

Malintzin/La Malinche/Doña Marina: re-reading the myth of the treacherous translator¹

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Who is La Malinche/Doña Marina/Malintzin? La Malinche has long symbolized the conquest of the Mexican Indians by Europeans: of invaluable service to the Spaniards, a traitor to her own people. Retracing the construction of her portrayal over time amounts to a paradigm of translation. Varying contexts and interpretations from different periods have assigned her attributes that are positive or negative, sometimes inflating, sometimes deflating her importance. In this article I undertake a re-reading of the myth of La Malinche in writings extending from those of Hernán Cortés to the works of Chicana authors such as Norma Alarcón, Sandra Messinger Cypess, Lucha Corpi, Carmen Tafolla and Gloria Anzaldúa. Through the reinterpretation of numerous texts written by both men and women and ranging from the sixteenth to the twenty-first centuries, the aim of the article is to recover a significant figure in the history of translation. The polyhedral portrayal that has built up around La Malinche reopens the debate about the implications of the various gender-related labels ascribed to her over time.

Keywords: La Malinche; history of translation; translators through history; gender and translation

For one often catches a glimpse of them in the lives of the great, whisking away into the background, concealing, I sometimes think, a wink, a laugh, perhaps a tear. (Virginia Woolf 1992, 58)

Malintzin/La Malinche/Doña Marina is one of the few women who has not been invisible either in history or in literature down through the centuries. The conquest of Mexico began in 1519 and, for almost five centuries, the myth of La Malinche and her controversial collaboration in the colonising enterprise of Hernán Cortés has been reinvented and kept alive. The Spanish invasion has been described and reinterpreted by generation after generation and the role of Cortés' interpreter debated and questioned.

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In spite of being a historical and mythological figure who left no direct sources of information and therefore has no voice of her own, a subaltern figure (Spivak 1993), La Malinche “gives us a wink, laughs lightly and lets one of her tears drop on our back” (Woolf 1992, 58) throughout the many texts in which she appears. In “Tradduttora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism”, one of the key articles in which the myth of La Malinche is rewritten from the viewpoint of Chicana feminism, literary critic Norma Alarcón classifies in three groups the documents that have dealt with this half historical, half legendary figure:

The first corresponds to the chroniclers and inventors of the legends; the second corresponds to the development of the traitor myth and scapegoat mechanism which apparently comes to fruition in the nineteenth century during the Mexican independence movement. In this study I would like to focus on the third, modernistic stage which some twentieth-century women and men of letters have felt compelled to initiate in order to revise and vindicate Malintzin. (1989, 64)

The aim of this article is to develop “archaeological”² research into the life and deeds of La Malinche, reformulating the three lines suggested by Alarcón and adding a fourth. Firstly, I will concentrate on the chronicles and writings of historians, such as the *Cartas de relación* (1993) that Hernán Cortés himself wrote to King Charles V or the *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (1984) written by one of his soldiers, Bernal Díaz del Castillo (the English version bears the abbreviated title of *The Conquest of New Spain* [1963]). Secondly, I will reconstruct the literary perceptions of La Malinche found in the works of several authors from different periods. Thirdly, I will review the myth from the viewpoint of feminism and Chicana literature written by women. Finally, I will offer a new approach to the recovery of the figure of La Malinche, considering her in her function as a multicultural translator/interpreter and as a metaphor for the complexity of translation itself.

Malintzin/La Malinche/Doña Marina and history

Malintzin/La Malinche/Doña Marina left no written document and is therefore the product of historical reconstructions. Despite being unable to speak for herself, for various political, identity and social reasons there has always been someone who has spoken in her name (see Spivak 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993). Alternating praise and calumny, the patriarchal system of the last five centuries has not ignored her. Unlike that of other historical figures, her memory did not have to struggle against oblivion; manuscripts that mention her almost in passing have not been underrated and abandoned but, rather, honoured and respected because they describe the exploits of great men. She has appeared in chronicles and histories since the conquest of New Spain and their authors have debated about her role and her identity.

Only 40 years after the death of La Malinche, in about 1527, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, a soldier who took part in the conquest of Mexico under the command of Hernán Cortés, began writing the *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, a compilation of his memories of the conqueror and his heroic deeds. Apparently he began this task in 1555, at the age of 60, and continued it over the next 30 years until just before his death in 1584. His work was not published until much later in Madrid in 1632.

