

## Contamination: A Relation of Differences

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*Tessera* has asked me to address the inclusion of French poems in my last book *'sophie*, a predominantly English text. It's simple, I sometimes write in French because I come from a bilingual background and some lines / poems come to me in French, while others come to me in English. I would have thought this natural since I live a bilingual life, but it seems that racism pervades even literature in Canada. How many times have I heard or read that French in an English text is pre-tentious, 'showing off.' Not only is it a handicap to be bilingual in Canada, it's unwise to display too much interest in literatures and theories whose linguistic roots can't be traced back to England. According to an interview in the last *Tessera*, French 'detritus' is percolating down to our artists and contaminating our *Canadian* literary scene!

Because I don't believe in a pure space of language anymore than I believe in a 'pure race,' I find the concept of contamination as literary device rather appealing. Contamination means differences have been brought together so they make contact. It is from this point of view that *'sophie* (and to a great extent all my work) was conceived. The book revolves around women as absence in philosophy, attempts to displace, contaminate the authority of philosophy through a woman's or 'sophie's point of view. 'Phil' is momentarily suspended, the suspension of his presence replaced by a small sign, an apostrophe, the presence of writing. As such the voice of truth, the virility of *philosophie* is contaminated by what has always been relegated to the lowest rung, the allegorical voice of a woman.

It struck me while writing *'sophie*, how impossible it was to reach the other in its absence and how that leads to desire. For the first time I understood, experienced why so much of patriarchal writing, which has flourished in segregation, by polarizing the masculine and the feminine, is based on desire. As Jane Gallop points out, it is a short-circuiting of desire by which desire turns on itself. Perhaps that's why

'*sophie* continually refers to music and song. Both are infused with a feeling of longing for something lost. I think it is significant that the only place in the Bible where woman speaks in her own voice is in 'Song of Songs,' a text revolving around an amorous, erotic discourse.

*Le corps féminin cherche son rapport vis-à-vis l'absence. Il a l'habitude, pourtant il continue à se demander quel est le mode d'existence de ses rapports amoureux. Il s'écrit et se dé-pense sous formes de vers et de rêve. Qui dit transition dit médiation.*

Babel should have taught us that no one language can impose itself on the world, yet most of us continue to experience the passage from one language to another as essential loss. To a certain extent it is a loss but it should also be experienced as gain. Translation is not an operation by which meaning is simply transferred from one language to another. We know, via philosophers such as Heidegger, Benjamin, Derrida, that translation is an operation of thought through which we translate ourselves into the thought of another language. Refusing translation, or even the contamination of one language with another, might give us the illusion of authenticity and purity, but it is only an illusion which eliminates the possibility of a relation of differences. I am delighted that *Tessera* has requested translations of one of my poems. Not only will it give other writers the opportunity to translate their thought into the thought of one of my poems, but my poem can then translate itself into the thought of their translations. *Ad infinitum*

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