



## Pandora's Tongues

Karin Littau

Volume 13, Number 1, 1er semestre 2000

Idéologie et traduction  
Ideology and Translation

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/037391ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/037391ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association canadienne de traductologie

ISSN

0835-8443 (print)

1708-2188 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Littau, K. (2000). Pandora's Tongues. *TTR*, 13(1), 21–35.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/037391ar>

Article abstract

Pandora's Tongues — This paper looks at translation not from the perspective of Babel, the "male god" as Jacques Derrida and George Steiner do, but from the perspective of Pandora, the first woman of the Greek creation myth, in order to offer a feminized version of the primal scattering of languages. The aim is to pose through the figure of Pandora questions about language and woman, and by extension, the mother tongue and female sexuality. Whilst the myth of the tower of Babel makes visible the filiations of translation and the word of the Father, the myth of Pandora allows us to uncover the matrix between translation and the mother tongue, presents us, in other words, with new possibilities for translation and gender.

# Pandora's Tongues

**Karin Littau**

In *After Babel* George Steiner recounts "two main conjectures" in mythology which explain "the mystery of many tongues on which a view of translation hinges". One such mythic tale is the tower of Babel, which not only Steiner, but also Jacques Derrida<sup>1</sup> after him, take as their starting point to approach the question of translation; the other conjecture tells of "some awful error [which] was committed, an accidental release of linguistic chaos, in the mode of Pandora's Box" (Steiner 1975, p. 57). This paper will take this other conjecture, the myth of Pandora, first woman of the Greek creation myth, as its point of departure, not only to offer a feminized version of the primal scattering of languages, but to rewrite in a positive light and therefore also reverse the negative and misogynist association of Pandora with man's fall.

I will therefore draw on recent feminist debates on the reappropriations of myth, and in this instance, use the figure of Pandora to combine aspects both of the Babel myth and the Oedipus myth. This is because, whilst Babel is associated with loss, the loss of one tongue, and Oedipus is associated with lack, man's castration anxiety, Pandora's box has been associated with both: the threat of linguistic chaos, i.e. the loss of understanding, and the threat of woman's sexuality, i.e. woman's lack of genitals. The Pandora myth, in other words, embodies phallogentric anxieties of Woman, both as regards language — the mother tongue, and

---

<sup>1</sup> As Derrida puts it in *The Ear of the Other*: "I chose the example of Babel because I think it can provide an epigraph for all discussions of translation" (1985b, p. 100). Or as he puts it rather succinctly later on in the discussion, "[t]here is Babel everywhere" (p. 149).

as regards her gender — female sexuality. But, rather than exposing the entrenched patriarchal bias in mythographers' interpretations of Pandora, my foremost aim is to pose through her figure questions about language and woman, and by extension, the mother tongue and female sexuality. Whilst the myth of the tower of Babel makes visible the filiations of translation and the word of the Father, the myth of Pandora allows us to uncover the matrix between translation and the mother tongue, presents us, in other words, with new possibilities for translation and gender.

Babel, of course, marks the multiplicity of languages imposed on the sons of Noah by God, as his punishment for man imitating the divine *Ursprache* by which word and world come simultaneously into being, as his revenge on man for making a name for himself. Babel also designates the name of the city of this second fall, names confusion, and is a composite name, Ba referring to father, and Bel to God. The gift of language which God had given to man he takes back; as Derrida shows in "Des Tours de Babel", he, Ba-Bel, the god as father "poisons the present", adds *Gift* to the gift (1985a, p. 167)<sup>2</sup>. What was the Adamic tongue now became mankind's many tongues, so that men would no longer communicate and understand each other with ease. Babel, as the proper name of a city, the common name for God the father, his patronym for this city, or more generally the synonym for confusion, thus unfolds all the different threads of its filiations, and poses for Derrida therefore the basic law of undecidability: "the impossibility of deciding whether this name belongs, properly and simply, to *one* tongue" (1985a, p. 174).

