SECOND EDITION  REVISED AND EXPANDED

Translating Slavery
Volume I

Gender and Race in
French Abolitionist Writing,
1780–1830

Edited by Doris Y. Kadish and
Françoise Massardier-Kenney
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5 Translating Slavery, Volume I: Gender and Race in French Abolitionist
   Writing, 1780–1830
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Preface

Doris Y. Kadish

We are publishing this revised edition of *Translating Slavery* in response to requests received over the years for paperback editions that would be accessible and useful to students and teachers in the fields of translation and French slavery studies. We have attempted to take into account the notable strides that have been made in those fields in the years since the publication of the first edition and to update sources and other materials accordingly. Because the number of translated works in the revised edition has been substantially expanded, we have chosen to present most of the original texts online rather than as appendices. See www.uga.edu/slavery.

Translation, gender, and race, the main topics of this volume, have often been relegated to a marginal status. In recent years, however, they have begun to receive the serious attention they deserve. Each of these topics stands at the frontier of much of the most challenging theoretical, linguistic, and historical activity occurring in the humanities and social sciences today. However, the important ties among these three topics have been insufficiently explored, leaving a gap in the treatment of the complex interrelationships that exist among them. *Translating Slavery* attempts to fill that gap by focusing on the French revolutionary period in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in France, from 1780 to 1830, a paradigmatic period during which a number of French women spoke out against the oppression of slaves and women. As the dates in the subtitle indicate, our focus is no longer limited to the period during which three women writers (Olympe de Gouges, Germaine de Staël, and Claire de Duras) wrote. Instead, we have chosen to broaden our focus to encompass the entire decade of the 1820s, a period that was especially rich in material by women and about gender and that we have only gradually begun to uncover.
Antislavery writings by French women have tended to be overshadowed by the far more negative, repressive works produced by French men writing in the second half of the nineteenth century. Those works functioned to crystallize and legitimize a fictive Africanist discourse that served, as Christopher Miller has shown (Blank Darkness 14–15), like Orientalism, to generate a set of mythic concepts and categories that stood as a screen between European subjects and the reality of the Other. Although it is true that antislavery works by women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries contributed to the creation of that discourse, it is also true that those works contributed significantly to a tradition of resistance against that discourse. Admittedly it is a mistake, as David Brion Davis points out, to glorify early antislavery writers, to overestimate their contribution, or to fail to acknowledge that their writings were motivated by a variety of economic, religious, humanitarian, and other considerations, not all of which were noble and disinterested. But it is also a mistake, as Raymond Williams states, “to overlook the importance of works and ideas which, while clearly affected by hegemonic limits and pressures, are at least in part significant breaks beyond them, which may again in part be neutralized, reduced, or incorporated, but which in their most active elements nevertheless come through as independent and original” (114). This volume discovers in French women’s writings of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods evidence of those significant breaks and independent, original elements.

For the purposes of this volume, 1780 and 1830 have been chosen as convenient and representative boundaries not only because they mark the dates when the principal works translated in this volume were written or published but also because they delineate an especially active period during which French women resisted the joint oppression of slaves and women. However, for more than a century before 1780, and for decades after 1830—even after 1848, when slavery was officially abolished once and for all in the French colonies—the interrelationships of gender and race continued to run through the fabric of French culture.

This volume focuses on translation, with a specific emphasis on gender and race. In addition to the marginalization that they typically undergo in literary and historical studies, translation, gender, and race all entail the same kind of mediating process. Looking closely at what happens when translators translate and when writers treat gender and race, we can see that literature is not an objective expression of universal values, as has been traditionally
assumed, but an ideological expression of local values. *Ideology* is defined broadly here as the process by which particular groups produce meanings, beliefs, and values that are central to the social and political order of their time.² When translators translate works and women writers write works about the highly charged issues of gender and race, the processes of mediation and ideology that occur need to be made visible to critical scrutiny through analysis.

A crucial component of telling the story of translating gender and race entails looking at what happens when persons of color write about the subject of slavery or translate works about that subject. Unfortunately, little on this topic has been unearthed or explored in depth. The voice of the racial Other is not yet as readily available in French during the period highlighted in this volume as is the voice of the feminine Other. However, various ways of trying to hear that voice from the past, which has been largely silenced, have been adopted in this volume. Whenever possible, there will be mention of specific persons of color who have spoken about this period and who may have thus perhaps given a voice to those who remain silent: for example, the political leader Toussaint Louverture, the critic and historian C. L. R. James, the modern writers Caryl Phillips and Patrick Chamoiseau, the model for the nineteenth-century writer Claire de Duras’ character Ourika, and other victims of the institution of slavery. Also, as translators and critics, we have attempted to sustain a dialogue that shows at least the willingness to listen in order to produce echoes today of that distant, muted voice. The dialogue that appears in chapter 8 and that tries to bring into the open some of the ways in which translators’ racial and cultural backgrounds affect their translations is the result of just such an attempt.

This volume argues, then, that the processes of mediation and ideology are essential for understanding translation and, accordingly, that translation should not be taken as rising above or standing outside those processes. For translators in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as for writers or translators of an earlier time, ideological factors inevitably affect the treatment of issues of gender and race. The purpose of the analyses of translation provided in this volume is to identify some of those factors and to provide an occasion for reflecting upon the way they affect translators, critics, and readers of literary and historical works. Rather than allowing silence to surround the problems encountered in producing translations of gender and race, this volume seeks instead to identify such problems and thereby increase
our awareness of the constraints of ideology. Rooted in the choices that translators make regarding gender and race, it is a method that scrutinizes works of literary translation textually, linguistically, and ideologically.

