Transgressive Textualities: Translating References to Gender, Sexuality and Corporeality in Nelly Arcan's Putain *and* Paradis, clef en main

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Je veux qu'on m'écoute, qu'on me voie, comme écrivaine.[1]
(Nelly Arcan)

Over the course of her short yet striking oeuvre, Québécoise writer Nelly Arcan (1973-2009) grapples with the transgressive by consistently pushing textual boundaries and engaging with controversial subject matter such as prostitution, incest, sexuality, anorexia, matrophobia and suicide. Daring to say what for a long time remained unsaid in women's writing,[2] Arcan seeks to liberate women from stereotypical frameworks of reference by asserting women's gendered, sexual and corporeal subjectivities in her texts. Such explicit women-centred thematic content connects Arcan to the emerging constellation of women writers such as Catherine Millet, Virginie Despentes and Catherine Breillat, whose writing is characterized by its "meticulous observation of bodies" with an "overwhelming insistence on sexual experience" (Jordan 8). Yet the specificity of Arcan's *écriture au féminin* extends beyond her thematic visualization of women to encompass a linguistic and physical textual inscription of women. A legacy inherited from Québec experimental feminist writers of the late 1970s and early 80s, Arcan visualises women linguistically in her texts in a similar fashion to her literary foremothers such as Nicole

[1] "I want people to hear, to see me, as a woman writer" [my translation]. Nelly Arcan in an interview with Pascale Navarro ("Nelly Arcan: Journal Intime").
[2] While post '68 women's life writing has engaged with issues such as sexuality, sexual desire and corporeality, a marked change in terms of the explicit detail and extreme range of sexual experience depicted has only emerged in Francophone women's writing since the late 1990s.

Brossard, Madeleine Gagnon and Louky Bersianik by exploiting the grammatical gender of the French language to assert women's gendered subjectivity. Furthermore, through her exploitation of the genre of autofiction, Arcan achieves a physical embodiment in her texts. This form of physically visualizing women, or more precisely of visualizing Arcan, the woman, is most notably seen in both her first and final novels. Her debut publication *Putain* (2001) catapulted Arcan into the literary (and media) limelight for the revelation that, like her protagonist, the author had previously worked as a high class prostitute in Montréal at one stage in her life.[3] Similarly Arcan's final novel,[4] *Paradis, clef en main*—a fantastical tale recounting the protagonist's quest for suicide—could be considered retro-actively autofictional since it was completed just days before Arcan took her own life in 2009.

Interestingly, and perhaps precisely because of these autofictional details, only Arcan's debut and final novels appear in English translation, translated as *Whore* (2005) by Bruce Benderson and *Exit* (2011) by David Scott Hamilton respectively. Yet what happens to this woman, Arcan, and the women she so meticulously inscribes, in translation? What happens to Arcan's *écriture au féminin* in translation when she is no longer in control of how women's subjectivities are textually inscribed? Does Arcan continue to embody her texts in translation? Unlike much of the experimental feminist writing emerging from Québec in the 1970s and 80s which was translated by feminist translators such as Barbara Godard, Howard Scott and Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood, who were aware of the importance of a gender conscious translation practice[5], neither Benderson nor Hamilton identifies himself as practicing such techniques. Furthermore, despite the fact that much has been written on feminist translation theory, neither

[3] Nevertheless Arcan makes the stipulation that her texts are written « à côté de la réalité » (Navarro).
[4] Although this was Arcan's final novel, there has since been a posthumous publication of a collection of some of her shorter pieces of writing titled *Burqa de chair* (2011), with a preface by Nancy Huston.
[5] Lotbinière-Harwood describes her feminist translation practice as "a political activity aimed at making language speak for women" (9).

translation shows evidence of engaging with this body of research.[6] Therefore it is my intention here to show that through a lack of ideological collaboration on the importance of visualizing women within the text, the specificity of Arcan's *écriture au féminin* can be read as compromised by translation. Through a close comparative analysis of references to gender, sexuality and corporeality in Arcan's source texts with their translations, I argue that the translation practices employed work counterproductively to obfuscate or even remove the layers of Arcan's textual visualization of women. Thereafter it will be important to consider the textual implications of these translation decisions and their impact upon Arcan's literary reception in the Anglophone context.

