

Translating Hysteria

Women and Madness in the English Translation of Ariana Harwicz's La débil mental



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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA in Translation Studies, Literary Translation option

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WORKS CITED

Abstract

This thesis is divided into two main parts. The first part establishes the theoretical framework that served as a guide for my English translation of the short novel *La débil mental* by Argentinian author Ariana Harwicz, and consists of three chapters. Due to the novel's narrative style and subject matter, my translation approach was centered on the topic of female madness in literature. Therefore, the first chapter examines feminist theories of translation and their relevance to the project at hand. The second examines the topic of madness in literature, and pays particular attention to depictions of women with mental illnesses in literary works. Then, in the third chapter, I will attempt to draw on the previous two chapters to develop an approach to translating female madness, and examine specific choices made in my translation of *La débil mental* in that light. Finally, the second main part of the thesis consists of my translation of the novel.

Résumé

Cette thèse est sommairement divisée en deux parties. La première établit le cadre théorique qui a guidé ma traduction anglaise du roman *La débil mental* de l'auteure argentine Ariana Harwicz. Celle-ci est constituée de trois chapitres. En raison du style narratif et du sujet du roman, mon approche traductologique est axée sur le thème de la folie féminine et de ses représentations littéraires. Le premier chapitre examine donc les théories féministes de la traduction et leur pertinence par rapport au projet en question. Le deuxième a pour objet le thème de la folie telle qu'elle est représentée en littérature, avec une attention particulière aux représentations des femmes souffrant de maladies mentales dans les textes littéraires. Puis, dans le troisième chapitre, je puise à même les principes des deux chapitres précédents afin de développer une approche traductologique qui s'applique aux textes traitant de folie féminine. J'examine également quelques exemples des choix que j'ai effectués dans ma traduction suivant cette optique. Finalement, la deuxième partie de cette thèse est constituée de la traduction en tant que telle.

1. Introduction

I was drawn to Ariana Harwicz's short novel *La débil mental* both as a reader and a translator due to its challenging nature. Harwicz's book has significant shock value due to a number of factors: its graphic depictions of sex, its experimental writing style of almost-poetic prose, and its final violent murder scene are among a few of the striking and potentially off-putting characteristics of the text. What stood out to me in particular, below its startling surface, was the title character. "La débil mental" is how she designates herself; one of many derogatory terms she uses to denigrate herself in the novel. She is not named, she "come[s] from nowhere" (74), yet her experience of events is all that the reader has access to. The book's narrator is an unreliable one, but openly so: she tells us about her madness, her obsession with her lover, and the hyper-sexual and violent nature of her intrusive thoughts. From her harsh words about herself emerges a female character who embodies the difficulties women experience when navigating patriarchal culture. She shows the symptoms of internalized misogyny in the way that she speaks about women and their roles in heterosexual relationships. The pressures of conforming to gender roles, especially those laid out by her mother, weigh on her psyche and lead her to descent into madness.

My goal with this thesis was to merge existing feminist translation strategies and theoretical principles with an analysis of the way madness has been examined as a literary theme, in order to extrapolate some consequences for a translation approach to first-person narratives of female madness. My theoretical analysis of these topics led me to Martine Delvaux's work on literature and hysteria, which was pivotal in understanding the intersection between feminist politics and the desire to let the voice of madness speak for itself.

Two central notions emerged from this analysis that bridge the two facets of my theoretical approach together. First, the theme of sexuality is treated as a symptom of the protagonist's madness in *La débil mental*. The topic is one of concern to feminist writers and translators, given that they seek to uncover the repressed sexuality in women that patriarchy has mediated and suppressed. Women's sexuality is an equally important concept in the discussion regarding literature and madness, as its overt expression was one of the main symptoms that constituted the diagnosis of hysteria in women of the Victorian period. Second to the theme of sexuality is the notion of silence. Feminist translators set out to use language as a political tool in order to uncover the voices of women who have been silenced by patriarchy. The mad, too, are silenced; unable to find the language to express their experiences, they rely on outsiders to speak for and about them, only to find their words manipulated by those who do. My role as translator of this text entrusts me with the language that could allow the female hysteric narrative to speak; but, as will be examined in the chapters below, language is never neutral and can be tinged with cultural bias, even unconsciously, by those who use it. Bearing this in mind, my project revolves around the question of whether the influence of cultural stereotypes and preconceived notions regarding women and madness can be resisted in translation.

1.1 Synopsis

Harwicz's novel consists of a series of short vignettes, grouped into three parts. The novel's unnamed narrator is a woman in her late twenties, whose internal monologue guides the reader through her troubled thoughts as she navigates the difficult relationships in her life and reflects on childhood trauma. Harwicz demonstrates the character's emotional instability through prose that is both poetic and experimental, resulting in a challenging experience for the reader.

La débil mental's protagonist's use of profane, misogynistic language to describe herself and other female characters in the novel stands out as one of the text's most striking features, along with graphic descriptions of sexual acts and fantasies. Harwicz makes scarce and unconventional use of punctuation, omitting dialogue markers and using comma splices and run-on sentences to illustrate the narrator's mental state. None of the characters in the book are named, which creates further confusion for the reader that reflects the narrator's own difficulty in grasping her surroundings.

In the first part of the novel, the dynamics of the relationships in the narrator's life are introduced. She is often lost in sexual fantasies revolving around her lover, a married man who contacts her infrequently and with whom she develops an increasingly intense obsession. He dominates her thoughts and it gradually becomes apparent that her fixation is rooted in a desire to escape her circumstances. She has a troubling relationship with her mother, and frequently experiences flashbacks to traumatic childhood memories in which her mother encourages her young daughter to accept her female role as a sexual being. In the second part of the novel, the toxic nature of their relationship intensifies, culminating in the narrator impulsively leaving her mother's house in the country in hopes of seeking refuge with her lover. Upon meeting with her lover, she is informed that his wife is pregnant and that he must end their relationship. In the third and final part of the novel, the narrator returns home, distraught, seeking comfort from her mother. Together they plot their revenge against him, which consists of stealing his car and money before violently murdering him. Her mother dictates most of the plan's details, according to her views on women's subordinate roles in heterosexual relationships. They execute their plan, though the narrator appears to experience something of a change of heart during the murder. The novel ends with the mother and daughter crashing their car after a police chase.

2. Translating Women

An overview of theories of translation concerning gender and feminism provides a guide to how these may be applied in my undertaking of this particular project. Feminist translation theories have, since the 1970s, sought to uncover and make visible traditionally silenced female voices, a goal that is consistent with my own project, which concerns women's experiences with mental illness. Feminist translation provides a useful framework for approaching the translation of this novel, which centres female sexuality and desire – taboo topics that defy traditionally repressive and censored depictions of women in literature. Due to the subject matter and narrative style of *La débil mental*, the undertaking of this translation inherently becomes a political project; one that attempts to resist the impulse to 'tame' the text or make it conform to conventional patriarchal language and culturally enforced gender roles in its English translation, much like the work of the feminist translators examined in this chapter. A particular feature of Harwicz's novel is the characters' frequent use of sexist language, which complicates the feminist approach to this translation.

At the end of this chapter, I will examine some criticisms of the feminist translation movement and evaluate whether some specific cases may provide cautionary tales of the potential pitfalls of an exclusively feminist approach. My intention with this project is rather to develop an approach rooted in the intersection between feminism and the study of literary depictions of madness.

2.1 Language and Feminism

From a feminist perspective, patriarchy permeates culture on all levels. The particular intersection between feminism and language may not be immediately evident, but language has

been historically dominated by men to the same degree as any other aspect of culture and society. The feminist movement of the 1970s identified language as a political tool – one that had previously been used by institutions to perpetuate the oppression of women, but that now had the potential to be reclaimed and subverted to serve the agenda of the women’s movement: “[i]ndeed, since language determines reality, women may be alienated not only from language but also from the female experience it fails to encode” (Deborah Cameron qt. in von Flotow 9). Language was deemed a “man-made artifact” conceived with the goal of describing an exclusively male perspective and “reflect[ing] men’s lives, their realities, their ideas” (von Flotow 9). The feminist movement called for an overhaul of this patriarchal language in order to convey the specific lived experiences of women.

The women’s movement of the 1970s thus sought to mobilize the words of French feminist writer Hélène Cixous, which became a popular slogan of the feminist movement: “la libération des femmes passe par le langage” (Simon 7); women’s writing became a crucial component of the fight for liberation. Language was targeted as a means of reclaiming agency and subverting the institutions that upheld oppressive patriarchal norms. Barbara Godard writes of this period that “[t]here is a widespread feeling that it has been necessary to invent a new language to discuss what has been taboo” (qt. in Homel & Simon 50). As such, radical feminist writers emerged that experimented with language in an attempt to confront, subvert, and correct the ways that everyday language participates in the enforcement of patriarchal norms. In the writing that resulted from this approach, women sought to centre themselves and their experiences in order to exemplify the exclusion and trivialization that the language of patriarchy reinforces, which “becomes a danger to women's confidence, self-esteem, psychological development and creativity, precisely because it is controlled and manipulated by 'malestream' institutions” (von

Flotow 9)

One additionally important concept in the feminist approach to language lies in the desire to do away with the oppositional gender binary. The socially constructed concept of gender is found to be represented linguistically on the grammatical level. In French, for example, so-called neutral designations are always represented with masculine grammatical forms by default. Gender is also present implicitly in coded language conventions, which perpetuate reductive notions of a masculine-feminine binary that dictates social norms. English grammar lends itself better to gender-neutral language than a Romance language like French – or Spanish, the language of the source text examined here, which also uses grammatical gender and poses challenges for a feminist approach to its English translation. However, even in a language with no grammatical gender, feminist theorists have identified cases in which the masculine is presumed when gender is not explicitly specified; the example “members of Parliament and their wives” (Scott qt. in Simon 18) is cited, demonstrating that “[t]he absence of ‘grammatical’ gender in English seems to be adequately compensated for by the presence of ‘psychological’ or ‘metaphorical’ gender” (Simon 18). Considerations of grammatical gender further demonstrate that language is never completely neutral – and without an awareness of the concept of gender as a social construct, these minor but loaded reinforcements of detrimental patriarchal language fly under the radar, unquestioningly adopted and internalized by speakers of the language, who thus unconsciously perpetuate gender norms and stereotypes. Moreover, as Roman Jakobson points out, the function of language is not merely communicative, but can in many cases be poetic as well, as is the case with literary works (Simon 17). Gender also has a poetic function in language: it is used metaphorically and invested with meaning, as some words carry symbolic weight that reinforces the gender binary without any relation to sexual difference: “[t]hey are

associated with corresponding contrasts such as strong/weak, active/passive” and show us that “gender is relational, and is in fact an extension of the binary, oppositional structure that pervades all our thinking” (Simon 17). The concern with rethinking oppositional binaries and replacing them with the acknowledgment of a continuum is of interest to translation theorists and will be explored further in this chapter. For the moment, what I wish to emphasize is how feminist writers have demonstrated an intent to subvert these concepts in their experimental writing “through their understanding of the performative, and not simply representational, nature of language” (Simon 2), as this pertains to the project at hand. Specific examples of translating grammatical gender in *La débil mental* will be detailed in section 4.

2.1.1 Writing the Body

Language surrounding sexuality was a particular area of concern for feminist writers of the 1970s, given the interest in breaking free from the imposed repression of female desire. These writers upheld the second-wave feminist slogan *the personal is political*¹, by bringing to the forefront the most private of women’s issues in their work. Luise von Flotow writes:

Women’s sexuality and women’s eroticism, *described from a woman’s point of view*, have become a preferred area of experimentation in feminist writing.

Writers have looked for and developed vocabulary for censored or denigrated parts of the female anatomy and tried to create erotic writing that appeals to women. (17, emphasis added)

The topic of women’s sexuality in literature is highly relevant to the current translation project being undertaken due to the subject matter and particular narrative style of the chosen

¹ The phrase was popularized by Carol Hanisch’s 1969 essay “The Personal is Political,” though she denies having coined the phrase herself and rather attributes it to the second-wave feminist movement as a collective.

text. *La débil mental* is a raw stream-of-consciousness narrative, the inner monologue of a lustful woman who details her most intimate desires and fantasies, memories of her sexual awakening, and the sexual experiences throughout her life. All euphemism and modesty have been abandoned in favour of an uncensored look inside the female protagonist's mind – a woman openly and frankly discussing her sexuality in a way that shocks in its defiance of gender norms. The explicit sexual language used by the novel's narrator stands out as an important stylistic feature of the text that forms the basis of its feminist underpinnings. The novel is an example, therefore, of language being used to convey a woman's experience unmediated by the male perspective. The female body "that has been depersonalized by patriarchy, that offers services in return for its maintenance, while at the same time maintaining the system that subjugates it" emerges from its long history of silence and becomes "the source of women's creative energy" (von Flotow 17).

Similarly, the protagonist of *La débil mental* attempts to break this silence and take ownership of her sexuality by discussing the most private parts of her sex life, while also openly revealing her most intimate and often perverse desires. The protagonist's mother, the only other (present) female character in the novel, encourages her daughter from a young age to explore her sexuality; significantly, no paternal figure is present during the protagonist's formative years. The novel's concern with sex echoes the interests of feminist writing. Sexuality is the battlefield on which the feminist writer engages in the fight against the patriarchy; "[w]hen women 'write the female body' they write on a subject that has hitherto been described in terms of the stereotypes of the lover ('whore'), the devoted and unsexed mother, or the untouchable Holy Virgin" (Von Flotow 17). A subversion of these tropes occurs in this novel: the unsexed mother is replaced by a hyper-sexualized one, while the stereotypical 'whore' – the narrator, a woman

consumed with lust and whose sexual urges drive all her actions in the story – becomes the servile woman who is entirely devoted to her male lover. Harwicz references the stereotypical mother-whore dichotomy when the narrator’s lover compares her to his wife: “[...] ella nació para eso, para ser madre, no como vos. [...] Vos sos divina. Vos resplandeces. Vos sos otra clase, no sos madre. Ella es madre desde la cuna” (Harwicz 90) (“[...] she was born for this, to be a mother, not like you. [...] You’re divine. You’re radiant. You’re in another category, you’re not a mother. She’s been a mother since birth” (127).) The sole male character of *La débil mental*, the voice of the patriarchy within the novel, categorizes the two women in his life according to rigid, mutually-exclusive standards that make a clear distinction between women’s sexual and domestic roles in relation to men. Harwicz confronts these tropes by having the male character speak them, while the two main female characters struggle throughout the novel with an ambivalence of identity between motherhood and sexuality that exposes the limitations of the reductive dichotomy. The lines are blurred between traditional female stereotypes, representing the true complex reality of female sexuality.

2.1.2 Translation as Metaphor

Taking considerations of the connection between language and gender a step further, feminists of the 1970s quickly began to identify an equally relevant connection between feminism and translation. On a metaphorical level, women and translators both share a reputation of passivity and servitude, to men and authors, respectively. Feminism and the practice of translation have the common interest of challenging the power dynamics that places them at the bottom of a hierarchy, labelling them as secondary and excluding them from male-dominated spaces. Sherry Simon writes that “[b]oth women and translators are the ‘weak’ terms in their

respective hierarchies, sexual and literary. Both are now challenging the power relationships behind traditional ideas of fidelity” (Simon 52).

Translation as an abstract concept has been used metaphorically by female writers to describe their experiences living in a male-dominated society. Von Flotow quotes French author Marguerite Duras regarding women’s writing within the confines of patriarchy:

I think "feminine literature" is an organic, translated writing ... translated from blackness, from darkness. Women have been in darkness for centuries. They don't know themselves. Or only poorly. And when women write, they translate this darkness... Men don't translate. They begin from a theoretical platform that is already in place, already elaborated. The writing of women is really translated from the unknown, like a new way of communicating rather than an already formed language. (Duras qt. in von Flotow 12)

Here translation stands in metaphorically for the expression of the lived experiences of women in a culture, society, and language inherently designed to silence them. With limited linguistic resources at their disposal to communicate the specificity of their experience – for example, working against the censorship of expressions of female sexuality and desire – they resort to a kind of metaphorical translation in their attempt to subvert patriarchal language. In the public sphere, women “translate their private language, their specifically female forms of discourse, developed as a result of gendered exclusion, into some form of the dominant patriarchal code” (von Flotow 12). Women’s words are manipulated and censored simply by virtue of the language they use to express them; “like translated texts [women] can be betrayed, transformed, invented, and created” (de Lotbinière-Harwood qt. in Homel & Simon 49). The metaphor is an apt one due to the word’s “figurative meanings of transcoding and transformation” (Godard qt. in Homel &

Simon 49), which illustrate the complex task of using the language of patriarchy in order to confront it.