The myth of the *Urweib* Pandora also tells of a *Gift*-gift (poison/present) she brings to mankind. But before unwrapping Pandora's box, it is necessary to add a few words about Pandora's name, which similarly plays upon an excess of significations. For, in Hesiod, it becomes clear that Pan-dora, gift-giver, signals in one name, and in one language, three meanings upon which he deliberately plays: "she is the giver of all gifts", "she who was given all gifts", "the gift of all the gods" (see Hurwit 1995, p. 176). What remains to be seen, however, is the precise nature of her gift, the contents of the box which she opens. For,

---

<sup>2</sup> The difference in meaning between the German word *Gift*, which is "poison", and the English gift, also of course echoes the term *pharmakon*, translatable from the Greek as both "poison" and "cure", a double translatability which I will return to later.

whether it was Pandora who opened the box, or Epimetheus who opened it, or whether Pandora's box, if there ever was such a container, was a cornucopoeia, or a *pithos* ("immovable storage jar"), or a *pyxis* ("small portable vessel"), or whether we should blame Erasmus of Rotterdam for his translation of *pithos* into *pyxis*, and for his translation's grammatical ambiguity which seems to suggest that it was the man, he, Epimetheus, being the subject of the sentence, who opened the box, and not Pandora (Panofsky 1962, p. 17) — all these versions constitute instances of the tale's history of textual transmissions of which translation itself decided the content of the myth, that is, decided both the nature of the box, and the gender of who opened it. Moreover, not only the nature but also the contents of the box point to two very different tales of the myth.

In one such tale, following the non-Hesiodic tradition of the myth, Pandora is Gaia, Mother Earth, the first woman, and wife to Prometheus, who created her out of water and earth and brought her to life with fire. Here, her container is a horn of plenty which contains all the provisions to feed mankind, and as such connotes fertility. The Pandora of Hesiod's tale, on the other hand, is created by Zeus to avenge the gods and punish Prometheus' theft of fire from them. When Pandora opens her box out of curiosity, all the ills of the world are released. When the lid falls shut, only hope remains at the bottom of the box. In this account, Pandora is a *femme fatale* whose beauty, charms and seductiveness ultimately bring about his downfall; and here, her box represents nothing other than the female body, the threats and allures of her sexuality. In a Freudian reading then, the box as an image of concealment as well as mystery, generates a metaphoric relation to the female genitals, which, unlike the phallus, remain hidden and invisible, conceal a secret dangerous to man. Her box in this sense does not so much contain gifts to mankind, but is *Gift* to him, hope remaining trapped in the box, and unavailable to mankind. Whilst Steiner clearly interprets Pandora's unleashing of "linguistic chaos" negatively (as *Gift*), T. Gantz, on the contrary, has it "that *elpis* should mean not 'hope' but 'expectation' or 'awareness', so that men would be denied the full knowledge of their sorry condition: trapping *elpis* in the jar, then would be a gift after all" (quoted in Hurwit 1995, p. 184). Once more then, in the myth's twists and turns, Pandora and her box appear in contradictory ways, which is why myth "cannot be grasped or encompassed; it haunts human consciousness without ever appearing before it in fixed form" (de Beauvoir 1972, p. 175). Female figures in mythology are "contradictory", and Pandora is

"various", precisely because she is a principle of projection: "Delilah and Judith, Aspasia and Lucretia, Pandora and Athena — woman is at once Eve and the Virgin Mary. She is idol, a servant, the source of life, a power of darkness", from which de Beauvoir concludes that "she is everything that he is not and that he longs for"<sup>3</sup>.