The *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* is one of the first texts not only to contain a reference to La Malinche but to pay special attention to her. According to Julie Greer Johnson, “Bernal Díaz is the only early colonial writer to make a woman a major figure in the historical events unfolding in Spain’s American possessions” (1983, 15). He explains that Marina was born into a noble family in the province of Paynala, at Coatzacoalcos, in the region of Veracruz. Her father died when she was very small and her mother married a young man with whom she had a son. Though she was the elder child, the inheritance was to go to the boy born of the second marriage and, to facilitate this, her mother and stepfather gave her away to some Indians from Xicalango who, in turn, gave her to a noble of Tabasco, who offered her to Cortés. Hence, before becoming the property of the noble of Tabasco, Marina travelled from her birthplace, where she spoke Nahuatl, to the region of Yucatán, where she learnt Maya. During that time, Hernán Cortés had arrived in Mexico from Cuba with his interpreter, Jerónimo de Aguilar, who knew the language of the Mayas as he had been a slave in that region. When the Mayas decided to change their policy of obstruction for one of cooperation with the conquerors, they offered Cortés food, gold, precious stones, slaves and 20 women, one of whom was Marina, who began to work as an interpreter with Aguilar.

Other authors have also referred to the linguistic gifts of Doña Marina. In *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán* (1985), the Franciscan friar Diego de Landa (1524–1579) reports how she was stolen as a child and sold in Xicalango and Champotón, where she learned the tongue of Yucatán and so was able to understand Aguilar. In *Historia de la conquista de México* (1987), the humanist Francisco López de Gómara, chaplain and official biographer of Cortés, who never set foot in México, also explains, in the section of his work in which he speaks of Doña Marina, that she began her association with Cortés because the latter was not satisfied with Father Aguilar’s interpreting of the Aztec messengers. On learning that one of the 20 women given him by the Tabascan leader knew the language, Cortés took her aside and promised her more than her liberty if she would establish friendship between him and the men of her country.

The detailed descriptions of La Malinche provided by Díaz del Castillo and the briefer ones by Diego de Landa and Francisco López de Gómara contrast with the minimal information found in Hernán Cortés’ *Cartas de relación* (1993). These five texts, entitled *Relaciones* [Reports] by Cortés, were letters addressed to the king and written at different times and in different situations, and can be read as stages of the same enterprise, the conquest of Mexico. In the second letter,

Cortés refers to La Malinche as “my interpreter”. In the fifth, after reporting many feats in which her role was extremely important, Cortés is a little more expansive in his narration and states that Marina always travelled with him.

As Sandra Messinger Cypess points out in *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth* (1991), probably one of the best and most comprehensive studies of this figure, the references to La Malinche in Cortés’ second and fifth letters coincide in time with two controversial events in the course of the conquest in which her intervention proved to be decisive: the massacre of Cholula and the murder of Cuauhtemoc. Her intervention in these events contributed not only to the “black legend” of the ruthless mass murders committed by the Spanish colonisers in the New World, but also to the “black legend” of La Malinche herself.

With different nuances, Hernán Cortés, Francisco López de Gómara and Bernal Díaz del Castillo confirm that it was La Malinche who warned the Spaniards of the ambush prepared by the Cholulans, the result of which was a massacre without precedent. López de Gómara places the emphasis on Cortés’ spirited decision on learning of the plot. Díaz del Castillo concentrates on the role of La Malinche as the discoverer of the intrigue. Apparently Doña Marina was sent to parley with the Cholula leaders and made friends with the wife of one of them, who wanted her to marry her son. Díaz del Castillo tells how Doña Marina led her on and then escaped to inform Cortés of the Cholulans’ plan.

The same chronicles support the view that Doña Marina was not alone in warning Cortés of the plot: the Tlaxcalans, who were enemies of the Cholulans, had warned the Spaniards of the Cholulans’ double game and so had other Indian slaves. Leaving aside the varying interpretations of the part played by Doña Marina in events, there is another issue that has damaged her image: her refusal to marry an Ameridian became, as Cypess indicates, “a metaphoric act signifying the repudiation of the native in favour of the foreign” (1991, 35), behaviour now considered paradigmatic and still known as *malinchismo*.