I have emphasized the ways in which the translation metaphor is used from a feminist perspective because, as will be discussed in the next chapter, it is also used from a psychoanalytic perspective to describe the relationship between the patient and her doctor or analyst. The foundation of my approach to translating *La débil mental* is the question of how to use language designed to maintain a patriarchal and ableist status quo in order to faithfully convey a marginalized voice. Because my medium is written translation, the metaphor is particularly apt, as it indicates the potential for manipulating language through the translation process.

2.2 Feminist Translation

Beyond purely theoretical considerations, feminist translators of the 1970s sought to explore “the process by which translation complies with gender constructs” (Chamberlain qt. in Simon 4). As a result, they began to experiment with ways to subvert patriarchal norms in their own work. Barbara Godard described the work of feminist translators as an attempt to usurp the source text (von Flotow 43) by appropriating language and using it as a tool to further the agenda of the women’s movement rather than continue to comply with the oppressive force of patriarchal language. These views gave way to creative experimentation with language in translations as they opened up the possibility of re-evaluating the role of both woman and translator. As Kathy Mezei points out, translation is “a *reading* and a *writing* of a text; by writing, reading, translating, one understands because one is forced to pause, deliberate, interpret, and invent” (qt. in Homel & Simon 48). The reading of texts from a feminist perspective informs the re-writing of the text in translation; “[t]he translators take on the role of

interpreter, educator and specialist in such literary experiments (von Flotow 40).

According to Barbara Godard, no text can be completely neutral given that every reader adds their own meaning to it, one that is informed by individual beliefs and cultural background (von Flotow 43). Von Flotow paraphrases Godard's view:

[F]eminist post-structuralist textual theory and writing is seen to have provided women translators with the assurance that no text is neutral or universally meaningful, not 'original', for that matter. Any text carries the mark of its producer, which is also the mark of the ideological and cultural context in which it is produced. Moreover, every reader adds their own individual meaning to the text. Feminist translators (as feminist readers and rewriters working in a context and culture conducive to feminist writing) are thus likely to produce work that is politically congruent with their time. (von Flotow 43)

Translators are readers of a source text who then write what they read – along with the cultural assumptions that shape this reading, and their subjective interpretation of the text. As stated by Susan Bassnet and Andre Lefebvre in the General Preface to Lawrence Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility*:

Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. *Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power*, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewritings can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices, and the history of

translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. *But rewriting can also repress innovation, distort and contain*, and in an age of ever increasing manipulation of all kinds, the study of the manipulative processes of literature as exemplified by translation can help us toward a greater awareness of the world in which we live. (qt. in Venuti vii, emphasis added)

Manipulations of the source text occur in translation intentionally or not by virtue of a text relying on one reader's interpretation and their ability to communicate it. Hence the feminist writers and translators who view translation as a means of engaging with literature perform a kind of literary activism, creating new lines of cultural communication with the goal of furthering their cause (Simon viii).

In the case of the project at hand, my interpretation of the source text forms the basis of a feminist approach to its translation. On the surface, *La débil mental*'s protagonist appears to be a kind of feminist antihero who may be difficult for readers to sympathize with given that she fits negative stereotypes of so-called 'hysterical', vindictive women. Her blunt expressions of intense sexual desire are explicit to an almost off-putting extreme, as with the violent rape fantasy she details early on in the novel (Harwicz 12). However, as the plot progresses, it gradually becomes apparent that the novel problematizes sexual politics with the use of female characters whose thought processes and worldviews are shaped by an internalization of sexist discourse. The narrator's intense self-awareness regarding her position in society as a woman becomes evident as she consistently defines herself solely as a sexual being who exists only for her male lover. Her 'madness' or perceived weakness of the mind – a central theme of the novel as evidenced by its title – is conveyed through a stream-of-consciousness narrative that gives the reader access to

the narrator's cognitive processes as her mind jumps quickly from sexual fantasies to flashbacks of childhood experiences to overwhelming emotion that leads to dissociation, ultimately revealing that her mental anguish is rooted in intense trauma and internalized misogyny. The novel's main character exemplifies the psychological effect of patriarchal standards on women – trapped in her own mind due to the trauma of having been socialized to conform to an imposed role as a sexual object. She finds herself trapped as well between the hypersexualized feminine identity that her mother has instilled into her, and an escapist fantasy of domestic life with her lover in spite of her marginal position in his life as his mistress. Her internal monologue reveals that without her lover, she loses her sense of self and struggles to define her own identity, reducing it to a mere abstraction: “[...] sólo soy una especie de idea” (Harwicz 22) (“[...] *I'm only a kind of idea*” (83).) My analysis of the novel from a feminist perspective has shaped my translation by providing me with a heightened attention to detail regarding the gendered language in the source text and its effect on the overall narrative.

2.2.1 Feminist Translation Strategies

Some women translators choose to comment on their work with the use of prefaces and footnotes in order to explain the politics behind their strategies (Simon 14); however, “this didactic approach in explaining linguistic and cultural issues in wordplay also raises problems since the translators cannot help but ‘explain’ via their own set of cultural values and assumptions” (von Flotow 41). As French philosopher and translator Antoine Berman has pointed out, mere awareness of cultural bias is often insufficient in fighting it – however, he also maintains that the explicit statement of the translator's background, approach, and cultural bias provides them with “*all the rights*” (Berman qt. in Simon 34) in terms of creative freedom in

their work. Supplementing my translation with metatexts such as prefaces is one option in ensuring the intent behind my translation is understood – the present thesis in itself is a metatextual explanation of a translation approach.

Sherry Simon discusses the use of the preface with reference to translations of Quebec literature that maintain French expressions. She states that prefaces that explain translation strategies “remind us of the special transgressive effect of local languages in literature, and of the need for translations to replicate their startling, jarring intent” (qt. in Simon & Homel 53). While the unconventional narrative style of *La débil mental* is rooted less in cultural specificity than in the conveyance of a mental state, the same “startling, jarring intent” is present in the source text and should somehow be conveyed in its translation in order to “give the reader a sense of the strangeness and separateness”, as “[...] the problem of translation is to find an equivalent literary form which has the same transgressive power” (Simon qt. in Simon & Homel 53). This explains a second strategy employed by feminist translators, one which revolves around creative experimentation with language. This strategy has the potential to be useful for my project due to the particular stylistic nature of the source text. Finally, and perhaps most controversially, the practice of what has been termed ‘hijacking’ can be employed by the feminist translator who wishes to appropriate a text “whose intentions are not necessarily feminist” (Simon 14) to make it conform to the translator’s politics.

2.2.2 Identity and (In)visibility

One of the core trends among feminist translators of the 1970s was a desire to assert their identities within the texts they were translating. Feminist strategies that let the translator’s voice be heard have been described as “usurping” or “woman-handling” the text, as the translator “immodestly flaunt[s] her signature” (von Flotow 40) by drawing attention to her identity as a

woman and openly intervening in the text to suit what she as an individual perceives as the needs of the feminist agenda. The woman translator makes “repeated reference to herself, her gender and her cultural context as influences on her work” (von Flotow 38), thereby proposing re-evaluating the meaning and role of the translator’s voice. This approach acknowledges the ways in which bias is inevitably present in all translations, and makes the active decision to re-orient the translation strategies toward the feminist cause rather than perpetuating the patriarchal bias present in culture by default. By making visible “the active play of identities within translation practice” (Simon 2), the feminist translator demands the reader’s attention, prompting the awareness of gender-based bias.

The case for a “visible” translator has been made most prominently by Lawrence Venuti in *The Translator’s Invisibility*. The repression of the translator’s ‘personality’ or individual voice is what Venuti refers to as ‘invisibility,’ which he describes as a “weird self-annihilation, a way of conceiving and practicing translation that undoubtedly reinforces its marginal status in Anglo-American culture” (Venuti 8). Female translators are no stranger to this type of repression: as translators, they are erased; as women, they are silenced. Hence the desire to affirm their status in the text they are translating; by making themselves visible, they confront the cultural forces that subjugate them. The translator’s voice guides the translated text into its relationship with the target readership (Simon 31). Sherry Simon writes:

This visibility, I think, is what makes the link between translation and feminism interesting and important. Here I write somewhat larger than usual the fact that translators are not transparent media. This is not to suggest that ideologically oriented translations are tendentious or misleading. [...] It is simply to recognize the necessary presence of the directing hand. (qt. in Simon & Homel 52)

The recognition of this directing hand provides the reader with an awareness of the translation process, and an implicit awareness of the cultural forces being subverted. Regarding this intentional visibility, Berman asserts that translators “have *all the rights* as long as their game is played up front” (qt. in Simon 34), indicating that an admitted and transparent bias liberates the translator from the expectation of fidelity.

Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood provides a good example of this kind of assertion in a preface to one of her translations, entitled ‘About the *her* in other’. She writes:

Dear reader,

Just a few words to let you know that this translation is a writing in the feminine of what I originally read in French. I don't mean content. Lise Gauvin is a feminist, and so am I. But I am not her. She wrote in the generic masculine. My translation practice is a political activity aimed at making language speak for women. So my signature on a translation means: this translation has used every possible feminist translation strategy to make the feminine visible in language. Because making the feminine visible in language means making women seen and heard in the real world. Which is what feminism is all about. (qt. in von Flotow 29)

The stated goal is to combat the traditional silencing of women by centring and amplifying the voice not only of the female author but also of the female translator. According to de Lotbinière-Harwood, this strategy is a means of not only confronting women's silencing but also correcting it with “deliberate feminist intervention that redresses the imbalance and places women directly into the language” (von Flotow 28). This silence can be compared to the translator's invisibility;

both are the result of cultural assumptions that dismiss, discredit, and suppress a voice that is viewed as secondary and inferior. Sherry Simon writes that “[t]his kind of approach promotes the desire to make literary works speak for the society they represent” (Simon 53). In addition to experimental linguistic strategies, the use of metatexts such as footnotes and prefaces, as in the above example, allow the feminist translator to openly state the intended purpose of her political project. The present thesis serves a similar purpose, as I outline the politics behind my approach to this translation project. The application of other feminist translation strategies on a textual level will be explored in section 4 of this thesis.

2.3 Ideology and the Choice of Text

My choice to translate *La débil mental* was rooted in an interest in contemporary women’s literature dealing with taboo topics that would likely have been censored in the past, and that may still even shock its modern readership with its content. The novel’s frank depictions of sex and female desire, its use of crass language, and its stream-of-consciousness narrative that reveals the most intimate thoughts of a mentally unstable female character all challenge notions of feminine modesty. My specific interest in these aspects of the novel would, according to feminist theories of translation, be considered a political one. My stated purpose is to resist the impulse to let my translation fall victim to the power structures – linguistic, patriarchal, ableist – that the source text subverts with its narrative voice. My intention is to avoid compromising what – in my view, in the context of my translation project – is most central and noteworthy in this text.

2.3.1 Ideologically Unfriendly Texts

The favouring of women’s works in translation by feminist translators does not necessarily imply that they translate feminist texts exclusively. Female translators may often find themselves

before a source text that is not outwardly or aggressively feminist and may even contain elements that go against the translator's beliefs and values. This point resonates with my project as well: *La débil mental* is a complex novel, one that features a female character openly discussing her sexuality while also living under patriarchy and who therefore has internalized sexist notions about herself and the women around her. Self-deprecating, misogynistic language appears throughout her internal monologue, which could be interpreted as being at odds with feminist views. On the one hand, the protagonist's openness about her sexuality aligns itself with the intentions of feminist literature and translation; on the other, the character judges her urges and desires according to patriarchal standards and dismisses her thoughts and emotions as weaknesses of the mind, as they make her dependent on her male lover.

Given its complicated relationship with gender roles and cultural ideas regarding madness, *La débil mental* blurs the line between progressive politics and political incorrectness. Approaching this work as a woman translator living in a cultural context that is increasingly concerned with intersectional social justice movements and diversity² has certain implications with regard to the ideological positioning of this project. As Sherry Simon puts it, “[e]ach literary generation brings with it different problems of translatability [and] the translator works these out within the same broad cultural dimensions as those from which the work emerged (qt. in Simon & Homel 54). Some feminist translators such as Carol Maier believe that “women translators should get under the skin of both antagonistic and unsympathetic works” and that “[i]n doing so, they become independent ‘resisting’ interpreters of these works” (Simon 29) – a point of view that resonates with the current project being undertaken and that informs the development of a feminist approach to the translation of *La débil mental*.

² This trend is evidenced by discussions in popular culture, as well as the growing presence of post-colonial and gender theories in cultural studies.

2.4 Feminism and Fidelity

My intention to be faithful to the narrative voice of the source text raises the question of what the notion of ‘fidelity’ truly entails in translation. The notion is rooted in traditional translation theories centred on the idea of equivalence and of fixed meanings, which have more recently been re-evaluated in Translation Studies, including by the feminist translation movement. Feminist translation practices emphasize the “fluid production of meaning” (Simon 12), given the highly contextual nature of meaning; that it is not a “hidden truth” but rather “a set of discursive conditions to be ‘re-created’” in the target language and culture (Simon 13). By drawing attention to the translator’s voice, feminist translators emphasize the translator’s role in determining meaning. Barbara Godard describes translation as an “associative process” (qt. in Simon 22); not a “carrying across, but a reworking of meaning” (qt. in Simon 22). Having established the performative nature of language, these women translators also identified the construction of meaning as a mode of performance.

2.4.1 The Translating Subject

Given the emphasis on identity, the feminist view of translation necessarily acknowledges the notion of the translating subject; that is, of the translation being produced by a human being with agency. Berman writes about the ethics of emphasizing the translating subject in “Translation and the Trials of the Foreign” (1985), wherein he posits that the human agents who produce translations face the internalized constraints that are inherent in a given language system. Furthermore, Berman tells us that this system “is largely unconscious, present as a series of tendencies or *forces* that cause translation to deviate from its essential aim” (286). Here, Berman judges the translator’s awareness of these constraints to be insufficient to allow them to

resist their influence: “More: these unconscious forces form part of the translator’s *being*, determining the *desire* to translate. It is illusory to think that the translator can be freed merely by becoming aware of them” (286). From a feminist perspective, these “unconscious forces” would include the internalization of patriarchal discourse – a key notion for the undertaking of a translation of a source text that consists of a female voice tainted by the “unconscious forces” of internalized misogyny. Berman’s concern here, however, is with ‘deforming’ the stylistic features of the literary work being translated by leaving them in the hands of a translating subject, who is tasked with interpreting these features before conveying them to the target readership.

Sherry Simon notes how Berman deviates slightly from this position in his 1995 work *Pour une critique des traductions: John Donne*, wherein he states that a translation should be judged according to both aesthetic and ethical standards (34). First, the translator must ensure the “poeticity” of his text and create an “esthetic [sic] object” (Simon 34). He does not specify a particular aesthetic formula that the translation must conform to. Second, he discusses the ethical grounds on which a translation should be evaluated: “The ethical character of translation is defined by ‘respect’ for the original, an attitude which according to Berman includes dialogue and even confrontation. It also includes respect for the reader, and for the reader’s need for complexity” (Simon 34). The interventions called for by feminist translators therefore appear somewhat permissible according to Berman, who states that what is important in a translation is its relationship not with the source text but with the translator’s – and the translation’s – ultimate goal. Simon paraphrases Berman’s position: “To the extent that the translator makes explicit his or her project, and constructs a translating relationship based on coherent esthetic [sic] and ethical principles, the translation can be considered successful” (34). Ultimately, the translator’s

relationship to the writing project being undertaken is understood to be what determines its success or failure.