The Texts

Published in 2001 with the prestigious Éditions du Seuil, *Putain* is a stream-of-consciousness, confessional narrative offering an introspective view into the life of a prostitute who only ever identifies herself in the novel by her "whore name," Cynthia, a name she appropriates from her dead infant sister. There is no sense of narrative thread with the text being only loosely held together by associations which centre around the inner dimensions of the narrator's psyche such as her reflections on her strained relationship with her mother, the ever-lurking incestuous possibilities suggested by the father-daughter relationship, the haunting remnants of her strict religious upbringing and the all-consuming pressure she feels to conform to an image oriented society. When the narrative does look outwardly it is mostly devoted to detailed descriptions of

[6] To cite but a few examples: Luise von Flotow has proposed the feminist translation strategies of "supplementing," "prefacing and footnoting" and "hijacking" (1991, 1995) which have been further refined by Françoise Massardier-Kenney as "author-centred" and "translator-centred" strategies (58). Feminist translator Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood has written about the feminist intertext and its importance for translators in terms of "gynergizing our memories, our imaginations, our actions" (126); Barbara Godard has coined the term "transformance" in relation to feminist translation practice as "the process of constructing meaning in the activity of transformation, a mode of performance" (90) and Lori Chamberlain has written an elucidating account of the gendered metaphors embedded in the very concept of translation itself (1992).

her intimate exchanges with clients. Aside from the sensationalist attention which surrounded *Putain*, Arcan's debut also earned her nominations for two of France's prestigious literary awards; the Prix Médicis and Prix Femina. Bruce Benderson's translation, *Whore,* appeared in 2005 with Grove Press. Previously, Benderson had translated Virginie Despentes' *Baise-Moi.*[7] Arcan's final novel, *Paradis, clef en main* is a first person narrative of Antoinette Beauchamp who is left a paraplegic after the customised suicide she orders is botched. The narrative shifts between the past and the present recounting the fantastical tale of the many tests she had to undergo to prove herself a worthy candidate, and her anger over her current vegetative existence. Arcan's novel was translated posthumously with Anvil Press by David Scott Hamilton in 2011 as *Exit.*

Translating Gender

Gendered identity plays a central role in *Putain.* In line with Judith Butler's interpretation of gender as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (44), much of the protagonist's derision for other women (including her mother and also herself to a certain extent) stems from her anger over their complicity in emulating and perpetuating a hyper-sexualized form of femininity which she sees as a patriarchal social construction used to control women. For the narrator motherhood poses a threat to this idealized form of femininity, both in Freudian terms in that the birth of a daughter averts the father's sexual attentions from the mother, and in her view of maternity as a source of corporeal

[7] Given the similarly transgressive content of Despentes' novel, a comparative analysis of how Benderson deals with the challenges of translating such extreme depictions of female sexuality would make for an interesting future study.

destruction.[8] In the following examples Arcan employs grammatically gendered language to visualize women in the text and emphasize that it is the narrator's gendered subjectivity which lies at the root of her strained relationship with her mother, highlighting the maternal link as a potentially damaging force for women. In contrast, Arcan's linguistic visualisations of women are omitted in translation:

> moi je suis coupable de la laideur de ma mère et de la mienne aussi, je ne dois plus en contaminer le monde ni la transmettre à une autre qui devra en mourir à son tour (*Putain* 80)
>
> I'm guilty of my mother's ugliness and mine as well, I should stop contaminating the world with it and not transmit it to another who will have to die of it in turn (*Whore* 72)
>
> j'aurais dû dès le début ne plus être une enfant (*Putain* 178)
>
> I would have had not be a child from the start (*Whore* 163)
>
> il ne faut jamais faire mieux que sa mère surtout si elle meurt de sa petitesse, ça pourrait l'achever de se voir surpassée par une enfant dont elle a exigé la compagnie fidèle pendant que le père courait les putains (*Putain* 139)
>
> you must never do better than your mother, especially if she's dying of pettiness, it could end with her seeing herself surpassed by a child whose faithful company she has needed while the father is running after whores (*Whore* 126)