As regards the second controversial intervention, it should be said that Doña Marina acted on many occasions as interpreter between the Aztec leader Moctezuma and Cortés after the Spaniards had captured the Aztec capital, now México D. F., on 8 November 1519. In the Florentine Codex – a series of paintings dated around 1550 that illustrate the history of the colonisation – the translator is always one of the central figures of the narrative, even appearing larger than others. In *The Conquest of America*, one of the first works to vindicate the role of La Malinche as a positive agent of cultural communication, Tzvetan Todorov notes that in the painting showing the first meeting between Cortés and Moctezuma, “the two military leaders occupy the margins of the image, dominated by the central figure of La Malinche” (1984, 101).

Although at first the Spaniards were made welcome, coexistence between the two peoples became difficult for the Aztecs. Following a series of setbacks, including the attack carried out by Pedro de Alvarado against the Aztec warriors, which led to the death of their leader, Moctezuma, the Spaniards decided, for their

own safety, to leave the city by night and in disguise. In their withdrawal they were discovered and attacked by the Aztecs. That night of 30 May to 1 June 1521 became known as the “Sad Night”. However, the Spaniards survived and, with the backing of their allies, the Tlaxcalans, recaptured Tenochtitlan on 21 August of the same year and took the Aztec leader, Cuauhtemoc, prisoner. Cuauhtemoc was hanged (before his execution two Franciscan friars, with the help of Doña Marina, commended his soul to God). This act on the part of Cortés has been regarded as one of the most gratuitous and inhumane he ever perpetrated. During this same journey, Cortés gave Doña Marina to Juan Jaramillo and they got married, after which little is known of her. The death of Cuauhtemoc coincides with the disappearance of Doña Marina from the life of Cortés.

The biography of La Malinche, with its gaps and unanswered questions, is controversial. It is a broken mirror giving patches of light and shade, multiple like her name(s). Before she became referred to as “Cortés’ tongue”, the metaphor used by Cortés himself and his chronicle writers to indicate interpreter, her name suffered various changes. She was born between 1502 and 1505 on the day named Malinalli, the Nahuatl term for the 12th day of the month of the Aztec calendar, associated with the South and climbing plants, and was thus named Malinalli. Amongst her own people she was also called Malinalli Tenepal. In Nahautl, Tenepal signifies a person who speaks with ease, who talks a lot and in a lively fashion. At her baptism, the priest gave her the name of Marina. Bernal Díaz del Castillo calls her Doña Marina. Marina was altered into Malina: the Spanish “r” does not exist in the Nahautl alphabet, hence the “l”. And Malina became Malintzin: the suffix “-tzin” in Nahautl indicates respect. Cortés was known as Malintzin-é but the Spaniards replaced the “-tzin-é” with the Spanish “che” and the result was Malinche. So Cortés was named Malinche, which according to Díaz del Castillo means “the captain of Marina”. William H. Prescott (1936) confirms that Cortés was known as Malinche, but he adds that the translation is “captain” and that La Malinche means “the wife of the captain”. For five centuries, writers of chronicles, historians and literary figures have alternated the names Malintzin, Marina and Malinche, and in this article I do likewise.

Malintzin/La Malinche/Doña Marina and literature

Norma Alarcón tells how, on the day of Mexican Independence in 1861, the politician and man of letters Ignacio “El Nigromante” Ramírez reminded those celebrating that the Mexican people “owed their defeat to Malintzin – Cortés’s whore” (1989, 58). Ever since the Spanish chronicles, in texts before and after Independence and right up to the twentieth-century literature of Mexican and Chicano authors, La Malinche has been interpreted as a “Mexican Eve”, a traitor who sold herself to the conquerors, an egoist who worked and spoke for herself and not for the community. As Alarcón points out, folklore as well as historical and literary documents suggest that “the indigenous female slave Malintzin

Tenepal was transformed into Guadalupe's monstrous double and that her 'banner' also aided and abetted in the nation-making process or, at least, in the creation of nationalistic perspective" (1989, 58).

In "‘Mother’ Malinche and Allegories of Gender, Ethnicity and National Identity in Mexico" (2005), Sandra Messinger Cypess connects myth, national identity and gender, and draws attention to the fact that in the development of national Mexican narratives the Amerindian myths and legends are mixed with those of the European western tradition. As La Malinche is identified with Eve, she is perceived as the instigator of the fall from paradise, therefore she is defined as a second-class citizen who must obey her husband and not raise her voice. However, Doña Marina is an interpreter: she speaks in public and makes herself heard. Having said that, her facet of social interpreter and mediator between peoples is not accepted in the traditional dominant discourses of the first half of the twentieth century in which she is relegated to the traditional role of a woman, that of mother. In these discourses, even her motherhood is questionable, on the grounds of being the result of an exaggerated sexual predisposition. For this reason, Chicana literary critics accuse some contemporary authors of relating La Malinche to a completely false moral code.

