

THE SCANDAL OF TRANSLATION

Lawrence Venuti*

*ABSTRACT: The essay discusses the concepts of translation and authorship based on an analysis of *Les Chansons de Bilitis* (1895) by Pierre Louÿs – a hoax translation of a supposedly classical Greek female poet.*

KEY WORDS: Translation; Authorship; Scholarship.

Translation scandalizes values that have long dominated literary culture, especially in French and English. And like every scandal it calls forth various policing functions designed to enforce the values in question.

Translation is, in first, an offense against the prevailing concept of authorship. Whereas authorship is defined as originality, self-expression in a unique text, translation is derivative, neither self-expression nor unique: it imitates another text. Given the reigning concept of authorship, translation provokes the fear of inauthenticity, distortion, contamination. Yet insofar as the translator must focus on the linguistic and cultural constituents of the foreign text, translation may also provoke the fear that the foreign author is not origi-

nal, but derivative, fundamentally dependent on pre-existing materials. It is partly to quell these fears that translation practices in French and English culture have routinely aimed for their own concealment, at least since the seventeenth century, since Nicolas Perrot D'Ablancourt and John Dryden.¹ In practice the fact of translation is erased by suppressing the linguistic and cultural differences of foreign text, assimilating it to dominant values in the target-language culture, making it recognizable and therefore seemingly untranslated. With this domestication the translated text passes for the original, an expression of the foreign author's intention.

Translation is, secondly, an offense against a still prevailing concept of scholarship that rests

* Temple University, U.S.A..

¹ For further discussion of this point, see my article, "Translation as Cultural Politics: Regimes of Domestication in English", *Textual Practice*, 7: 2 (1993): 208-223, and Antoine Berman, "La traduction et la lettre, ou l'auberge du lointain", in *Les Tours de Babel: Essais sur la traduction* (Mauvezin: Trans-Europ-Repress, 1985), pp. 31-150.

on the assumption of original authorship. Whereas this scholarship seeks to ascertain the authorial intention that constitutes originality, translation not only deviates from that intention, but substitutes others: it addresses a different audience in a different language. Instead of enabling a true understanding of the foreign text, then, translation provokes the fear of error, amateurism, opportunism. And insofar as the translator focuses on the linguistic and cultural constituents of the foreign text, translation provokes the fear that authorial intention cannot possibly control their meaning and social functioning. Under the burden of these fears, translation has long been marginalized in the study of literature, even in our current situation, where the influx of poststructuralist thinking has decisively questioned author-oriented literary theory and criticism. Whether humanist or poststructuralist, contemporary scholarship tends to assume that translation does not offer a true understanding of the foreign text, or a valuable contribution to the knowledge of literature, domestic or foreign. The effects of this assumption are evident in the hiring, tenure, and promotion practices of academic institutions, as well as in academic publishing. Translation is rarely considered a form of scholarship, it does not currently constitute a qualification for an academy appointment in a particular discipline, field or area, and translated texts are rarely made the object of scholarly research. The fact of translation tends to be ignored even by the most sophisticated scholars who must rely on translated texts in their research and teaching.

To explore the issues raised by the continuing scandal of translation, I want to consider the literary hoax perpetrated by the French writer Pierre Louÿs, the book-length collection of prose poems he entitled *Les Chansons de Bilitis* (1895). Louÿs presented his text as a

French translation from the Greek poetry of Bilitis, a woman who was said to be Sappho's contemporary. Yet most of his readers knew that none of Bilitis's poetry survived, and that in fact she seems never to have existed, whether in the sixth century B.C. or in some other period of antiquity. Louÿs described his project in a letter to a French scholar in 1898: "Les Chansons de Bilitis sont toutes apocryphes, à l'exception de sept ou huit, imitées de divers auteurs/The songs of Bilitis are all apocryphal, with the exception of seven or eight, imitated from various authors."² This hoax is remarkable for its demystification of dominant cultural values, not only the academic of classical Greek literature and of Sappho's poetry is particular, but also concepts of authorship and historical scholarship that still prevail today. On the one hand, *Les Chansons de Bilitis* exposed the multiple conditions of authorship, questioning the claim of originality; on the other hand, it exposed the many values that inform scholarship, questioning the claim of historical truth. Louÿs's hoax is transgressive on several levels, some of which escape his control – such as the use to which I am putting it in this essay. And, most importantly for my purposes, his hoax derives its transgressive power mainly from simulating (and occasionally being) a translation.