The numerous literary and expository texts dealing with slaves and slavery that women produced, especially those works by French women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries singled out for close consideration here, deserve to be better known. By making them better known, this volume foregrounds the existence of a French tradition of women’s antislavery writing—Moira Ferguson similarly identifies “a gynocentrically-oriented discourse on slaves” (133) that existed in England from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries—that plays a significant but often overlooked role in French literature and history. This volume provides as well a selection of modern translations that will make some of the works in that feminine tradition available to English-speaking readers interested in issues of translation, gender, and race. This volume attempts to highlight key issues in the theory of translation as well as essays on the practical issues involved in translating gender and race. The translations produced for Translating Slavery were originally produced collaboratively by a group of women of French, American, and African American origin. Working as a team, this group of women attempted to make accessible the work of women writers of the past and thereby to maintain in some measure the tradition of women’s resistance to those hegemonic cultural and social practices that have adversely affected women and persons of color. For the revised edition, we have expanded our group to include other translators, who have made it possible to incorporate new antislavery material.

Translating Slavery opened the door to an inquiry into the interwoven issues of race, gender, and translation some fifteen years before Christopher Miller’s recent reassessment of those issues in The French Atlantic Triangle. Following the lead of our book, which he examines in detail, Miller “adopts” our focus on translation, which he considers essential for understanding the slave trade, and, acknowledging the centrality of gender for understanding abolitionist history, he “adapts” our separation between women and men in structuring the two central parts of his book (102). Miller’s book differs from ours, however, in seeking to deconstruct clear divisions between genders. As Miller states, “Gender, like any boundary, is a line of demarcation that can be crossed, tripped over, or even transcended through acts of translation,” and he asks, “Why are men who participated in the same intellectual project
of abolitionist ‘translation’ not considered as part of the same picture? I will nominate counterexamples: several men who conform to the intellectual definition of a ‘woman’ that seems to be at work in *Translating Slavery*” (100). Although our revised edition does, for reasons of comparison and contrast explained below, include male writers, we do not propose adding them as “women.” Perhaps in another place and time we can debate the deep-seated and far-reaching theoretical differences between our feminist project and Miller’s deconstructive objectives.3

However, Miller raises one specific issue that we wish to address here. It is the limited selection of writers in the 1994 edition. Unearthing silenced voices in abolitionist history, with a special focus on women, has been central to our project from the start. Now, fifteen years later, having discovered more materials and made editions of primary texts available, we are able to add Sophie Doin, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, and others to those voices in *Translating Slavery*. Although Miller’s questioning of the exclusion of more widely accessible authors such as Grégoire and Lambert is understandable, he perhaps misunderstands the importance that we have attributed and continue to attribute to making little-known writers available to students and scholars of French and world literatures and history. It is telling that Miller resorts to a dismissive, aestheticizing language in his discussion of Doin and abolitionist poets, calling both “well intentioned and noble in purpose but mediocre by any standard of literary quality” (*French Atlantic Triangle* 216). Ironically, this is the same language that Flaubert and others used to dismiss *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and that has blocked the entry of so many historically significant writers into the literary canon. Miller’s enthusiasm for hearing the “voices from below” of persons of color who have been silenced in the past and present does not seem to be as great when it comes to lesser-known women authors, for whom gaining a voice has presented and continues to present considerable challenges.

Chapter 1 presents a theoretical framework for the issues of translating slavery that are raised in this volume. Drawing on the contributions of a number of recent translation theorists, this chapter articulates an approach that has among its goals to textualize and contextualize translation, to produce a collaborative patchwork of textual components, to de-essentialize race and gender, and to practice a “creole translation” that distances itself from claims of universality and monolinguisum. It is also an approach that attempts to be self-reflective and to address openly the ideological and linguistic limitations
of its own theory and practice. In addition, chapter 1 dwells on some of the strategies adopted in order to maintain or restore the resistant elements of the works translated in this volume. Further discussion of those strategies and of specific problems encountered in translating particular authors occurs in later chapters.

Chapter 2 establishes the kind of broad historical context that is necessary for dealing adequately with the specific topic of translating gender and race in the period highlighted in this volume. In order to set the stage, the chapter begins by moving back before 1780 and taking up an example that illustrates especially well how the processes of mediation and ideology at work in translation affected a work about slavery. That example is the translation into French by a French male writer, Pierre Antoine de La Place, of what is commonly acknowledged as the seminal novel about slavery, *Oroonoko*, by the English woman writer Aphra Behn. Although Behn’s novel dates from the late seventeenth century and La Place’s translation from the mid-eighteenth century, the issues surrounding the translation of *Oroonoko* provide a highly relevant context for discussing those issues about gender and race that resurface in the production of translations of works from the period examined in this volume. After the discussion of *Oroonoko*, the second chapter then takes up the period from 1780 to 1830 in order to provide the historical and literary context necessary to understand more fully the significance of the works by writers translated and analyzed later in the volume. The second chapter comes to a close with careful consideration of a second example, which again stands outside the specific period of interest in this volume but, like the first example, is part of the broad context necessary for understanding the intricate ties among translation, gender, and race in the revolutionary period. This second example consists of the translation into French by the Irish writer Louise Belloc, in collaboration with Adélaïde de Montgolfier, of what is undoubtedly the best-known work about slavery, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. By contrasting that translation by a woman, which Stowe singled out for praise, claiming that “I am convinced that a feminine mind can more easily mould itself to my own” (Belloc vi), with the translation of the novel by a man, Émile de La Bédollière, we are able to shed further light on the complex historic interaction among translation, gender, and race.

