, the number of tangible similarities between the two stories indeed makes for a parody of Nabokov’s autoreferential writing. However, when I asked her, Barbara Kingsolver could not remember having read that precise story by Nabokov, although she does recall having read much of his writing. Should the translator then try his best to allow the French reader to draw the same connections that arise in English, regardless of the author’s intentionality? If so, implicit textual quotations give rise to a further complication in that the hypotext might have already been translated. It may then be necessary to refer to the publicly available translation so as to provide the reader with the means to recognize the quotation or allusion. Hence my translation, [une distance artificielle entre] le voyage et le voyageur—and not le passage et le passager—in order to allow for the same echo to Nabokov’s story, entitled “Le Voyageur” in French.

Besides, as a colleague once pointed out to me, the title “Stone Dreams” reads as if taken from Baudelaire’s sonnet “La Beauté”: “Je suis belle, ô mortels! Comme un rêve de pierre [...].” Although I was at first puzzled by this possibly new hypotext, it then struck me that
the author must have included the reference partly because of a shared dream between
the two of a perfect "petit poème en prose" (Q27), toward which Kingsolver's stories,
poetry and essays, all tend. Although it is debatable how much intertextual writing
happens subconsciously, Barbara Kingsolver denied having ever meant such an allusion
to Baudelaire. It would nonetheless seem fair to let other French readers find the same
pleasure in the discovery of a bridge leading to Baudelaire's poetry, inasmuch as "Stone
Dreams" easily translates to "Rêves de pierre" thus recovering the intertextuality,
without uncovering it any further. On the contrary, "Songes de pierre" in MLB definitely
covers the potential hypotext.

Kingsolver's sometimes curious names for her characters also deserve special attention.
In "Homeland" for instance, Great Mam (Q28) could very well translate to Grand-mère,
Grande-mère or to Grand-maman. I believe Green Leaf is supposed to embody the way of the
American Indian grandmothers, and that her name obliquely alludes to the Great Mother
Goddess in Indian mythology. The nickname Bisy, short for Bisaïeule, given to Green Leaf
in MLB makes it impossible to read Great Mam as a spokesperson for the Indian figure of
the Great Mother, also referred to as La Grande Mère in French. In addition, it seems rather
unlikely anyone would ever call his or her great-grandmother Bisaïeule, even in the 50's.
The same phenomenon occurs when MLB translates Gro Maman, in "Jump-Up Day," by
Grosse-Maman which is just an invention (Q29). Gro Maman is Patois, and can be used as
such both in English and French to refer to the African serpent Goddess. Had the
translator wanted to translate her name, she could again have chosen Grand-maman or La
Grande Mère, which would be more accurate in terms of mythical intertextuality, and
intratextuality.

Last but not least, the title "Une île sous le vent" chosen for the French collection creates
an unsettling reference to the name given to the Caribbean islands of Aruba, Curaçao and
Bonaire, to part of the French Reunion Island, and other islands in French Polynesia,
precisely referred to as "les îles" or "l'île sous le vent." This introduces confusion because
of the story taking place in St. Lucia, which may very well trouble the reader's
identification of which island has been chosen for what purpose and symbolical meaning.
Even worse, one might suspect the author of flimsy cultural references. The title "Une île
sous le vent" for the story "Islands on the Moon" moreover dismisses the central
metaphor from which most of the meaning comes (Q30). This title dispels the sense of
mystery, the poetry, and cognitive dissonance in the originally oxymoronic title,
providing a metaphor for isolation as an illusion. Magda tells her daughter: "We're like
islands on the moon," which Annemarie challenges, "There's no water on the moon," and
Magda insists, "That's what I mean. A person could walk from one to the other if they just
decided to do it" (BK: 146). The metaphor goes together, I believe, with an implicit
intratextual reference to Matisse's painting "The Dance" (Q31), representing—like
pregnant Annemarie and Magda in the end (Q32)—a woman reaching out to catch her
fellow dancer's hand so as to close up the joyous merry-go-round of life formed by a
group of dancing women. Both Matisse's painting and Kingsolver's metaphor of the
islands on the moon invite the art viewer to step into the circle, or the reader to bridge
the gaps, thus taking part in the creation process, or in the merry-go-round uniting
writers, readers, and, hopefully, translators.

Kingsolver's fiction often weaves together texts and myths from various origins, trying to
create a multicultural, syncretic vision of the world. As a writer, she believes in literature
as a way to raise awareness, and feels very deeply about scientific accuracy in fiction:
[Fiction must] be nested in truth. The latter I mean literally; I can't abide fiction that fails to get its facts straight. I've tossed aside stories because of botched Spanish or French phrases uttered by putative native speakers who were not supposed to be toddlers or illiterates. More often, I've stopped reading books in which birds sang on the wrong continents or full moons appeared two weeks apart. [...] In any case people learn from what they read, they trust in words, and this is not a responsibility to take lightly. Scientific illiteracy is a problem I care about [...].