The Pandora myth therefore tells (at least) two stories, or we might say, speaks in (at least) two tongues. Pandora brings hope and/or ills; she brings remedy and/or poison to mankind; in short, when she opens her container, she unleashes the *pharmakon*. Thus, not unlike Plato's doubly translatable term *pharmakon* (writing as poison, and/or as remedy), which, as Derrida shows, came to be inscribed differently by its translators in the tradition of philosophy (sometimes as poison, other times as remedy), so, the seemingly fork-tongued Pandora has come to be inscribed differently by her mythographers (sometimes as hope for mankind, other times as his ills). For us, therefore, Pandora poses the question of translation, as the *pharmakon* does for Derrida<sup>4</sup>, not merely "in the passage from one language to another", but also "in the tradition between Greek and Greek" (1981, p. 72); a point which Derrida encapsulates in the phrase "*plus d'une langue* — more than one language, no more of one" (1986, p. 15). The plurality of languages within what is no longer one suggests that translation is always already operative within the *same* language, which is why "[t]here is impurity in every language" and why "[t]his fact would in some way have to threaten every linguistic system's integrity", that is, undermine the very presumption of "the existence of one language and of one translation in the literal sense"

---

<sup>3</sup> See also Littau 1995 for an expanded version of this argument, illustrated with reference to the many projections of Wedekind's Lulu-figure from his plays *Earth Spirit* and *Pandora's Box* in subsequent adaptations, translations and rewrites.

<sup>4</sup> Note also the myth of Medea — the foreigner from Colchis, who later turns into a nomad — the (in)famous sorceress whose *pharmaka* (herbs and magic potions) are used by her both to *heal* and to *poison*. While her herbs in effect save Jason from sure death in his quest to obtain the Golden Fleece, or rejuvenate Jason's frail father, her magical concoctions later on in Ovid's version of the tale in *Metamorphoses*, not only kill Jason's father's brother, Pelius, but also poison Jason's new bride. Space does not allow here to follow through the twists and turns of the Medea myth, suffice to say, if Pandora's box unleashes the *pharmakon*, Medea's box of magic potions (like Pandora, she is also often depicted pictorially carrying a box) unleashes *pharmaka*, cures and ills.

(1985b, p. 100). The catch-phrase "*plus d'une langue*" therefore marks the irreducible multivocality which inhabits "one" language and all languages, performing in effect the resistance to the concept of a univocal translation and to translatability as such; it also connects inextricably translation and deconstruction. As Peggy Kamuf puts it, Derrida pushes us to "the almost unthinkable notion of an originary translation before the possibility of any distinction between original and translation" (1991, p. 242).

It is in this sense also, that Derrida's enterprise illustrates, according to Barbara Johnson, that "[l]anguage, in fact, can only exist in the space of its own foreignness to itself" (1985, p. 146). Since, she further points out, "Western philosophy has had as its aim to repress that foreignness" (p. 146-147), thus insisting on sameness, while repressing all that which threatens sameness, of philosophy to itself, of the West to the West, of man to man, we might extend this argument to include also the repression of that which is foreign to man, that which is other to man: woman. Moreover, since the repression of differences between entities (be it original and translation, or man and woman) are as Johnson has it, "based on a repression of difference within entities, ways in which an entity differs from itself" (1980, p. x) we might boldly state that it has always been the aim of Western philosophy to obliterate this foreignness or otherness in (the quest for) the return of the same or, in short, what Luce Irigaray has called "hom(me)ology" (1985a, p. 134), the return of the same (homo) as the return to man (homme); a concept we will return to later. The *pharmakon* then, speaking two languages in one language, is foreign to itself, is "not [...] identical to itself" (Derrida 1985a, p. 188), and like the German *Aufhebung* (conservation or suppression) of which Derrida says that its "double signification cannot be translated by a single word into other languages" (1985b, p. 130), it illustrates that "translation [is] both necessary and impossible" (1985a, p. 174). What makes translation necessary is the duplicity of given words; what makes it an impossible enterprise is that this will involve "an essential loss", as Derrida states with reference to the *pharmakon*, it is its "undecidability [which] is going to be lost" (1985b, p. 120) in the translation.

