6 "One Man in Two is a Woman": Linguistic Approaches to Gender in Literary Texts

ANNA LIVIA

1 Introduction

The question of gender in literary texts has been approached by linguists in two different ways. The first involves a comparison of the fiction created by male and female authors and is typified by the search for "the female sentence" or a specifically female style of writing. The second involves a study of the uses to which the linguistic gender system of different languages has been put in literary works. In the former, gender is seen as a cultural property of the author, in the latter, a morphological property of the text. A third perspective on language and gender in literary texts is provided by translators and translation theorists. Translation theorists typically view a text as expressive of a particular time and place as well as being expressed in a particular language. The differences between source and target language may be accompanied by differences in culture and period, thus translators often work with both morphological gender and cultural gender. In this chapter, I will discuss men's and women's style in literature as well as literary uses of linguistic gender. I will also survey material on translation theory and what it offers to students of gender.

2 Male and Female Literary Styles

The most prominent modern thinker to discuss the differences between male and female literary styles is Virginia Woolf, writing at the beginning of the twentieth century. In a review of Dorothy Richardson's novel *Revolving Lights* (1923), she describes the female sentence as "of a more elastic fibre than the

old, capable of stretching to the extreme, of suspending the frailest particles, of enveloping the vaguest shapes" (Woolf 1990b: 72). Assuming the traditional literary sentence to be masculine, she argues that it simply does not fit women, who need something less pompous and more elastic which they can bend in different ways to suit their purpose. However, descriptions such as "more elastic," "too loose, too heavy, too pompous" are annoyingly vague and impossible to quantify.

Woolf comes closest to giving a more specific evaluation of the female sentence in a review of Dorothy Richardson's *The Tunnel* (1919). Here she quotes a passage of interior monologue as triumphantly escaping "the him and her" and embedding the reader in the consciousness of the character: "It is like dropping everything and walking backward to something you know is there. However far you go out, you come back. I am back now" (Woolf 1990b: 71). The exact relationship between the pronouns "you" and "I" in this passage is unclear. They seem to refer to the same person, the self, but also to include the reader. Because we do not know who "I" is, we have no referent for the temporal or spatial indicators "now" or "come back" either. This slipperiness of the referent seems to be what Woolf means by "elasticity."

It is significant that Woolf chose the writings of Dorothy Richardson to illustrate the female sentence, and specifically, a passage of interior monologue. Interior monologue has the property of breaking down the boundaries between character and narrator, so that the angle of focalization (who sees the action) coincides with the narration of that action (who tells about the action). More traditional methods of storytelling present a narrator, who recounts, but is separate from the character whose point of view is related. It was one of the projects of modernism (and both Richardson and Woolf are considered modernist) to render the depths of modern experience in an appropriate form, which meant breaking away from what they considered a smug, self-satisfied Edwardian frame of social realism and an omniscient narrator. Although we cannot speak of a "modernist sentence" as such, nevertheless, the other authors usually included in the modernist canon such as T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound, as well as Woolf and Richardson, have all experimented with sentence fragments, elimination of predicates, meandering syntax with many clauses in apposition. These are the very elements which tend also to typify interior monologue.

We would do best, therefore, to take Woolf's description of the female sentence as a literary rather than a linguistic commentary. As the stuffy Edwardian era gave way to greater freedom for women, especially in the inter-war period, so women novelists felt freer to express themselves in new ways. The literary movement of modernism coincided with (and was also itself a product of) the new social developments consequent upon the horror and paradoxical liberty of the post-First World War period. Woolf's unremitting self-consciousness is shared by her contemporaries. Indeed her precursor, Henry James, writes of his own awareness of a fragmented consciousness in a discussion of his novel *Portrait of a Lady* (quoted in Millett 1951: v): " 'Place the centre of the subject in

the woman's own consciousness,' I said to myself, 'and you get as interesting and as beautiful a difficulty as you could wish'." The challenge of this "beautiful difficulty" may be taken up by men or women authors.

Although Woolf's discussion of feminine style is impressionistic and essentialist, modern theorists have looked at more subtle differences in men's and women's writing. Sara Mills examines features such as descriptions of characters and self-descriptions in personal ads. In an analysis of a romance novel by best-selling author Barbara Taylor Bradford, Mills demonstrates that the actions performed by the female character are of a different quality from those performed by the male (1995: 147–9). Parts of the woman's body move without her volition and she is represented as the passive recipient of the male's actions. The male acts while the female feels.

That male and female characters in fiction receive very different treatment is not particularly controversial, but the claim that women's writing differs in some essential way from that of men is more tendentious. Quoting Woolf's categorization of the female sentence as loose and accretive, Mills proceeds to look at some concrete examples to see what proof there may be of these differences. She concludes that the concept of a female-authored sentence stems from overgeneralization on the part of the literary critic rather than from any inherent quality in the writing, but she demonstrates that a female (or male) affiliation may be a motivating factor in certain texts (1995: 47–8). Comparing descriptions of a landscape taken from two well-known novels, Anita Brookner's *Hotel du Lac* and Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*, she shows that the first is conventionally feminine while the second is conventionally masculine (1995: 58–60). The features which mark the first as feminine include: abundant use of epistemic modality ("it was supposed," "it could be seen"); grammatically complex, meandering sentences with many clauses in apposition; and an impressionistic, subjective vocabulary such as "stiffish," "skimming," and "area of grey." In contrast, the second landscape is masculine in style, featuring the absence of an obvious authorial voice; an impersonal, objective tone; the description of amenities rather than people: "Overlooking one of these valleys, which is dominated by two volcanoes, lies, six thousand feet above sea-level, the town of Quauhnahuac" (1995: 60).