2.4.2 Equivalence and the Construction of Meaning

The ‘meaning’ of a text is highly subjective and unstable, determined by the reader whose interpretation is informed by the culture that surrounds them and to which they have been socialized to conform. The re-writing and re-framing involved in feminist translation practices and strategies seeks to confront these cultural assumptions and draw attention to them, thus subverting their power over the reader’s interpretation of the text and challenging preconceived notions. A feminist translation project “concord with the impulse of the text, questioning the most basic relationship of word to object, word to emotion, word to word” (Simon 27).

Beyond the depictions of female characters and sexuality in *La débil mental*, however, an additional taboo topic is addressed, one that certainly carries the weight of cultural assumptions and prejudice: the concept of female madness, and more specifically the notion of *hysteria* – a concept that will be expanded on in the next chapter. Not only have women been defined by deeply embedded cultural assumptions regarding gender roles, their narratives dealing with experiences of madness have historically been heavily mediated in a way that stifles their voices and denies their agency. This aspect of the novel’s translation will be further examined in the following chapter; however, the question of how to intervene as a woman translator of this kind of text with the awareness of the history of silencing these types of stories is relevant to the present analysis of gendered theories of translation. The construction of meaning in translation is complicated by the narrator’s difficulty in understanding her own experience and mental state, let alone expressing it coherently in language. This makes the text vulnerable to the reader’s projections which are inevitably informed by patriarchal psychiatric discourse – and, as has been

pointed out, those of the translator herself, given that she is primarily a reader of a text who transmits her interpretation.

From a feminist perspective, the notion of equivalence in translation is highly problematic and illusory, as cultural bias is central to the interpretation of meaning. Von Flotow summarizes this view below:

The interest in constructing meaning through translation confronts theories that repose on notions of equivalence. [...] To produce 'equivalent' texts is to reduce both the source and the target texts to some acceptable, mainstream level, thus producing 'in-different' texts. Feminist work wants to disrupt acceptable, mainstream reading and writing and understanding; it wants difference. Further, it wants to draw attention to women translators' work - to the translator-effect. It is logical then for feminist translation to stress difference, deterritorialization (the fact that the text has been taken out of its territory), displacement (the exile of the text into another culture) and contamination (the confluence of source and translating languages), rather than fidelity or equivalence. (44)

Traditional notions of equivalence have played a crucial role in the dismissal and erasure of the translator's agency by neglecting to acknowledge the two distinct cultural systems that are in dialogue through the process of a translation. Barbara Godard writes that "what equivalency theory ignores is the extreme difficulty of translating meaning because of the importance of formal and contextual relationships" (qt. in Homel & Simon 50). She goes on to explain that "[e]quivalence is located between the coding/decoding operations of two *systems*, rather than between the contents or words of two messages" (Godard qt. in Home & Simon 50). The feminist approach to translating therefore debunks the reductive and illusory notion that true,

impartial equivalence is possible between two language systems; through self-awareness regarding her background, bias, and approach, “[t]he translator becomes an active participant in the creation of meaning” (Godard qt. in Homel & Simon 50).

2.4.3 Potential Pitfalls

The manipulations of texts and construction of meaning that occur in the practice of feminist translation have, inevitably, drawn some criticism. Rosemary Arrojo perceives hypocrisy within the movement, asking, “[w]hy is a masculinist interpretive model a betrayal while a feminist one is enriching?” (qt. in Simon 28), implying that the dichotomies feminists intend to break free from are actually ironically reinforced by their approach. She calls for “a reevaluation of the dialectic between translator and text” in order to “avoid re-imposing the violence of subjectivity,” and asks whether “there be a version of the female subject which does not re-introduce new but still vigorous dichotomies” (qt. in Simon 28). She posits that injecting new meaning into a text in translation, however subversive or feminist the changes may be, is problematic due to the inevitable “violence” implicit in the intent “to replace, or at least to supplement, other moves or other theories”; she goes on to state that “what is to be most criticized in many of the masculinist formulations of fidelity in translation is the fact that they suppose a ‘universal’ subject” (qt. in Simon 29). Far from dismissing the practice of feminist translation as a whole, she suggests that the tension between fidelity to the source text and fidelity to feminist interests be addressed. This tension is highly relevant to my project due to my concern with producing a faithful representation of the highly subjective narrative voice in *La débil mental* while being aware of my position as a female translator “who share[s] not only an awareness of [my] gendered [voice] but, mainly, of the political responsibilities associated to

such [a voice]” (Arrojo 1994, 149). In addition, my approach to this translation is shaped by a strong awareness of the potential for that voice to be misconstrued or fall victim to stereotypes about women or the mentally ill. Arrojo also writes that all translators, including feminist ones, inevitably “take over the author’s role” as they translate, and thus “the only kind of fidelity we can possibly consider is the one we owe to our assumptions, not simply as individuals, but as members of a cultural community which produces and validates them” (1994, 160). This also raises a question with regard to my project: that of how to remain ‘faithful’ to feminist politics while rendering the often sexist and ableist language used by the novel’s narrator to denigrate herself on the basis of her gender and her experience of mental illness, due to the internalization of the cultural views that surround her.

Attempts to intervene in this regard can certainly prove problematic. One example is provided by Pauline Henry-Tierney’s analysis of Adriana Hunter’s translation of Catherine Millet’s overtly sexual memoir *La vie sexuelle de Catherine M.* (2001). The admittedly more conservative Hunter deems passages that depict Millet in a submissive sexual role to be at odds with her own feminist politics. In an interview about the translation, she rhetorically asked, “how was this empowering for her when she was making herself an object?” (qt. in Henry-Tierney 231). As such, in Hunter’s translation, “Nous baisons tous les trois, les deux garçons *m’enfilant en même temps*” becomes, “The three of us would fuck together, both boys *inside me* at once” (Millet qt. in Henry-Tierney 231); the active verb in the French original is neutralized in English. In this case, Hunter remains faithful to her own sexual politics, but she also notably censors the first-hand account of a woman’s lived sexual experience, which strongly conflicts with the feminist impulse to ‘write the body.’ Hunter therefore takes it upon herself to participate in the very silencing of women that feminist translators actively fought to challenge, a contradiction my

own translation may be vulnerable to given the conflict between the feminist politics of my approach and the misogynistic language present in the source text.

Arrojo's work is particularly enlightening in its attempt to bridge the gap between feminist translation studies and post-colonial theory. She provides an illustrative case of fidelity to individual feminist politics conflicting with the voice of the source text with her analysis of the disconnect between what is perceived to be a dialogue between the work of Brazilian modernist writer Clarice Lispector and the way in which it is interpreted and rewritten by French feminist writer Hélène Cixous. Arrojo raises the issue of asymmetrical power dynamics in translation, demonstrating that they can still exist within the realm of feminist translation and can indeed be perpetuated by self-professed feminist translators. She examines the devotion Cixous feels toward the woman she translates, "which has been perceived as a reversal of the paradigm of colonial, patriarchal encounters" (1999, 144). Cixous's projection of her own theories on feminine writing onto Lispector's work demonstrates "[...] the delusive ethics that seems to underlie most acts of reading and translating – and particularly those undertaken in asymmetrical contexts – in which it is the interpreter's labour of faithful love that is supposed to guarantee the protection of the other even if it means the denial of the interpreter's own identity and interests" (Arrojo 1999, 142). As is the case in any social movement, the prominent figures and spokespersons do not together form a monolith. Differing perspectives exist as to how best to take up the feminist cause in translation. Therefore, some contradictions are to be expected. Where this difference becomes problematic is when it compromises the stated goal. Cixous's appropriation of Lispector's writing and voice to exemplify her own theories actually removes Lispector's agency due to the idealization and fetishizing of this literary figure who, in this so-called dialogue, "conveniently cannot talk back" (Arrojo 1999, 159). Cixous's theories regarding

“the limitations and dangers of dualist thought, of subjectivity based on the obliteration of the Other” (Sarap qt. in Arrojo 1999, 150) are associated with Lispector’s work without her consent; her work is thus “violently absorbed by French feminism” (Arrojo 1999, 151), a European institution with more international clout than the context in which Lispector’s work originally appeared. Cixous’s discovery of Lispector’s work “brought together an influential, academically powerful reader and an author who had hardly been read outside the limits of her marginal context and language” (Arrojo 1999, 155).

Arrojo notably uses the psychoanalytic term ‘transference’ to describe the projected relationship that Cixous imagines with Lispector’s writing (1999, 143) – the term will be explored in the next chapter in the context of the discussion regarding the dynamic between psychiatric patient and analyst, and the co-opting of women’s stories about their experiences of mental illness. Arrojo ultimately concludes that “[i]n her readings of Lispector, Cixous’s feminine approach to evade the violence of translation and the mediation of patriarchal language turns out to be just another instance of the same relationship between subject and object that she so vehemently rejects” (Arrojo 1999, 155).

The two cases examined above may serve as cautionary tales for my own attempt to translate into English from a feminist perspective – one that has been theorized from primarily North American and European perspectives. It should be clarified that the theorists and translators examined in this chapter represent a specific perspective of feminist translation developed mainly by North American translators and influenced by French feminists. The feminist translation movement has more recently received criticism for its narrow scope and exclusion of women with different backgrounds, who write and translate in different countries and languages and are treated as Other within the movement. According to María Reimóndez,

Feminist translation studies has so far made limited efforts to develop a critical understanding of geopolitical positionality of (translating and translated) subjects and languages and open up the epistemological world of feminist thinking to a diverse body of non-hegemonic languages and cultures” (50).

Reimóndez calls for a diversified polyphony of feminist voices in Translation Studies; one that accounts for the vast differences in background of the women it intends to represent. This polyphony, according to Reimóndez, is essential to truly examine translation from a feminist perspective. Solidarity among women was a stated goal of the second-wave feminist movement, but it excluded large portions of the female population, thereby subjecting them to the very silence that they sought to challenge. In the same way, several voices have inevitably been excluded here as well.

In light of all this, the importance of my taking an intersectional approach to my project becomes evident, due to the fact that I am exploring the visibility of a subgroup within an already marginalized group – women who are mentally ill. It is not only the feminine that I wish to make visible, but the particular voice of female madness that I want to ensure is heard amid the much louder voices of popular assumptions and stereotypes. The cases detailed above illustrate the dangers of unintentional hypocrisy when taking a feminist approach based on a narrow view that fails to take into account the intersection between two distinct marginalized groups.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

Feminist translation theory shapes my approach to translating *La débil mental* to the extent that it accounts for representations of female sexuality and questions how to approach these from a perspective that is faithful to feminist politics. The interest in challenging the silencing of women's voices is particularly relevant to my project and will be carried over into discussions of female madness in literature in the chapter that follows. The complex question of how to translate or intervene in a text that deals so heavily with issues of gender is complicated even further by the way that it addresses the theme of mental illness – as taboo a topic (if not more so) as explicit depictions of female sexuality.

3. Translating Madness

The theme of madness echoes throughout *La débil mental*, from its protagonist's actions to the novel's narrative voice. Madness as a literary theme will be examined in this chapter, with the goal of developing a translation approach that remains faithful to its voice. Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida's theories and definitions of madness provide the foundation of my approach to the topic, complemented by the particular history of how madness has historically been perceived in women. General theories regarding madness in literature will be briefly examined, followed by Martine Delvaux's case studies of how the topic has been addressed in literature by and about women in particular. My goal is to extrapolate some theoretical principles for the translation of 'mad' literature, and explore how these may be combined with feminist translation strategies.

3.1 Defining Madness

I will be using French philosopher Michel Foucault's writings about madness as a theoretical framework for this project, particularly due to his focus on the ways in which madness is framed and represented in both literature and society. In addition, Jacques Derrida's response to Foucault's work on the topic sheds light on some problematic aspects of his views regarding the way madness is written about, illustrating the complex nature of the issue and its inherent contradictions.

For Foucault, madness is a concept that emerged historically as a means of scapegoating the poor who were perceived as unable to work or produce anything, and were therefore unable to contribute to society. Between the 16th and 17th centuries, with the end of leprosy outbreaks, Foucault perceives a need in society to find "une nouvelle incarnation du mal, une autre grimace de la peur, des magies renouvelées de purification et d'exclusion" (qt. in Delvaux 18). This space

was filled with the concept of madness. The lack of ‘work’ produced by the poor led Foucault to describe madness as “the absence of an *oeuvre*” (qt. in Seferin 385), which he further defines as “the absence of a body of work representing madness as madness” (Seferin 385). This concept is central to the question of how to translate narratives of madness, as Foucault concerns himself with how best to “allow madness to speak for itself” (Seferin 387), given that it has historically been written about from outside perspectives – or what Foucault describes as the voice of ‘reason,’ its opposite. Regarding the discourse surrounding madness, Foucault states:

There is no common language: or rather, it no longer exists; the constitution of madness as mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, bears witness to a rupture in a dialogue, gives the separation as already enacted, and expels from the memory *all those imperfect words, of no fixed syntax, spoken falteringly*, in which the exchange between madness and reason was carried out. *The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue by reason about madness, could only have come into existence in such a silence. My intention was not to write the history of that language, but rather draw up the archaeology of that silence.* (qt. in Seferin 386, emphasis added)

I have emphasized the references to silence in the above quote given that they echo the stated intent of feminist translators, as we have seen in the previous chapter – to give voice to those that society censors and silences. Furthermore, Foucault’s words accurately describe the narrative style of *La débil mental*: an attempt to use the language of reason to express its polar opposite consists of “imperfect words” with “no fixed syntax, spoken falteringly.” Harwicz’s novel challenges the reader with textual features that express this mental state. The consistent absence of dialogue markers – for example, where two characters will speak to each other in the same

paragraph or even the same sentence, often interrupted by flashbacks and personal reflections that are seamlessly inserted into the narrative with no clear separation between concepts – force the reader to rely on inference in order to decipher meaning. The narrator struggles to find the words to describe her experience; language continuously fails her when she tries to convey her emotional state or define her identity: “Soy huérfana, como decir, soy una mujer casada, como decir, tengo hambre” (Harwicz 75) (“*I’m an orphan, or rather, I’m a married woman, or rather, I’m hungry*”) (117). Madness is present in *La débil mental* not only in its content but on a textual level as well, as Harwicz experiments with language in order to capture its voice.

Foucault’s characterization of madness as an inability to conform to social norms will be equally important further in this chapter as the more specific concept and history of female madness or hysteria will be examined. James Seferin summarizes Foucault’s view on the opposition between reason and madness, and the problem with allowing the former to define the latter:

The mad discourse is silenced and in this silence arises a monologue by reason about madness; a monologue that attempts to define and categorise madness, but in applying such reasonable ways of knowing never understands madness madly. For Foucault this is related to the constitution of madness as madness because “[t]he gesture that divides madness is the constitutive one”. (Foucault 2006d, xxviii) The silence that results from this division is madness as the absence of an œuvre. (386)

The asymmetrical power dynamics expressed above, whereby the group that controls language and discourse is entitled to speak of and for the silenced, is as applicable to the feminist theories

of translation detailed in the previous chapter as it is to the present discussion of madness. Due to this thesis's concern with the intersection between the two marginalized groups – women on the one hand, and the mentally ill on the other – uncovering this silence is crucial.