In the first example, Arcan has used the grammatically feminine pronoun "une autre" to highlight that this ugliness (i.e. the de-sexualized post-maternal body), which the narrator is so sensitive about, is passed down only from woman to woman and so the narrator offers this as the reason why she herself should not have a daughter since this would be the way to break the chain and maintain an idealized patriarchal projection of femininity (to which she objects but simultaneously feels unable to escape). In translation, however, the idea of the matrilineal heritage of this ugliness is lost since the translator uses the neutral term "another." Had a more

[8] In the text the narrator states : « c'est trop long, trop charnel, trop de temps à gonfler et à se contracter » (*Putain* 76). The translation reads: "it takes too long, it's too physical, it takes too much time to puff up and contract" (*Whore* 68).

gender-conscious approach been adopted, then the translator could have employed the feminist translation strategy of "supplementing" and added the word "woman" or "girl" to the translation. In the context of feminist translation theory, Luise von Flotow defines supplementing as a translation strategy which constitutes "voluntarist action" ("Contexts, Practices and Theories" 75) on the text. By this she means that the translator creatively intervenes in another part of the text in order to recoup for any losses which may occur during the linguistic transfer due to the linguistic, grammatical or cultural differences in how gender is codified in the two languages. Then, in both the second and third examples, Arcan has feminized the noun "enfant" (where a generic masculine is more commonly used in French to designate a child), highlighting the importance that it is because she is a *female* child that she is held responsible for her mother's demise, since, in the narrator's eyes, it is invariably daughters who turn into these prostitutes who steal away the husband's attention. The translator's use of the gender neutral noun "child" removes Arcan's idea of the cyclical pattern in which the mother is (figuratively) replaced in a sexual capacity by a daughter. What is more, this translation decision also downplays the incest motif which permeates the novel since, ultimately, it is on *her* door that her own father could potentially knock seeking out a prostitute—a truth which both fascinates and haunts the narrator throughout. In all instances, by removing the traces of Arcan's feminization of the nouns, the translator removes the central idea of the corporeal connection between mother and daughter and the importance this has in shaping maternal relationships.

In *Paradis, clef en main* Arcan asserts women's gendered subjectivity through subversive wordplay. In a similar fashion to experimental women writers such as Louky Bersianik and Nicole Brossard, Arcan visualizes women in her text by feminizing conventionally masculine figures. The following examples are all references to the protagonist's mother who becomes

Antoinette's primary care-giver after she is left paralyzed by the botched suicide and so Arcan uses wordplay here to emphasize the importance of the mother's role:

> C'est l'heure de la visite de Dieu la Mère annoncée. (*Paradis* 19)
>
> It's time for the scheduled visit from the Mother of God. (*Exit* 18)
>
> Un bouchon sur l'engloutissement dans Dieu la Mère sans cheveux blancs. (*Paradis* 31)
>
> The bobbing cork that stops me from being completely swallowed up by the Mother of God with no grey hair. (*Exit* 28)
>
> Le retour de la mère Fouettard. (*Paradis* 131)
>
> The Mother of God had returned. (*Exit* 113)
>
> Je tente de me convaincre que son absence n'est qu'une tactique … que l'un de ses fouettages de mère Fouettard visant à m'expulser du nid. (*Paradis* 161)
>
> I'm trying to convince myself that her absence is just some kind of tactic … just another horsewhipping from the Mother of God to force me to leave the corral. (*Exit* 141)

Arcan feminises the masculine figures of Dieu le Père (God the Father) and le Père Fouettard (the Whipping Father[9]) in order to convey the idea of the mother as both a life-source and a figure of authority for the protagonist. Subverting traditional paradigms of masculinized identity was an important part of the feminist writing project for the aforementioned experimental writers which in turn, required their feminist translators "to develop creative methods similar to those of the source-text writers" (von Flotow, *Translation and Gender* 24). Yet, in this translation, despite these two different terms, they are consistently translated in the target text by the "Mother of God." Arcan's subversive feminist play on words is lost since the translator has reconfigured the mother into a recognizable figure from Western theology; Mary, the Mother of God. Relocating the mother to this culturally male-dominant framework of reference means that