I

By deliberately presenting himself as a translator instead of an author, Louÿs directed his reader's attention to the cultural materials from which he produced his text. This was of course done to give Bilitis an air of authenticity, but it also implied that Louÿs was not an authentic au-

2 "Lettre à un Erudit," *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, ed. Jean-Paul Goujon (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), p. 318. All translations of French writing are mine.

thor. The first favorable reviewers, most of whom either knew or sensed that Bilitis was a fiction, tended to regard Louÿs's writing as derivative, a "délicieux pastiche"; and even when they explicitly recognized his authorship, they defined it not as self-expression, but as scholarship, although cast in the emotionally evocative language of poetry. "L'érudition, le détail technique de reconstitution ne blessent jamais ici/The learning, the technical detail of reconstruction never offend here", wrote the reviewer for the *Mercure de France*, because "M. Pierre Louÿs est tout à fait un poète: sa forme savante qui gênait l'émotion a soudain pu l'enserrer/Mr. Pierre Louÿs is entirely a poet: his scholarly form which restrains emotion can suddenly encompass it."³ Louÿs's hoax blurred the distinctions between translation, authorship, and scholarship. As soon as the reader realized that Bilitis was invented, and that Louÿs's text derived from numerous literary and scholarly sources, authorship was redefined as historical research that takes the form of a literary imitation comparable to translation.

Louÿs initially planned to publish his text with detailed scholarly notes that identified his sources. He chose to withhold these notes, but they survive and reveal quite clearly his intention to play havoc with the question of authorship. One annotation states that "Une mauvaise variante de cette idylle est attribuée à Hedylus dans l'*Anthologie Palatine* (V. 199)/A bad variant of this idyll is attributed to Hedylus in the *Greek Anthology*."⁴ The French text de-

scribed thus is actually Louÿs's imitation of Hedylus's poem, not his translation of an "idylle" by Bilitis that happened to be badly imitated by Hedylus. The note supports the hoax by aiming, in one stroke, to establish Bilitis's existence in literary history and to assign her poetry to the canon of classical literature. She is implicitly characterized as a major poet considered worthy of imitation by later and lesser poets such as Hedylus (who was active in the third century B.C.). Louÿs makes the same gesture in his biographical essay on Bilitis, where he observes that another Greek poet, Philodemus, "l'a pillée deux fois/pilfered her [poetry] twice."⁵ For any reader aware of the fiction, such comments resonate with complex ironies: they indicate that Louÿs's authorship hinges on his production of a derivative text, an adaptation or partial translation, while slyly suggesting that he is the author of classical poems imitated by later classical poets, or in other words that he is himself a classical poet. The pseudo-attributions allow Louÿs to displace Hedylus and Philodemus as author of poems preserved in the *Greek Anthology*. Here authorship involves a competition with a canonical poet, a game of poetic one-upmanship, in which a text by that poet is imitated through adaptation or translation (or plagiarized: "pillée").

This construction of authorship is, moreover, masculinist. Louÿs is the author of his text by virtue of his competition with other male poets, and the arena in which they compete is the representation of female sexuality.⁶ Louÿs's fiction dwells almost exclusively

3 Camille Mauclair, Review of *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, *Mercure de France*, avril 1985, pp. 104-105 (105). Louÿs's text was described as a "délicieux pastiche" in the review that appeared in the *Echo de Paris*, quoted in H. P. Clive, *Pierre Louÿs (1870-1925): A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 111.

4 "Notes explicatives inédites," *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, ed. Goujon, p. 218.

5 "Vie de Bilitis," *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, ed. Goujon, pp. 21-37 (35).