At this juncture we might wish to hesitate, and look at the question of loss and undecidability not from the perspective of Babel, the "male god" (Derrida: 1985b, p. 152), but from the perspective of Pandora, the first woman, take a feminist track rather than a deconstructive one, to pose another scenario: would it not be true to say that there are not just

two stories of Pandora, but that the very undecidability between these two stories — Pandora as gift or *Gift* to mankind — makes a third one? This by no means implies a Hegelian *Aufhebung* in the sense that this third story (the story of her undecidability) is an amalgam or synthesis of the other two stories, nor does it imply a deconstructive untranslatability rehearsed once more in the undecidability of the term *Aufhebung* (as the "conservation" of one story, or the "suppression" of the other), but it does indicate that the impossibility of deciding between one or the other of her stories is indeed a third story, which is why it makes perhaps more sense to speak of an excess here rather than a loss: undecidability then is not conceived in terms of a loss, but a potentially unstoppable gain. For, undecidability is only going to be lost if we were to operate from the assumption, as Derrida does, that the original cannot be transported intact (in all its multiplicity and undecidability) into the new language; if however, we were to be less concerned with the relation between an original and *its* translation, that is to say, if we did not see the translation process restricted to the relation between original and translation as a binary relation, the relation between two poles, between the same and the different, but as a process whereby the original will continue to engender more than one version, then nothing is going to be lost in the series of endless versions that are always possible.

This serial nature of the translation process (original *and* version *and* another version *and* yet another) rather than the binary orbit (an original *and* its translation) — even if this binary comes to be deconstructed, a point we shall turn to later — will be our starting point to suggest not a tale of mourning ("What is being told in this biblical *récit* is not transportable into another tongue without an essential loss" [1985b, p. 100]), but a joyous affirmation that what Pandora's myth tells us is transportable again and again, for here, difference is inconceivable without repetition, after all, repetition without difference would not be repetition. In short, what informs the difference that Pandora can make, is the Deleuzian difference implicit in "the logic of the and" (Deleuze & Guattari 1988, p. 25) rather than the Derridean *différance* (see 1982, pp. 1-27) as the suspension of difference, the deferral or undecidability between merely two poles.

If Babel recounts a *difference within* the father's tongue even before the very im/possibility of translation, Pandora's mother tongue is not just simply a forked tongue, as if her language were marked by an

internal division or a splitting apart, but she is already multi-lingual. This difference in emphasis is crucial and must be unfolded further. Since, Babel as a proper name, which is "divided, bifid, ambivalent, polysemic" (1985a, p. 170), marks a division not just in God's name, but also a "division of God", "insofar as it divides God himself" (1985b, p. 102), this would suggest that his name, which also stands for linguistic confusion, comes to name what is irreducible in language. However, rather than arguing that the word Babel, his Word, or any other word is "divided", which at least numerically, would seem to involve the possibility of a process of reduction (after all, two divided by two makes one); and, rather than arguing that language is "bifid" which would seem to indicate that something is split into two, from presumably what was one; or for that matter, arguing that language is marked by "ambivalen[ce]" which might gesture towards two things being of equal, that is, of the same (ambi) value; I would wish to play one of Derrida's words off against the others: "polysemic", unlike "divided" or "bifid" or "ambivalent", is a term which escapes the *reduction* from the two towards the one, and the consequent rise of loss or mourning; "polysemic" moves instead towards *production*. This is to say, Pandora's name and her tongue — the mother tongue — is not so much divided from within, but must already be seen as multiplied. The many translations of Pandora's name engender her many different tales, and illustrate not a lack at the source, but an excess which is played out with each and every rendition.