Foucault's intention was to let madness speak for itself, without being framed by the discourse of reason – much as the present thesis examines the possibility of translating such a voice while resisting the influence of the discursive voice of patriarchal ableism that demonizes women and the mentally ill. In *Madness and Civilization* (1961), Foucault wrote that he believed it possible to resist falling into the trap of reason speaking for madness by uncovering a language that predates the division between reason and madness; one that is “more original [...] than that of science, the dialogue of their rupture, which proves [...] that they are still on speaking terms”; a language that blurs the lines between the two concepts and wherein they are “confusedly implicated in each other, inseparable as they do not yet exist, and existing for each other” (Foucault qt. in Seferin 387). Jacques Derrida perceives inherent contradictions in Foucault's project, deeming the desire to escape from the language of reason to be naïve. According to Derrida:

Foucault wanted madness to be the subject of his book in every sense of the word: its theme and its first-person narrator, it's [sic] author, madness speaking about itself. Foucault wanted to write a history of madness itself, that is *madness speaking on the basis of its own experience and under its own authority*, and not a history of madness described from within the language of reason. (qt. in Seferin 386, emphasis added)

If madness is the absence of a work, Foucault's work *about* madness would inevitably then be

classified as a work of reason and fail in its attempt to let madness express itself uncensored. Derrida problematizes the project of writing about madness with the goal of uncovering its silenced voice:

The misfortune of the mad, the interminable misfortune of their silence, is that their best spokesmen are those who betray them best; which is to say that when one attempts to convey their silence itself, one has already passed over to the side of the enemy, the side of order, even if one fights against order from within it. (qt. in Seferin 387)

For Derrida, Foucault's work cannot be anything other than a work of reason, and by framing his work as one that liberates the voice of madness he "is only imprisoning madness in a subtler way by denouncing its imprisonment in a work that is itself inescapably reasonable" (Seferin 387). Derrida believes that Foucault's determination not to contribute to the rhetoric that stifles the language of madness is in itself mad, and that his text "can only be considered a work of madness because the work is unaware of its own impossibility" (Seferin 388). Foucault's attempt to emancipate madness is, in Derrida's view, illusory, as "all he can do is denounce the crime of its incarceration while repeating it" (Seferin 388). He ultimately questions whether Foucault's approach may in fact do more harm than good: "[w]ould not the archaeology of silence (i.e. of madness) be the most efficacious and subtle restoration, the repetition, in the most irreducibly ambiguous meaning of the word, of the act perpetrated against madness – and be so at the very moment when this act is denounced?" (qt. in Seferin 388). Martine Delvaux summarizes this view: "[...] car en cherchant à entendre cette voix, il faut se demander si on n'est pas déjà en voie de l'éteindre en lui prêtant la nôtre" (77). However well-intentioned, the practice of writing about the inner workings of a mind that is not one's own cannot escape the pull of projections

and assumptions shaped by cultural perceptions.

Inherent in the intent to uncover the silenced voice of madness is a desire to examine and deconstruct the binary oppositions of abstract concepts, an impulse that echoes the intentions of the feminist translators that I examined in the previous chapter with regard to the gender binary. Derrida's deconstructionist theory takes aim at the notion of mutually exclusive binary oppositions present in Western philosophy. In Derrida's view, "[...] one of these terms is always privileged, while the other is perceived to be controlled or dominated by the first" (Rojas 9) – this dominance and our tendency to "locate the center of any text or discourse within what he identifies as the *logos*" (Rojas 10) is what Derrida calls 'logocentrism'. Questioning or challenging the dominance of the privileged concept, however, is what Derrida refers to as the practice of "deconstruction" (Rojas 10). The privilege that reason, or sanity, holds over madness is an example of logocentrism. The goal of my translation project is to confront these logocentric tendencies as they apply to the language used to describe women and madness – the patriarchal language examined in previous chapter, and the language of psychiatry, which will be examined later in this chapter.

The dialogue between Derrida and Foucault reveals a complex problem for my work on the translation of *La débil mental*. Harwicz lets madness speak in her novel through a series of narrative devices – by writing in the first person, by employing a stream of consciousness style, and thus by making the protagonist's internal state the main narrative focus, above even the novel's plot. This would, however, still likely be considered a failure from Derrida's perspective – the voice of reason is inescapable regardless of intent, internalized through the absorption of cultural norms that demonize mental illness. Any divergence from socially constructed neuro-typical norms has the power to unsettle and cause discomfort due to cultural stigma. These

cultural assumptions persist in popular culture even in a current context, making these theories highly relevant to our examination of a contemporary novel.³ The mad are essentially stigmatized due to their non-conformity to societal norms; Martine Delvaux summarizes Foucault's position: « [l]es fous dérangent parce qu'ils viennent de l'intérieur. Ils font partie de la société tout en dérogeant aux règles qu'elle impose » (18).

3.2 Madness and the Male Gaze

The particular case of female madness is complicated by the intersection of the silencing of women by patriarchal discourse and the silencing of the mad by discourses of reason. Martine Delvaux examines this issue in *Femmes psychiatisées, femmes rebelles* (1998), wherein she argues that subjective accounts of women suffering from mental illness are the only means of emancipation from the oppressive force of psychiatric discourse that silences female mental patients in particular. Her work on this topic will be discussed in this section, as it provides essential insight into the ways that so-called 'mad' women are discussed in psychiatric discourse and literary criticism. These cultural assumptions are so deeply embedded in society that it may be inevitable for them to unconsciously feed into my translation practice.

Delvaux points out the same dichotomies that the feminist writers and translators examined in the previous chapter sought to challenge, and that Foucault and Derrida attempted to deconstruct: the logocentric binaries that privilege one concept over another. French feminist writer Hélène Cixous is among the figures discussed who focused on the gender binary that perpetuated the oppression of women, and drew connections between it and other associated

³ These views are reinforced in popular discourse; discussions that scapegoat the mentally ill following mass shootings in the United States are one example of their prevalence.

concepts, such as the notions of active/passive, and, notably, reason/madness (Delvaux 11). The view of women as irrational and overly emotional compared to men sets the stage for the emergence of the hysteria diagnosis. According to Delvaux, women are considered dangerous due to their excessive sensitivity and impressionability; she quotes Jean-Marie Briquet: “Toute femme est faite pour sentir et sentir c’est presque l’hystérie” (qt. in Delvaux 12). Delvaux states that these views have been so widely held throughout history that their origin cannot be traced (12); her goal in *Femmes psychiatisées, femmes rebelles* is to examine how this female madness has been expressed in writing by psychiatric institutions, literary critics, and by the female patients themselves. She also examines the act of reading these narratives, from the way psychiatrists ‘read’ the patient and her symptoms, as well as how the patient ‘reads’ the institution of psychiatry: “D’une part, imposition d’une maladie, d’autre part négociation d’une guérison” (Delvaux 12).

Delvaux identifies the same tendency that Foucault detects regarding the socially constructed diagnostic criteria that defines madness: that it relies on assumptions regarding the role one is expected to play in society. Foucault used the example of the poor, who failed to work and therefore failed to contribute to society in a way that was considered adequate. Delvaux takes this notion a step further by noting the particular case of women, who face especially rigid expectations in terms of conforming to gender roles; any deviation, and they run the risk of being declared ‘mad’ or ‘hysterical.’ Delvaux cites numerous sociological studies (13) conducted in the second half of the 20th century that examine the statistics regarding the diagnosis of mental illnesses, which concluded that not only were there more female psychiatric patients than male, but certain disorders – notably depression, anxiety, psychosis, and paranoia – were overwhelmingly prevalent in women, while the most diagnosed disorders in men have

consistently been addiction and personality disorders (13). Delvaux interprets these results as an indication of a societal assumption that female madness is organic and comes from within, whereas male madness is induced by external causes (30). In addition, she cites the work of sociologist Dorothy E. Smith, who attempted to identify potential bias in the methodology used in these studies (Delvaux 14). Smith's work ultimately led her to suggest that the results of these studies, which relied merely on data collection rather than a critical analysis of the statistics, were determined by conceptions of mental health and mental illness defined by psychiatric institutions (Delvaux 14). Regardless of whether or not these studies may have used biased methodology in favour of a feminist cause, Smith states that the studies themselves raise the question of how madness is defined by psychiatric institutions, and asserts that this definition relies on "un ensemble de préjugés sociaux qui déterminent quels rôles féminins et masculins sont jugés adéquats, quels comportements physiques et verbaux sont trouvés acceptables, quelle est la marque d'une certaine adaptation sociale" (Delvaux 14). Delvaux later quotes François Laplantine on how culture shapes mental health diagnoses : "On ne devient pas fou comme on le désire ; la culture a tout prévu" (15). Delvaux thus seeks to deconstruct, or in her words, 'decontaminate' the notion of madness (15), a goal that aligns itself with that of the present thesis. Is it possible to 'decontaminate' my translation of *La débil mental*, and free it from the socially constructed bias that defines madness according to the standards that it deviates from? As with the efforts of feminist translators to escape the confines of patriarchal language, the bias in favour of so-called 'sanity' appears to be ingrained in the collective unconscious.

3.2.1 Hysteria

No discussion of female madness would be complete without an examination of the notion of hysteria. Its emergence as a diagnosis exemplifies the gendered bias in psychiatry and psychoanalysis, and the asymmetrical power dynamics between the (traditionally male) analyst and the female ‘hysteric’ patient. The concept is of particular relevance to my translation of *La débil mental* because the main character exhibits its traditionally-defined symptoms of intense female sexual desire and overt expressions of intense emotion.

Martine Delvaux argues that the explanations given for hysteria from Plato to Freud have all revolved around the conquest of the female body (30–31). Foucault has also pointed out that the diagnosis of hysteria in women stems from a desire to dominate and police women’s bodies and sexuality (Delvaux 31). Delvaux draws parallels between Foucault’s writings on surveillance and Jeremy Bentham’s panoptic prison, and psychiatry as an institution: “La science psychiatrique, à la manière de la prison panoptique, régleme, régimente, classifie” (31). Hysteria would appear to be synonymous with the dismissal and condemnation of any behaviour that falls outside the prescribed gender norms imposed by patriarchy. Delvaux quotes David B. Morris regarding the place of women within the medical institution:

Toute femme dont les symptômes ne réagissaient pas aux traitements conventionnels – surtout si son médecin la considérait *trop émotive, théâtrale, égocentrique, ou sexuelle* – pouvait bientôt se trouver [sic] classée et implicitement condamnée comme hystérique. L’hystérie s’offrait comme une case diagnostique pratique pour l’emprisonnement des femmes que les médecins étaient incapables de guérir. (qt. in Delvaux 32, emphasis added)

In other words, what could not be explained by the male-dominated field of medicine was classified as a danger to society. Strong sexual desire having been a common symptom that signified hysteria reinforces its relevance to the current translation project. The madness of *La débil mental*'s protagonist stems from a kind of sexual obsession with her lover that overwhelms to the point of possessing her, so to speak. The reliability of the narrator is put into question due to her intense emotions, the incoherence of her narration, and her apparent mental instability. The possible causes of this perceived madness are hinted at through descriptions of her unstable relationship with her mother, who raised her daughter with an awareness of women's sexual roles. The protagonist's hyper-sexual fixations alone do not constitute her madness; yet, her own internalization of an association between intense female sexual desire and madness are evident in the perception she has of herself that she describes in her inner monologue.

The establishment of diagnostic criteria for psychiatric disorders has been largely controlled by male doctors and analysts, and tainted by sexism. If, as seen in the previous chapter, "[t]ranslation is a metaphor used by women writers to describe their experience" because "like translated texts they can be betrayed, transformed, invented, and created" (Harwood in Homel & Simon 49), the metaphor can be extended to describe the experience of women's relationships with psychiatric professionals. The history of the hysteria diagnosis illustrates the power dynamic between patient and analyst, and the gendered bias that perpetuates the silencing of women in psychiatric contexts. Delvaux writes that Freud and his contemporaries constructed narratives about their female patients, taking advantage of their distress and the perceived incoherence in the stories they told about their lived experiences (69). Freud thus co-opted the narratives of his case studies' subjects, allowing his patients to express themselves only within the pre-established criteria of the diagnosis. According to Delvaux, "[I]e

discours de la patiente est médiatisé, comme s'il avait été épuré, corrigé, en somme vidé de lui-même. Sa voix, si elle est *traduite* soit par sa récupération dans un mode de discours indirect, ou à l'intérieur du processus de la citation, passe par celle du médecin" (71). Popular conceptions of mental illness in women are thus formed based on this mediated discourse, i.e. 'translations' of women's stories by (predominantly male) doctors, distorted by the male gaze and designed to perpetuate stereotypes of women as irrational and hyper-emotional when they deviate from standard gender roles. Delvaux describes this dynamic as 'conquest' (73), referring to the dominant patriarchal voice that presides over the female subject's descriptions of her own experience. Psychiatric discourse thus participates in the objectification of women; in the words of Delvaux, "[l]e discours psychiatrique et son utilisation du diagnostic constituent des moyens épistémologiques qui permettent de conquérir ces obscurs objets de savoir et de désir que sont la psyché et le corps féminin, d'appriivoiser le danger qu'ils représentent en les transformant en *objets* plutôt que de les percevoir comme *sujets*" (81–82). Women are presumed not to understand their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Elia Geoffrey Kantaris explores this dismissal of women's sexual agency, citing Jacques Lacan's writings about female sexual pleasure or *jouissance*, in which he theorizes that "[the woman] knows that she experiences it, and when it happens, but what it is, what its relation to *signifiance* might be, she would appear not to know or to be unable to say" (6–7). Psychiatric discourse projects onto the female psychiatric patient its desire to uncover and reveal the hidden truth of female sexuality, a voyeuristic impulse that symbolically objectifies the female body. The institution of psychiatry in the Victorian period sought ultimately to condemn female power, autonomy, and sexual desire. Even the desire that women experienced did not belong to them, as it was presumed that they could not fully understand its meaning. This objectification of women inherently implies a

denial and erasure of their subjective agency. By perceiving women as objects to be observed rather than voices to be heard, the psychiatric institution joins patriarchy in its silencing of the female voice. And, according to Delvaux, even when this voice speaks, it is immediately discredited (63). As the translator of a source text that represents the ‘hysteric’ voice, I am entrusted with conveying that voice while bearing in mind the long history of its suppression, and the ways that language participates in its silencing.

3.3 Madness in Literature

The translation of *La débil mental* raises questions about literary depictions of madness and particularly of mentally ill women. An overview of Lillian Feder’s work on how madness has historically been represented in literary works follows, along with an analysis of Delvaux’s work on the particular cases of writing that deal with women who suffer from mental illnesses. Delvaux notably explores how an outside perspective consistently differs significantly from first-hand accounts from the subject herself. This raises the issue of how to mediate these narratives and examine potential ways to resist the suppressive tendencies of patriarchal psychiatric discourse.

In her analysis of madness in literature, Feder proposes the following definition of madness: “[...]a state in which unconscious processes predominate over conscious ones to the extent that they control them and determine perceptions of and responses to experience that, *judged by prevailing standards of logical thought and relevant emotion, are confused and inappropriate*” (5, emphasis added). Here again, madness is a relative term, defined as behaviour that does *not* conform to the *logos*. Feder’s assertion that “logical thought and relevant emotion” determine whether or not behaviour conforms to social norms raises the question of exactly

which emotions are deemed appropriate as responses to logical thought, and who determines this appropriateness. If women and the mad are silenced, their stories remain untold and their experiences unknown; moreover, their minds and responses to these unknown experiences remain secret as well. Therefore, even if one could define the vague concept of what constitutes a “relevant” emotion according to societal norms, it is impossible to determine what this relevancy consists of without knowledge of the lived experience and thought processes that prompted the response. First-person accounts of the experience of madness somewhat subvert this paradox, particularly in the case of stream-of-consciousness narratives, by exploring and expressing the inner workings of the subject’s mind. They are, Derrida might argue, still written in the language of reason – inevitably tainted and even defined by logocentric norms that demonize the marginalized, as is the case with feminist writings that employ language developed by patriarchy. The internalization of widely held and deeply embedded societal views is ultimately inescapable. Harwicz addresses this issue in her novel with characters both male and female who make frequent use of sexist language that reflects stereotypes and double standards. However, recognizing and deconstructing these problematic notions is an approach that allows for slight subversion of the ignorant assumptions that depict the psychiatric patient as weak and inferior.