[9] Le Père Fouettard is generally regarded as a character who accompanies St Nicholas on 6th December in order to deliver floggings or lumps of coal to the children who behaved badly during the year. In 1930s America this French term was appropriated as Father Flog as a counterpart to Father Christmas.

the mother is no longer the God-figure Arcan imagines but subjugated to a higher force; God, commonly regarded as a masculine force.[10] Furthermore the reference to the mother as a disciplinarian is completely eradicated and with it the Beauvoirian notion of women's assumption of the disciplinary figure as a cathartic expunging of her patriarchal subjugation through violence.[11] Such translation decisions not only negate Arcan's references to women's potential for subjective agency but they also serve to perpetuate fixed patriarchal representations of women.

Translating Sexuality

In relation to her analysis of how sexual terms and references to sexuality in the work of Simone de Beauvoir are translated, Luise von Flotow argues that translating sexuality poses a "*cas limite*" (16) or rather a test for translation, citing self-censorship on the translator's part as well as different target culture sensibilities and traditions, as possible explanations for the "vulgarization," "the systematic masculinization of sexual terms," and "the use of censorship or euphemisms" in the translations of Beauvoir's oeuvre (31). Taking Toril Moi's definition of sexuality as "the interaction between desire and the body" (156) (as von Flotow does), it becomes apparent that Arcan's translators also apply censorship (be it intentional or not) and euphemism to her references to women's sexuality. In *Putain*, very little textual space is devoted to details of the protagonist's sexuality since she rarely conceives of a sexual identity beyond the scope of her prostitution. However, the following example sees the protagonist reminiscing over

[10] Feminist bible translator Joann Haugerud argues that the dominance of masculine-gendered language as well as masculinised imagery in earlier versions of the Bible make it almost impossible for the reader not to imagine God as a man (i).

[11] In *Le Deuxième Sexe* Beauvoir writes: « Une mère qui fouette son enfant ne bat pas seulement l'enfant, en un sens elle ne le bat pas du tout : elle se venge d'un homme, du monde, ou d'elle-même » (327).

her journey into puberty and how the discovery of her sexual self was a catalyst in her emotional estrangement from her father:

> je me raconte des saletés depuis toujours, depuis le jour où mes cheveux ont commencé à foncer, depuis que je n'ai plus voulu m'asseoir sur les genoux de mon père parce que j'étais déjà trop enveloppée de mon sexe, (*Putain* 133)
>
> I've been telling myself stories for a long time, dirty stuff forever, since the day my hair began to darken, since I stopped wanting to sit on my father's knee because I was already lost in a cloud of sex, (*Whore* 121)

Arcan thematically visualizes the protagonist's sexual subjectivity here by detailing her growing interest in the erotic and describing her physical maturation; the darkening of (presumably pubic) hair and an awareness of her physical sexuality. Arcan employs the colloquial term "être enveloppée de"[12] to mean that the narrator felt as if her genitals were already *too plump* or *fully developed* for her body to come into physical contact with that of her father's. Yet, in the translation, the whole reference to the narrator's realization of her physical sexuality is completely distorted. Instead, the translator creates a euphemistic image which has the narrator lost in the haze of some ephemeral notion of sex which floats around her in a cloudlike state. Furthermore, the addition translation strategy of the word "lost" works to undermine the narrator's sexual agency by describing her in a more passive and vulnerable state. This obfuscates one of the narrator's main reasons for her physical distancing from her father, namely due to her aversion to the physicality of their (now both) sexualized bodies coming into contact. Interestingly though, while the narrator's sexuality becomes blurred through translation, the translator does not resort to euphemism in descriptions of masculine sexuality, particularly in reference to the incestuous characterization of the father (which effectively extends to all father figures in the text). For instance, throughout the text the narrator returns repeatedly to explicit descriptions of the male incestuous gaze—an aspect of sexuality which could arguably prove

[12] Definition from *Le Petit Robert* - p.p. adj. FAM. *Personne enveloppée* (de graisse), un peu grosse.