Parts 2 and 3 focus on two specific women writers. The first, Olympe de Gouges, wrote about the subject of slavery directly before and during the
early years of the revolution at a time when overtly abolitionist sentiment was prevalent. The second, Germaine de Staël, wrote about that subject at the same time as Gouges, as well as at the end of the Napoleonic period, when pressure from England to end the international slave trade was being exerted. The introductory essays in parts 2 and 3 provide a context for understanding the particular nature of these women’s contributions and for understanding the differences among them. Produced by members of a collaborative team who have different backgrounds and who were dealing with authors having a greater or lesser degree of direct connection to translation per se, these introductory essays sketch different kinds of contexts, in some cases focusing more on literary history; in others, more on biography and translation practice. Parts 2 and 3 then go on to provide representative translations. Each translation is followed by a translation analysis that looks at the issues of gender and race that those translations bring to the fore. Like the introductory essays, these analyses adopt very different approaches, according to the disparate backgrounds and interests of their authors. In the case of Gouges, the translator comments on her intentions and the decisions that she made. In the case of Staël, two of the translators engage in a dialogue aimed at identifying, however tentatively and preliminarily, the ways in which the existence of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds affect translation, especially for the highly sensitive and ideologically charged issue of race. The purpose of these different kinds of analysis is to provide examples of ways to address the ideological issues that inevitably arise in translation. Each of these analyses, like the translations themselves and other textual components included here, has its limitations. The process of reflection upon those limitations, begun by the contributors to this collaborative project within the pages of this volume, needs to be continued by its readers.

Part 4 provides translations of a group of authors—Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, Sophie Doin, Victor Chauvet, M. Dumesnil, Charles de Rémusat—whose works have been added to this revised edition. To reflect the literary breadth and depth of antislavery writing from the 1820s, we have chosen to include new material in the genres of poetry, narrative, and theater in chapter 9. Although Translating Slavery remains focused throughout on women’s writings, some of this new material consists of translations of works by male authors: Charles de Rémusat, the author of the play L’habitation de Saint-Domingue, ou L’insurrection, and Victor Chauvet and M. Dumesnil, the authors of two widely acclaimed abolitionist poems. Gender was central to the
writings of these men, as it was to French abolitionism generally. By including
their works in Translating Slavery, we seek to illuminate through comparison
and contrast some of the distinctive features of women’s writings against
slavery. In addition, in chapter 10 we include an interview with Norman R.
Shapiro, who has joined the team of women translators represented in this
book. His expertise in translating poetry and theater considerably enriches the
revised edition, as do his reflections on what translating antislavery writing
has meant to him.

This volume is intended for a variety of readers, both bilingual and
monolingual. It is hoped that bilingual readers will want to go back to the
original texts provided online after reading the translations and that their own
reading will be informed by the translators’ theory and practice. It is hoped
that bilingual readers will scrutinize those texts for the interventions of the
translators and assess what was done or could have been done. It is further
hoped that, as a result of the kind of scrutiny practiced by the translators
here, monolingual readers will be more aware in reading translations that
translation has occurred, and that they will be reminded that translation is
a kind of cultural mediation that we need to explore and examine, all the
more so since we live and write under conditions of cultural protectionism
that act to exclude languages and values other than our own.

This volume is also intended to serve a variety of academic purposes. Some
readers may wish to focus on the translations as applications of the theoreti-
cal principles that this volume develops. Other readers may wish to focus
on the women whose work as writers and translators is highlighted in this
volume. Still other readers interested primarily in literature or history may
wish to focus on the texts, which are difficult to obtain either in French or
in translation. The authors of this volume hope, of course, that most readers
will want to read the book in its entirety and that a comprehensive reading
will make the important point that translation, literature, and history are
all most clearly illuminated when their inextricable links are acknowledged
and understood.
Part One

Theory, Practice, and History
Chapter 1
Translation Theory and Practice

Françoise Massardier-Kenney

As the title indicates, Translating Slavery: Gender and Race in French Abolitionist Writing, 1780–1830 links theory and practice. The contributors to this volume are not speaking of literary and cultural translation in general, nor are they essentializing race and gender. Translating “gender and race” suggests that race and gender are already textualized. “Translating” race and gender implies a transitive operation that is necessarily contextualized. The translators who worked on the pieces by women writers—Olympe de Gouges, Germaine de Staël, Sophie Doin, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore (volume 1), and Claire de Duras (volume 2)—have doubled these authors’ common discourse, a discourse that iterates that race, class, gender, and culture are figures of difference that are essentialized as causes of differences rather than as effects of a specific power imbalance. The texts presented here include analyses of the contribution during a specific period primarily of French women and of some male authors who wrote about people of color at a time when race was starting to be defined in essentializing terms,¹ and who have not been part of the canon of French literature. They also include translations of the French texts and comments on the translations by the translators themselves or by translators of other pieces. This collaborative patchwork of texts, comments, and translated texts deliberately fuses/defuses the differences between text and translation, between translating and writing, between reading and critiquing, and brings attention to translation as a critical gesture.² The consequence of this attempt to present translation and commentary, theory and practice, and gender and race as inextricably linked in a kind of hybrid text is that this presentation will inevitably require a discourse that cannot, that will not, neatly separate these strands, that will only leave gender to come back to it via a discussion of race, that will describe cultural difference only to question it in the practice of translation.
The displacement of writing and translation implied in a patchwork is especially apparent in the sections of the book devoted to Gouges, Staël, and Duras. In those sections, the translators reproduce the authors’ own practices and awareness of the importance of translation for the representation of race and gender. Each of these three authors was directly involved in translation. Olympe de Gouges wrote in French, not her native language, so that for her the very act of writing was a translation. It is therefore not surprising that her writing-in-translation produced results that pushed the limits of the genre of French theater. Germaine de Staël’s involvement with translation was more mediated, but no less central. She was a practitioner of translation, a theorist of translation, and her story “Mirza,” presented here, fuses the three key elements of translation, race, and gender. Similarly, Claire de Duras practiced translation, criticized it, and created a powerful Senegalese heroine who represents the colonized subject as a “translated being,” as someone who is seen and sees herself through the lens of the colonizing dominant culture.