In addition, Kantaris points out the particular preoccupation with psychoanalysis in Argentinian literature, particularly in women writers and feminist theorists, who concern themselves with questioning “that which remains unanalysed in its construction of gendered positions” (5). Kantaris attributes this recurring theme to the particular treatment of incarcerated women in the Argentinian Dirty War, stating that “[...] a terrifying military fantasy of total control, accompanied by a paranoid desire to be rid of an *internal enemy* which had taken on giant pathological proportions in the military mind, began to be played out in the most brutal

fashion” (16). Madness itself is an *internal enemy* that causes anxiety due to the impossibility of fully understanding it from an outside perspective. Given Harwicz’s identity as a female Argentinian author, this analysis provides additional context to the concern with the theme of female madness and to the particular interiority of this madness in *La débil mental*. While the novel is not an internment story, its protagonist is arguably a prisoner of her own mind, and her inability to break out of her mental state and express herself is repeated in her internal monologue.

3.4 Writing Women

Delvaux states that the doctor puts on a show and fabricates a story, and compares him to a stage director, museum curator, art critic, zookeeper, or ringmaster (40) – and to this list may be added the additional role of translator. If women’s mental health treatments and diagnoses must rely on their doctor to translate women’s descriptions of their symptoms into the language of psychiatry, literary depictions of women with mental illnesses are by extension also translations and interpretations of these symptoms. For this reason, Delvaux sees writing as a means of emancipation from psychiatric discourse, wherein the patient proposes a counter-narrative to that of the institution that silences her (24). In writing her experience of madness, the woman therefore studies her own case study (24), and can deconstruct the language that manipulates her voice. Through written expressions of the repressed female voice of madness, first-hand and thus arguably more legitimate accounts of mental illness can be heard. Rather than adopt the societal view of madness as contagious, Delvaux argues that it is in fact their silencing that is contagious, as it pervades popular discourse. The ‘decontamination’ of repressive psychiatric discourse depends upon the ‘contamination’ of the reader by the subject’s account of

her lived experience (Delvaux 24). If the language of reason is insufficient in allowing madness to speak, as Foucault and Derrida have theorized, the author of a subjective account of mental illness must in some way translate her own story in order to make her experience resonate with the reader. The socially constructed impulse to distance oneself from the mad out of a fear of its contagion must be subverted. Delvaux quotes Cixous, who states “[...] je suis ce que Dora aurait été, si l’histoire des femmes avait commencé” (25). The reference to Dora, the subject of Freud’s seminal case study on hysteria, indicates a desire from a feminist perspective to uncover the particular voice of so-called ‘mad’ women. Delvaux draws a parallel between the ‘feminine’ writing expounded by feminist writers like Cixous and ‘mad’ writing, as they both escape the patriarchal frames of expression in order to access “une écriture corporelle, instinctive, non-linéaire, métaphorique, qui rendrait compte d’une sexualité féminine” (154).

Delvaux examines the cases of Zelda Fitzgerald and Sylvia Plath, both female writers who suffered from mental illness and whose narratives about their own experiences with madness have been overshadowed by efforts to understand their work exclusively through a psychiatric or psychoanalytic lens. Fitzgerald attempted to write a fictionalized account of her experience with mental illness and psychiatric internment in her novel *Save Me the Waltz*, wherein the female protagonist is a dancer whose body stands in as a metaphor for Fitzgerald’s mental state. The novel is largely based on autobiographical details from Fitzgerald’s own life; however, as Delvaux demonstrates, her husband F. Scott Fitzgerald co-opted her narrative in his own novel *Tender is the Night*, in which a female character based on Zelda struggles with madness. Scott complained that Zelda’s work was plagiarized from his own manuscript, in an attempt to control the narrative surrounding their relationship and its effect on Zelda’s mental

health (124). Their published letters reveal a power struggle, with Scott persistently discrediting Zelda's literary talent in order to convince her not to publish her own account of events.

The reframing and co-opting of Sylvia Plath's experience with mental illness occurred posthumously, as her husband Ted Hughes took charge of her literary estate. All publications of her journals and documents shared with biographers since her death have therefore been mediated by Hughes (Delvaux 129). Hughes thus 'translated' Plath's writing, just as F. Scott Fitzgerald 'translated' Zelda's story into a novel he deemed more legitimate than her own writing, which he dismissed as 'amateur' in order to delegitimize her claim to truth (124) and protect his reputation by mobilizing his male privilege.

Both of these high-profile cases exemplify the trend of silencing and controlling the subjective narratives of women who try to communicate the causes and details of their mental anguish. By virtue of their mental health diagnoses, their accounts become easy to dismiss, discredit, and manipulate. The term 'gaslighting' has been coined relatively recently to describe the practice of casting doubt on a person's account of events, by making the subject question her own memories or sanity ("Gaslight"). The term is derived from the play *Gas Light* in which a man attempts to convince his wife that she is mad by making the gas light in their home flicker while categorically denying the phenomenon when his wife points it out (Nelson 31). The phenomenon has proven to occur in doctor-patient dynamics in the field of psychiatry as well (Loftus). The term is useful in discussions of women's mental health and the history of diagnoses of disorders in women; not only are women's narratives co-opted and reframed through a male-centric lens, they are also frequently discredited when attempting to describe their experience of events. This manipulation tactic exemplifies the tendency to marginalize and silence women with mental illnesses; the very practice that the current project seeks to challenge and subvert.

Moreover, the manipulation and ‘hijacking’ of women’s stories described here may serve as a justification for the feminist counter-strategy of ‘hijacking’ texts in translation to redress the power imbalance whereby women are represented from an exclusively male perspective.

My particular interest in how the protagonist of *La débil mental* expresses her struggle with madness is rooted in her use of harsh self-deprecating language to refer to herself. In this case, the mad female voice makes frequent use of the very language developed to oppress her. Yet, the reader is also given a glimpse of her lived experience, including the traumatic events of her upbringing that have defined her own self-perception. The internalization of misogynistic and ableist discourse confronts the reader’s preconceptions about female madness directly by naming them. For example, the narrator frequently associates her madness with weakness, as is evidenced by the novel’s title, which literally translates to *The Weak-minded Woman*.

3.5 Diagnosing Art

According to Eunice Rojas, “[d]espite the several centuries of silencing of madness that Foucault depicts in *History of Madness*, insanity has a long tradition of being linked to artistic expression” (19). Rojas cites Plato’s *Phaedrus*, in which Socrates asserts that a certain ‘madness’ is in fact integral to the creative process: “He who without the divine madness comes to the doors of the Muses, confident that he will be a good poet by art, meets with no success, and the poetry of the sane man vanishes into nothingness before that of the inspired madmen” (qt. in Rojas 9). However, analyzing literature from this perspective can be problematic, as it implies a certain ‘diagnosis’ of the text based on assumptions founded on cultural perceptions of madness – which can be highly subjective. In addition, what constitutes ‘madness’ in a text is a fluid concept; for example, a text by an author with a mental illness is not inherently an

autobiographical account of the ‘mad’ experience. Biographical presumptions regarding the authors of texts can be more harmful than useful in analyzing these, especially with regard to works of fiction, wherein confusing the author with the text’s narrative voice would be inherently naïve.

Yet, my approach to translating *La débil mental* also revolves around the narrator’s ‘madness,’ primarily due to the internal monologue that frames the story. The protagonist’s mental state shapes the reader’s understanding of the plot, setting, and characters, as it is the only thing to which the reader is given access. Due to the hyper-subjective nature of the text, her emotions and desires are the novel’s focal point. The stream-of-consciousness style that Harwicz adopts, wherein the character’s mind jumps from one topic to another with little to no narrative cohesion, showcases the character’s ‘madness’ by challenging the reader to find coherence in her inner monologue. My treatment of this text as ‘mad’ is rooted in my analysis of these narrative devices, as opposed to an analysis of the character’s behaviour using diagnostic criteria for actual psychiatric disorders. Therefore, although the theories discussed above regarding women and madness serve as a framework for my approach, I limit my analysis of the ‘madness’ of this text to its effect as a literary device. Lillian Feder defines her task in *Madness in Literature* similarly:

My purpose is neither to consider literary works as the psychological autobiographies of their authors nor to diagnose the psychic complaints of fictive madmen, tedious procedures that add little to our knowledge of psychology or literature. Nor do I seek to reveal the anthropological or historical significance of the literature of madness. My method is to employ all areas of knowledge relevant to a comprehension of the types of symbolic transformation that characterize madness in literature. (10)

La débil mental's protagonist symbolically embodies the hypersexualized madness of hysteria, and through her self-awareness of outside perspectives of her behaviour, a tension emerges that leaves the reader questioning their capacity to sympathize with the character. Regarding 'mad' literary characters, Feder writes:

The madman of literature is, to some extent, modeled on the actual one, but his differences from such a model are at least as important as are his resemblances to it: he is rooted in a mythical or literary tradition in which distortion is a generally accepted mode of expression [...] A mad literary character must thus be approached on his own terms, through the verbal, dramatic, and narrative symbols that convey the unconscious processes he portrays and reveals. (11)

It is important to note that “[...] a literary critic’s role is to define and not to diagnose” (Rojas 11), and due to the interpretive nature of translation, the same can be said for the translator.

Having noted *La débil mental*'s theme of female madness, my goal in translating this text is to allow the novel’s narrative voice to speak without imposing subtle diagnoses or prejudice.

Below, an analysis of a feminist translation of a ‘hysteric’ voice will shed light on the consequences of an approach based on the intersection between gender and mental illness.

3.6 Diagnosis in Translation

Catherine Mavrikakis presents a case study in feminist translation of a ‘hysteric’ narrative, one that proves influential for my own project. She begins by asserting that psychoanalysis is largely based on hysteria – referring to the notion’s important role in the development of Freud’s theories (73). In addition, the psychoanalytic approach depends on language, as it consists of talk therapy that seeks to uncover repressed emotion through

discussion with an analyst; and, according to Mavrikakis, translation is at the core of hysteria. The patient must translate her experience into the language of reason – which, as we have seen, is also the language of patriarchy. The description of symptoms that is necessary for a mental health diagnosis inherently relies on language, as these must be explained with words for clinicians to be able to acknowledge and treat them. Freud himself describes the clinical term ‘repression’ as a “failure of translation” (qt. in Mavrikakis 76): “The motive for it is always a release of unpleasure which would result from translation; it is as though this unpleasure provokes a disturbance of thought which forbids the process of translation” (qt. in Mavrikakis 76). Due to the patient’s difficulty expressing herself in language, she is vulnerable to having her words manipulated in order to serve an agenda, leading to a distortion of her mental state in translation. The hysteric patient asks the doctor to ‘decode’ her symptoms and in fact relies entirely upon him to release repressed emotions through his translations, as he alone is capable of this process. As the patriarchal bias inherent in psychiatry and psychoanalysis has been discussed at length in this thesis, the potential for mistranslation is evident here. The psychoanalyst’s interest in uncovering the repressed emotional and psychological core of a woman’s psyche is inherently problematic due to the fact that patriarchy and psychoanalysis participate in that very repression and the silencing of women’s voices when they speak of their lived experiences. Like F. Scott Fitzgerald’s ‘translation’ of his wife’s account of madness into literature with his novel *Tender Is the Night*, the language of both women and the mentally ill is highly vulnerable to manipulation due to deeply embedded patriarchal ableist norms. According to Mavrikakis:

La cure analytique peut être vue comme un processus de traduction tous azimuts, qui doit permettre au sujet de se redonner la langue-cible, celle où peuvent s’inscrire toutes les traductions de la charge émotive. On voit donc que la

psychanalyse est fondée dans une pensée de la traduction, du déplacement et de l'efficacité économique de l'opération traduisante. Pour Freud, la traduction est un performatif. Elle n'est fidèle que dans la mesure où elle agit sur le texte de départ et transforme celui-ci dans une langue-cible, à partir de laquelle il sera encore possible de traduire. Sans fin. (77-78)

In addition, Mavrikakis points out a fundamental concept in the relationship between language, translation, and psychoanalysis: "Il faut peut-être alors penser que la fidélité et l'infidélité du traducteur ou de la traductrice à la langue d'origine ne sont parfois que des effets de l'inconscient, des constructions systématiques d'une conception inavouée et souvent idéologique du texte qui est traduit" (78). The psychoanalytic concern with the unconscious thus applies to the translator, because ideology and societal norms operate unconsciously in translations. Feminist translators address this problem by making conscious efforts to subvert perceived evidence of patriarchal influence on language in their translations.

As such, Mavrikakis presents the case of translations of Alice James, novelist Henry James' sister, who herself was diagnosed with hysteria (79). Her personal diaries reveal the details of her internal struggle with her identity as a woman and its relationship to her mental health. They exemplify the close association of hysteria with the non-conformity of women with traditional female gender roles. James reflects on her secondary status as a woman within the family, noting her brother's tendency to appropriate her words in his own writing and pass them off as his own; by virtue of his being male, he carries the family name and serves as its spokesperson, while her individual contributions go unacknowledged and overshadowed (80). Mavrikakis analyzes the French translation of the diaries by Marie Tadié, published in France by feminist press Éditions des femmes in 1983, and notes instances of significant differences that

stem from the translation's ideological pulse. For example, regarding the practice of written reflection as a means of untangling her muddled 'hysterical' thoughts, James writes: "My circumstances allowing of nothing but the ejaculation of one-syllabled reflections, a written monologue by that most interesting being, myself, may have its yet to be discovered consolations" (qt. in Mavrikakis 79). Mavrikakis highlights the use of the word 'ejaculation' here as a metaphor for the incoherent language of a troubled, hysteric mind, due to its psychoanalytic roots, noting its connection to fundamental Freudian theories: "De l'envie du pénis, à l'hystérie comme symptôme d'un manque, de la masturbation à la volonté de ne pas se voir elle-même comme auteure féminine, Alice donne à penser et à repenser la psychanalyse à ses débuts [...]" (81). The word, however, disappears from the French translation: "Les circonstances de ma vie me permettant de m'exprimer seulement par monosyllabes, un monologue écrit par cet être très intéressant, *moi-même*, offrira peut-être des consolations encore inexplorées" (qt. in Mavrikakis 81). According to Mavrikakis, the erasure of the word 'ejaculation' by the feminist translator stems from a desire to 'feminize' the text and remove a perceived unconscious internalization by the author of the patriarchal notion of penis envy: "Alice James ne doit pas éjaculer sous peine de voir la construction de la victime idéale et féminine se désagrèger" (82). Mavrikakis also notes in the translation the disappearance of the word 'reflection,' used twice in the original. The notion of reflection disappears also in the translation of the opening sentence of the diaries, which go from the English "I think that if I get into the habit of writing..." to "Si je prends l'habitude d'écrire..." in French, where the reflective "I" subject is notably removed. James's words appear to be manipulated consistently by her feminist translator based on an assumption of internalized misogyny that is presumed to be prevalent in women of the 19th century – and that ignores the possibility of James's complexity of thought in her reflections on her womanhood

and her conscious use of specific patriarchal language to communicate it. James's agency is effaced in translation in order to make her fit the profile of victimhood that exemplifies the translator's feminist politics. The translation is seemingly 'faithful' to feminist principles, but the author's unique voice as a woman reflecting on her social status in relation to her mental health is suppressed on the basis of her word choice, on the assumption of it being the result of patriarchal socialization rather than a deliberate literary strategy. Mavrikakis reads in James's words an attempt to empower herself and a desire to rebel against the patriarchal dynamic of her family: "[p]ar ses écrits, Alice veut se donner une virilité interdite et entrer en compétition avec ses frères" (84). Writing her diary is a cathartic exercise that allows her to heal from her mental anguish through an exploration of the oppressive gender norms that cause it; the translation of her words, however, removes this nuance through its presumption that the author knows no better than to use the language of the system that victimizes her.

3.7 Concluding Remarks

In *Femmes psychiatisées, femmes rebelles*, Delvaux cites Jacqueline Rose regarding the aforementioned Sylvia Plath, whose legacy is defined by her mental illness to such an extent that her individual artistic voice is stifled:

[...] on retrouve deux attitudes: l'une qui tend à diagnostiquer Sylvia Plath et à voir ces écrits comme des symptômes et des signes avant-coureurs de sa maladie mentale, et l'autre féministe, qui la présente comme une victime d'un régime patriarcal. La première attitude met en scène un être dont le comportement est déterminé par les affres de la "folie", la seconde présente une femme déterminée par le monde extérieur ; dans les deux cas, Plath est la victime. (132)

Presumptions regarding women's experiences with mental illness inevitably suppress the subject's voice and impede her self-determination, whether they come from a male psychoanalyst of the Victorian period or a feminist translator with the intention of subverting patriarchal language. While Arrojo argues that feminist translators can only be faithful to their own politics, this approach can result in an unconscious silencing of women's voices when applied to texts by or about women with mental illnesses.