problematic to a translator since, as José Santaemilia has argued, "the translator basically transfers into his/her rewriting the level of acceptability or respectability he/she accords to certain sex-related words or phrases" (227). Yet Benderson does not shirk from the task of translating such transgressive textualities and provides very literal translations as the underlined sections in the following two examples illustrate:

> papa chéri et des oncles qui bandent qu'elle soit assise sur leurs genoux pour la faire sauter un peu (*Putain* 49)
>
> Daddy dear and the uncles who get hard when she sits on their knees to play horsey (*Whore* 42)
>
> ce père qui est le mien et qui me détaille encore aujourd'hui, qui mine de rien cherche toujours la démarcation de mes mamelons à travers le tissu de mes vêtements (*Putain* 178)
>
> my own father, who to this day still scrutinizes me, casually looks for the imprint of my nipples through my clothing (*Whore* 164)

The translation decisions made here have wider implications for the narrative—by obscuring the narrator's sexual subjectivity while clearly communicating paternal sexuality, the text becomes less nuanced in translation as it does not convey how it is not only her father's but also *her* sexualized identity which problematizes their relationship.

In *Paradis, clef en main* the death company (of the same name) from whom Antoinette orders her customised suicide makes the protagonist complete a series of fantastical tests to determine if she is a worthy candidate. In one such instance she is taken to a strip club to ascertain whether she considers her sexual vitality as a factor to dissuade her from pursuing her plans. In the following example, Arcan uses explicit and experimental vocabulary to depict female sexuality:

> Une force vitale me remplissait, me débordait, suintait ses phéromones, effluves de chatonne, comme un trop-plein de cyprine. (*Paradis* 75)

> I was suddenly overflowing with some vital essence, oozing with its pheromones, its fragrance of a kitten, its deluge of cyprine. (*Exit* 65)

Arcan uses the feminist neologism "cyprine," a word used by feminist writers including Monique Wittig and Nicole Brossard to refer to female sexual secretions.[13] In her translation of Brossard's *Sous La Langue* (1987), feminist translator and theorist Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood used the word "cyprin" which, for her, echoes the French and recalls the proper noun Cyprus, the birthplace of Aphrodite. Yet in his translation Hamilton has chosen the word "cyprine." Whether he intends this to be an appropriation of the feminist neologism is unclear (italics are commonly used by translators to indicate the insertion of a source text word into the target text), and his translation choice is also misleading since the word already exists in English as a noun within the lexis of mineralogy. Whatever the translator's intentions, Arcan's palpable description of female sexuality is obfuscated in the translation. What is more, the translator's literal translation of "chatonne" as "kitten," instead of its more vulgar meaning[14] used here by Arcan to designate female genitalia, further counteracts Arcan's efforts to convey the protagonist's sexual agency.

Translating Corporeality

In terms of corporeal discourse, Arcan uses language as a way of asserting the narrator's subjectivity in *Putain* since no matter what her body is subjected to in her role as a prostitute; she maintains control by defining how her body is textually described. As Isabelle Boisclair has observed, there is a tension between the object status of the narrator suggested by her role as prostitute; yet, she counterbalances this staking claim to subjective agency through the act of writing (112). Arcan uses explicit language consistently in an attempt to make women's

[13] In *Le Corps Lesbien,* Wittig writes : « une agitation trouble l'écoulement de la cyprine eau fluide transparente » (20) and in Brossard's *Sous La Langue* : « Fricatelle ruisselle essentielle aime-t-elle le long de son corps la morsure, le bruit des vagues, aime-t-elle l'état du monde dans la flambée des chairs pendant que les secondes s'écoulent cyprine, lutines, marines» (stanzagraph 3).