In *Siting Translation* Tejaswini Niranjana has said about translators’ prefacing that “the work from which they seem to exclude themselves (i.e., the translation) is constituted by the traces of their historicity, and the gesture of exclusion they perform makes possible the presentation of the text as a unified and transparent whole” (49). Here the contributors to this volume wish to come out into the open, to move, so to speak, from the preface to the surface, to face, and perhaps “deface,” these texts in a movement that acknowledges that translation practice is always a practice of a “theory” or a working out of an ideological position, but also that translation theory inevitably emerges out of a specific practice. As Antoine Berman has shown, “There is no translator without translating position” (75).

This attempt at a self-reflecting translating practice follows in the steps of the most recent and interesting theoretical discussions of translation that have appeared in English. These discussions emphasize the ideological position implied by translation practices, the inevitable “refraction,” to use André Lefevere’s term, that occurs when a foreign text enters another culture.³ One of these positions, as Lori Chamberlain has demonstrated, involves the traditional representation of translation in gendered terms. This representation implies a hierarchical relation (translation is like woman, i.e., secondary) that Chamberlain proposes to challenge by advocating a translating practice that asserts the role of the translator as that of an active textual producer. Barbara Godard is also struggling against the ancillary, feminine
conception of translation when she advocates a conception of translation within the context of the theory of feminist discourse as “production not reproduction,” and within “a logic of disruptive discourse in which nothing is ever posited that is not also reversed” (90).

Rather than accept the opposition that Godard retains between production and reproduction, an opposition that goes back to the notion of the origin, authority, and superiority of the one who produces, translators could perhaps reclaim “reproduction” for translation as that operation that produces, through labor, something issued of something else, of an Other something. Thus reproduction as gendered production, as the labor of childbirth, of bringing forth a text out of another text, is a metaphor rich in implications for our understanding of translation as a linguistic mediation rather than as a linear source/target movement that reinscribes the notion of writing as origin.

Of course, since translation is also a legitimizing process for a writer—a writer takes on the authority implied in being an author insofar as he or she becomes translated—a translator can become an active textual producer in the very process of choosing who will be translated, a choice that does not have to be left to the editors of commercial publishing houses or even to the academic establishment. Translation may not be a form of discourse encouraged by the cultural hegemonic powers in this country, but its very obscurity gives its practitioners a certain amount of freedom.

It is because of this awareness that translation is a way to bring a certain authority to texts, a way to alter specific cultural power structures, that the contributors to this volume have chosen works by authors who stand in some cases in the margins of French literature, and whose texts are often hard to obtain in English, if not in their native language. European women attempt to make us hear colonized voices at a time when such voices were barely audible. Translating authors such as Gouges, Staël, Doin, Desbordes-Valmore, and Duras means that their attempt at revoicing the colonized will be heard again. Significantly, their voices are part of a tradition of political opposition that expressed itself, among other things, as an opposition to the politics of slavery and racism. Our choice of authors, which points to the intersection of gender, race, and translation at the level of practice, reflects the increasing number of translations of noncanonical and older texts, many made by women translators and editors.

That the work of translation can be the process of creating meaning and restoring literary reputation is clear within the context of these writ-
ers: for example, Gouges’ work in French has been dismissed as “bad,” Staël’s “Mirza” was dismissed as “awkward” and her essay on translation ignored, Desbordes-Valmore’s writing was dismissed until recently, Doin has remained largely unknown, and Duras’ *Ourika* was often forgotten until recently. The translations of the works presented in this volume, by pushing on the texts’ resistant features, provide critical readings that follow the hidden threads of female agency and show that women authors of this period were, perhaps because of their cultural position, sensitive to the plight of Africans and opposed slavery textually in ways that their male counterparts (canonical writers such as Hugo and Mérimée) did not or could not (see, for example, Hugo’s *Bug-Jargal* and Mérimée’s *Tamango*).

The practice of translation can be conceived of as a kind of “archeology of knowledge”: translation can reconstitute traditions that have been ignored because of their radicalness or their difference, or it can show how isolated voices could be seen as constituting traditions. As Pascale Casanova has brilliantly demonstrated in *La république mondiale des lettres*, the space of literature has been an international space for several centuries and translators have been essential creators of literary “value” in this world literary market (31). By translating, one participates in the constitution of culture, and the very gesture of translating can create pockets of resistance in the cultural hegemony. Translation does not necessarily have to be market driven and geared to producing easily digested versions of compliant texts that mirror American cultural values, which is how Lawrence Venuti defines the major output of translations into American English.