Female affiliation, or a distinctly feminist style, is a third possibility, in which the tone may be ironic or detached; female characters are presented as assertive and self-confident, and the reader is addressed directly and drawn into the text to share the narrator's point of view. Mills quotes a passage from Ellen Galford's *Moll Cutpurse* to illustrate her point: "She had a voice like a bellowing ox and a laugh like a love-sick lion" (1995: 60–1). This heroine is clearly very different from the passive female, mere object of the male's attention. The oxymoronic (apparently contradictory) quality of the comparison between Moll and a "love-sick lion" demonstrates the playful, almost parodic nature of the description. A lion is usually a symbol of masculine strength, but this lion is in love and therefore emotional. Moll thus combines a traditionally masculine quality (strength) with a traditionally feminine quality (deep feeling).

For contemporary critics, it is possible to identify certain features such as complex sentences with many subordinate clauses and a vocabulary that is vague and impressionistic as typifying the "female sentence," but there is no essential link between the fact of being a woman and this type of writing. It is a style which may be deliberately chosen by either sex. Indeed, if one considers Marcel Proust's sometimes page-length sentences, and his deliberations about the exact quality of colors and smells, one is obliged to classify his style as distinctly feminine:

> *Jamais je ne m'étais avisé qu'elle pouvait avoir une figure rouge, une cravate mauve comme Mme Sazerat, et l'ovale de ses joues me fit tellement souvenir de personnes que j'avais vues à la maison que le soupçon m'effleura, pour se dissiper aussitôt, que cette dame, en son principe générateur, en toutes ses molécules n'était peut-être pas substantiellement la duchesse de Guermantes, mais que son corps, ignorant du nom qu'on lui appliquait, appartenait à un certain type féminin qui comprenait aussi des femmes de médecins et de commerçants.*

> (I had never imagined that she could have a red face, a mauve scarf like Madame Sazerat, and her oval cheeks reminded me so much of people I had seen at home that I had the fleeting suspicion, a suspicion which evaporated immediately afterwards, that this lady, in her generative principle, in each one of her molecules was perhaps not in substance the Duchess of Guermantes but that her body, ignorant of the name she had been given, belonged to a certain feminine type which also included the wives of doctors and tradespeople.)   (Proust 1954: 209–10)

Proust's sentence in the above extract is indisputably long, complex and meandering, convoluted and concerned with female apparel and appearance – all traits which have been classified "feminine."

It is equally possible for a woman author to deliberately flout this convention and write in a recognizably feminist style, or indeed a traditionally masculine one. The writer James Tiptree Junior was declared by the science fiction author Robert Silverberg to be a man in the introduction to one of her short story collections:

> For me there is something ineluctably masculine about Tiptree's writing. I don't think that a woman could have written the short stories of Hemingway, just as I don't think a man could have written the novels of Jane Austen, and in this way I think that Tiptree is male.   (Silverberg 1975: xii)

Tiptree was invited to participate in a symposium organized by the science fiction magazine *Khatru*, the ensuing discussion being published in issues 3 and 4, but "his" style was felt to be so rebarbative that "he" was asked to withdraw (Lefanu 1988: 105–6). At this point "he" revealed that "he" was none other than Alice Sheldon, a renowned, and definitely female, author. The ensuing discussion of each participant's perceptions and misconceptions turned out to be the most fruitful part of the forum.

Novels may be identified as the work of a woman purely because of their content. The British feminist publishing company Virago was about to publish a novel by a young Indian woman, when they learned that the book had in fact been written by a middle-aged English vicar. Upon hearing this, Virago stopped publication. As a company that was set up specifically to publish books by women, they were angry at being hoodwinked into accepting a manuscript written by a man. Critics of Virago's actions argued that it was the submissive, downtrodden status of the heroine which had at first convinced the editors that the novel was written by an Indian woman. This, they said, was a form of racism as the editors assumed that a victim status was typical of Asian women. Dinty Moore, a male author, was assumed to be female when he published a short story in an anthology of reminiscences of a Catholic girls' school. This also caused hot debate, though the anthology was not withdrawn (Rubin 1975).

In a study on the micro-level of text-making (looking at the immediate linguistic environment rather than the whole novel), Susan Ehrlich (1990) has analyzed the use of reported speech and thought in canonical texts, particularly the novels of Virginia Woolf. She compares Woolf's style with that of Henry James and Ernest Hemingway with regard to the types of cohesive devices each uses (1990: 101–3). James depends heavily on what is known as grammatical cohesion, or anaphora. This means he introduces a character, and as soon as the reader has had the chance to form a mental image of this character, he replaces the character's name with a pronoun (this is, of course, a very traditional strategy). Hemingway relies instead on lexical cohesion, or a simple repetition of the character's name. Woolf, in contrast, uses a much greater variety of cohesive devices including grammatical and lexical cohesion as well as semantic connectors, temporal linking, and progressive aspect. A semantic connector tells the reader explicitly to connect two pieces of information in a particular way: *at the same time*; *in this way*; *in addition*. Temporal linking gives two clauses the same time reference and is a feature that often involves hypothetical clauses which have no time reference of their own: *Edith would be sure to know*; *I would have arrived before the others*. Progressive aspect also links two propositions where one clause provides an anchor for the other.