I have analyzed the particular treatment of women with mental illnesses in order to deconstruct dominant cultural views and uncover the many ways in which psychiatric and literary discourses participate in the silencing of so-called 'mad' women. Having explored the theoretical principles that have shaped my translation approach, I will examine the practical applications of these principles in my English translation of *La débil mental* in the next chapter.

4. Translating Hysteria

Having established the two-pronged theoretical basis for my translation, I will now examine the narrative and stylistic devices that Harwicz employs in *La débil mental* to illustrate the protagonist's mental state, giving an example of the translation choice I made for each.

4.1 Punctuation and Style

Harwicz's writing style makes for a challenging enough read, let alone translation. The stream-of-consciousness style in *La débil mental* is one of the most striking features of the text and is fundamental in conveying the protagonist's cognitive processes and emotional state. For this reason, and due to my specific interest in producing a translation that resists the cultural stigma against mentally ill women, conveying the novel's style in translation was a particular focus of this project. Standard rules of grammar and punctuation are consistently sacrificed in *La débil mental* in favour of rhythm. Frequent run-on sentences and comma splices convey the racing mind of the novel's protagonist as she processes childhood trauma, a toxic mother-daughter relationship, and the neglect she experiences in her romantic relationship as well as the resulting heartbreak. Short sentence fragments are interspersed throughout these passages, creating a specific rhythm for the reader that indicates sudden strong emotional impulses or flashbacks to troubling childhood memories.

In a passage from the second part of the novel, the protagonist describes her thoughts as she awaits a call from her lover: "Creo que no pensé realmente en nada en toda mi vida. Pateo piedras al lado del camino. Ahora soy una turba de aves nocturnas. Ahora soy una imposible horrible maravillosa noche. Ahora una avalancha hueca" (Harwicz 51). In this instance, I made the decision not to punctuate the fourth sentence of the passage with commas, as would be

appropriate according to English grammatical conventions: “Now, I am an impossible, horrible, marvelous night.” Adding pauses in this way disrupts the rhythm of the source text and thus alters the style in translation. More importantly, it manipulates the words of the protagonist’s inner monologue, distorting the emotional weight of the statement and changing the reader’s impression of the character. Added punctuation attributes a coherence to the speaker that the source text deliberately omits. Pauses between adjectives indicate composure and rational thought, rather than the frantic, uncensored and impulsive nature of this character’s inner monologue. The three adjectives used to describe the ‘night’ (impossible, horrible, and marvelous) are somewhat contradictory and are evidence of sudden flashes and swings of extreme, often conflicting emotions. The three sentences in which she metaphorically describes herself begin with loosely related concepts and end with a seemingly random interjection. In the original passage, the narrator jumps from one image to another with few or no cohesive links between concepts, which is emphasized by the scarce punctuation. Therefore, I opted not to add any commas or other punctuation in my translation of the passage: “Now I am a mob of nocturnal birds. Now I am an impossible horrible marvelous night. Now a hollow avalanche” (102). In the last sentence, one is left to wonder whether *she* is the avalanche or whether she is externalizing her mental illness by using the avalanche as a metaphor (the same metaphor is used throughout the novel for the sudden rushes of overwhelming emotion and mental instability that the protagonist experiences). These highly evocative tangential passages are typical of the character’s inner monologue throughout Harwicz’s novel. This is one example of the scarce punctuation used consistently throughout the source text. Since the ‘rambling’ nature of the narration is essential to conveying this novel’s ‘madness,’ I kept most of the original punctuation (or lack thereof) in my translation.

Harwicz also notably punctuates the end of certain questions with periods instead of question marks, mainly in the narrator's internal monologue, and especially as the plot progresses and her mental state deteriorates. Dialogue passages respect the standard Spanish convention of the inverted question mark at the beginning of the sentence and the question mark at the end, but when the protagonist ruminates, her thoughts flash through her mind in short bursts of sentence fragments and questions that take the form of declarative sentences. This difference modifies the tone of the sentence in its oral pronunciation by moving the phonetic emphasis, resulting in a monotonous tone for the reader that reflects the way information whizzes through the narrator's mind with a marked lack of analytical thought. The protagonist is lost in thought throughout the novel, and her ramblings, which illustrate her struggle to put her experience into words, dominate the text. Harwicz uses this punctuation strategy to convey the narrator's mental state: her failure to consider her questions as questions indicates her inability to fully process facts and think rationally. For example, in the third part of the novel, after the main character has fled from her mother's house, as she anxiously awaits a message from her lover, she runs through frantic questions in her mind:

No escribió, no llamó, no apareció. Dónde está. Qué hace. Con quién. (Harwicz 67)

He hasn't written, he hasn't called, he hasn't appeared. Where is he. What's he doing. With whom. (112)

The periods here produce a brisk staccato effect that merges the questions with the declarative statements that surround it, with no distinction between the two types of sentences. I chose to keep the punctuation of the source text in my translation in this and other similar passages in

order to maintain this effect.

The first sentence that follows is a declarative statement and describes the narrator's actions: "Pago la cuenta pero ni siquiera miro la cara del mozo" (Harwicz 67). (*"I pay the bill but I don't even look at the waiter's face"* (112).) A question then follows: "¿Tiene cara?" (*"Does he have a face?"*) Harwicz has no choice but to punctuate this question using the standard format, as the punctuation here determines whether the sentence is a declarative statement or a question. In Spanish, "tiene cara" followed by a period would translate to "he has a face," and only a question mark would change its meaning to "does he have a face?"; there is no difference in the wording in Spanish between the two as there is in English. In English, because the wording of a yes-no question changes, there exists the possibility of continuing the style of punctuating questions with periods: "Does he have a face." I strongly considered this option in an earlier draft of my translation, as it seemed consistent with my goal of remaining faithful to the voice of madness, given that it emphasizes the frantic thought patterns of the narrator's internal monologue. Although it didn't appear in the original Spanish, I considered the possibility that this may only have been due to language constraints. I ultimately decided against the intervention, however. My justification was that the pronoun 'he' in this case referred not to her lover but to the waiter. Given that her most troubled thoughts usually concern her sexual relationship with her lover, I decided that the distinction was consistent with my translation approach. In this passage, she appears to be tuning in and out of reality. The question mark illustrates how trapped she is in her own mind and how confused she becomes when she tries to escape it and process the world around her.

One of the most notable ways that Harwicz uses punctuation to convey the narrator's mental instability is with the complete absence of dialogue markers throughout the novel. Most

of the dialogue in *La débil mental* occurs between the narrator and her mother, and as neither of the characters are named, the reader must rely on inference to distinguish between the two of them as they speak to each other. There are no markers to indicate when a section of dialogue begins or ends, or which character is speaking. In the following example, the sentences alternate between speakers, beginning with the narrator's voice: "No me vuelvas loca, no me adoctrines, andáte lejos. No te adoctrino, te educo, y necesito escuchar, necesito darte ideas, te voy haciendo gestos. No necesito ideas, andáte o no llamo. Y me voy por la ruta [...]" (Harwicz 81). (*"Don't make me crazy, don't indoctrinate me, go away. I'm not indoctrinating you, I'm educating you, and I need to listen, I need to give you ideas, I'll gesture to you. I don't need ideas, go away or I'm not calling. And I head down the path [...]"* (121).) In the last sentence of this passage, the protagonist resumes her narration, immediately after a line of spoken dialogue. This lack of dialogue markers creates confusion throughout the source text, and further illustrates the inner workings of the narrator's chaotic mind. Although my goal as a translator is to produce a target text that is at the very least comprehensible for English-language readers, the source text's punctuation is essential to the narrative due to its being intricately related to the theme of madness. For this reason, my translation is also devoid of dialogue markers.

I did make one particular intervention in the punctuation of my translation that departed from the source text. My decision was heavily influenced by the theories discussed in the chapter on feminist translation. It becomes evident in the novel that the narrator's madness is rooted in the dynamics of the two main relationships in her life: first, her relationship with her mother, who raised her daughter to believe women are exclusively sexual beings that are subordinate to and dependent on men; second, her sexual relationship with the married man she is seeing, with whom she has secondary status as she and the man's wife are cast into the roles of the 'mother-

whore' dichotomy of stereotypes described in section 2. Her devotion to her doomed relationship becomes a form of escapism from the life in which she feels trapped, under her mother's influence. This devotion becomes increasingly obsessive as the novel progresses and the narrator gradually succumbs to madness. In the second of the three parts of the novel, she states: "La vida es una perra alzada pero ofrece lo imposible a veces. Me ofrece una pureza demoníaca. Me ofrece a él" (59). In my translation, I decided to capitalize the pronoun that refers to her lover in order to give it additional semantic weight. There is a particular phonetic emphasis on the final syllable in the original Spanish sentence that is lost in the English translation, and that has the effect of further centring the object of the narrator's obsession. I deemed it appropriate to capitalize 'Him' in the sentence due to the narrator's almost religious devotion to her sexual partner. This recalls the ecstasy of St-Teresa, who, as discussed in the previous chapters, claimed to experience a kind of sexual *jouissance* through her connection to God. As mentioned previously, St-Teresa was an important figure for feminists. She exemplified how men speak for women's experiences, as Jacques Lacan claimed she could not fully comprehend what was happening to her – a phenomenon that occurs with respect to women's sexuality as well as their experiences of hysteria. Moreover, the "demonic purity" from the preceding sentence indicates the protagonist's conflicting views on love. The narrator worships her lover not unlike a deity; when she watches his lips move as he speaks, enthralled and unable to take in his words, she fixates on "[t]hat transition from mouth to divinity" (83). Her obsession soon consumes her and leads to her descent into madness. Language surrounding demonic possession appears throughout the novel; this will be further examined below. I translated the passage above into English as: "Life is a bitch in heat but sometimes it offers the impossible. It offers me a demonic purity. It offers me to Him" (107).

4.2 Grammar

This text presented grammatical challenges in translation as well. At times the noun-adjective order in the original Spanish makes it difficult to obtain the same effect in English, breaking up parallelisms that are important in conveying mental instability in the source text. The narrator often repeats herself in her inner monologue, which illustrates the way her mind functions: it remains ‘stuck’ on the same thoughts and memories, returning to the same ideas no matter the context. Virtually any external stimulus can trigger a mental episode consisting of a frantic stream of emotionally charged thoughts. These repetitions are important because they are indicative of the character’s obsession with the affair she is having and how it dominates her entire sense of self, as well as the extent to which her troubled childhood continues to influence and haunt her well into adulthood. This strategy shows how the novel’s protagonist struggles to communicate her mental state. In some cases, English grammar rules force modifications in translation and alter the rhythm of the source text, as in the following passage: “Deseo degenerado. Deseo nocivo. Deseo lunático” (Harwicz 14). Here the repetition of the word ‘deseo’ (*desire*) at the beginning of each sentence fragment illustrates her sexual fixation, as she struggles to describe the psychological effects of her intense desire. Due to the need to place ‘desire’ after its qualifying adjective in English, however, the emphatic effect of the word is lessened. Initially, in an attempt to maintain the original structure, I translated the passage as: “Degenerate desire. Toxic desire. Psychotic desire,” resigned to the English grammatical structure. Upon revising, however, with a focus on capturing this female character’s voice, particularly with regard to her descriptions of her experience of mental illness, I modified my approach. While repetition is an important feature of the text that aids in capturing the character’s ‘madness’, I decided that the impact of emphasizing ‘desire’ before the adjectives

used to characterize it surpassed the need to use the same repetition as the source text. I imitated Harwicz's tendency to use short, rhythmic sentence fragments in an attempt to achieve the same effect as the repetition in the original. Since she is speaking of her specific desire and not the concept of desire in general, I opened with "This desire" to introduce the specific thought her mind is stuck on. I then listed the adjectives, each followed by a period much like the source text, but omitted 'desire' here since it has been introduced and the reader can infer which noun they qualify without the specification: "This desire. Degenerate. Toxic. Psychotic" (78).

4.2.1 Grammatical Gender

The absence of grammatical gender in English makes it difficult to capture some subtle and important distinctions in the source text. These are of particular importance for the purpose of this project, due to my focus on gendered and potentially misogynistic language. In the following passage, the narrator muses about parenthood after learning that her lover's wife is expecting a child, alluding to the way her own mother raised her:

[...]vi que nacemos por error. Una tarde echados en cualquier posición, por torpeza, por vicio, después de un empacho. El enfermero tentado sobre la paciente con un ACV. Que nacemos por debilidad, hijos que se engendran como un hecho en los huecos o temprano a la mañana, sin mirarse a la cara, alguien al que se le escapa, como mamá ahora triturando botellas con las manos pegajosas. (78-79)

The word 'debilidad' notably appears in this passage, alluding to the title; the sexual desire leading to procreation is thereby associated with a kind of weakness of mind. Physical illness stands in for this mental impairment in the above passage with the patient-nurse metaphor – which illustrates a gendered power dynamic in the original Spanish text, as the nurse *enfermero*

is masculine, while the patient *la paciente* is specified as feminine. I tried different strategies in an attempt to capture the distinction, finding it difficult to idiomatically convey both gender markers without over-translating in a way that would compromise style. In the two following options, possessive pronouns helped offer some clarification:

- (1) The stroke patient who tempts *her* nurse.
- (2) The nurse tempted by *his* stroke patient.

In Option 1, only the patient's gender is specified. The passive voice from the source text disappears, as the patient actively tempts the male nurse. Moreover, she becomes the sentence's subject, emphasizing her role in the dynamic. This translation represents a departure from the view the narrator maintains throughout the novel that she is under her lover's spell, so to speak. Although throughout the novel she assigns blame to herself for her perceived weakness in resisting the effect her lover has on her psychologically, this particular passage is from the third part of the novel, after he has ended their relationship, resulting in a vindictive shift in her perspective. In Option 2, the passive voice from the source text is retained, subtly shifting the blame away from the female patient and portraying the nurse as the weak party who succumbs to temptation. Given the feminist underpinnings of my approach, I hesitated to use the possessive pronoun *his*, concerned that it may portray the feminine party as subservient to the male caretaker and remove female agency. I then decided that this translation is actually consistent with the narrator's desire to hold her lover accountable for the pain he has caused her; *his* patient means that the patient is under his care. The gender distinctions in this metaphor illustrate a power dynamic – the same one that exists when a practitioner is entrusted with the wellbeing of a vulnerable, sick patient. Even with my omission of a female gender marker, the very fact that the metaphor is a patient-nurse dynamic captures the vulnerability that is at the core of the metaphor.

The male gender marker tells the reader that her lover is the nurse in this metaphor; it can be inferred that the narrator represents the other party without specifying the female gender of the patient. I therefore chose Option 2 in my translation (120).

Having developed my approach to this project partly based on the theoretical framework provided by feminist translation, I considered whether interventions on my part in terms of grammatical gender may help or hinder my desire to faithfully represent mental illness in women as it appears in *La débil mental*. In one instance, I took the liberty of making a slight modification in my translation by specifying gender where the source text leaves this information ambiguous. In the same section as the passage quoted above, in the context of her devastation over the end of the relationship, the narrator projects her emotional state onto the natural world by comparing her feelings to the animal and plant life around her. Her internal monologue while she speaks to her mother consists of stating the random urges she has to act out her emotional pain; for example, “Pegar la nariz al humus del suelo, a los restos de pulsiones salvajes de los venados” (Harwicz 80). I translated this sentence to: “Sticking my nose into the mud, into the remains of the savage urges of stags” (121). This was a subtle attempt on my part to reinforce the theme of animalistic sexual desire in the novel. Where *venados* could simply mean the gender-neutral *deer*, it could also be masculine and designate the male of the species specifically. The distinction is a minor one, but it serves a purpose in the larger context of my project. The protagonist’s mother’s lectures about relationships are marked by gender essentialism, with reductive statements that oversimplify gender dynamics and assign certain behaviours to one sex or the other. Up to this point in the novel, primal sexual urges are associated with women in the narrator’s inner monologue, with little to no mention of men’s behaviour. However, once the breakup shatters the narrator’s delusions about the relationship, she begins to hold her lover

accountable for his actions. As the adulterer, his own sexual drives have led him to deceive and mislead women. He holds power over the narrator in the relationship due to his being married. At this juncture, she experiences a shift in perspective and my translation subtly reflects this by specifying that the stags are the ones who have had the savage urges, whereas in the rest of the novel women are the ones being compared to animals because of their sex drives.