However, translating a text is more complex than just choosing a text, since it puts into play not only gender and race, but the issues of social class and nationality as well, and it is the very complexity of translation that the translators and critics of these volumes foreground here. These issues directly confront the translator as a woman who has to mediate between her desire to be visible in all it implies in terms of her own ideological investment and the necessarily different ideological positions of the text she translates. Any attempt to bring into another language or another culture the racial or cultural Other—women or persons of color—inevitably implicates the translator–mediator in the exploitative conditions that link Otherness to a specific power structure. Because of the specific historical and social circumstances in which women writers such as Gouges, Staël, Doin, Desbordes-Valmore, and Duras wrote, their texts present characteristics that the modern reader
is likely to view as compliant with the dominant culture rather than as “radical,” in spite of the fact that these authors were generally progressive (Staël, for example) or revolutionary (in the case of Gouges). For instance, Staël writes to urge the abolition of the slave trade, not the abolition of slavery itself, and in “Mirza” uses a male narrator who stereotypes African blacks in what may be offensive terms to present-day readers. At the same time, Staël’s story valorizes her Jolof heroine and gives her access to language in a movement that was certainly resistant at the time. What can the translator do to make this resistant gesture apparent? Is it sufficient to acknowledge this resistance in the “margins” of the translation, in the preface, or can this gesture be included in the translation itself? Since the goal of the collaborators of this volume is to reconstitute a tradition of women writing in a specific historical context, any intervention of the translator for the benefit of the modern reader could scramble the very voices the translator sought to bring back. Instead of stemming from an attention to the French author’s particularity, adapting the radical gesture of the text could very well be another way of making the text “culturally fluent,” of making it fit our own contemporary expectations of what constitutes “resistant” writing, or, to use Antoine Berman’s expression, to impose one’s own poetics. Making Staël politically correct could be far more compliant than producing a text whose mixture of radical and compliant elements makes us see the struggle involved against the dominant patriarchal discourse of the time and the inevitable limits that ideology places upon any writing, our own included—if not always acknowledged. As Gayatri Spivak has observed about the translation of Indian works into English, the translator “must be able to confront the idea that what seems resistant in the space of English may be reactionary in the space of the original language” (“The Politics of Translation” 186), and we may add that the reverse is true: what may appear compliant in English might have been resistant in the original language, and the translator-reader needs to decide how to handle the discrepancy between the two cultures.

This choice (unconscious as well as conscious) of whether to radicalize the text or not is scarcely gender free. A question one might ask about some of the translation practices discussed in chapter 2, “Translation in Context,” is whether they are the result of a historical shift in translation theory (after the 1800s, the concept of translation as something “faithful” displaced the concept of translation as adaptation), or whether the kinds and the number of liberties that translators take with their texts may also have to do with
gender. For instance, Louise Belloc, who translated Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1853, produced a translation that was very close to the American text and contained very few added or deleted elements, while Emile de La Bédollière, in his translation of that same text in 1852, produced a freer adaptation. We must notice that Belloc, a woman translating another woman, very carefully listened to the voice of her text, whereas the male translator La Bédollière felt free to rewrite Stowe’s work to fit the expectations of his audience or his own expectations of what male and female characters could say. These examples may or may not be representative, but they bring out the question of whether the range of the translator’s textual intervention is linked to gender positions.

The global strategies used by the different translators who worked on the texts presented here seem to follow parallel patterns. While the translators all refrain from adapting the French authors’ politically and racially radical positions to the new Anglo-American context, and thus seem to produce linguistically conservative versions, they nonetheless do what Godard describes as “feminist discourse as translation.” For Godard, “translation is one among many ways of rewriting within literary systems, pushing them in a certain direction through canonization” (92).

First, the translators have attended to the specific linguistic experiments, to the stylistic difference of the authors they were translating, in that the translators were furthering their agenda of reconstituting forgotten voices, looking toward their French texts rather than their audience. Maryann DeJulio’s translation of Olympe de Gouges, for instance, emphasizes the polemical, rhetorical tone of the author, a tone that contributed to the creation of a new kind of ideologically engagé (i.e., politically committed) theater that has been largely ignored. The translator emphasizes the legal aspect of Gouges’ writing by adding expressions from the language of contracts.

Staël’s pieces, in turn, are translated with an attention to word choice that stresses the male/female opposition and valorizes the female in an effort to emphasize Staël’s position as a woman writer, in conformity with the view that “the task of the feminist translator is to consider language as a clue to the workings of gendered agency” (Spivak, “The Politics of Translation” 177). Similarly, the translation of *Ourika* (in volume 2) by Claire Salardenne and Françoise Massardier-Kenney purposefully heightens the eloquence of the black female character in an effort to make heard a female voice that reaches the modern reader muted, already in translation (since Ourika does not
know her mother tongue, she does not know the tongue of her mother). Here Ourika’s fluency is not a way to satisfy the demands of the intended reader but a strategy that emphasizes the strength of a voice formed and perhaps deformed by the colonizing culture. It satisfies the demands of the translators as readers. It should be added that the two contributors, working on different pieces of Ourika, both purposefully effaced what sometimes appeared to them as the whining undertones of the character Ourika. This decision was made because of their common intention to produce a text that presents an oppressed but dignified woman of color. Specific lexical choices were thus made on the basis of the impression that the translators wanted the whole text to make. Our project of presenting these authors as exemplary presences who gave voice to forgotten subjects (women and blacks) made the translators aware of the patronizing implications of presenting a woman and a colonized subject strictly as a victim.

These contributors’ own desire as women translators to empower the female characters dictated a number of their choices. In this regard, as the feminist translator Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood points out about feminist translation in general, they recognize that “context determines translation strategies” (114) and that this particular context (women authors, women translators, a university press, and a sympathetic audience) made it possible for us to make the feminine visible in the text and valorize it.

Translation, as a self-reflective activity that contributes to the construction of a specific gender position, does not necessarily need to work on texts already, transparently, “feminist.” As the examples presented here show, the translator can bring to the surface elements that specific historical and cultural modes of discourse bury. The translator can bring out in specific parts of the text the hidden or implied gender identification of the text as a whole. They can bring it out or subvert it in the case of sexist male writers, in the sense of bringing out a version of the text that is there only implicitly, as Suzanne Jill Levine argued about her own translation of Latin American works.