The advantage of research like Ehrlich's is that it provides a concrete set of criteria by which to distinguish different literary styles. We cannot assume that all women will write like Woolf and all men like James or Hemingway, but if we know that a researcher has based his or her claims entirely on a study of canonical texts by male authors, we can predict that certain types of data will be missing.

Studies of gender in literary texts have not been confined to stylistic analysis but also include investigations into the representation of men and women and what these literary models can tell us about conversational expectations in the real world. In an insightful analysis of the preferred conversational strategies of a husband and wife at loggerheads with each other, Robin Lakoff and Deborah

Tannen (1994) propose a new methodology for interpreting communication between the sexes. They analyze the contrasting conversational strategies of Johan and Marianne in Ingmar Bergman's film, *Scenes from a Marriage*.

In this study, they introduce the concepts of pragmatic identity, pragmatic synonymy, and pragmatic homonymy, which, as they demonstrate, replicate the semantic relations of synonymy (having the same meaning but a different form), homonymy (having the same form but a different meaning), and identity (having the same form and the same meaning) (1994: 148–9). The analysis shows that the two partners often use similar strategies to very different ends and, an even more significant finding, that they also achieve the same end (avoiding conflict) by very different strategies: excessive verbiage on Marianne's part and pompous pontification on Johan's. Marianne prattles: "Here already! You weren't coming until tomorrow. What a lovely surprise. Are you hungry? And me with my hair in curlers" (1994: 152); Johann drones: "I'd been out all day at the institute with the zombie from the ministry. You wonder sometimes who those idiots are who sit on the state moneybags" (1994: 154–5). Marianne's contribution is characterized by short sentences, abrupt changes of topic, and a homely, domestic tone. Johan's style is more cohesive and elaborate; it concerns the world of work and is distanced from the current situation. Although their styles are very different, they share the same goal: each is trying to avoid a confrontation about their deteriorating marriage.

Justifying their choice of the constructed, non-spontaneous dialogue of a film script, Lakoff and Tannen explain that "artificial dialog may represent an internalized model . . . for the production of conversation – a competence model that speakers have access to" (1994: 137). They later define this type of competence as "the knowledge a speaker has at his/her disposal to determine what s/he is reasonably expected to contribute, in terms of the implicitly internalized assumptions made in her/his speech community" (1994: 139). Although this type of analysis has not been widely imitated, it demonstrates the utility of looking at constructed dialogue precisely because such pre-planned scripts allow us to see what pragmatic roles have been internalized and what expectations speakers have of patterns of speech appropriate for each sex.

In the French tradition, the *écriture féminine* school, made famous by such writers as Hélène Cixous, Chantal Chawaf, and Annie Leclerc in the 1970s, defines women's writing as corporeal, tied to the workings of the body, and at the same time multivalent and polysemic, defying syntactic norms. Chawaf challenges the reader with the rhetorical question "*l'aboutissement de l'écriture n'est-il pas de prononcer le corps?*" (1976: 18) ("is not the aim of writing to articulate the body?"), while Cixous exhorts, "*Ecris! L'Écriture est pour toi, tu es pour toi, ton corps est toi, prends-le. [. . .] Les femmes sont corps. Plus corps donc plus écriture*" (Cixous and Clément 1975: 40, 48) ("Write! Writing is for you, you are for you, your body is yours, take it. [. . .] Women are bodies. More body so more writing"). The assertion that women are bodies is a little puzzling. Are women, according to Cixous, more corporeal than men? How can writing be corporeal except in a pen and ink sense?

Écriture féminine came out of the women's liberation movement as a response to the complaint that men's writing was increasingly abstract and distanced from material concerns. Where the prevailing ideology, which dominates most text forms from highbrow novels to the language of advertising, tended to see the female body as dirty, messy, shameful, and generally problematic, *écriture féminine* set out to celebrate this body in all its wet, bloody, sticky functions and by-products from menarche to pregnancy and childbirth to menopause. Where the subliminal message of mainstream, misogynist discourse was that women were mired in their own physicality and therefore constitutionally unable to produce great works of fiction, *écriture féminine* saw men as cut off from their own bodies, decentered and more interested in the play of signifiers than in their real-world referents.

When we encounter sentences like the following from Cixous's *La Jeune née* (*The Newly Born Woman*), "*Alors elle, immobile et apparemment passive, livrée aux regards, qu'elle appelle, qu'elle prend*" ("Then she, immobile and apparently passive, prey to glances, that she calls, that she takes") (Cixous and Clément 1975: 237), which has no main verb and two subordinate clauses, we may feel lost, confused, or simply impatient. In order to appreciate the innovatory quality of this style, which provides no object for usually transitive verbs (who does she call? what does she take?), we need to feel the weight of the well-formed French sentence and the desire of the feminist writer to wriggle out from under it at all costs. For the French, their language is "la langue de Molière" (the language of Molière), while English is "la langue de Shakespeare" (the language of Shakespeare). The apex of literary achievement was apparently achieved many centuries ago, and perfected by male writers. *Écriture féminine* is a reaction to this assumption of perfection and its attribution to men.

3   Literary Uses of Linguistic Gender

In my own work on the literary uses of linguistic gender, I have examined the role of gender concord in the creation of particular stylistic effects such as focalization (or point of view), empathy, and textual cohesion (what makes everything fit together) (Livia 2000). Insofar as gender concord may be considered a choice in a given language, and not a morphological or syntactic necessity, it can be used as a stylistic device to express some aspect of character or personality. While Judith Butler's research on the performativity of gender emphasizes the iterative and citational aspects of speech, greatly reducing the role of speaker agency, my own work on the gender performances of characters such as drag queens, transsexuals, and hermaphrodites, and those whose gender is never given, demonstrates that observing (or ignoring) the requirements of gender concord allows authors to express a wide range of positions.