Amongst the biographies of La Malinche, the historical novels and plays inspired by her figure over the years, the following are of special interest: *Doña Marina* (1883) by Ireneo Paz, the grandfather of Octavio Paz; *Doña Marina* (1935) by Gustavo A. Rodríguez; *Doña Marina, la dama de la conquista* (1942) by Federico Gómez de Orozco; and *Doña Marina: una india ejemplar* (1957) by J. Jesús Figueroa Torres. In these works Cortés and La Malinche are usually presented either as a romantic couple or as the originators of Mexican cross-breeding, with a marked nationalist background. The text which signals the beginning of a review of the myth of La Malinche is Octavio Paz's "Los hijos de la Malinche", included in *El laberinto de la soledad* (1950) and translated by Lysander Kemp as "The Sons of Malinche" (1967).

Paz traces the evolution of the myth of La Malinche, relating her to the biblical figure of Eve and to the Mexican archetypes, La Llorona (the weeping woman) and La Chingada (the fucked woman). He explores extensively the connections between La Malinche and La Chingada as sexual victims and mythical mothers violated both physically and psychologically. For Paz, La Malinche is the cruel incarnation of the human condition and, thus, of an innate female vulnerability which leads to all women being "chingadas". After discussing the verb "chingar" (its active voice is considered masculine and the passive, feminine), Paz emphasises

the resemblance between the figure of the *macho* and that of the Spanish conquistador. This is the model – more mythical than real – that determines the images the Mexican people form of powerful men: caciques, feudal lords, hacienda owners, politicians, generals, captains of industry. They are all "*machos, chingones*". (1967, 73)

The *macho* is the paradigm of the power of the Spanish conqueror, La Chingada that of the subjugation and violation of the Indian woman during the conquest. Paz concludes that the permanent presence of Cortés and La Malinche in the Mexican imagination shows that they are more than historical figures: “they are symbols of a secret conflict that we have still not resolved” (1967, 77–8). He adds that, for as long as Mexicans continue to repudiate La Malinche and their past, they will remain orphaned, drifting through the labyrinth of solitude alluded to in the title of his book.

Paz’s interpretation of La Malinche aroused diverse reactions and criticism (more negative than positive), and was responsible for kindling the debate about the relationship between Cortés and La Malinche, and its part in the origins of the Mexican people. In the 1960s, playwrights such as Celestino Gorostiza, Salvador Novo and Rodolfo Usigli provided the Mexican public with positive views of the *patria*, with the aim of correcting the contradictions that Paz presents in his article, but they continued to reproduce the same patriarchal discourse in which La Malinche is the passive object of manipulating active subjects. In 1970, Carlos Fuentes (1984), in *Todos los gatos son pardos*, went beyond asymmetrical relationships and concentrated on La Malinche’s desire for revenge and her gifts as a linguist. In Fuentes’ work, Malintzin is the narrator: it is her right to speak. She is the mirror image of the patriarchal Eve, who was the first linguistic mediator and the first biblical mother and traitor. Malintzin is a “go-between” who arbitrates between two cultures.

Mexican author José Emilio Pacheco, a contemporary of Fuentes, in his poem “Traduttore, traditori”, from the volume *Islas a la deriva* (1976), stresses Malintzin’s linguistic gifts, as opposed to Paz and even Fuentes, who stressed her sexual qualities. Pacheco brings to the forefront the three best known translators of the conquest – Jerónimo Aguilar, Gonzalo Guerrero and La Malinche – and claims that we should be grateful to them for having helped to create “the hotchpotch named Mexico” (1976, 27–8). Sticking to the theoretical discourse that all translation or interpretation is an act of treachery, he suggests that all linguistic mediation is a “corruption” which can make the interpreter a traitor in the eyes of others – not simply a traitor but a traitor to an original tradition expressed through an act, a text or an experience.