However, unlike Lotbinière-Harwood, because of the very nature of our project, we refused to consider gender as a factor overriding all others, gender as a unified context that determines all translation strategies. The translators attempted to attend to the interrelationship of all the factors—gender, race, or class—that were present in the texts. The translators of this volume reacted to the texts in ways that suggested that race, gender, and class were equally important ideological issues. For instance, Sharon Bell’s translation of Staël’s
essays “Appel aux souverains” and “Préface pour la traduction d’un ouvrage de M. Wilberforce” was the result of conflicting responses to the texts. On one hand, in her position as a woman translator, Bell reported her appreciation for Staël’s tactful use of logic to convince her audience. She was drawn to Staël’s conciliatory tone and her effortless passage from logic to feelings, a quality she attributed to her being a woman. As a result, Bell’s translation reflects an author-centered strategy, a strategy that expresses the translator’s respect for the author’s achievement. On the other hand, Bell is also African American and Staël’s use of words like primitive and her mention of slavery as an African practice offended her. Because of these “details” in the text, she experienced a racial, a historical, and a class distance from Staël. To handle that distance in her translation, she stayed very close to the French text, a closeness here that paradoxically expressed her alienation, her lack of intimacy with Staël. Thus, the same strategy of translating very closely the French text, of not attempting to make it “transparent,” resulted from both respect and repulsion, reactions that fell along specific ideological identifications.

Bell’s strong reactions to specific words that had to do with the description of race helped certain of the other European American translators become more sensitive to the translation of these terms, helping them to attend to race as much as to gender issues in the texts. The sensitivity thus acquired is apparent, for example, in Maryann DeJulio’s discussion of her reasons for not translating primitif as “primitive” in Gouges’ play L’esclavage des noirs. For specific words like noir and nègre, much of the translators’ work was collaborative.

A major working decision for certain of the translators’ handling of race was to find out what kinds of connotations these words had at the time when they were used. By consulting dictionaries of the times, we found that nègre often tended to be synonymous with slave, and that noir became associated with abolitionist politics. As William Cohen claims, “It was no accident that, at its founding in 1788, the abolitionist society took on the title Société des Amis des noirs” (French Encounter 132). It must be added that a modern French dictionary like the Larousse gives nègre as synonymous of “slave” but also defines nègre as “a person of black race,” a revealing definition, since the concept of a black race has been discredited as having little scientific validity. But even dictionaries of the period hide the complexity of this semantic issue, a complexity linked to specific historical changes, as Serge Daget shows in his statistical study of the use of the words esclave, nègre,
and *noir* in French abolitionist literature from 1770 to 1845. Although there was no strict consensus on usage, an analysis of abolitionist writings shows that until 1791 the term *esclave* tended to be avoided (the disappearance of the term being linked to a push for the disappearance of slavery), while *nègre* was still used, but since some of its uses were pejorative, *noir* came to be the preferred term. Daget argues that since in seventeenth-century literature, *noir* was rarely capitalized, capitalizing it was a significant innovation (as in the Société des Amis des Noirs). This use stemmed from a desire to give a moral lesson to proponents of the slave trade. The use of *noir* led to strong violent reactions, which proved that changing the word was indeed perceived as a way to work for abolition. However, even Clairière, the president of the abolitionist Société des Amis des Noirs, used traditional vocabulary (i.e., *esclave* or *nègre*) as well as *noir* to “convince everyone and not only people already devoted to the abolitionist cause” (Daget 524). Furthermore, specific historical events triggered changes in usage. For instance, the word *nègre* was widely used during the rebellion in Saint Domingue in 1791, while, paradoxically enough, the 1792 suppression of subventions to the slave trade led to the disappearance of the word *noir* as free people of color “categorically rejected *nègre* or Noir” (Daget 525). But after the 1794 decree abolishing slavery, *noir* regained favor in France. With the restoration of slavery by Napoleon in 1802, *noir* lost ground to *nègre*, which again became the preferred term. After Napoleon’s fall in 1814, the term *noir* came back into favor. Daget’s study shows that translating terms connected with race is complex and that even typographical markers like a capital letter are significant. An author’s use of *nègre* instead of *noir* is thus linked to specific times and to the kinds of audience the author had in mind.

The dictionary equivalent for *nègre* is “Negro,” but its use in our translations was debatable, since today it is rejected by African Americans. Geneva Smitherman’s description of the changing use of the word *Negro* shows the complexity of its use, a complexity that parallels that of French usage. According to Smitherman, in colonial America, whites used *negroes*, *slaves*, and *niggers* to designate African Americans. *Negro* and *nigger* were used interchangeably, and “it was not until the twentieth century that whites began to semantically distinguish ‘negro’ and ‘nigger,’ with the latter becoming a racial epithet” (36). At that time *Negro* was not capitalized, as in the original Spanish form it was an adjective. However, in colonial America, blacks used the term *African*, which was abandoned in the nineteenth century. At
that time, some blacks began to use the white man’s term *negro* as well as *colored*. In the 1920s black leaders advocated the capitalization of *Negro*, and a number of blacks adopted it. Although *Negro* was never totally acceptable or universally used by blacks themselves (Smitherman 40), it was widely used in its capitalized form until the 1960s.

Since our translations are sited as historical texts and since *Negro* was used until the 1960s by blacks themselves, we chose to keep the term in certain cases. Bell’s knowledge of the current vocabulary of race sensitized the native French translators to the many connotations that terms describing race have in the United States and helped us make our decision, not because of any “intuition” based on race, but because of her familiarity with several types of black culture in the United States. The collaboration of several translators working from different cultural backgrounds helped us balance our specific ideological interest. The mixture of black, white, American, and French translators produced what we hope are translations in which all the factors of race, gender, and nationality intersect.