6 This reading is inspired by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

on Bilitis's sexual experience. In the biography that he constructs explicitly in the preface and more indirectly in the poems, her life is divided into three moments, each linked to a specific locale and a specific form of sexual activity. First, she passes a precocious girlhood in Pamphylia, where she takes a masturbatory pleasure in straddling tree limbs, is raped by a goatherd, and bears a daughter whom she abandons. She then travels to Mytilene, where she is seduced by Sappho and subsequently engages in various lesbian affairs, including a decade-long relationship with a young girl who abandons her. Finally, she travels to Cyprus, where she becomes a courtesan consecrated to Aphrodite until age compels her to forego prostitution. In the individual texts that support this biographical narrative, Louÿs competes against classical poets in representing the female as an object of male sexual domination. The poem "conversation", included in Bilitis's "Epigrammes dans l'Île de Chypre", incorporates his partial translations of two Greek poems – one by Phylodemos, one anonymous – in which a man negotiates with a prostitute for her services (*Greek Anthology*, v. 46 and 101). Louÿs also chose to adapt the poem by Hedylus in which a virgin is raped in her sleep:

Οίνος καὶ προπώσεις κατεκοίμισαν Ἀγλαονίκην
αἱ δόλιαι. καὶ ἔρωσ ἡδύς ὁ Νικαγόρεω.
ἦς πάρα Κύπριδι ταῦτα μύροις ἔτι πάντα μυδῶντα
κεῖνται. παρθενίων ὑγρὰ λάφουρα πόθων.
σάνδαλα. καὶ μαλακαί. μαστῶν ἐνδύματα. μίτραι.
ὑπνου καὶ σκυλῶν τῶν τότε μαρτύρια.

(Wine and toasts sent Aglaonice to sleep, both crafty, plus the sweet love of Nicagoras.

She laid before Kypris this scent still dripping all over, the moist spoils of virgin desire.

*Her sandals and the soft band that wrapped her breasts are proof of her sleep and his violence then.)*⁷

Louÿs's version, entitled "Le Sommeil interrompu" ("Interrupted Sleep"), records that crucial moment in Bilitis's life when she was raped by the goatherd:

Toute seule je m'étais endormie, comme une perdrix dans la bruyère. Le vent léger, le bruit des eaux, la douceur de la nuit m'avaient retenue là.

Je me suis endormie, imprudente, et je me suis réveillé en criant, et j'ai lutté, et j'ai pleuré; mais déjà il était trop tard. Et que peuvent les mains d'une enfant?

Il ne me quitta pas. Au contraire, plus tendrement dans ses bras, il me serra contre lui et je ne vis plus au monde ni la terre ni le arbres mais seulement la lueur de ses yeux.

*À toi, Kypris victorieuse, je consacre ces offrandes encore mouillées de rosée, vestiges des douleurs de la vierge, témoin de mon sommeil et de ma résistance.*⁸

7 Hedylus's text is quoted from *The Greek Anthology*, ed. and trans. W. R. Paton (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956-1960). The English translation is mine. I am indebted to George Economou of the University of Oklahoma for answering my queries about the Greek text. Paton provides the following prose rendering: "Wine and treacherous toasts and the sweet love of Nicagoras sent Aglaonice to sleep; and here hath she dedicated to Cypris these spoils of her maiden love still all dripping with scent, her scandals and the soft band that held her bosom, witnesses to her sleep and his violence then."

8 "Le Sommeil interrompu", *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, ed. Goujon, p. 74.

(All alone I was falling asleep, like a partridge in the heather. The light wind, the sound of the waters, the sweetness of the night were holding me there.

I fell asleep, imprudent, and awoke with a cry, and struggled, and wept; but already it was too late. Besides, what can a child's hands do?

He did not leave me. On the contrary, his arms clasped me more tenderly against himself and I saw nothing in the word, neither earth nor trees, but only the gleam in his eyes.

To you, victorious Kypris, I consecrate these offerings still wet with dew, vestiges of the virgin's sorrows, witness to my sleep and my resistance.)

Louÿs's literary competition with Hedylus results in deviations that exaggerate the image of the female as sexually desirable and submissive to the male. Perhaps the most significant change is Louÿs's shift from a third – to a first-person persona. Hedylus's poem questions Nicagoras's motives by indicating that his "wine and toasts" are deceptive, intended to put Aglaonice to sleep and thus make her vulnerable to his "violence". Louÿs's poem, in contrast, shows the victim blaming herself: Bilitis suggests that, like a game bird ("perdrix"), she will naturally be pursued by men, so it is "imprudent" of her to sleep alone and in the open air. Bilitis subscribes to a patriarchal representation of herself as a sexual object, aware of her desirability, but also of her helplessness before male aggression. Louÿs underscores her acquiescence by omitting the explicit mention of male "violence" in Hedylus and focusing instead on female "resistance" finally overcome. Bilitis depicts herself as possessing a child-like

weakness ("les mains d'une enfant"), clasped in the goatherd's arms, enchanted by the gaze that he has fixed on her ("la lueur de ses yeux"). Louÿs's authorship, both derivative and masculinist, is established by an adaptation that exceeds Hedylus's image of male sexual domination, not merely by exaggerating this image, but by assigning it to a female poet who in effect confirms it. The fiction of translation again calls attention to the conditions of Louÿs's authorship, although with an outcome that he may not have anticipated: to create the appearance that he had translated an authentic classical poet, he was led to add annotations that simultaneously identify his sources and reveal his authorial identity to be a masculinist construction.