[14] Interestingly the translator could have made use of the term "pussy" here. This colloquial term for female genitalia would have mobilised the feline lexical field in the same way that Arcan's text does.

corporeal discourse more visible within literature. A pertinent example of this is the term "mon sexe" which Arcan employs throughout the novel to refer to female genitalia. The word is explicit yet neutral in the sense that it does not work to eroticize the body. However, the same lexical consistency is not maintained in the translated text as the following examples show:

> m'obligeant à faire deux fois tout ce qu'elle n'a pas su faire avec mon sexe qui voyage de par le monde (*Putain* 59)
>
> making me do everything twice that she hasn't known how to do, with my sex organs that have been around the world (*Whore* 52)
>
> un sexe qui ne bande pas (*Putain* 123)
>
> it's a sex that doesn't get hard (*Whore* 111)
>
> comment mon sexe peut-il être normal alors qu'il s'est perdu dans un réseau d'échanges (*Putain* 138)
>
> how can my vagina be normal when it's lost in a swapping network (*Whore* 125)
>
> un sexe rasé (*Putain* 178)
>
> the shaved crotch (*Whore* 163)

Arcan's repeated use of the term "sexe" in reference to the protagonist's corporeality allows her to maintain control over her corporeal subjectivity in an environment where her role as a prostitute continually threatens to reduce the body to the sexualized object. Indeed, a parallel can be drawn here to French writer Annie Ernaux whose preference for this neutral term in her own novels enables her, according to Pascale Sardin, "to avoid any form of 'hysterization' of the female body" (4).[15] However, the inconsistencies in the translation of the term "sexe" into English distort Arcan's neutral tone. The translator's use of the words "sex organs" and "vagina" ring as clinical terms which work against Arcan's assertion of corporeal agency by reducing the

[15] Sardin makes reference to Foucault's notion of the hysterization of women's bodies: "a process whereby the feminine body was analyzed—qualified and disqualified—as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality" (Foucault 104). Interestingly, Sardin also finds many inconsistencies in how Ernaux's translators have rendered her corporeal references to "sexe," categorizing the translations choices as euphemistic and anatomical.

body to an anatomical depiction. Furthermore, by opting for translations which conceal women's bodies in the wrappers of euphemistic terms, such as the word choice of "crotch," the translator denies the narrator her sexual subjectivity.

Arcan's visualization of women through corporeal discourse is also evident in *Paradis.* As a paraplegic, Antoinette feels that her body is redundant, yet when she is confronted towards the end of the novel with the cancer-ridden body of her mother, she suddenly evinces the desire to keep on living. In the following example, Arcan describes the mother's body through the image of Russian dolls to show the importance of corporeality in the maternal link between mother and daughter:

> Son corps comme une poupée russe, sortie de sa matrice, son corps comme une poupée écaillée découverte, posée à côté de son contenant, le corps d'avant, plus gros, plus fort. (*Paradis* 185)
>
> Her body is like a chipped Russian doll pulled from its sequence and placed beside its undamaged sister: the body she had before. (*Exit* 163)[16]

In the translation, Arcan's three references to the body (le corps) are condensed into two with the further deletion of details relating to the body the mother had before; bigger and stronger. More importantly, Arcan's reference to "sa matrice" (her womb), which evokes a corporeal link between women through maternity, is replaced in the translation by the more anonymous word "sequence." By obfuscating the importance of corporeality in women's matrilineal bonds, the translator blurs important thematic details too since it is ultimately the confrontation with her mother's decaying body which is pivotal in Antoinette's about-face attitude towards her own death; in opposition to her mother's body, her own is still very much alive and so she can use her

[16] It could be argued, however, that the translator employs a supplementing translation strategy here to account for the loss of the maternal corporeal reference to "matrice" by later inserting the noun "sister" in place of Arcan's choice of "contenant." While such a strategy does visualize women, the idea of a matrilineal link through corporeality is still lost.

body as an instrument of redemption, atoning the mother's imminent death by ensuring her corporeal legacy lives on through Antoinette.

Conclusions: Arcan's Anglophone Other

This study set out to explore what happens to Arcan's *écriture au féminin* in translation when she is no longer in control of how women's subjectivities are textually inscribed. From my analysis, it seems that Arcan's efforts to textually visualize women in her writing have been obscured by translation. Arcan's linguistic visualization of women through grammatical gender marking finds scant resonance in the target text, while her linguistic feminist wordplay is negated by translations which reinsert women into patriarchal frameworks of reference. Furthermore, euphemism and distortion of vocabulary related to physical manifestations of desire in the translations of Arcan's references to women's sexuality work to undermine the writer's attempts to carve out an uncensored textual space for the portrayal of women's sexual realities. Lastly, due to inconsistencies in the translation of corporeal referents, it can be argued that women's bodies are colonized by translation, removing Arcan's central idea of the body as a potential source of women's subjective agency.