A specific challenge was presented by the translation of *Ourika*, since this is the only case where there exist other translations. To emphasize translation as process, and as ideological mediation, we did not consult the existing translations; we wanted to be able to verify whether our attempt to work could self-consciously produce a translation different from the two others, which we assumed had been written without the kind of attentiveness to racial or gender context that we had. The analysis by Doris Kadish of the three translations in volume 2 allows the reader to see how this situation of translation consciousness has worked out. Normally, a final version of a new translation of any work would only come after the translators consulted the existing versions and modified their own version to include particularly felicitous items from the others, or to clarify in their texts what the other versions do effectively. However, here the translators skip this final step because they want to use the translation of *Ourika* as a kind of “control” that indicates whether their experiment with race and gender can produce a different kind of translation. The translators also acknowledge that one of the translations is by the British writer John Fowles and that one of the best ways not to be swayed by the language of the canonical writer is to not read or hear him or her.

That translation is a powerful cultural activity for the construction of race as well as gender has been argued in its most negative consequences, most pointedly by Niranjana. She argues about the translation of Indian
texts into English (and this specific context will be particularly important) that translation, by presenting specific versions of the colonized subject in coherent and transparent texts, contributes to the repression of difference and is part of the process of colonial domination. Niranjana’s argument that translation practices are overdetermined by religious, racial, sexual, and economic discourses—in other words, that they are a significant component of cultural hegemony, to use Gramsci’s terms (12)—is both a criticism and a reminder of the power of translation, since translation not only legitimizes specific authors but also gives a seal of authority to certain versions of entire cultures or races. Although Niranjana’s examples deal specifically with the way British translation is implicated in the construction of the colonized Indian, her observations pertain generally to translations of culturally and racially different texts. Race can therefore be seen as a key issue in translation. The implications of Niranjana’s work for our project are many and force us to ponder the following questions: Is her description of the translation process when it involves a first-world culture and a third-world culture applicable to the translating situation when the power balance seems to be even, such as when two Western first-world languages such as French and English are involved? Is translation’s constitutive power over the colonial subject the same kind of power as for the colonizing (i.e., French) subject? Next, how can Niranjana’s call for a need to “translate, that is [disturb or displace] history,” be applied to texts that present beings already in translation, that is, African voices available only through the French colonizer’s language?

Although the texts considered in these volumes are coherent, and certainly transparent texts that represent characters of color and do minimize differences between cultures and races, their representation of race and difference is embedded in a specific historical situation that produces an opposite effect to that described in general terms by Niranjana. The authors considered here do construct images of women and people of color, but they do not necessarily “repress” difference. Instead, they de-essentialize it; they displace it: they present people who are different not because of an essential, inherent Otherness, but because of specific historical conditions. For example, the violence of Gouges’ black hero Zamor is not shown as a trait of his race, but as the only resource available to a slave who has to protect his honor and his life. Moreover, Gouges does not naively indulge in a romantic view of the Other. She also represents another Other, a Native American, a cruel man who is opposed to the lofty Zamor.
Similarly Staël’s “Mirza” contrasts the situation of the white male narrator to that of her three West African characters, but she carefully distinguishes between them. These characters belong to different tribes who are at war (here Staël expresses her distance from the myth of “the” African), and these characters are individualized. For example, the women characters react very differently to authority: Ourika is presented as a beautiful and dutiful wife, while Mirza is a solitary thinker. Gouges and Staël do, in some instances, minimize difference by suggesting that blacks and whites are not essentially different. What is different is their specific circumstances and their relation to power. In these instances, Gouges and Staël are writing against their own culture, which stakes its political, economical, and moral superiority on the belief that people of color are essentially different, that is, so unlike oneself that one does not have to treat them as one would oneself. In this context, if the translator were to affirm difference, a practice that Niranjana recommends as “enlightened,” it would be a racist strategy. The lesson for us is that any theory of translation must be embedded in a specific practice. It must be theoretical, but it must not be universalizing. In this, we could argue that translation is like creoleness as it is defined by Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant in “In Praise of Creoleness”: “Creoleness is an annihilation of false universality, of monolinguisum, and of purity” (892).

In *Ourika* Duras takes the de-essentializing of difference a step further, since she recounts the excruciating experience of difference by a character who is precisely like the members of the hegemonic culture. *Ourika* exposes a situation described by Fanon, and, more recently, by Caribbean writers Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, as “a terrible condition to perceive one’s interior architecture, one’s world, the instants of one’s days, one’s values with the eye of the other” (886). For Duras, racism, which makes an outcast of the Senegalese Ourika in French culture, is precisely that which insists on essential differences. So while the presentation of characters can seem to “repress” difference, it can as well be seen as an effort to deconstruct the notion that a different shade of complexion is essential, rather than a detail used by a powerful group to facilitate the repression of a less powerful group. This holding at bay of difference, of color, that acknowledges its existence is a central paradox of translation. Translation is a linguistic mediation conducive to creoleness. By setting up all the factors of race, gender, class, and culture for a kind of “creole translation practice,” translators can produce a text that claims its hybridity,¹² that distances itself from the claims of universality, monolinguisum, and purity.
Significantly, the original French texts on which the translations presented here are drawn heighten the problematic link between difference and translation. They represent race (i.e., exemplary difference) in a language that negates that difference: literally, all the West African characters speak and think in French (and English in the translations). So translation starts from a desire to give voice to the Other but can only do so under erasure, as it were. Staël’s characters are West Africans but their representation is monolingual, and some readers may be too. These characters come to us already in translation, a translation that inscribes a specific power balance: a French version of the West African colonized for a French reader. Although Staël’s goal of promoting antislavery sentiments is antihegemonic, the text replays the historical and cultural imbalance, and so will the translation in English, unless some gesture is made to restore that balance in the direction of the absent language.