This brings us then to another aspect of Derrida's thinking on translation. When he writes that "the structure of the original is marked by the requirement to be translated" (1985a, p. 184), he qualifies this point further when he states that "the original [...] begins by lacking and by pleading for translation" (p. 184), and provides the following reason: "if the original calls for a complement, it is because at the origin it was not there without fault, full, complete, total, identical to itself" (p. 188), which is also why "[t]he translation will truly be a moment in the growth of the original, which will complete itself *in* enlarging itself" (p. 188). Derrida reminds us however that "[a]s this growth comes also to complete [...] it does not reproduce: it adjoins in adding" (p. 189). As such, translation clearly operates according to the logic of the *supplément* which enacts a double movement of addition and substitution. The *supplément*, Derrida writes in *Of Grammatology*, "adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude...". On the other hand, it "adds only to replace. It intervenes itself *in-the-place-of*: if it fills, it is as if one fills a



void" (1976, pp. 144-145). The *translation*, which in effect exposes this void, thereby "reveals also a potentially infinite series of future *translations* providing further supplementations"<sup>5</sup>. Although this argument appears radical if we consider, as is traditionally held, that it is the original which is characterized by richness or plenitude, whilst the translation tends to be regarded as an impoverished version of it, apparently lacking this richness, and that Derrida begins to deconstruct this hierarchy by posing the original in terms of lack, we might wish to consider what this claim might imply. The notion of equivalence in traditional Translation Studies has, of course, called for an equivalent plenitude on both sides of the relation, while the logic of the *supplément* now makes a counter-assumption, denying plenitude to either original or translation. In order to assess whether this latter move is really as groundbreaking for translation as it first appears, let us consider Derrida's perspective from Pandora's point of view. What would it imply for Pandora to say that she was "not there without fault, full, complete, total, identical to itself" (Derrida 1985a, p. 188)? To pose Pandora and her tongue as incomplete, "pleading for translation", would this argument not run the risk of inviting endless future supplementations of what might contribute to Pandora's growth? To impose on Pandora a lack of identity, or posit her as an empty screen, would this not also invite endless male projections of what he wants her to be, what he longs for in her? Moreover, not only the original, but by extension the language of the original — the mother tongue — would have to be seen as lacking something, and therefore be in need of something extra.

What then might Pandora be seen to be lacking? Both the *Urweib* and the mother tongue would fall within the purview of a Freudian description of woman, whereby woman, measured against his possession of the phallus, is lack. What underlies this thesis is that there is only one true *sex*, which is male, a thesis which Luce Irigaray (1977, pp. 64-65) rewrites when she proposes that the female sex should no longer be conceived as lack, as a wound, or a black hole or "dark continent", but as the embrace of "two lips" by two more, and two more again (the lips that speak *and* the vaginal lips that touch). Following Irigaray's line of argument, rather than Derrida's then, we can say that

---

<sup>5</sup> I am rephrasing Marvin Carlson's (1985, p. 10) words here, who is making this point *vis-à-vis* the relation between text and performance.

Pandora, as *Urweib*, is not just the bearer of more than one image, she is also already the speaker of more than one tongue. Here then, translation is not so much the result of Jehova's wrath after man built the tower of Babel, but Pandora's gift before man. In other words, Pandora speaks with "two lips", and since originary translation is at the tip of the *Urweib* Pandora's tongue, then the *Ursprache*, the mother tongue, was more than one from the beginning (not a question then of a watershed before and after Babel). Pandora then is the epitome of *this sex which is not one*, as Irigaray puts it:

[...] a single word cannot be pronounced, produced, uttered by our mouths. Between our lips, yours and mine, several voices, several ways of speaking resound endlessly, back and forth. One is never separable from the other. You/I: we are always already several at once. (1985b, p. 209)

The multiplicity which characterizes woman in Irigaray's discourse extends to both woman's body and woman's speech. In Irigaray, woman is neither lack (which would be tantamount to saying that she has no voice), nor is she pure plenitude (which would be tantamount to saying that the presence of her voice immediately gives us an understanding of what she means and therefore what she is). This is why, Pandora in our tale, is not a void; she does not lack, nor is she whole, but she transports excess, becoming an excess of transport, even sometimes subject to excessive transports. The parallel then between the discourses of Derrida and Irigaray becomes exponentially divergent at this point. For, to inscribe a lack in the mother tongue, to inscribe lack in woman, is to open up Pandora's box, *not to unleash excess, but only to fill it* with endless further supplementations. In our tale then, Pandora definitely exceeds the *pharmakon*, because the box lacks nothing<sup>6</sup>. It is marked, through every transfer, by too much of whatever it contains.