At the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 80s, Mexican literature finds new voices that break completely with La Malinche’s image/metaphor of “chingada” and reinterpret the conquest in a tone of humorous parody while at the same time criticising the patriarchal and conservative discourses that have reduced the polyhedral figure of Malintzin to one sole reading. Here we must mention plays such as *El eterno femenino* (1975) by Rosario Castellanos and *Águila o sol* (1985) by Sabina Berman. Satirical as well as rigorous, the works of Castellanos and Berman reinterpret the facts and question the patriarchal images of the myth. They suggest that we should return to the past to undo the myths that have condemned Mexican society to exclusive, immovable interpretations of itself and others.

Even though it may be thanks to odd fragments that happened to survive over time, an archaeological investigation will always be the principal means of reconstructing a community.

Malintzin/La Malinche/Doña Marina rewritten by Chicana feminism

At the beginning of the 1970s, Chicano intellectuals tried to draw attention to the experience of being Chicano in the US: life as a migrant, bilingual (American English/Mexican Spanish), with rural and working-class roots, an Indian and Mexican inheritance, often on the edge of society and exploited as a labour force. Women writers felt under-represented in this Chicano movement of social criticism and they expressed this in a literature which not only attempts to define their position as an ethnic group but also as women of that group. The source of the problem is the necessity to construct a feminine subject with her own voice, a feminine subject who will be listened to internally and externally. This means confronting ideological questions such as: who are we? How do we see ourselves? How do others see us? Who are our cultural mothers?

The Chicana writers search for their own identity, interrogate themselves, turn past and present inside out, dig down to the deepest roots in order to get to know themselves. This need to expose their own identity is accompanied by an urge to recover and communicate with their cultural mothers (Chicana writers often refer to themselves as symbolical daughters of La Malinche). Thus they promote a “new consciousness”, as Gloria Anzaldúa puts it (1987), excavating the past and acting as public-spirited, committed historians. They not only battle against the oblivion into which some mothers have fallen, but also against the strata under which androcentric interpretations have buried them. They carry out palaeographic tasks and unearth virgins, archetypes and heroines of a Chicano past; they also reinterpret them and present them with attributes that differ from those of the traditional discourses. This context of historical reconstruction, based on feminine subjectivity, gives birth to the feminist review of the figure of La Malinche.

The tasks of excavating and recovering La Malinche from a feminist and Chicana viewpoint have been neither quick nor easy. This recovery has followed two main paths. On the one hand, Chicanas have identified themselves with her to such an extent that any negative interpretation of the myth is considered an attack on their community, defined as that of multiple, “in-between” women living between two cultures and two tongues. On the other hand, they have integrated her into their writings. They have reviewed her authenticity and historical contribution in a variety of essays, and they have incorporated her into their creative work.

First in “Chicana’s Feminist Literature: A Re-vision Through Malintzin/ or Malintzin: Putting Flesh Back on the Object” (1981) and later in “Traduttora, traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism” (1989), Norma Alarcón vindicates and retraces the reconstruction of La Malinche in the works of various feminist Chicana writers of the 1970s and 80s. In her study of texts and authors she

singles out the essays “Malintzin Tenepal: A Preliminary Look into a New Perspective” (1977) by Adelaida del Castillo (the importance given to the “philanthropic attitude” of Malintzin) and “Chicanas and El Movimiento” (1974) by Adaljiza Sosa-Riddell (underlining Malintzin’s “mediating position”), and the poem “La Malinche” (1985) by Carmen Tafolla. Alarcón observes that these three texts have two points in common: the victimization of the figure of La Malinche in a colonial context and the affirmation that she was the founder of a new race, “La Raza”, a theme that will reappear in Chicana writings from then on.

The first lines of Tafolla’s poem are as follows: “Yo soy la Malinche. / My people called me Malintzin Tenepal / the Spaniards called me Doña Marina / I came to be known as Malinche / and Malinche came to mean traitor. / They called me – chingada / Chingada”. The poem ends thus: “[...] and I reached it. / Another world... la raza. / la raaaaa-zaaaa” (1993, 198–9). In the body of the poem, the poetic voice reveals that she submitted herself voluntarily to Cortés because she foresaw a new race. Unlike Paz, who also describes La Malinche as a founding mother, Tafolla implies that she acted with a specific purpose, hence she makes her a historical strategist. In Tafolla’s poem, La Malinche demonstrates self-assurance and confidence in the task to be carried out for the benefit of humanity. She has linguistic and interpretative gifts: the use of Spanish phrases and expressions inserted into the English text is a reminder of these gifts. But her mastering of the language of the coloniser does not mean he is her master. Tafolla interprets La Malinche as a positive and visionary figure, and turns her into one of the ideological mothers of what Mary Louise Pratt has called “transculturation” (1992, 6).