We can extend this reading further by observing that Louÿs imagined his audience as primarily male, literary, and bohemian, an exclusive group that rejected bourgeois values in art and morality. In a letter written to his brother Georges in 1895, Louÿs confided that "Je voudrais beaucoup avoir un public féminin/I would like to have a female readership, "but this seemed unlikely to him because "les femmes n'ont que la pudeur des mots/women experience only the shame of words, "so concerned with respectability as to be hypocritical: "Je crois bien que si la préface de Bilitis la représentait comme un monstre de perversité, pas une des dames que je connais n'avouerait avoir lu le volume/I truly believe that if the preface to Bilitis represented her as a monster of perversity, none of the women I know would admit to reading the volume". The literary competition that established Louÿs's authorship was conducted

9 "Extraits de Lettres Inédites de Pierre Louÿs à Georges Louis," 29 mars 1895, *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, ed. Goujon, p. 314.

before other male writers, acquaintances such as André Gide and Stéphane Mallarmé who knew of the hoax and praised his writing. And the competition included canonized French poets like Baudelaire: *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1856) linked Sappho with lesbianism in poems that provoked the government censor (most notably "Lesbos" and "Femmes damnées"),¹⁰ while *Le Spleen de Paris* (1869) developed a poetic prose that could incorporate various genres, narrative, lyric, and dramatic. Louÿs, however, refined the polymorphous Baudelairean prose poem by reducing it to a four-strophe text, and his depictions of sexual activity exceeded Baudelaire's, not merely because they avoided any moral judgment, but because they constituted a form of pornography that titillated male readers. Henri de Régnier, who published an appreciative article on Louÿs's text in the *Mercure de France*, wrote to him that "La lecture de Bilitis m'a jeté dans des transports érotiques que je vais satisfaire aux dépens de l'honneur de mon mari ordinaire [*sic*]/reading Bilitis has thrown me into erotic raptures which I satisfy at the cost of my honor as an ordinary husband."¹¹

What *Les Chansons de Bilitis* expressed was Louÿs's own sexuality, as well as that of his male readers; and the form of his expression shows that his sexuality was equally derivative, that his desire was not self-originating but culturally constructed. This is borne out by the autobiographical dimension of the text. Louÿs wrote most of it during 1894, when he made a short visit to Algeria and had a liaison with Meryem bent Ali, a sixteen-year-old girl

who was cited by her initials in the dedication to the first edition. Meryem belonged to the Oulad Naïl tribe, in which young girls traditionally resorted to prostitution to earn their dowry.¹² They were introduced by Gide, to whom Louÿs sent a revealing description of her: "elle est Indienne d'Amérique, et par moments Vierge Marie, et encore courtisane tyrienne, sous ses bijoux qui sont les mêmes que ceux des tombeaux antiques/she is an American Indian, and at moments the Virgin Mary, and again a Tyrian prostitute, beneath her jewels which are the same as those from ancient tombs."¹³

Louÿs's desire for Meryem was determined by various cultural codes: it was a romantic fascination with the alien that was simultaneously bohemian, antiquarian, and Orientalist. His letter to Gide rests on a stereotype of North African women that is both racist and masculinist. As Edward Said has observed, "in the writing of travellers and novelists" like Flaubert and Louÿs, "[Oriental] women are usually the creatures of a male power-fantasy. They express unlimited sensuality, they are more or less stupid, and above all they are willing."¹⁴ Louÿs's experience with Meryem can be detected in several poems, but it also resulted in the Orientalist themes that recur throughout his scholarly apparatus. His fictive biography of Bilitis assigns her a Greek father and a Phoenician mother, and he annotates the

10 Joan DeJean discusses Baudelaire's representation of Sappho in *Fictions of Sappho 1546-1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 271-273.