(Kingsolver, 2002: 213)

25 If covering or uncovering intertextuality falls to the author, the readers are entrusted with discovering it, while the translator will hopefully refrain from bringing his discoveries to the surface, but will instead focus on the discrete and faithful recovery of the more or less covered intertextual bridges (s)he has perceived and researched.

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

NOTES

1. My PhD thesis, entitled “La nouvelle-oxymore de Barbara Kingsolver : la révélation des écritures et l’écriture des révélations”, was defended at the University of Toulouse-le-Mirail, in presence of the author, on October 1st 2005. Previously to the publication of Michèle Lévy-Bram’s translation, I had translated Barbara Kingsolver’s collection Homeland and Other Stories, as well as two short stories published separately and which provide sequels to two of the stories in the collection. These translations are included in my doctorate as an annex to my thesis. The present article was in fact born from a longer study of the translation by Michèle Lévy-Bram, written for Barbara Kingsolver.

2. I will respectively refer to the three versions by using the initials of the writer or the translator’s name: BK for Barbara Kingsolver, MLB for Michèle Lévy-Bram and BM for Bénédicte Meillon. Throughout this article, I will be using the symbol Q for quote, followed by a number corresponding to the order in which they appear in the Fascicule des textes de référence.

3. Cf David Gergen interview.

4. I am here using the terminology coined by Roland Barthes so as to differentiate between the easily accessible text, the “readerly” (“le lisible”) and the “writerly” (“le scriptible”) which requires more effort on the part of the reader to reconstruct the hidden meaning(s) of a text.

5. Cf Donna Perry interview.

6. This hypothesis in no way seemed farfetched in the light of Kingsolver’s broad literary culture and her own confession regarding intertextuality, “Oh! I include everything. That’s why it’s so hard for me to write short stories. I just keep wanting to throw more stuff in, it’s hard for me to rein myself in! […] There’s always an imprint. I think everything I’ve ever known, everything I’ve ever read—including the Bible, including Chaos theories—leaves its imprint on my work. Some of it is probably subconscious but once it’s pointed out I say ‘Oh yeah, yeah, that’s there.’” (Meillon Interview)

RÉSUMÉS

Le titre de l'article a été inspiré par le motif du pont dans les nouvelles de Barbara Kingsolver, motif qui sert à révéler les liens implicites d'une histoire à une autre à l'intérieur même du recueil, et indique que ces ponts intratextuels rejoignent les nombreux ponts intertextuels. Les récits palimpsestes de Kingsolver dépendent étroitement de ces « ponts couverts » (du titre de l'une des nouvelles « Covered Bridges ») et ce d'autant plus lorsqu'il s'agit de la forme brève de la nouvelle. De façon problématique, c'est en fonction de son encyclopédie personnelle et de sa capacité, en tant que lecteur, à découvrir les structures hybrides tissées dans la toile du texte que...
le traducteur saura, ou non, recouvrer ces « ponts couverts ». Si le lecteur risque de sous- ou sur-interpréter l’original, il arrive que le traducteur découvre (cette fois-ci au sens de mettre à nu ou dévoiler) les références jugées par lui trop implicites, ou pire encore, qu’il les recouvre, à défaut de les avoir perçues dans l’original. M’appuyant sur mon analyse et mes traductions des nouvelles de Barbara Kingsolver et les comparant avec la traduction publiée en mai 2004, je voudrais démontrer dans cet article que le rôle du traducteur se joue dans le recouvrement le plus discret et le plus fidèle possible des ponts intertextuels plus ou moins couverts qu’il aura repérés et pour lesquels il aura effectué des recherches.

The title of this paper was prompted by the bridge motif in Barbara Kingsolver’s short stories, a motif revealing implicit connections from one story to another within the collection, and showing how those intratextual bridges extend to the many intertextual ones. Kingsolver’s palimpsest narratives strongly depend on these “Covered Bridges”—indeed one of the story titles—all the more so in the case of very brief short stories. Problematically, the translator’s recovery of these “covered bridges” will depend on his/her personal encyclopaedia, and his/her capability to discover the hybrid structures woven into the fabric of the text. While the reader’s interpretation may tend to leave out or add meaning to the original, the translator sometimes chooses to clarify references he might deem too implicit, or (what could be worse) covers them up after not having spotted them in the original text. Based on my analysis and translation of Barbara Kingsolver’s short stories and a comparison with the recently published translation (2004), this paper argues that the translator’s task lies in the discreet and faithful recovery of the more or less covered, intertextual bridges (s)he perceives and researches.

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