So far, our argument has sought to follow through the implications of the claim that the original, and by extension the mother tongue, is incomplete, and is therefore "pleading for translation", and speculated what this Derridean claim might mean for Pandora. And we

---

<sup>6</sup> Compare Irigaray's point from her essay "When Our Lips Speak Together" in *This Sex which is not One*: "We are not lacks, voids awaiting sustenance, plenitude, fulfillment from the other" (1985b, p. 209).

have seen that for Derrida "[t]he original is not a plenitude" which is why, as he puts it in *The Ear of the Other*, "[t]he original is in the situation of demand, that is, of a lack or exile" (1985b, p. 152). In other words, the division, or fissure within, is also the lack of integrity and unity from which springs the command, or the pleading for translation, the incomplete original's yearning for the complement. In this context, let us return from Pandora to Babel.

Babel is a man, or rather a male god, a god that is not full since he is full of resentment, jealousy, and so on. He calls out, he desires, he lacks, he calls for the complement or the supplement or, as Benjamin says, for that which will come along to enrich him. (Derrida 1985b, pp. 152-153)

In this description we find another deconstructive manoeuvre, and at least on the surface, one which unsettles the Freudian purview of woman, ascribing the lack not to woman, but to Babel as the man. What are we to make of his lack, what are we to make of this wounded and in effect already castrated male god? Is this another tale of mourning? Or, more to the point, does this manoeuvre not fall victim to the Irigarayan critique, despite itself? For, to say that the father "lacks" is surely to remain within the economy of what Irigaray means by hom(me)ology (1985a, p. 134). Since patriarchal culture, a culture based on the *homme*, can only function if he is its model, and others are modelled on him, it necessarily has to reduce woman to the other of the same (*homo/same = homme/man*); and rather than account for the difference of femininity, her sexuality is explained as nothing other than a mutilated copy of his. What drives psychoanalytic theory in Irigaray's analysis is, of course, its explanation of castration as pertaining to both sexes — to him, that it might happen, to her, that it already has. To then pose God the father, Ba-bel, as castrated is another way of staying within the very economy of *presence and/or lack* of the phallus, which Freud took as the starting point from which to explain both male and female sexuality. Even if the presence/lack couplet now comes to be ascribed differently, it is he who is lacking, the very orbit of this analysis stays in place: overturned and destabilized, it is still within the same economy that presence and absence exchange their properties, come to be defined in their non-relation to each other. Moreover, we might add with some degree of irony, the distinctive lack that delineates the only property of femininity has been reappropriated by the male, making her only property (even if it is built on lack) his.

What Irigaray's thesis illustrates throughout her work, is that she conceives of both woman's body and woman's language, not in relation to a male other, but as a multiplicity from the outset. Unlike Derrida then, she does not therefore follow a deconstructive logic whereby the binary opposition between male and female would be exposed, reversed, and finally undone, but works with the multiplicity that the phallogocentric order attempts to reduce, in accordance with the procedure she calls "hom(me)ology" to *the* one and *its* other (1985a, p. 134). Hence, the metaphor of the "two lips". Similarly, I have not approached the question of woman in terms of the second sex, nor the question of translation in terms of the second text in order to expose, reverse and undo the hierarchization operative in the couplet primary and secondary. That is to say, rather than unknitting the metaphors which woman and translation share, as Lori Chamberlain (1992) does brilliantly, by drawing a link between the secondary roles that women and translations have played, and subsequently exposing the violence implicit in the hierarchization at work in binary oppositions, be it the privileging of primary over secondary, the privileging of model over copy, original over translation, man over woman — I have sought to get beyond not only the one, but also the two which a binary opposition necessarily takes as its premise, in order to demonstrate that irreducible multiplicity (in all these contexts) cannot logically be dealt with within a reduction to pairs. Accordingly, this has consequences for translation insofar as it posits an irreducible seriality of versions, as it does for feminist theory, similarly starting from a point of excess, rather than lack, as Irigaray proposes.