4.3 Externalizing Madness

As established in the previous chapter, the urge to ‘diagnose’ a text or author with mental illness is a problematic one based on cultural preconceptions regarding what constitutes madness. Letting madness speak for itself in the manner theorized by Foucault without diagnosing the narrator in some regard would be impossible, as we have seen in the previous chapter. My focus with this translation was on the character’s self-assessment and self-determination; her own self-diagnosis with madness, untainted by any additional cultural stereotypes outside of those that appear to have been internalized by the character in the text. The self-deprecating language that the character uses subverts external judgment of the character’s mental state, since the character already thinks of herself in the negative and judgmental terms that conform to popular stereotypes. This forces the reader to confront their existing prejudice, while giving them an intimate glimpse of the uncomfortable and highly stigmatized mind of the ‘mad.’

In certain instances throughout the novel the narrator externalizes the parts of herself that relate to her mental illness and trauma, depicting them as separate from her own identity. A separation occurs between her sense of self and her physical body; one example of this appears near the beginning of the novel: “Mi lengua se distrae comiendo pasto” (Harwicz 14). Here

‘lengua’ is the subject, exemplifying the character’s tendency to personify parts of herself as though they operate independently, uncontrolled by the mind: “My tongue distracts itself by eating grass” (78) implies a disconnect between cognitive processes and physical movements, which relates to the novel’s theme of desire as a primitive, animalistic drive that defies rationality. Physically, she goes through the motions of daily life, her body operating on autopilot while her mind remains elsewhere, fixated on sexual fantasies. Another example of this fragmentation of the self comes from one of the many passages during which the character’s thoughts race as she wanders the countryside, when she refers to herself in the third person, as “la muerta que llevo” (Harwicz 24). Due to grammatical constraints in English, no single word encapsulates the gendered nuance of *muerta*. I debated between a few options of gender-neutral terms: *body*, *corpse*, or even *cadaver*; though these did not, in my opinion, capture the explicit mention of death in the source text, which I deemed important to recreate due to the repeated use of intense metaphors bordering on hyperbole in the novel. The implication is that her lover is her life-force; that her entire life and identity are defined by the madness that he provokes in her. I settled on “the dead woman,” deeming it just as important to specify gender as it was to explicitly mention death, given the feminist interests of this translation project. Furthermore, I translated the complete phrase as “the dead woman that I carry” (85) having hesitated as well with the translation of the verb ‘llevar,’ which serves the function of expressing the fragmentation of the character’s identity. I considered writing that the character was *wearing* the dead woman, as with a disguise that hides her true self. The preceding sentence, however, provides additional context to the meaning: “A mamá le va a crecer la joroba y va a ver un momento donde diga, soy ella” (Harwicz 24). Here the narrator addresses her worry that she may become her mother due to her instability and perceived weakness of mind. The looming

possibility of following in her mother's footsteps and having her health – both physical and mental – deteriorate is a heavy burden that weighs on the character and consistently causes her anxiety throughout the novel as she resigns herself to her supposed fate. As a result, I chose to translate 'llevar' in the sense of *carry*. I considered synonyms with more weight, such as *lug* or *bear*, or a different phrasing such as *burdens me*, but however consistent these may be with the intensity of the novel's overall narrative style, my intention was to maintain this quality of the source text without amplifying it so as to over-emphasize the character's emotional pain any more than she herself expresses it. I intended to be sympathetic to the character's emotional suffering in an attempt to resist interpreting her words through the lens of exaggerated stereotypes based on the notion of hysteria. However, I considered that adding a stronger term than the one used in the source text would constitute a kind of 'diagnosis' of the text and its narrator, assigning additional emotional weight that is absent from the original. "La muerta que llevo" thus became "the dead woman that I carry" (85) in my translation.

A pivotal moment in the plot occurs in Part 3 of the novel, when the protagonist seeks comfort in her mother, after learning that her lover's wife is pregnant and that he must end their relationship as a result. Her mother lectures her about the "impossibility" (118) of passion due to the unreliability of men, taking advantage of her daughter's vulnerability to perpetuate the toxic 'lessons' she has instilled in her since childhood regarding relationships with men. Their plot to extort and murder him is an attempt to take control of the situation and challenge the passive female role they feel they have been forced into in their romantic relationships. At this point, the narrator expresses her despair to her mother, stating: "Tengo esta locura mamá, de arrancarme los ojos y el corazón cuando el deseo me hace perder la cabeza y la conciencia" (Harwicz 79). Here she refers explicitly to her 'madness' and states that it occurs as a result of overwhelming

desire. In the source text, if one were to translate word for word, this madness is *possessed* by the narrator, as indicated by the verb ‘tengo.’ In the previous sections of the novel, rather, the narrator consistently states that this madness possesses *her*. This change in perspective can be explained by the disillusionment she experiences beginning in Part 3, after she has been rejected by her lover. This detail, in the context of my project, is important to capture in translation, though the phrasing posed a slight challenge. ‘Having madness’ would not be idiomatic on its own, but I wanted to maintain the possessive as much as possible. I opted for “I have this madness *in me*”; this way, the madness is something that exists inside her, rather than something that possesses or defines her. It is important to note as well that in this sentence desire is clearly identified as the cause of her bouts of insanity, and sexuality is still associated with female madness. The complete English translation of the sentence is as follows: “I have this madness in me now, that makes me want to tear my eyes and heart out when desire makes me lose my head and my grip” (120).

4.4 Translating the Title

The novel’s title in translation presented me with a dilemma. Translated literally and without any loss of meaning, it would equate to ‘The Weak-minded Woman’ in English. This translation captures the essential meaning of the original title, but ‘weak-minded’ is euphemistic when compared to ‘*débil mental*,’ a much more derogatory term that encompasses both mental deficiencies and psychiatric instability in its connotation. Finding an idiomatic equivalent that captures meaning and connotation while also communicating the feminine gender marker posed a challenge.

The English translation of Québec author Nelly Arcan's novel *Folle* by David Homel served as an inspiration for the title of my translation. *Folle* and *La débil mental* share similar titles, as well as content: both are narrated by mentally unstable women with a heightened sense of self-awareness regarding their troubled minds, both narratives revolve primarily around a doomed affair, and both narrators closely associate their madness with sexuality. Both titles are based on the protagonists' self-diagnoses and negative judgments of themselves informed by internalized cultural stereotypes. In order to convey both the reference to madness and the feminine in English, while also capturing the derogatory undertones, Homel translates *Folle* into *Hysteric*. A direct translation would be something along the lines of *Crazy* or *Mad*, gender-neutral terms that lack the particular nuance of the original title. By invoking hysteria – a diagnosis traditionally applied to women, as examined in the previous chapter – Homel retains the feminine due to the term's connotation. The word *hysteric* could theoretically apply to *La débil mental*: a dated term designating mentally ill women that has evolved into a derogatory term. I wanted, however, to ensure that the title I chose held the same significance as *débil mental* in the context of the narrative.

Harwicz uses the term *débil mental* only once in the novel, in Part 1. I examined the single instance where it appears in an attempt to gain insight into possible translations of the title:

Lo escuché con la reverencia y el sobrecogimiento de una débil mental que se nubla y se pierde en mil detalles a su alrededor, una plaga de microbios sobre la explanada. Confundo el meneo de los animales con el de las plantas, las lagartijas insoladas metiéndose en los canales de desagüe. Y todo al terminar fue difuso, impreciso, brumoso. (Harwicz 20)

The narrator compares herself to a *débil mental* when she is too distracted by desire to take in her

lover's words. Enthralled in passion, she becomes powerless before him and nods along with what he says without being able to make sense of it. She listens with the "reverence" and "awe" of a kind of simpleton, one whose mind is clouded and who "loses herself [...] in all the details of her surroundings" (82). At the end of their interaction, the world seems "vague, ambiguous, hazy" to her and she cannot recall any part of their conversation. She is essentially brainwashed, or possessed – and though the term *débil mental* appears only once in the novel, the notion of demonic possession is invoked several times as a metaphor for the same feeling of debilitating obsession.

Taking note of the various instances when the term *possessed* was used in the novel, I encountered the same recurring themes of sexual desire and passionate devotion. In the very first section of the novel, the narrator's masturbatory fantasies about her lover are described as an attempt to "possess" his face (74). In a telling sentence at the end of the first vignette, the narrator tells us, "I am not crazy, only possessed, the answer is always the same" (75). Here the narrator defends herself against the imagined charge of madness, and clarifies that anything "crazy" about her is actually a result of her devoted obsession. Soon after, sex is aligned with the notion of possession a second time as she describes a violent rape fantasy during which it is said that she and her mother "possess" the eyes of their imagined assailants (77). Later in the novel, she loses herself in her fantasies, and escapes to "[e]l mundo poseído del sexo con portones" (Harwicz 42); the realm of her sexual fantasies is a world that is "possessed." Her mother lectures her in the third part of the novel about relationships with men, first by telling her about her own past devotion to the narrator's absent father, to whom she said "[...]I'm going with you, I'm your possession, I want to die in your arms [...]" (118). Her mother then concludes that women are "stubborn and possessed" (118) because of their devotion to men. Near the end of

the novel, the narrator calls her now ex-lover as part of her plan to murder him. She detects disinterest and a lack of affection in the way he speaks to her, which she calls “[t]hat voice of someone who isn’t possessed” (122), very clearly associating feelings of love and desire with the notion of possession.

Even without explicit use of the term, the notion of the two women being “possessed” by men is alluded to throughout the novel. For example, near the beginning of the novel, the narrator very clearly expresses the cause of her madness, which is rooted in her sexual fixation: “The idea of desire about desire leaves me mad [...]” (75). Later, as they plot their revenge, mother and daughter are hopeful for “[...] the possibility of leaving all this shit behind, of tearing ourselves away from his cock like a bulldozer digging out a family that’s been buried by a hurricane” (120), implying that sexual desire and fixation holds them captive and controls their lives, and that only a kind of exorcism whereby men are removed from their lives can bring them peace. In another instance, when returning home from an encounter with her lover, the narrator describes how her sense of her own identity dissolves as her obsession with her lover takes hold: “Soy un espectro, camino con la panza apretujada, con el demonio en la panza, cae a mis pies, me muevo entre habitaciones” (Harwicz 21). (*“I am a ghost, I wander with my stomach in knots and the devil in my gut, it falls at my feet, I move between rooms”* (83).) The novel’s overall plot reinforces the idea of the protagonist’s madness being rooted in trauma at the hands of men: her father’s absence, her exposure to her mother’s promiscuity as a child, and her resignation to the role of neglected mistress in a doomed affair are only a few examples. I translated while bearing in mind the semantic field surrounding demonic possession. When the character is so distracted by her racing mind that she can no longer focus at work, she runs away in the middle of her shift, using demonic possession as a metaphor: “I run to let the evil in me spill out” (99). Later, when

she leaves her mother's house, she describes a memory of her sexual awakening: "Cruzo el jardín donde una vez corrí hablando en jerigonza" (63) – in this case, although the meaning could be simply "speaking gibberish," I emphasized the concept of demonic possession by translating the sentence to "I cross the garden where I once ran speaking in tongues" (110). It becomes apparent, by the end of novel, that obsession and possessive love are what is meant by the character when she describes herself as a *débil mental*. The novel explores the extreme possessive devotion and sexual desire that result in madness, the inherent madness in idealization and escapism, and, finally, the madness or hysteria in women that results from living within the confines of patriarchy – as evidenced by the character's inability to view herself as anything other than a sexual object, a view that is reinforced by the way she is treated by both her mother and her lover. Her possessive love ultimately possesses her. She liberates herself from this possession at the end of the novel, symbolically taking back her agency by acting out against the man who rejects her.

I titled my translation *Possessed* in light of the above analysis. Evidently, this solution does not capture the feminine nuance of the original title, nor does it attempt to recreate its derogatory connotation. I instead chose a term that is equally loaded with meaning in the context of the novel. In doing so, I did not intend to censor or correct the female voice and change the way the character sees herself to a more feminist perspective. Given my intention to let women speak for themselves about their emotional and mental states, the motivation behind my chosen title was to employ a term the character uses herself to qualify her own madness.

4.5 Concluding Remarks

Translating this novel problematized the notion of fidelity to the source text, particularly when that narrator's reliability is questionable. In this case, the narrator's worldview is explicitly narrow: her focus and undivided attention remain fixed on sexual fantasies about her lover and escapist fantasies about the possibility of a fulfilling relationship. Moreover, the narrator's words are harsh and designed to shock and alienate the reader, filled with derogatory language that she aims at herself. In doing so, she confronts the stereotypes shaped by cultural views regarding women and hysteria by overtly acknowledging them through self-deprecating remarks. Her madness does speak for itself – and it is tinged with the influence of those around her, as well as the misogynistic cultural views that the character has internalized regarding women's sexuality. The acknowledgment of these stereotypes by their very subject – who does not condemn them but rather believes in them herself – forces a certain level of empathy for the character in a way that the reader may not normally feel regarding other 'mad' literary characters.

La débil mental's protagonist puts all her cards on the table, so to speak, when it comes to her bias and the acknowledgment of the way her mind warps her perception of reality. Like the overtly feminist translator, she 'translates' her troubled mind into language and offers the reader a glimpse into her chaotic mind. Such an acknowledgment results in an implicit contract with the reader that guides them through the narrative. The exercise of trying to maintain the mad female voice in translation involved a series of decisions, from whether or not to modify punctuation or add gender markers to rethinking the book's title.

5. Translation: *Possessed* by Ariana Harwicz

5.1 Part I.

I COME FROM NOWHERE. The world is a cave, a heart of stone that crushes me, a level vertigo. The world is a moon sliced up by black whips, by arrows and bullets. How deep do I have to dig to find contempt, to make my days burn. I could have been born with white eyes like this forest of smooth pines and yet, I am awakened by the ashes of a volcano in a garden full of clovers. And yet, mom pulls out locks of her hair and casts them into the fire. Day breaks, I am a baby and mom is leaning back in her chair and crying. I wake up as a child, with lavender outside, with mom inside and her black hairs between the embers. There are bits of cloud everywhere, low and white, high and passing, dark and fleeting. I make up a life for myself in the clouds that I feel in my clitoris. I vibrate, I twitch, I dose myself with morphine in my fingers and during that time, all is well. My hand inside me is a thousand times his face inside me, however much you can possess a face, however much you can put a face inside you. During that time the grass is grass and I can run between pastures. Of the thousand ways there are to exist, I was touched by this one, I don't recognize anyone and when I am attacked by the great despair, I live anywhere. Mom stops crying, I can already walk by myself, I can talk, we are already sharing our clothes. I want him to come back against all odds, against all pain, I want his eyes to destroy me and see the tops of the trees. My head takes a turn. My plummeting head gets jammed. Suddenly, I take the tone of a dead woman. The swollen face of an addict in the tub. The epic body that will jump out into the rocky void. Suddenly, I notice that it's noon and the blue eyes of the hares shine cold and I go out to eat, but it's too late. Am I praying or is it that I'm in love. I beg him to spit on me, to break my face with a slap. I stare at him. I am not crazy, only

possessed, the answer is always the same. I'm bored, mom. My brain is moths in a jar and they are hanging themselves.