In the series of four poems entitled “Marina Mother”, “Marina Virgin”, “The Devil’s Daughter” and “She (Marina Distant)” (translated into English by Catherine Rodríguez-Nieto), the Marina of Lucha Corpi (1980; in Rebolledo and Rivero 1993, 196–7), unlike La Malinche of Tafolla, does not have a voice of her own; the poetic voice is an imaginary spiritual daughter. Corpi, born in the state of Veracruz and at present resident in the US, writes in Spanish, using Marina’s Spanish name, which she situates in biblical rather than patriarchal discourses. According to critics, the value of Corpi’s text lies in the fact that it covers most of the images and metaphors that have emerged over the years around the figure of Marina: from love, betrayal, religion, sexuality and motherhood to repatriation. In spite of the perception that La Malinche is a victim of her condition as a woman, Corpi’s Marina appears as a mediator who crosses frontiers, in this case, most probably that of Mexico and the United States.

As it would be impossible to include here all the creative contributions of the Chicana writers who have adopted as their own, and identified with, the figure of La Malinche, I would like to mention at least some of these authors in order to do justice to the time and effort they have dedicated to the task, and thus help to add more beads to the archaeological necklace of Chicana women: Cordelia Candelaria, Margarita Cota Cárdenas, Lorna D. Cervantes, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Laura Esquivel, Erlinda González-Berry, Sylvia González, Angela de Hoyos,

Pat Mora, Cherríe Moraga, Beverly Sánchez-Padilla, Adaljiza Sosa-Riddell, Alma Villanueva, amongst others. Some have highlighted La Malinche's gifts as a linguist and mediator; others her philanthropic, sexual, maternal, religious, political or ideological facets. She has been seen as a "choice-maker" and as a "history-producer". But all these writers have contributed to destroying the existing binary identifications (for example, that of Guadalupe/Malintzin) and have reconstructed a more positive, rich and multiple Malinche by means of new readings, rewritings and negotiations that leave aside the old sexist and androcentric discourses. However, we must always remember that, as poststructuralism and deconstruction have taught us, language is neither neuter nor innocent. Neither is writing, translating or the rewriting of a myth. Conscious as they are of the subjectivity inherent in all reinterpretation, Chicana writers have chosen to speak of themselves and of their mothers, in this case of La Malinche, because if they do not do it this way, as María Carmen África Vidal Claramonte puts it, "we are in danger of having our tongues ripped out" (2008, 85).

I will bring this section to a close with a reference to the chapter "The Wounding of the India-Mestiza" from the work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), by the Chicana critic Gloria Anzaldúa. Here Anzaldúa re-reads the myth of Malinalli Tenepal or Malintzin and notes how the Chicanos call her a "prostitute", a "whore" who "sold herself" and was a "traitor", and how they are always referring to her when they say the "Chingada" (the fucked one). "Male culture has done a good job on us", she remarks (1987, 22). For Anzaldúa, it was not La Malinche who perpetrated the great betrayal, but rather, the dominant discourses that made women believe that the Indian within all of them is a traitor: "We, *indias y mestizas*, police the Indian in us, brutalize and condemn her" (1987, 22). From the starting point of Chicana feminism, it has been necessary to carry out extensive archaeological research, in a Foucauldian sense, in order to rediscover and honour her: solid ideological tombs constructed by the dominant discourses have been excavated, fragments have been gathered, disregarded manuscripts deciphered and, finally, various "histories" (all of them subjective, of course) have been reconstructed, distinct from official history. Because in the case of La Malinche, as in the case of translations, there are as many as there are writers of chronicles, interpreters or historians.

La Malinche, a metaphor for translation

Encouraged by Lori Chamberlain's magnificent article on "Gender and the Metaphorics of Translation" (1992), in which the author appeals for reviews and speculative works on the myths that have nourished dominant discourses in translation studies over the centuries, Karin Littau rewrites the myth of Pandora in "Pandora's Tongues" (2000), stressing that this mythical figure is in herself a metaphor for translation. In this last section, I will present La Malinche as another metaphor for translation, inasmuch as she was in herself a point of convergence and the furtherer of the new consciousness of the *mestiza*.