11 Henri de Régnier, 16 décembre 1894, in "Lettres," *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, ed. Goujon, p. 329.

12 For Louÿs's relationship to Meryem bent Ali, see Clive, *Pierre Louÿs*, pp. 102-106, and Louÿs, *Journal de Meryem*, ed. Jean-Paul Goujon (Paris: Librairie A. G. Nizet, 1992).

13 Louÿs, Letter to André Gide, 10 August 1894, quoted in Clive, *Pierre Louÿs*, p. 106.

14 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), pp. 207-208. Clive discusses Louÿs's many affairs, including his relationships with North African women, in *Pierre Louÿs*, passim.

poem entitled "Les Bijoux" ("The Jewels") with a glance at the present: "Il est remarquable qu'à l'époque actuelle, ce système de bijoux a été conservé sans aucun changement par les Oulad Naïl/It is remarkable that in the present era this ensemble of jewels has been preserved without any change by the Oulad Naïl.¹⁵" What Louÿs expressed in *Les Chansons de Bilitis* was partly his desire for Meryem, if not his heterosexual promiscuity in general, yet that desire was already a translation of his readings in classical Greek literature. In 1894 he wrote to brother Georges that "j'ai écrit vingt pièces nouvelles, en grande partie inspirées par des souvenirs d'Algérie où j'ai pu vivre toute l'Anthologie pendant un mois/I have written twenty new pieces, inspired for the most part by memories of Algeria where I was able to live out the entire Greek Anthology in a month."¹⁶

II

By blurring the distinction between translation and authorship, Louÿs's hoax inevitably questioned scholarship that defined historical truth as a verification of authorial originality. *Les Chansons de Bilitis* is an elaborate parody of a scholarly translation, in which he invented not merely a classical text by a Greek poet, but a modern edition by a German professor whose

name, "G. Heim", puns on the German word for "secret" or "mysterious", *geheim*. In the poems themselves, Louÿs paid a scholarly attention to detail. For instance, he used an archaic spelling for Sappho ("Psappha"), as well as various Greek words that relate specifically to classical culture, like "Héraïos", the month in the Greek calendar consecrated to Hera, or "métôpion", a perfume that originated in Egypt. And the biography of Bilitis, as Joan DeJean has pointed out, "is situated in the interstices of Sappho scholarship. Louÿs weaves Bilitis into Psappha's life as her rival for one of the beloved girls actually mentioned by Sappho, Mnasideka" (p. 277).

In his correspondence Louÿs admitted that his intention was to debunk the prevailing concept of scholarship. He sent a copy of his text to a classical scholar precisely to deceive him. When the scholar responded that Bilitis's poems "ne sont pas pour moi des inconnus/are not unknown to me," Louÿs attributed this delusion to the assumption that historical research affords unmediated access to the truth or even enables a total identification with past cultures. He framed the scholar's reasoning as an impossible syllogism: "Comme archéologue et comme *athénien*, je dois connaître tout ce qui est grec. Or Bilitis est un auteur grec. Donc je dois connaître Bilitis/As an archaeologist and *Athenian*, I must know everything that is Greek. Now Bilitis is a Greek author. Therefore I must know Bilitis" (Louÿs's emphasis).¹⁷ Louÿs thus suggested that, like his counterfeit translation, scholarship is engaged in historical invention, which, however, can pass for truth because it shares the cultural authority enjoyed by academic institutions ("archéologue"). At the

15 "Notes explicatives inédites," *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, p. 223.

16 "Extraits de Lettres Inédites de Pierre Louÿs à Georges Louis," 7 septembre 1894, p. 311. Although Louÿs's authorial identity can be described as both masculinist and heterosexual, *Les Chansons de Bilitis* nonetheless inspired later lesbian treatments of Sappho by Natalie Clifford Barney and René Vivien: see DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho*, pp. 279-280.