The impact of these translation decisions can be seen in the Anglophone reception of Arcan's work. In a review of *Whore* by Publisher's Weekly the protagonist's "tirades" are described as "raunchy," yet Arcan's neutral style of depicting women's corporeality and sexuality in the source text does not eroticize her narrative, meaning that such an observation must be a response to the translated text. Similarly, a review in Canadian literary magazine *Quill and Quire* laments that, "*Whore* fails to deliver on the one issue that will bring many readers to the book in the first place: the man thing. […] Arcan is determined not to put out" and concludes by saying that *Whore* "adds little to the hooker canon." Yet, as Arcan herself has said, it was

never her intention to scrutinize the figure of the prostitute as an object of curiosity.[17] Equally, it could be argued that this response to the novel could be a result of the translation's obfuscation of women's subjectivity.

So far my study has shown that the cumulative textual effects of the translation decisions made in response to Arcan's depictions of gender, sexuality and the body have undoubtedly altered Arcan's *écriture au féminin* in the Anglophone context, both in terms of how she visualizes women linguistically and thematically in her texts. Yet, what about the third dimension of Arcan's *écriture au féminin;* namely her use of autofiction to physically visualise women in her text? Interestingly, here too translation plays a significant role. The translation of paratextual elements such as the cover photograph and the blurb on the back cover all contribute to how Arcan and her writing are received in the target culture. Compared to the standard simple format of red text on a cream background in Seuil's original publication of *Putain,*[18] the cover page of Grove Press' *Whore* displays a photograph of Nelly Arcan with a superimposed red cross over the top of the image, dissecting Arcan at eye level. It could be argued that the cross image invites a moralistic judgement on the text while undoubtedly the colour red creates associations for the reader with prostitution (i.e. red light districts). A decision about a paratextual detail such as this is rarely accorded to the translator but more commonly falls to "paratranslators" (Olga Castro 11). Castro argues that when publishers or editors choose a particular image for a book cover "they are following an ideological communicative strategy" (ibid) and in the case of Arcan's work this seems to be in order to emphasize the autofictional properties of her text,

[17] In the interview with Pascale Navarro, Arcan states: « Je ne veux surtout pas que l'on s'intéresse à l'image de la prostituée comme objet de curiosité; tout le monde sait ce que c'est, qu'on ne vienne pas faire semblant de vouloir encore apprendre quelque chose ».

[18] It should be noted, however, that the cover of the'Points' edition (an imprint of Seuil) released the following year features a black and white photograph showing the lower abdomen, crotch and thighs of a woman wearing sheer lace underwear and whose fingers have strayed under the waistband.

rendering the sensationalism accompanying Arcan's text all the more tangible. In a similar fashion, Anvil Press' *Exit* makes explicit reference on the blurb on the back cover to the fact that "Arcan took her own life in 2009 at the age of thirty-six" whereas the blurb on the source text published by Coups de Tête, simply refers to "son décès" (her death). In answer to my question of whether Arcan embodies her text in translation, it would seem that precisely because of paratranslation Arcan, or more accurately the *celebrity* of Arcan, is made all the more visible in the Anglophone context.

Finally, returning to Arcan's sentiment : « Je veux qu'on m'écoute, qu'on me voie, comme écrivaine » it seems not incidental, and indeed fitting, that Arcan should feminize the word "écrivaine" (woman writer) here since it is precisely in this capacity that she "wants people to hear her, people to see her." It is through the act of writing and the elaboration of her own specific *écriture au féminin* that Arcan makes women, and herself, the woman, the *écrivaine*, visible. Yet, as we have seen, translation can make Arcan, the prostitute, the suicide victim, easier to see but Arcan, the écrivaine, all the more difficult to hear.

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