Thus, Irigaray's analysis might also be taken into a slightly different register, might also be extended to include those theories which within feminism demand equality, and within Translation Studies demand equivalence. For, those who demand that translation should be equivalent to, should be like the original, and those who demand that women should be equal, should be like man, nihilate difference in the name of the return of the same, in the name of "hom(me)ology". But precisely because translation as a process only becomes visible as it becomes serial — after all, one translation might be conceived as being merely a mirror to its original, exactly as woman, so long as she remains one, is only ever the other of man, man's other — precisely because every text can be retranslated (and every myth can be rewritten), seriality is a condition which neither has a beginning nor an end. What is at stake in the seriality

of translation, is not only a rethinking of the assumption that the original's richness or plenitude must be matched by its self-same translation, that there is one perfect translation for each original; but also, on the other side of the spectrum, a thinking beyond a Derridian approach, which in order to deconstruct the hierarchy implicit in a couplet such as original-translation, must therefore take this binary opposition as its point of departure, restrict its orbit of inquiry to the relation between these two; and as such also, must leave the lack/plenitude couplet as the horizon, the divided whole within which the original and the translation exchange their properties. In either case, we are faced with two: the original on the one hand, and the translation on the other; the numerical two being evidence of a divided one — as we saw with reference to Babel; or the two being evidence of a reduction of the many to the one and its other — as we saw with reference to Irigaray's critique of hom(me)ology.

Unlike the God's "double command": "Translate me and what is more don't translate me. I desire that you translate me, that you translate the name I impose on you; and at the same time, whatever you do, don't translate it, you will not be able to translate it" (Derrida 1985b, p. 102), a "double bind" from which follows Derrida's thesis that translation is both necessary and impossible, and that language is at once translatable and untranslatable, Pandora tells a different tale. The many Pandora myths lend emphasis not to the impossibility of translation, but the impossibility of putting a stop to endless retranslation, in short, show us the serial nature of translation: there are always more translations, retranslations. This then is not a deconstructive logic of undecidability, which wavers between two poles (original-translation), which wavers between two meanings of "one" term (*pharmakon*), but a logic of multiplication. Nothing lacks here, nothing gets lost, with each and every translation there is always one more. The Pandora myth, which metaphorically links the female body and its speech — the mother-tongue — allows us then to look back at both Babel and Oedipus, to revise not only the deconstructive conception of translation and the psychoanalytic conception of woman, but to see with fresh eyes new possibilities for translation and gender. Just as Irigaray demonstrates a morphology of woman's body and her speech and writing, *the lips which are not one*, too complex, or several, to be reducible to the one, what Pan-dora, her name, exposes is a seriality, not just that there never was "one", but that there is always "one" more, and so on. To translate her name is therefore not finally to translate her, to

translate her at last, to approximate some original condition, but rather to translate again, to retranslate.

University of Essex

I would like to thank Marika Zeimbekis who helped me to make a beginning with this paper, Luise von Flotow who urged me to expand it, and Iain Hamilton Grant who finally helped me to bring it to an end.

### References

CARLSON, Marvin (1985). "Theatrical Performance: Illustration, Translation, Fulfillment, or Supplement". *Theatre Journal* 37 (March).

CHAMBERLAIN, Lori (1992). "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation". In Lawrence Venuti (ed.) *Rethinking Translation*. London: Routledge, 57-74.

BEAUVOIR, Simone de (1972). *The Second Sex*. Trans. H. M. Parshley. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

DELEUZE, Gilles and Felix GUATTARI (1988). "Introduction: Rhizome". *A Thousand Plateaus*. Trans. Brian Massumi. London: Athlone Press.