17 "Lettre sur la Mystification de Bilitis," *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, ed. Goujon, pp. 320, 322.

same time, Louÿs demonstrated that translation can be a form of historical scholarship, that it can constitute a scholarly invention of the classical text for the modern reader, but that unlike most scholarship it does not conceal its status as an invention or its historical difference from the classical text. This is how Louÿs described his project to his brother: "tout en évitant les anachronismes trop grossiers, je ne perdrai pas de temps à ménager une impossible vraisemblance/while avoiding anachronisms that are too gross, I shall not waste any time in contriving an impossible verisimilitude."¹⁸ Louÿs expected his readers to recognize that he was not presenting ancient poems, but modern derivations. And his readers complied: the reviewer for *Gil Blas* observed, with some uncertainty, that "Si c'est une traduction véritable, ce doit être une traduction assez libre, car, tant que s'évoque l'esprit grec, ces poèmes paraissent imprégnés aussi quelque peu d'esprit moderne./If this is a real translation, it must be a rather free translation, since, insofar as the Greek spirit is evoked, these poems also seem imbued a little with a modern spirit."¹⁹ Louÿs's hoax makes clear that both scholarship and translation are necessarily anachronistic: however much grounded in research, their representations of the past are likely to possess "une impossible vraisemblance" because they are motivated by present cultural values.

This point was dramatically made by an unexpected development: in 1896 the influential classical scholar, Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, published an extremely negative

review of *Les Chansons de Bilitis*.²⁰ Wilamowitz saw through the hoax. He noted that Louÿs's effort to create the appearance of authenticity was learned ("In gewissem Sinne ist auch P. L. ein Classicist/In a certain sense, eve P. L. is a classicist" [p. 69]), and he found some of the texts persuasive imitations of classical literature ("Fast das ganze letzte Buch der Bilitis würde sich in hellenistische Epigramme übersetzen lassen/Almost the entire las book of Bilitis could be translated into Hellenistic epigrams" [p. 68]). But he faulted Louÿs for factual errors and anachronisms:

wenn er so viel tut, um im detail antik zu scheinen, so fordert er die Kritik des Sachkenners heraus, der ihm dann doch sagen muß, daß es im Altertum in Asien keine kamele gab, daß Hasen Keine Opfertiere sind, daß 'Lippen rot wie Kupfer, Nase blauschwarz wie Eisen, Augen schwarz wie Silber', drei ganz unantike Vergleiche sind. (p. 64)

(by striving so hard to appear ancient in each detail, he challenges the critique of the expert who feels compelled to tell him that ancient Asia knew no camels, that rabbits are no sacrificial animals, that "lips red as copper, the nose blue-black as iron, eyes black as silver" are entirely unancient comparisons.)

18 "Extraits de Lettres Inédites de Pierre Louÿs à Georges Louis" avril 1894, *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, ed. Goujon, p. 311.

19 Paul Ginisty, resenha de *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, *Gil Blas*, 5 janvier 1895, citado em Clive, *Pierre Louÿs*, p. 111.

20 Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Anzeige von "P.L., Les chansons de Bilitis traduites du Grec pour la première fois. Paris 1895". *Göttinger Gelehrte Anzeigen* 1896, reproduzido em Wilamowitz, *Sappho und Simonides: Untersuchungen über griechische Lyriker*, Berlin, Weidmann, 1913, p. 63-78.

For Wilamowitz, only scholarship was capable of discovering historical truth, and it did so through an imaginative identification with the authorial "individuality" that was uniquely expressed in the text:

wird emsige Beobachtung marcherlei ermitteln; aber in Lyrik vollends ist die Individualität die Hauptsache, und sie läßt sich auf diesem Wege nimmermehr zurückgewinnen. In solchen Fällen kann das beste nur durch nachschaffende poetische Intuition geleistet werden: Welckers Macht beruht darauf, daß er die Gottesgabe dieser Phantasie besaß. (p. 70)

(industrious observation will unearth a lot; but in poetry individuality is what ultimately matters, and it can never be retrieved by [Louÿs's] method. In such cases the best accomplishments can only be achieved through imitative poetic intuition: Welcker's power rests on his divine gift of this imagination.)

In this remarkably revealing passage, Wilamowitz indicated the necessity of careful research ("industrious observation"), but confessed that scholarship goes beyond the historical record by relying on the scholar's "poetic intuition". What keeps this intuition from being merely a modern invention is apparently a "divine" omniscience, the scholar's ability to transcend his historical moment in the retrieval of the ancient author's intention. Louÿs's texts lacked this transcendence because they contained too many details that were recognizably modern, addressed to a modern readership: Wilamowitz called them "leere Bruchstücke [...], mehr oder minder schief übersetzt und damit dem Publicum

imponiren will/vapide fragments [...], more or less unevenly translated, in order to impress the public" (p. 69).

