

Feminist Translation: Facing the Challenge of Gendered Language When Translating Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères*

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This summer I aimed to create a translation of Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères* which retains the feminist language and themes of the original. Wittig herself as well as other translators have criticized the previous English translation, published in 1971, for the ways in which the translator changed Wittig's intentional use of gendered language. My goal was therefore to conduct sufficient research on modern theories of feminist translation, in Wittig's feminist theory, in analyses of the original text, and in Wittig's other works to have the context and the perspectives needed to convey the power of the original text in English.

My time during the first four weeks of my fellowship was spent reading and immersing myself in Wittigian literature and feminist translation. I read Wittig's most well known fictional novels (*L'Opoponax*, *Les Guérillères*, *Le Corps lesbien*, *Virgile, non*) as well as her most well known essays on feminist and lesbian issues (*The Straight Mind*, *Dans l'arène ennemi*), and miscellaneous other works by Wittig or related to feminist translation (*Le Voyage sans fin*, *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes*, *Sur les bouts de la langue*, etc.). These readings gave me a sense of Wittig's style of writing, like her experimental syntax, the importance of one central pronoun in each respective novel, and the often unspecified chronological order of her stories. Other readings gave me a sense of what was important to Wittig as a feminist and as a lesbian, like the de-masculinisation or feminisation of the French language, the de-sexualisation of "feminine" bodies, and the ultimate goal to destroy any form of gendered hierarchy by making gender and gendered language obsolete. With this knowledge and these goals in mind, I was able to begin my translating process.

The remaining six weeks were spent both translating and continuing this research. During my translation, my greatest challenge was finding an English equivalent for the central pronoun "*elles*," the plural feminine form of "*they*." This pronoun, used as the subject of the novel, was important in feminizing the text in opposition to the masculine-neutral form of "*they*" which is far more often used to describe groups of people in French. After experimenting with multiple strategies, some inspired by Wittig's other novels, I continued with "*She*," a feminization of the masculine-neutral "*He*" used to describe humanity in general and capitalized as in the "*He/Him*" used for the technically genderless christian God. Other challenges in the translation included words which had been unnecessarily sexualized by the previous translation, words which Wittig invented herself (ex: the animal called a *glénure*, the books of wisdom from which the characters often read called *féminaires*), and wordplay which is made less clear in English (ex: "*femme*" as both woman and wife).

During this fellowship, I was able to understand the feminist perspective of Monique Wittig and use it to translate around one half of the novel with the intention of retaining the themes conveyed by the original text. I plan to continue this work, both research and translation, in an honors project during the academic year.

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