In her pioneering work *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that speakers, or in her words "culturally intelligible subjects," are the results, rather than the

creators, "of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself into the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life" (1990: 145). Although her prose is a little dense, what this means in simple terms is that she sees individual speakers as being formed by the discourse they use. This discourse is "performative" because it is by uttering (or performing) it that speakers, obligatorily, gender themselves. They are compelled by the syntactic structure and vocabulary available to position themselves only in certain restricted ways with regard to gender, that is, the traditional roles of "men" and "women." They are not free to take up any gender stance they like, for this would not be "culturally intelligible." Although she does suggest three linguistic strategies by which a speaker can undermine the system (parody, subversion, and fragmentation), on the whole Butler sees agency as severely curtailed, limited merely to "variations on repetition." For her, it is the gender norms themselves which provide the lynchpins keeping "man" and "woman" in their place. She argues that "the loss of gender norms would have the effect of proliferating gender configurations, destabilizing substantive identity, depriving the naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality of their cultural protagonists" (1990: 146). Once these stabilizing norms have been lost, other possibilities become available, moving beyond the heteronormative lynchpins "man" and "woman."

This view of gender as performative has become a key tenet of queer theory, which investigates and analyzes "the naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality" and the various sexually liminal figures who do not fit into this traditional framework. Arguing against the linguistic determinism of Butler's stance, I refute the claim that gender, and particularly linguistic gender, is rigidly confining and explore the different messages it can convey. My research on a corpus of literary texts in both English and French, presented in *Pronoun Envy* (2000), shows that the realm of what is "culturally intelligible" is much wider and more diverse than queer theorists have supposed and that the traditional gender norms are often used as a foil against which more experimental positions are understood.

Anne Garréta, writing in French, and Maureen Duffy, Sarah Caudwell, and Jeanette Winterson, writing in English, have each created characters without gender in at least one of their works. Nowhere in these novels is there any grammatical clue as to whether the main protagonists are male or female. In French this is a particularly difficult feat, for gender is usually conveyed not only by the third-person pronouns *il/elle, ils/elles* (like the English *he/she* and unlike English *they*) but also in adjectives and past participles. Thus in a sentence of five words like *la vieille femme est assise* ("the old woman sat down"), the gender of the person sitting is conveyed four times: in the definite determiner *la*, in the form of the adjective *vieille*, in the lexical item *femme*, and in the form of the adjective *assise*. In English, the difficulty is decreased by the fact that morphological (or linguistic) gender is limited to the distinction between *he/she, his/her, his/hers*.

Garréta's novel *Sphinx* features both a genderless narrator and his or her genderless beloved. The novel is written in the first-person singular *je* ("I"),

which is gender-neutral. Thus when the narrator describes his or her own actions, the author can avoid giving gender information by using only gender-neutral adjectives and tenses, like the *passé simple* rather than the *passé composé*. However, gender-neutral adjectives and expressions tend to be less frequently used than those which agree with the gender of the noun. The use of the *passé simple* rather than the more common *passé composé* also introduces a literary, almost anachronistic element to the text. Since the novel recounts how a White Parisian theology student becomes a disc jockey in a seedy bar and falls in love with a Black American disco dancer, the use of markedly literary tenses and descriptive expressions seems somewhat out of place. It is as though the theology student never really left the seminary.

When the narrator describes the actions and attributes of the beloved, the situation becomes even more complex and the language somewhat convoluted, for here the use of pronouns must be avoided as well. The beloved can never simply be referred to as *il* (he) or *elle* (she) and various techniques are introduced to avoid this. Often the proper name, A***, is repeated. This repetition makes it appear that a new character is being introduced, so that A*** (already confined to an initial and a string of asterisks) never becomes a familiar figure, but always seems a little strange and distant.

Another technique used by the author to avoid conveying A***'s gender is to describe A***'s body parts rather than the person himself/herself. Instead of the more straightforward *"Elle avait les hanches musculeuses, les cheveux rasés et le visage ainsi rendu à sa pure nudité"* ("she had muscular hips, a shaven head and her face was thus returned to its pure, bare state"), for example, the author is obliged to avoid mention of gender by describing A***'s body in the following, far more distanced and depersonalized way: *"Le modelé musculeux de ses hanches . . . ses cheveux rasés . . . le visage ainsi rendu à sa pure nudité"* ("the muscular moulding of her/his hips . . . her/his shaven hair . . . the face thus restored to its naked purity") (1986: 27). Because A*** is systematically referred to by a proper name, or in terms of parts of the body rather than the whole, this character seems fragmented and static.

Clearly, a text which avoids gender agreement produces a very different effect from one which follows a more orthodox pattern of reference. But it is perfectly possible to create a whole novel on this basis, as Garréta's achievement has shown. One could argue that the style of *Sphinx*, whether or not it was initially imposed by the decision to avoid gender, suits the plot of the novel admirably. Given the different worlds the narrator and the beloved inhabited prior to their meeting, and the enormous social distance between them, one a White Parisian intellectual, the other a Black dancer from Harlem, the presentation of A*** as strange, constantly unfamiliar, and composed of a series of bodily fragments, creates an exoticism which well suits the story of infatuation, incomprehension, and loss.