It is at this moment perhaps that the radicalization of the text that we discussed earlier can be done: not in the direction of the English-speaking reader, but in the direction of the language that was never there, in the direction of multilingualism, of an intersection of several languages, and this gesture would not be a fluent, compliant strategy. A localized linguistic intervention can defamiliarize the text and make the readers experience directly the absent Otherness in its disquieting foreignness. For instance, the West African characters in “Mirza” reach us already in translation, a fact hidden by the white narrator, whose “guide” is really an interpreter who makes it possible for him, and for us as readers, to communicate with the Senegalese characters. Perhaps then, the translator can present a version of the missing voice and emphasize that all the French author has given the reader is a translation of a translation. The translator can recover Ourika’s speech in Wolof and make clear that the interpreter’s version in French is a sign of the narrator’s and the reader’s linguistic weakness. By translating from French into Wolof, rather than from French into English, in strategic parts of the text, the translator can momentarily “withhold translation” to make the translation apparent, to restore multilingualism. The strategic use of Wolof could also be paired with “code mixing,” that is, the regular interspacing of words of one language in sentences from another language spoken in a multicultural environment. Although such code mixing is considered an interference, in an interpreting situation, the translator could rather claim it as an “intersection” where languages can meet.
Since code mixing is most often used in speech, using it in a written text would also have the advantage of emphasizing the “orality” of the translated text, an orality that is an important component of the texts considered here, as the analyses provided in the following chapters will make clear. Moreover, orality is an especially important component for the cultural survival of the people of color who were enslaved in a number of West African countries as well as the West Indies. Attending to the orality of the texts we present here is thus a necessity; as Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant convincingly argue, the “nonintegration of oral tradition was one of the forms and one of the dimensions of our alienation” (895).

Orality is situated at the intersection of gender and race, and as translators, editors, and critics, we needed to attend to it. Although the strategy of code mixing was very appealing, our lack of familiarity with the specifics of code mixing in French and Wolof made us refrain from using it. However, if code mixing was not possible in the translation of “Mirza,” its use was still possible in the comments following the translation. Thus, the critical essay that was supposed to follow the translation of “Mirza” became a dialogue between two translators of Germaine de Staël. The code mixing became a text mixing between the language of writing and that of speaking, between translating and analyzing. The momentary withholding of translation in the English version of “Mirza,” however, is not possible for the translation of Ourika because the very issue presented in the novel is that there is nothing to translate back to. The Senegalese character’s only language is French, the language of the slave traders who took her away from her family, and that of the man who brought her back to France to save her from slavery. Duras presents an extremely pessimistic view of cultural translation as that which presents the cultural Other as deprived of her own language. Duras presents an indictment of translation conceived as monolingualism, as the presence of the discourse of the master. Translating a text that so deeply points to the repressive aspect of cultural translation can be daunting; but if we remember that what is condemned is translation as erasure of the language of departure, the producer of the English version can ensure that, at least, traces of that language are left in the text. In this case, since the translators of Ourika were both French, moving from their mother tongue into the foreign language, their translation is inevitably marked by Gallicisms, which are not signs of linguistic weakness, but a reminder to the reader that Ourika is a translation of a French text, which, far from being absent, is but a few pages away. The
fact that a French text is translated into English by French natives contributes to a shift in the balance of cultural power, since their version of Ourika is then partially dependent on their identification with the culture of departure rather than with the dominant values of American culture.  

Similarly, texts strongly marked by race and gender would probably need to be translated by people who are concerned with these issues. That is not to say that only a woman can translate a woman author, or that only a person of color can translate an author of the same color, but that a translator aware of issues of the construction of gender and race will be better equipped to pick up in the texts the strands that are significant in terms of gender, or of race.

Obviously, the conscious valorization of gender or race can better be done by translators who have a stake in it and who can read the intertexts present in the text they translate, as Lotbinère-Harwood has demonstrated about feminist works (126–31). Since this is the case, the ideological investment of the translator determines the kinds of practice the translator engages in, although ideally (or perhaps utopically) this investment should not lead to the absence of questioning of the very notions he or she seeks to promote. Thus, while the collaborators of this volume want to investigate the interrelations of gender, race, and translation, they also recognize that it is important to problematize these very notions of gender and race, or at least avoid forgetting to be sensitive to other issues such as social class and nationality. In this regard, Christopher L. Miller’s recent The French Atlantic Triangle, which broadens our subject by including male authors, is a welcome gesture.

The very authors we present here lead us to consider many such issues, since their texts bring together all these ideological formations—race, gender, social class, nationality—and de-essentialize them. Their female characters at times act in ways conventionally defined as manly, the authors often seem to identify with their black characters, the rigid class structure they represent is frequently questioned, and they iconoclastically blur differences between French and Senegalese. In brief, their representations of race, class, gender, and nationality suggest that these are figures of difference that are essentialized as causes of differences to mask the real gap, that is, a power gap. It is this gap that the translator straddles. Because of its very nature as language mediation, translation can only exist in a situation of difference, but the work of translation consists precisely in de-essentializing and recontextualizing this difference. That some translation practices attempt to erase difference, be it linguistic or cultural difference, is but an extreme example of the process of
translation as the necessary inclusion of both sameness and difference. The translations and the critical comments presented in this volume are an attempt to practice translation as a coexistence of sameness and difference, as a kind of situation of créolité that privileges a discourse on race and gender.