To begin with, I would like to return to Anzaldúa and her concept of history as seen through the eyes of the *mestiza*:

Her first step is to take inventory. [...] She puts history through a sieve, winnows out the lies, looks at the forces that we as a race, as women, have been a part of. [...] She reinterprets history and, using new symbols, she shapes new myths. (1987, 82–3)

Anzaldúa's notion of "history" underscores the need to analyse the changing situation of the subject. It is not a question of the essence of her identity but of how this identity is formulated, modified and displaced. Both Anzaldúa's *mestiza* and the La Malinche myth that we have examined here show how subjectivity develops in relation to social, cultural, ideological and economic contexts. And it is precisely these contextual parameters that prefigure experience.

The concept "experience" is linguistic, strategic. According to Joan W. Scott, "[e]xperience is a subject's history. Language is the site of history's enactment. Historical explanation cannot, therefore, separate the two" (1992, 34). Experience does not come about in isolation; it does not exist in spheres where social interaction is absent. It is the linguistic interpretation of a dynamic relationship not only between the subject and the society of the moment, but also amongst the subject's many "I"s. That is why, in the words of Scott, it is "an interpretation and is in need of interpretation" (1992, 37). The historical/mythical figure of La Malinche, like the original text in translation, exists always after interpretation.

This brings us to Jacques Derrida's theory of translation, developed mainly in "Living On: Border Lines" (1979a), "Me – Psychoanalysis" (1979b), "Des Tours de Babel" (1985), *Positions* (1987), "Roundtable on Translation" (1988a), "Letter to a Japanese Friend" (1988b), "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce" (1988c) and "What is a 'Relevant' Translation?" (2000), where he states that the original text exists only after its interpretation. First, the original text is read and interpreted, and afterwards its signification is established. The paradox is that, in order to establish the cause, in this case the original text, first the effect, the translative interpretation, must be experienced.

There is a parallelism between historical and translative interpretations. Both are "interpretations in need of interpretation", tactical provisional states that are not trapped in stable significations. The translation-related interpretation and the historical interpretation tell us the signification of the original text and experience, respectively, and determine the message we receive from them. Even so, each individual establishes a contaminated signification, and, therefore, an original text and an experience that are also contaminated. Both the experience of a historical figure and the original meaning of a translated text are subject to the filtering of voices, echoes, intertexts. They never reach us from one sole source but through many rewritings. This is the case of the multiple reviews/translations of the figure of La Malinche that we have analysed here. We have encountered many Malinches (and many more remain to be encountered): amongst others, those of Cortés, Bernal del Castillo, Francisco López de Gómara, Diego de Landa, Tzvetan Todorov,

Norma Alarcón, Sandra Messinger Cypess, Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes, Carmen Tafolla, Lucha Corpi and Gloria Anzaldúa. To enumerate these names and significations is to recognise the multiplicity of the figure of La Malinche and it brings us to the theories of two writers, Karin Littau and, again, Gloria Anzaldúa.

In “Refractions of the Feminine: The Monstrous Transformations of Lulu” (1995) and in “Pandora’s Tongues”, Littau examines meticulously the myth of the Tower of Babel and the interpretations of it in the work of George Steiner and Jacques Derrida. She pays particular attention to two statements by Derrida, which should be underlined here: firstly, “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” (Derrida 1985, 188); secondly, “the original [...] begins by lacking and by pleading for translation” (Derrida 1985, 184). The Derridean theory of translation is not based on whether texts are translatable or untranslatable but rather on the transformations they undergo, the ambiguities they present, and the gratification involved in confronting the possible impossibility of translation. For Derrida, to translate is to accept that there will be things pending, mysteries, surprises and questions with no final answer. It is a relationship of give and take with the textual Other: an endless game of seduction which fortunately always leaves something out, an “untranslated remnant” that guarantees non-assimilation and constant metamorphosis.

For Littau, the gratification does not lie in the possible impossibility but rather in the propagation and multiplication. Littau insists that if Derrida’s logic of the incompleteness of the original is applied to the myth of Pandora, or similarly to the mother tongue or to woman herself, this “is to open up Pandora’s box, *not to unleash excess, but only to fill it* with endless further supplementations” (2000, 29). Littau claims that the figure of Pandora goes beyond Derrida’s “double bind” and “living-on”: it is richness, plurality, multiplicity, never lack. She insists: “Precisely because every text can be translated (and every myth can be rewritten), seriality is a condition which neither has a beginning nor an end” (2000, 31). Littau’s Pandora refuses to be either incomplete or impossible. Metaphorically speaking, myths as well as original texts are snowballs that grow larger as they roll and gather intertexts that make them richer, more exuberant and fertile, although we should always bear in mind that they are inseparable from their first snowflake, the original text, which is an intertext in itself.