Maureen Duffy's novel *Love Child* tells the story of the adolescent Kit and his/her murderous jealousy for Ajax, his/her father's secretary whom he/she believes to be his/her mother's lover. (In the third person, gender-neutral

pronominal reference can become extremely clumsy.) While the mother and father are clearly gendered, Duffy gives no clue as to Kit or Ajax's gender. The effect of this is rather different for each character since Kit, as first-person narrator, can use the pronoun "I," while Ajax is never referred to by pronoun. In this *Love Child* resembles *Sphinx*. A character referred to without pronouns is simultaneously less empathic and less of a coherent whole. Empathy for a character may be gauged by the types of reference used for that character. Repetition of the proper name and the use of different lexical items such as "my father's secretary," "my mother's lover" create the least empathy, while pronouns and ellipsis create the most. Use of pronouns and ellipsis presuppose that the reader is already familiar with the referent and can readily access it, given minimal or zero prompts. In a similar pattern, the linguistic device which creates the strongest cohesive link is ellipsis followed by pronominalization. If the proper name is simply repeated, there is no necessary link forged between each of its appearances. In contrast, in the following sentence: "Ajax spieled, pattered, manipulated unseen puppets, drew scenes and characters" (1994: 50), in order to understand that Ajax is the subject not only of "spieled," but also of "pattered," "manipulated," and "drew," the reader must connect the four verbs, and this connection creates a strongly cohesive text.

While Kit comes across as a lonely, angry, jealous teenager who causes the death of his/her mother's lover, Ajax (like A***) seems not quite real, a mere collection of qualities and attributes, not someone who acts on his/her own behalf. We never find out if Kit is an adolescent girl witnessing a lesbian affair; a boy jealous of his mother's male suitor; a boy watching his mother flirt with another woman; or a girl who is aware of her mother's heterosexual conquests. Each interpretation gives very different readings to the text. Nevertheless, Kit is a character for whom the reader can feel some emotional connection while Ajax is not. It is the presence or absence of pronouns which creates this contrast, not information about gender, since neither character is gendered.

Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body* and Sarah Caudwell's mysteries revolve around a genderless narrator, but all third-person characters are assigned traditional gender markers; these novels do not, therefore, offer the same degree of complexity as Duffy's or Garréta's.

Science fiction authors, like Ursula Le Guin and Marge Piercy, have used the possibilities offered by new worlds and new biologies to invent imaginary communities whose gender positions are very different from those of twentieth-century Earth. In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin introduces the ambisexual Gethenians whose gender status changes at different phases of their life-cycle. During most of the year their bodies are asexual, but when they enter their mating phase (called *kemmer*) they develop either male or female reproductive organs. They never know in advance which organs will develop and their gender may change from one period of *kemmer* to another. For her part, Piercy has experimented with utopian worlds in which gender is so insignificant that it is no longer encoded in the grammar. In the futuristic community of Mattapoisett, described in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, people are anatomically

male or female, but this distinction is almost entirely irrelevant in determining their social roles. To demonstrate the effect this egalitarianism has on the language they speak, Piercy has invented the pronouns *person* and *per* in place of *he/she* and *his/her/hers*. These neologisms are used to describe the futuristic characters, in contrast with the twentieth-century characters.

Monique Wittig, writing in French, has experimented with a different aspect of the linguistic gender system in each one of her works. In her first novel, *l'Opoponax* (1966*)*, she uses *on* as the voice of the narrator, recounting the daily lives and relationships among a group of young schoolchildren in a small village in eastern France. Traditional literary texts in French are narrated either in the first-person *je* or in the third-person *il* or *elle*. *On* is grammatically a third-person singular pronoun which, unlike *il/elle*, is not marked for gender. Furthermore, it may be used with the meaning of *I*, *we* (inclusive, i.e. *I* and *you*, or exclusive, i.e. *I* and a third party); "you" (singular or plural); "he" or "she" or "they" (masculine or feminine). This means that *on* is both remarkably flexible to manipulate and remarkably slippery in meaning. Wittig chose it because it did not encode gender information, but its effect is to neutralize other oppositions as well.

On refers most often to the narrator, a little girl called Catherine Legrand, but it is not always clear from the immediate context when it refers exclusively to Catherine, when it also refers to the other children who are all participating in the same actions and share the narrator's thoughts and feelings, and when it includes not only other children but adults as well. In one particularly memorable scene, a new child arrives at school and is instantly separated from the other children, sitting on a bench by herself. Subsequently, in a sequence of increasing violence, she is searched for lice, then beaten on the head by hand and then with rulers. Who performs each of these acts? It must be the teacher who seats the girl apart from the others, but does she also participate in, or even instigate, searching for lice? Wittig states that she uses *on* to "universalize" a very specific and somewhat unusual point of view: that of a group of young children. In fact *on* does far more than this. Because of its many possible meanings, it forces the reader to pay close attention not only to assumptions about gender, but also to assumptions about age appropriateness and common sense.

In *Les Guérillères* (1969), Wittig uses the feminine plural *elles* to tell the story of a group of women warriors who live a separatist lifestyle away from men. This feminine plural is less common than the feminine singular *elle*, the masculine plural *ils*, and the masculine singular *il*, for the following grammatical reasons. *Il* can refer either to an animate entity such as a person (*Eric arrive*, **il** *aime le chocolat*, "Eric is coming, **he** likes chocolate"); to an inanimate object (*le clou m'a griffe*, **il** *m'a fait de la peine*, "the nail scratched me, **it** hurt me"); or to an abstract idea (*le théorème est trop abstrait*, **il** *est mal expliqué*, "the theorem is too abstract, **it** is ill-explained"). *Il* is also used as a "dummy morpheme" or verb marker in meteorological and modal expressions such as **il** *faut venir* ("**it** is necessary to come," i.e. you must come); **il** *pleut* ("**it** is raining"). *Elle*, in contrast,

refers to a person, inanimate object, or abstract idea, but is never used in modal or meteorological expressions. The plural *ils* refers to people, inanimate objects, abstract ideas, or a combination of these, as does *elles*. However, *ils* is also used for a combination of grammatically masculine and feminine items, while *elles* is restricted to feminine items only.