Yet Louÿs's hoax was so powerfully transgressive that it forced Wilamowitz to reveal the modern values informing his scholarship. This is evident, first, in the mention of Friedrich Gottlieb Welcker, the early nineteenth-century philologist. Wilamowitz's critique of Louÿs rested on an acceptance of the German tradition of Sappho scholarship, specifically Welcker's view that Sappho was not homosexual, Wilamowitz asserted that "mit voller Zuversicht bekenne ich mich zu dem Glauben, daß Welcker Sappho von einem herrschenden Vorurteil befreit hat/In full confidence I confess to the belief that Welcker has liberated Sappho from the dominant prejudice"; she was "eine vornehme Frau, Gattin und Mutter/a noble woman, wife, and mother" (pp. 71, 73). Welcker's reading of Sappho, however, was hardly an intuition that escaped the contingencies of his moment: as DeJean has argued, "at the time of the French Restoration and in a period of rising German nationalism, Welcker posited an essential bond between male physical beauty, militarism, and patriotism on the one hand and Sappho's chastity on the other" (p. 205). Welcker's Sappho was a distinctively German invention: she functioned in a "nationalistic program for civic virtue" as a teacher who prepared virgins for marriage and the production of "new citizens" (DeJean, pp. 218, 219). In Wilamowitz's review, some eighty years later, the nationalism survived not only in his strenuous denial of Sappho's homosexuality – most of his review is devoted to this question – but also in some rather explicit statements of his prejudices. His homophobia was linked to a belief in German cultural superiority: "In Deutschland brüsten sich die Kreise, die mit der Tendenz der

Bilitis sympathisiren, meist mit ihrer Bildungslosigkeit/In Germany, those circles who sympathize with Bilitis's tendencies usually boast of their lack of cultivation" (p.68). And Louÿs's Orientalism provoked an anti-Semitic reaction in a footnote where Wilamowitz commented on the name "Bilitis":

*Offenbar ist das der syrische Name der Aphrodite, den ich meist Beltis geschrieben finde. Vor den semiten hat der Verfasser jenen unberechtigten Respect, der wissenschaftlich längst überwunden immer noch hie und da agrassiert. Er läßt sie in Pamphylien sich mit den Hellenen mischen, fabelt von **rhythmes difficiles de la tradition sémitique** und versichert, daß die Sprache seiner Bilitis eine Masse phoenikischer Vocabeln enthalte. Lauter Undinge. Aber Mr. Louys hat auch die aphroditegleiche Schönheit seines Romanes aus Galilaea stammen lassen und zu ihren Ehren erotische Stücke des Alten Testaments herangezogen. Er wird wohl für die Semiten eine angeborene Vorliebe haben. (p. 64)*

*(Apparently this is the Syrian name of Aphrodite, which for the most part I have found written as Beltis. The author shows the Semites that inappropriate respect which, although it has scientifically been overcome for a long time, still flourishes here and there. He has them mix themselves with the Hellenes in Pamphylia, tells fables about the **rhythmes difficiles de la tradition sémitique**, and assures us that the language of his Bilitis contains*

numerous Phoenician words. All nonsense. But Mr. Louys also has the Aphrodite-like beauty of his novel [Aphrodite, published in 1896] originate in Galilee and in her honor has referred to erotic pieces of the Old Testament. He must have an innate preference for the Semites.)

Louÿs's hoax posed a serious threat to classical scholarship because his representation of ancient Greek culture challenged the nationalist and racist values that figured in the German reception of Sappho's poetry. Wilamowitz felt compelled to review *Le Chansons de Bilitis* in order to reaffirm Welcker's image of the chaste Sappho. He lamented that "er außerhalb Deutschlands nicht so vollkommen triumphiert, wie bei uns/outside of Germany [Welcker] has not triumphed as perfectly as among us" (p. 71).²¹

III

Louÿs's hoax prompts a reconsideration of the distinctions that are currently drawn between translation, authorship and scholarship. Translation can be considered a form of authorship, but an authorship now redefined as derivative, not self-originating. Authorship is not *sui generis*; writing depends on pre-existing cultural materials, selected by the author, arranged in