In the same way that Littau presents Pandora and translation as serial and complex (an interpretation plus an interpretation, plus another, plus another, plus another, etc., with nothing lacking), and asks us to add and not subtract when we rewrite historical myths or translate because everything is complementary and nothing excessive, Anzaldúa proposes a “new *mestiza* consciousness” which is also subject to the “logic of multiplication”. Anzaldúa typifies the new *mestiza* as follows:

La mestiza constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and towards a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes [...] The new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity. She learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode – nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only she sustains contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (1987, 79)

Anzaldúa's new *mestiza* moves around, roams the world over, includes and does not exclude, abandons the patriarchal cultural oppositions that often limit us: native/foreign, white/black, coloniser/colonised and here/there. The *mestiza* is a migrant and a traveller, and therefore tolerates ambiguity, confrontation and uncertainty. She learns to be an Indian in a Mexican culture and Mexican in an Angloamerican culture. She juggles cultures and identities. Her personality is pliant, Babelic, plural. She does not scorn anything, does not look askance at anything, does not abandon anything. She makes use of every element available to her to help construct the new *mestiza* consciousness, along the lines of the "bricoleur" of Gayatri Ch. Spivak and the "amateur" of Edward Said.

In research relating to the Third World, as in research in general, it is thought that the only way to avoid dogmatic discourses is by using tools, strategies and procedures that are essentially plural. In synthesis, this is how Spivak sums up her working method in an interview with Angela McRobbie (1985, 8): "I am a bricoleur, I use what comes to hand". Borrowed and adapted from the ethnographer Lévi-Strauss, Spivak's "bricoleur" is in contrast to the term "engineer". Similarly, Said (1991, 1994) opposes the concept of "specialist" to that of "amateur". And that is Anzaldúa's *mestiza*: like Spivak's "bricoleur" and Said's "amateur", she always looks ahead, never behind, aware that nothing is wasted, everything is worth incorporating in a multiple and, at the same time, irreducible assembly of parts:

This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness – a *mestiza* consciousness. (Anzaldúa 1987, 79–80)

Anzaldúa predicts that "en unas pocas centurias, the future will belong to the *mestiza*" because "the future depends on the straddling of two or more cultures", and demands the creation of a new mythological consciousness that may achieve "a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the way we behave" (1987, 80). This new consciousness is the pretext for a rebirth, a new code of life, a new literary code, a new translation code, which will always accumulate, since it is impossible to halt life, texts, translations.

After this archaeological investigation, we can say that Malintzin/La Malinche/Doña Marina is the putative mother of this new metaphorical consciousness because, as Stephen Greenblatt points out, apart from being a crucial figure in the conquest of New Spain, she is “the only figure who appears to understand the two cultures, the only person in whom they meet” (1991, 143). La Malinche must therefore be vindicated twofold, as a “translation figure-site” (Zaccaria 2008, 80). On the one hand, she is a *historical/mythical figure*. Emblematic amongst so many translators and interpreters who have remained, and still remain, invisible, La Malinche represents them all far beyond the period of history in which she was destined to live. On the other hand, she is a *translation site*, a metaphor for the convergence of languages and cultures, a frontier space subject to constant contamination and multiplication.

Like Pandora, La Malinche is a feminine translation myth that must be brought to the forefront, because it is rich, complex, unfinished, serial, multiple and irreducible. In this article, five centuries after her existence, I have attempted to recover her figure by means of the miscellaneous fragments that remain and the many rewritings that exist. I hope that, amongst the words, you have discerned “a wink, a laugh, perhaps a tear”.

Notes

1. This article is the result of work by the research group “Gender Studies: translation, literature, history and communication” (AGAUR 2009, SGR 833) of the Universitat de Vic. It also forms part of the project “Women translators and translations in contemporary Catalunya (1939–2000)” (FF12010-19851-C02-02), subsidized by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation.
2. Term first introduced by Michel Foucault in the 1960s and 70s in Humanity Studies (see Foucault 1963, 1966, 1969). As María Carmen África Vidal Claramonte puts it, in Foucault “the difference between archaeology and genealogy is that the first is a descriptive procedure and the second is an explicative one” (1998, 142).

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