As well as these grammatical reasons for the more limited use of *elles*, the French psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray (1987: 81–123) has found that people talk more rarely about groups of women than about men, mixed groups, or singular subjects. When asked to finish sample sentences, her respondents were far more likely to speak of singular, masculine referents than of anyone else. Although *il/elle* and *ils/elles* appear to have contrasting but equal functions in the pronominal system, their frequency of use is actually steeply graded from *il* to *ils* to *elle* to *elles*. A novel in which the least favored pronoun among the third-person set, *elles*, is used as the main reference point of narration is a radical innovation.

For the narrator of *Le Corps lesbien* ("The Lesbian Body," 1973), Wittig has invented the pronoun *j/e*, a divided *I* who describes and interacts with another woman. This "barred" spelling is repeated throughout the first-person possessive paradigm: *me* is spelled *m/e*, *ma: m/a*, *mon: m/on*, and *moi: m/oi*. Although, as we have seen, *je* is non-gendered, it is clear in *The Lesbian Body* that the narrator is a woman since there are frequent, lyrical descriptions of specifically female body parts such as clitoris, labia, vagina.

As for exactly what this divided *j/e* represents, Wittig herself has provided two, rather different explanations. In the "Author's Note" to the English translation of 1975, Wittig states that *je*, as a feminine subject, is obliged to force her way into language since what is human is, grammatically, masculine, as *elle* and *elles* are subsumed under *il* and *ils*. The female writer must use a language which is structured to erase her (as *elle* is erased in *il*). Wittig explains that the bar through the *j/e* is intended as a visual reminder of women's alienation from (by and within) language. Ten years later, however, Wittig claims: "the bar in the *j/e* of the Lesbian Body is a sign of excess. A sign that helps to imagine an excess of *I*, an *I* exalted." This new explanation suggests that, far from signaling the difficulty for women of taking up the subject position in a linguistic structure in which the masculine is both the unmarked and the universal term, the bar through the *j/e* has the positive value of an exuberance so powerful it is "like a lava flow that nothing can stop" (ibid.). Within ten years, *j/e* has evolved from a mark of alienation to a mark of exuberance.

Members of liminal communities, such as hermaphrodites, transsexuals, drag queens and drag kings, who do not fit easily into the existing bipartite gender positions, often use the linguistic gender system to rather different effect from its traditional function. Drag queens (gay men who wear stereotypically feminine clothing and use hyper-feminine mannerisms) and drag kings (lesbians who wear stereotypically masculine clothing and use hyper-masculine mannerisms) often cross-express, using the pronouns which traditionally refer to the opposite sex. Thus a drag queen might refer to another drag queen as *her* and speak

about getting her periods, engaging in a catfight, or putting on her make-up. A drag king might speak about *his* butch brothers, getting an erection, or going home to *his* wife.

In a study I carried out on the use of linguistic gender by male to female transsexuals writing in French, I found that although all the authors stated that they had always felt they were women, in fact they alternated between masculine and feminine grammatical agreement throughout their autobiographies (Livia 2000: 168–76). Masculine agreement could indicate variously a sense of belonging with other males, the gender other people ascribed to them, or a feeling of power and superiority. Feminine agreement indicated the gender they felt most comfortable in, isolation and alienation, or a triumphant affirmation. There was no simple, one-to-one alignment of masculine pronouns with the rejected gender and feminine pronouns with the desired gender.

When we turn to the descriptions of hermaphrodites in literary texts, we find that the situation is even more complex. Possessing the sexual organs of both sexes, hermaphrodites tend to vary in self-presentation far more than the transsexuals I studied. Feelings of solidarity, isolation, alienation, success, failure, are all encoded in switches from one gender to another. Indeed, the switch may be made from one sentence to another with no attempt to naturalize it, or it may be presented as a positive sign of the fluidity of gender.

4   Gender and Translation

Where the two types of analysis come together (discussion of writing styles, and discussion of uses of linguistic gender) is in investigations of gender and translation, a field in which both morphological gender and cultural gender are highly relevant. Translators work both as interpreters of the original text and, often, as guides to the culture which produced the text. If the social expectations of gender in the target culture are very different from those of the source culture, they need to deal with this anomaly. Similarly, if the languages encode gender in very different ways, they need to devise a system to encompass the differences. In their dual role as linguistic interpreters and cultural guides, translators must decide what to naturalize, what to explain, and what to exoticize.