²¹ William M. Calder III notes Wilamowitz's "distrust" of the French in "Ecce Hommo: The Autobiographical in Wilamowitz's Scholarly Writings," in *Wilamowitz Nach 50 Jahren*, ed. Calder, Hellmut Flashar, and Theodor Lindken (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985), pp. 80-110 (86-87). In *Fictions of Sappho*, DeJean shows that "the two modern traditions of Sappho speculation – German philological solemnity and French sexual sensationalism – appear so far opposed as to be mutually exclusive" (p. 200).

an order of priority, and rewritten (or elaborated) according to specific values. Louÿs made this clear in a letter to his brother on the eve of the second edition of *Les Chansons de Bilitis*:

Je crois justement que l'originalité du livre vient de ce que la question pudeur n'est jamais posée. En particulier, je crois que la seconde partie semblera très nouvelle. Jusqu'ici, les lesbiennes étaient toujours représentées comme des femmes fatales (Balzac, Musset, Baudelaire, Rops) ou vicieuses (Zola, Mendès, et auprès d'eux cent autres moindres). Même Mlle de Maupin, qui n'a rien de satanique, n'est pourtant pas une femme ordinaire. C'est la première fois [...] qu'on écrit une idylle sur ce sujet-là.²²

(I believe that the originality of the book derives precisely from the fact that the modesty question is never posed. In particular, I believe that the second part will appear very new. Until now, lesbians have always been represented as fatal women (Balzac, Musset, Baudelaire, Rops) or vicious (Zola, Mendès, and another hundred lesser writers). Even Mlle de Maupin, who is not at all satanic, is nonetheless not an ordinary woman. This is the first time [...] that an idyll has been written on this topic.)

Louÿs felt that his derivative text made him an original author, but only in the sense that it transformed previous representations of female ho-

mosexuality and cast them in a different genre ("une idylle"). From this point of view, what distinguishes translations from so-called original composition is mainly the closeness of the mimetic relation to the other text: translation is governed by the goal of imitation, whereas composition is free, relatively speaking, to cultivate a more variable relation to the cultural materials it assimilates.

Translation can also be considered a form of scholarship. Both translation and scholarship rely on historical research in their representations of an archaic or foreign text, but neither can produce a representation that is completely adequate to the author's intention. On the contrary, both translation and scholarship answer to contemporary, domestic values that necessarily supplement that intention: in effect, they (re)invent the text for a specific cultural constituency that differs from the one for which it was initially intended. Thus, Mallarmé wrote to Louÿs that

Un charme si exquis de ce livre, à la lecture, est de se rendre compte que le grec idéal, qu'on croit entendre derrière, est précisément le texte lu en votre langue.²³

(One of the exquisite charms of reading this book is to realize that the Greek ideal, which one seems to hear behind it, is precisely the text read in your language.)

Mallarmé, who was aware of the fiction, nonetheless took pleasure in reading Louÿs's poems as a translation ("entendre derrière"), yet a

²² "Extraits de Lettres Inédites de Pierre Louÿs à Georges Louis," 22 décembre 1897, *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, ed. Goujon, p. 317.

²³ Stéphane Mallarmé, 31 janvier 1898, in "Lettres," *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, ed. Goujon, p. 331.

translation that was so successful as to displace the Greek texts. From this point of view, what distinguishes translation from scholarship is mainly the necessity of a performative relation to the other text: translation must perform or enact its representation in its very language, whereas scholarship enjoys the freedom, relatively speaking, to lay out its representation in commentary.

Finally, the many cultural and social determinants that bear on any writing suggest that translated texts deserve the scholar's attention as much as the foreign texts they translate. The study of translations is truly a form of historical scholarship because it forces the scholar to confront the issue of historical difference in the changing reception of a foreign text. Translation, with its double allegiance to the foreign text and the domestic culture, is a reminder that no

act of interpretation can be definitive for every cultural constituency, that interpretation is always local and transient, even when housed in social institutions with the apparent rigidity of the academy. Perhaps what is most scandalous about translation today is that it crosses institutional boundaries: not only does translation require scholarly research to move between languages, cultures, and disciplines, but it compels the scholar to consider cultural constituencies beyond the academy – for example, the overwhelming majority of English-language readers who need translations because foreign-language study has declined as English has achieved global dominance. At the present time, translation studies comprise an area of research that uncomfortably exposes the limitations of English-language scholarship – and of English.