DERRIDA, Jacques (1976). *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Spivak. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

— (1981). *Dissemination*. Trans. Barbara Johnson. London: Athlone Press.

— (1982). "Différance". In *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, pp. 1-27.

— (1985a). "Des Tours de Babel". In Joseph F. Graham (ed.). *Difference in Translation*. Ithaca New York: Cornell University Press, pp. 165-248.

— (1985b). *The Ear of the Other. Otobiography, Transference,*

*Translation*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Schocken Books.

— (1986). *Mémoires for Paul de Man*. Trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, Eduardo Cadava, and Peggy Kamuf. New York: Columbia University Press.

GANTZ, T. (1993). *Early Greek Myth*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

HURWIT, Jeffrey M. (1995). "Beautiful Evil: Pandora and the Athena Parthenos". *American Journal of Archeology* 99, pp. 171-86.

IRIGARAY, Luce (1977). "Women's exile". Trans. Couze Venn. *Ideology and Consciousness* 1, pp. 62-76.

— (1985a). *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca New York: Cornell University Press.

— (1985b). *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca New York: Cornell University Press.

JOHNSON, Barbara (1980). *The Critical Difference: Essays in Contemporary Rhetoric of Reading*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.

— (1985). "Taking Fidelity Philosophically". In Joseph F. Graham (ed.). *Difference in Translation*. Ithaca New York: Cornell University Press.

KAMUF, Peggy (ed.) (1991). *A Derrida Reader. Between the Blinds*. Hemel Hempstead. Harvester Wheatsheaf.

LITTAU, Karin (1995). "Refractions of the Feminine: The Monstrous Transformations of Lulu". *Modern Language Notes* 110 (4), pp. 888-912.

PANOFSKY, Dora and Erwin (1962). *Pandora's Box: The Changing Aspects of a Mythical Symbol*. Princeton New Jersey: Bollingen Foundation/ Princeton University Press.

STEINER, George (1975). *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**ABSTRACT : Pandora's Tongues** — This paper looks at translation not from the perspective of Babel, the “male god” as Jacques Derrida and George Steiner do, but from the perspective of Pandora, the first woman of the Greek creation myth, in order to offer a feminized version of the primal scattering of languages. The aim is to pose through the figure of Pandora questions about language and woman, and by extension, the mother tongue and female sexuality. Whilst the myth of the tower of Babel makes visible the filiations of translation and the word of the Father, the myth of Pandora allows us to uncover the matrix between translation and the mother tongue, presents us, in other words, with new possibilities for translation and gender.

**RÉSUMÉ : Les langues de Pandore** — L'auteure élabore ici une réflexion sur la traduction à partir non pas du mythe de Babel — du « dieu masculin » — comme l'ont fait Jacques Derrida et George Steiner dans leurs travaux respectifs, mais en reprenant plutôt celui de Pandore, de la première femme de l'humanité telle que représentée dans la mythologie grecque, afin de proposer une lecture féminisée de la confusion primitive des langues. Cette relecture du mythe souhaite revivifier la problématique du langage et de la femme; de la langue maternelle et de la sexualité féminine. Pour y parvenir, l'auteure propose, à l'instar de l'interprétation du mythe de la tour de Babel visant à démontrer les divers liens unissant la traduction à la parole du Père, une représentation du mythe de Pandore révélant la matrice où s'unissent traduction et langue maternelle, et par où s'entrouvrent, par conséquent, de nouvelles voies pour explorer genre et traduction.

**Keywords:** deconstruction, feminism, translation, Pandora, myth.

**Mots-clés :** déconstruction, féminisme, traduction, Pandore, mythe.

**Karin Littau:** University of Essex, 6 Selwerthy Road, Knowle, Bristol, BS42LF

**E-mail:** grantlittau@cableinet.co.uk