Studying the role gender plays in translation, Sherry Simon observes that since as early as the seventeenth century translations themselves have been seen as *belles infidèles* (beautiful but unfaithful) because, like women, they can be either beautiful or faithful, but not both (1996: 10–11). Many of the metaphors for the act or process of translation are highly sexed, and indeed, heterosexed. One dominant model views translation as a power struggle between author and translator (both male) over the text (female). In this model, the translator must wrest the text away from the original author, like a son growing up to rival his father. George Steiner, himself a prominent translator, describes the translator as penetrating and capturing the text in a manner very similar to

erotic possession (1975). Lori Chamberlain, another translation theorist, quotes Thomas Drant, the sixteenth-century translator of Horace, who claims: "[I have] done as the people of God were commanded to do with their captive women: I have shaved off his hair and pared off his nails" (1992: 61–2). For Drant, the original text must be utterly enslaved and deprived of its foreignness, or, in his own words, "Englished." In another model, the original author becomes the translator's mistress whose hidden charms must be revealed and whose blemishes must be improved. In yet another view, the translator is a submissive, subjugated, female, alienated, absorbed, ravished, and dispossessed, entirely taken over by the author (Chamberlain 1992: 57–66). Although the imagined relationships that prevail among author, text, and translator vary widely, at the core is the sense that translation is a sexual act.

Given this intense gendering of the process itself, it is hardly surprising that when it comes to linguistic gender in the original text, the problems posed are complex and sometimes unanswerable. The novels and poetry of French Canadian feminist writers such as Nicole Brossard and Louky Bersianik are characterized by rich alliteration, plays on words, and the creation of portmanteau words. The title of Brossard's novel *L'Amèr*, for example, is a portmanteau word containing three others: *la mer* ("the sea"), *la mère* ("the mother"), and *amère* ("bitter"). *Amer* is the masculine form of the adjective, while *amère* with a grave accent and a terminal *-e* is the feminine form. In itself *amèr* is a neologism invented by Brossard. Since the English words *sea*, *mother*, and *bitter* do not contain the same phonemes as the French words, the neatness of the alliteration is necessarily lost. The gender play is also lost in English since the adjective *bitter* has only one form. Brossard's translator, Barbara Godard, decided to use a very elaborate graphic representation for the translated title, composed of three distinct phrases: The Sea Our Mother, Sea (S)mothers, and (S)our Mothers, all twined around a large *S*. The English title can therefore read either *These Our Mothers* or *These Sour Mothers* (Simon 1996: 14). This is an elegant rendition of the original French, but it does not address the practical problem of how librarians and book catalogues are to refer to the novel.

In my own translation of Lucie Delarue-Mardrus' *l'Ange et les Pervers* ("The Angel and the Perverts," Livia 1995), I had to tackle the question of how to refer to the central character who is a hermaphrodite. Here both linguistic and cultural gender are at issue. Delarue-Mardrus describes Mario (or Marion, in her female persona), the main protagonist, as alternately masculine and feminine. The changes in gender concord in the original French are intended to produce a sense of shock, requiring the reader to work out how the grammatical system relates to Mario/n's personality and mental state. The first chapter introduces us to the young boy and his childhood in a glacial château in Normandy. Here masculine pronouns and concord are used: *Il avait toujours été seul au monde* ("he had always been alone in the world"; Delarue-Mardrus 1930: 19). The second chapter begins in the bedroom of a rich society woman in an upper-middle-class suburb of Paris. In this section, Marion is described in the feminine: *Elle n'aime rien ni personne* ("She loves nothing and no-one";

Delarue-Mardrus 1930: 21). There is no obvious connection between the *il* of the first chapter and the *elle* of the second. Furthermore, both place and social setting have changed, from Normandy to Paris, and from an old, lonely castle to a gossipy boudoir. By witholding any explicit link, Delarue-Mardrus forces readers to make the connection themselves between Mario(n)'s male and female personae. In this way, they are also implicated in his/her change of gender.

Occasionally, Delarue-Mardrus shocks the reader by referring to Mario/n in the masculine and then immediately afterwards in the feminine, without providing any intervening material or a change of context to make this seem more natural. The River Seine provides a geographical divide between Mario's bachelor garret and Marion's more luxurious rooms. In one scene we watch as Mario/n crosses the river and moves from one personality to the other: *La voilà chez elle. Le voilà chez lui* ("She was home. He was home"; Delarue-Mardrus 1930: 38). For a translator the lack of gender concord in English poses a problem. While the pronouns *la* and *le* may easily and effectively be translated as "she" and "he," their grammatical connection to the expressions *chez elle* ("at her house") and *chez lui* ("at his house") are harder to convey. "There she was at her house" and "there he was at his house" are more faithful translations than "she was home," "he was home," and they retain the naturalizing effect of grammatical necessity. They sound rather stilted in English, however.

In the memoirs of a nineteenth-century hermaphrodite, Herculine Barbin, recently rediscovered and annotated by Michel Foucault (1980), the narrator's unusual gender status is conveyed to the reader on the first page. Barbin begins her self-description in the masculine: *soucieux et rêveur* ("anxious and dreamy"), but ends in the feminine: *j'étais froide timide* ("I was cold, shy"; Barbin 1978: 9). By this movement from masculine concord in the adjective *soucieux* to feminine concord in the adjective *froide* in the next sentence, Barbin gets immediately to the crux of the matter. In contrast, in the English translation it is not until page 58 that reference is made to the grammatical ambiguity of Herculine's identity: "She took pleasure in using masculine qualifiers for me, qualifiers which would later suit my official status." The expression "using masculine qualifiers" is strangely formal, even learned, and stands out in this plaintive, simply stated autobiography.

5   Implications

We have seen that although many prominent writers have set out to discover the differences between men's and women's sentences, following in the footsteps of Virginia Woolf at the beginning of the twentieth century, no convincing linguistic evidence has yet been provided to indicate the stylistic characteristics of each. Instead, we have found that there are conventions of masculine and feminine style which any sophisticated writer, whether male or female, can follow.

When we turned to look at linguistic gender, we saw that far from being a tyrannical system which forces speakers to follow a rigid dualistic structure, it actually provides means by which speakers may create alternative, oppositional, or conventional identities. In the realm of science fiction, authors have created neologistic, non-gendered pronouns to speak of egalitarian utopias, supplementing the existing system, which is retained for more traditional worlds. Authors have experimented with non-gendered protagonists in both the first and the third person. Although these literary experiments have an effect on our reading of the novel, it is the lack of pronominal reference, not the lack of gender markers *per se*, which causes disturbance.

Finally, in our discussion of the role of the translator and the metaphors used for the process of translation, we observed that while many different metaphors exist for the act itself, the dominant metaphors place the translator in a sexual role in relation to the text and the author. Frequently, when translating from a language in which there are many linguistic gender markers into a language which has fewer, either gender information is lost, or it is overstated, overtly asserted where in the original it is more subtly presupposed.

This research on linguistic approaches to gender in literature demonstrates the utility for students of gender in society at large to investigate the uses to which gender may be put in the unspontaneous, carefully planned discourse of fiction. It reveals not what native speakers naturally do, but what they are able to understand and the inventions and models that influence their understanding.

REFERENCES

Barbin, Herculine 1978: Mes souvenirs. In Michel Foucault (ed.) *Herculine Barbin dite Alexina B*. Paris: Gallimard, pp. 9–128.

Brossard, Nicole 1977: *L'Amèr ou le chaptire effrité*. Montreal: l'Hexagone. Translated as *These Our Mothers Or: The Disintegrating Chapter* (1983) by Barbara Godard. Toronto: Coach House Quebec Translations.

Butler, Judith 1990: *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge.

Chamberlain, Lori 1992: Gender and the metaphorics of translation. In L. Venuti (ed.) *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 57–74.

Chawaf, Chantal 1976: La chair linguistique. *Nouvelles Littéraires* (26 May): 18.

Cixous, Hélène and Clément, Catherine 1975: *La Jeune née*. Paris: Union générale d'éditions. (Translated as Cixous, Hélène and Clément, Catherine 1986: *The Newly Born Woman*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.)

Delarue-Mardrus, Lucie 1930: *L'Ange et les Pervers*. Paris: Ferenczi.

Duffy, Maureen 1994: *Love Child*. London: Virago.

Ehrlich, Susan 1990: *Point of View: A Linguistic Analysis of Literary Style*. London: Routledge.

Foucault, Michel 1980: *Herculine Barbin*. Translated by Richard MacDougall. New York: Random House.

Garréta, Anne 1986: *Sphinx*. Paris: Grasset.

Irigaray, Luce 1987: L'Ordre sexuel du discours. In *Languages: Le sexe linguistique*, vol. 85 (March): 81–123.

Lakoff, Robin and Tannen, Deborah 1994: Conversational strategy and metastrategy in a pragmatic theory: The example of *Scenes from a Marriage*. In Deborah Tannen (ed.) *Gender and Discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 137–73.

Lefanu, Sarah 1988: *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction*. London: Women's Press.

Le Guin, Ursula 1973: *The Left Hand of Darkness*. St Albans: Granada.

Livia, Anna 1995: Introduction: Lucie Delarue-Mardrus and the phrenetic harlequinade. In Lucie Delarue-Mardrus (ed.) *The Angel and the Perverts*, translated by Anna Livia. New York: New York University Press, pp. 1–60.

Livia, Anna 2000: *Pronoun Envy: Literary Uses of Linguistic Gender*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Millett, Fred 1951: Introduction to *The Portrait of a Lady* by Henry James. New York: Random House, pp. v–xxxv.

Mills, Sara 1995: *Feminist Stylistics*. London: Routledge.

Piercy, Marge 1976: *Woman on the Edge of Time*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Proust, Marcel 1954: *Du côté de Chez Swann*. Paris: Gallimard.

Richardson, Dorothy 1919: *The Tunnel*. London: Duckworth.

Richardson, Dorothy 1923: *Revolving Lights*. London: Duckworth.

Rubin, Gayle 1975: The traffic in women: Notes on the "political economy" of sex. In Rayna Reiter (ed.) *Toward an Anthropology of Women*. New York: Monthly Review Press, pp. 157–210.

Silverberg, Robert 1975: Introduction to James Tiptree, *Warm Worlds and Otherwise*. New York: Ballantine.

Simon, Sherry 1996: *Gender in Translation*. New York: Routledge.

Steiner, George 1975: *After Babel*. London: Oxford University Press.

Winterson, Jeanette 1993: *Written on the Body*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Wittig, Monique 1966: *The Opoponax*. Translated by Helen Weaver. London: Peter Owen. (Originally published as Wittig, Monique 1964: *L'Opoponax*. Paris: Editions de Minuit.)

Wittig, Monique 1969: *Les Guérillères*. Paris: Editions de Minuit. (Translated as Wittig, Monique 1971: *Les Guérillères*. Translated by David Le Vay. New York: Avon.)

Wittig, Monique 1973: *Le Corps lesbien*. Paris: Editions de Minuit.

Wittig, Monique 1975: *The Lesbian Body*. Translated by David Le Vay. New York: Avon.

Woolf, Virginia 1990a: Women and fiction. In Deborah Cameron (ed.) *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*. London: Routledge, pp. 33–40.

Woolf, Virginia 1990b: Dorothy Richardson and the women's sentence. In Deborah Cameron (ed.) *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*. London: Routledge, pp. 70–4.