MOM AND THE GUY GRAB THEMSELVES BY THE NECK and rub themselves on the slippery cement floor. The guy finishes inside her while looking up at the sky and it all begins. Let's put a microscope inside my shapeless body on this evening of slow flies. They could hang it in the living room like an abstract painting. At this hour hot trees appear, slippery leaves, I hide from her. I hear her cry out. I am wandering on the hill, to where. For the moment there is only the sound of the wind at the peak and the calls of birds. For the moment the mysticism goes on and it's ants inside my arm. If you like living in a dream, stay there, she protests, and she goes back inside and everything is smoke without her. I always have that memory of childhood fever in a scorching car. The sight of mom from the front, mom from the back like a hard-shelled insect. The sight of mom smoking in the train seat made of ripped synthetic leather. I wake up in the locked car, unable to speak, the neighbours call the police. I move slowly, where is she now. I bend over to kiss the earth. How is it possible, this repeated, nagging desire, the idiot cousin of the family that interrupts breakfasts in the sun with croissants and jam and ends up throwing himself off the balcony. The profoundly retarded cousin who touches his nose, saying, nose. This epileptic desire, this twisted desire, a horny love-struck cripple who needs to be lifted up by two people and loaded onto a wagon to be able to fuck on the soft mattress. And yet, he has nothing else to do but fuck me, but desire me from his seat. And yet, the thick and transparent areola on the mattress proves that I'm alive. I get my finger ready, but I think so much that afterwards I faint. The idea of desire about desire leaves me mad, a parasite with bags under my eyes that

hang down to my neck. Mom, where have you gone, I'm exhausted, I worked nine hours straight, workers need rest. Mom, warm, getting warmer, hot, burning. If she saw me I would scare her, I give off an impressive hatred. If you want to remain in dreams, go on then, she berates me from her mousetrap.

HOW ARE WE SO DUMB standing in front of the shelves, not knowing what to eat? Why are we buying basil and parsley in bulk if we have some in the garden?, and we laugh. Dying is a good option when all the jars of condiments that we pick up one by one like bits of bone fall on us and there's garlic left between our fingers. Stretching myself out on the sand, on the short grass, on the dry ground. Stop fighting mom's arms. I try to focus on the taste of the zucchinis. They're fresh, I say. I barely seasoned them, she says, only a bit of olive oil. Look at the grass, look how it grows in some parts, how strange, there are these dry patches, as if the sun had only shone there, there are buried patches, like swamps. A mystery, hija, why keep asking. Enjoy. It seems like the chickens are hungry, they won't stop clucking. We eat, the back-and-forth from hand to mouth. Where's my phone mom. It's not here. We said that we would do it, we're doing it so well together, throw a bit of salt on it. I don't ask either for the crystal glasses. Mom. He may have called. Focus. Fix a point in space and let's keep eating. Good thing we bought this long table, right? It wasn't too expensive with the chairs, we're missing a parasol and maybe a lawn chair. Yellow or striped? That way we add a bit of colour. They say colour gives life. What nonsense. Or polka dots? I stare at a point in space, and? Nothing is real. The feeling of him slipping away from me is a sharp stab in my stomach. You fill yourself with pictures that are garbage for your health, why don't you focus instead on the happy silly girl you used to be

before you knew him, setting up little hospices for dying ants? Don't ruin this dinner, you're becoming so ungrateful, such a surly girl. I wasn't happy. I take the time to cook instead of reheating leftovers and not even a thank you.

WE PICK UP THE PLATES amongst the crickets. How lucky I am that there's no son, one less plate, no leftover food scraps, no voice to interrupt mine. Nothing that happens to me when I jerk my head up. Something white rises, a fog that swallows us, there behind us, that envelops us, that flattens us in the field. My mom laughs as she remembers my tiny body slipping out of her hands while she still held the purple cord, everything comes back to that, to little underwater knives, to eels. The two of us washing dishes with cheap soap and gloves, both of us putting away the cutlery in the drawer with the different compartments, fork with fork we chant to ourselves, spoon with spoon and we dance a kind of tarantella. Both of us going to take the bottle of pastis outside, nothing happens. The tiniest thing is enough to make us unhappy, a bee stings us on the elbow, the wind knocks over a glass and breaks it, or the doors and windows stay still. One of us swings in the hammock, while the other waits her turn on the bench. Both of us hot, from our scalps down, both of us abandoned sows. Two pretty little foxes with orange snouts. Two allergics. In truth, dreaming of two men in wide-brimmed hats entering through the gate, asking permission then proceeding to rape us against the chairs, against the wooden seesaw, in the pergola, one in the back, the daughter in front. Against the sink they put something inside mom, the blond guy's baseball bat, and she doesn't really like it but tries to make it look like she's enjoying it. Nothing matters as we watch each other possess the black eyes in front of us. They grab us by our armpits, they turn us around and our long hair falls like dark drapes against the

grass. Is there whiskey left in the cupboard, hija? It's so great that your childhood is behind us, so wonderful that everything is so far behind us that it almost never happened, that no longer in this life is there that smell of wet eucalyptus from when you got your finger stuck in the automatic door. That smell of hot canvas, of rubber, of a bike rental place. That smell of caramel, of apple, of pink sugar. I've waited for that moment ever since you were born. Didn't we go to the sand dunes when you turned six? Did we tightrope walk on the breakwater? Did we throw ourselves like milanesas to the edge of the rapids? Are you sure that on that day you heard that gunshot from the hotel room and thought it was me? Did we secretly sleep in the tourists' tents for an entire summer, your mounds of poop piled up like ramparts? Those golden days of holding in the bitter air and taking you skating, whole days of helping you do a handstand on the shore, making you jump on the springy bed, washing your undies by hand. Hiding myself in the cold sand on those beachside evenings to vomit your childhood.

WHISKEY WITH MOM from the electric blue to early morning and now, far from home, my hands are covered in excrement. I didn't recognize my scent, the layer of smell that forms in the body as the hours pass without water. My tongue distracts itself by eating grass. Sucking the hard teats of an animal, licking its fur, its dressed teeth, or imagining a parent's death, it's all the same. The moment he entered my head, cursed hell. Fanatic pounding in my veins. The problem with the mind is I can never manage to restrain it, always ploughing forward through the rubble, always forward like a bulldozer. Where have I ended up, I don't recognize these mansions and I've never passed that sharp corner. This desire. Degenerate. Toxic. Psychotic. I can't find my way back anymore and mom must be unconscious and hanging down there. Hopefully without

her feet cut off. And at this late hour the clouds are logs and the tide won't let up and I throw myself into any position to masturbate, my hair electrified, my skin hot, my eyelids rigid. My hand giving it to me only to stay quiet as an insect afterwards, and nothing is enough. Him and me in a convertible. Him and me on a dirt road. There shouldn't be tits on a body after a certain age. I will have them removed, thinking of my breasts, when they become fat flesh. You shouldn't be spreading your legs either. I'm searching for a word that replaces the word. I'm searching for a word that captures my devotion. That word that is the point, the distance, the exact centre of my delirium. We should be like little snakes until the end and be buried like that, in long shafts like gutters. There I get up nervous, my head in thick blood. I walk toward the house and open the windows. The wind sweeps away the bodies of the insects trapped in the mosquito net. Behind it are jars of rusty water and fossils of every species. It looks like she's never slept, always needing a bath, a new haircut, pants without piss. And what when all is said and done is this elusive pleasure that we get from our fingers in our youth. And what is that thin golden fluid falling, diluting itself, if afterward, later on, when at last I find her, highball glass in hand, shaking the ice around and asking the waiter for another round, we're with mom sitting at the table in the garden with a fountain of broth and two spoons. What is this leftover desire, buried, as we drink our soup and the steam hits our faces, and there is nothing left now, nothing.

NO MORE WHISKEY, I say. No more whiskey, she says. No more, eh, and we make a crucifix with our fingers and toast with water and throw the empty bottles in the incinerator. What did I say. I want to say that a halo of death reigns. That's not it. That death is too present between mom's mouth and mine and at the bottom of the drowned glass. And that the hours don't fix it.

Starting a new day. How to unplug the fridge and plug it back in after a blackout from the storm and hurrying to finish putting the food away before it goes bad. But the moldy cheese and the gamey meat make us gag. Or repairs, spending the week fixing things, with a needle and thread, the window screens full of holes and painting the planters green. Or setting wire traps so the owls don't come shit or go after the nests. The gelatinous yellow duckling yolk between its talons. Or buying a little turtle and forgetting to feed it and clean its water. Wake up, mom, before the day is over, don't nod off in the lawnchair. She trimmed her ends and her bangs, just like on every one of her benders. Let's go for a ride down the muddy road. Her body craves fluid in her organs, in the membranes that surround her brain. As I watch her rub herself with lilac soap in the oval mirror, I know that there's a better way to wind down for the night than this mug of coffee with sedatives.

ON THE ROAD WE RELIEVE OURSELVES, first on the corduroy seat, and a second time on the steering wheel. Mom on her blue blouse with the little white buttons. Me on my long legs. Covered in my own waste I had the pleasant feeling that this outfit looked amazing on me. We get naked on the side of the road, our shorts becoming entangled in our high heels. Our bras are on the back seat, our stomachs on the pavement. We continue the trip with the window down and diapers. We reek over the white lines, without napkins or lipstick, but we laugh for the first time in so long. We've never done it, it's not our style, driving at 200km/h and laughing. Wanting to live and laugh again. We run inside, two teenagers with greasy skin, and bathe.

THE PHONE, MOM. It's fine. We're already falling, we're already organizing the cupboard again and sweeping, the hot eggs laughing in the skillet. Where is it. How do you want your eggs? Don't make me look at you again. I won't give it to you, I won't give in. I stare at the pots and pans that we hung up with such care. I stare at the tiles, each glued together side by side. I stare at the walls and the foundation, the pieces of bread. Give it to me, now. Why do you want to leave again, we're going out together, come on, without the help of doctor Mister knife, alone among the old folks, we're getting there and it's getting nice out. Picnic? I'll leave you the hammock. Give it to me before the eggs go bad and you cry in front of the cold plate like you always do. I should fry that fucking phone for you. Give it to me now. I should put it in the oven. Whatever you want, then, but in a threatening tone, and she leaves the kitchen with her hands dripping wet and enters the darkness of the hallway and goes back again into the light of the now-dark living room and throws it at me.

I HEAD OUT WITH A SPRING IN MY STEP. I've got a message from him and it's a burst of sparks like an ejaculation that brings me back to life. It rises inside me like an illness. I call him, I hear him, he's coming. I wait for him at the highway junction, under the bridge with the right-wing extremist posters and the junkies' graffiti tags. What can be understood outside of this suffocation. My head is a huge lamp, sporadic, cars occasionally fly by at top speed. A truck carrying a dozen carcasses of old cars. The road to the junkyard. It's been so many days since I've seen him. And, while I live in the vestibule, I'm a beetle on its back and I have fleeting urges to go toward the light. Swift urges to go toward what is pure. Seeing only the tree's branches from a crack. The air transpires. The horses, the grass, the manure, the air, are covered

by just one piece. Everything is covered in compulsion. He appears. I get in the car. We go to a roadside hotel. There was nothing on the way, no landscape, no movements, no time or space until we get to the room. Just a break, a jump. I stay on my feet and my veins dilate. He undoes my pants, I hear them fall. He spins me around. He pulls my panties down, his hand enters me like an object. The destructive force of sex washes away mom's blond hair from the back, from the front, running toward me on the shore, rubbing the salt from the mesh lining of my tights, in the middle of a sandstorm. The times she would put me on the train of happiness with music and she would go have her drink and I would wave to her from above, my head lost in colours. The times I would look for her among the other ladies, that I would take a stranger's hand. I have this fixation, how much more can it grow. But it rises. And while the room exists it has the clarity of an ax.

AFTERWARDS, UNLESS I'M DELIRIOUS, he said he wouldn't be able to keep coming so often, there was something he wanted to tell me and he couldn't. Although he said it clearly when we went under the bridge and the echo threw it back. That his situation, that the context, that being responsible, that we would see each other again, that there was no way we wouldn't see each other, that I'm not inside his mind to understand, that if I were inside his head for a second, but that he couldn't keep driving out here so often, that it's jeopardizing everything, that he'd write to me for the next rendez-vous. I listen to him with the reverence and awe of a simpleton who loses herself in the clouds and in all the details of her surroundings, a plague of germs on the path. I confuse the movement of animals with the sway of plants, the geckos throw themselves into the sewer pipes. And everything, when it was over, was vague, ambiguous, hazy.

What had he explained to me? We stayed bound together. My jaw hanging wide open. Where were these words coming from? Why had he opted for these over others? What language to choose to baptize things? How is anyone able to speak? What had he said. I had forgotten. It was the thick fluid of his spit coming together, coming apart, on his palate. That transition from mouth to divinity. Like an incurable genetic disease, he finished his speech and we kissed. And kissing drove the dagger in deeper.

I FIND A NOTE PINNED TO THE DOOR, “Don’t go to bed late, tomorrow we’ll go sailing.” The house is full of snores and there’s only the two of us. I am a ghost, I wander with my stomach in knots and the devil in my gut, it falls at my feet, I move between rooms. There is nothing, I wouldn’t even say pain, it isn’t that either, it’s cold tiles rather, if there’s no use putting your head in the tiger’s mouth, what’s the point. I search the house for something and I don’t know what. I wander, I see mom’s shapeless form washing herself, scratching herself. Late to have lived, early to kill yourself. I get in her bed, I don’t wake her, I go up to her and I hug her, I am losing consistency and I’m only a kind of idea. I am the idea of love of a man who lives with another, who loves another, hundreds of kilometres away.

I GO TO SLEEP LIKE THE EXERCISE OF LOOKING DOWN A RAVINE before jumping. They are nursing me. I mentally divorce myself from everything and I’m not in this house anymore between mom’s paws suckling at her teat. I no longer have those old geezers for neighbours, I’m ejaculating alone in a meadow amid the tall fresh grass. And I can hear roars

that aren't approaching. And my hand is a melodic instrument that vibrates. I'm socially inept, too much time spending my mornings like an old goat, my teeth rotting, my body rancid, my skin stinking of fried onion, of bacteria, of badly treated nodules. A dog that's been tied up too many times and growls now when it sees a baby. I can declare myself in favour of fascism, of the death penalty, of burning gypsy caravans. I don't control sphincters, I don't acknowledge or greet anyone. I practice exercises of stillness over thorns, of cruelty toward the poor, of absolute silence. I'm idle in my basement, in my cupboard. I'm locked in and I reek. Outside the pines shine and the sun is soft. Out there, people live in homes like this one with low ceilings and stack their empty cans in the cellar. Out there, they spend their time laid back in their rocking chairs eating canned fruit and snoring. And they have lives like this one, the hot tedium of a tapeworm in our stomachs.

AND IN THE HALLWAY on my way to bed I have a vision of someone on all fours and my head tucked underneath their double genitals. My moist mouth takes in that magic air. That nest. I get undressed, I lie down, I turn off the light, like that or in any other order. Something is burning, mom.

BETWEEN SIX AND EIGHT IN THE MORNING I carry a strangely potent mouthful of pessimism. The people I see, the neighbour who's still alive, but with a goiter in his throat, below the left earlobe, mowing his lawn with the woman who cares for him and makes his meals, his bones increasingly thin. Mom is asleep, the scoliosis in her shoulder turns her into an

alligator. Not just the snout, the false teeth, everything shrunken and fragile. And the bright red sunset between the olives or over the black sea. And the purest love. A couple from the area, a man with a cane and a woman on a bike, who will fade into oblivion. It's raining stones, we can't go out. Stones that fall in droves between the trees that intercept them. Stones making holes in the diapers. Stones hitting the canal, the silky summer fruit, the cornfields all along the path. Stones breaking the sparkling slugs. Masturbation and lethargy. And the fatal loss. We won't go sailing, we'll spend the day playing bridge, backgammon, scrabble. Mom's hump will grow and there will be a moment when she says, I'm her. The dead woman that I carry strolls through the wet field of wild strawberries. The woman I carry marches on and the size of her trembling clitoris grows larger.

I AM AWAKENED BY THE CLICK CLICK OF A TACTICAL C11 RIFLE EQUIPPED WITH A LASER POINTER. Or the smell of peat moss in the air. Or stone walls and moss. I am awakened by a bittersweet love that doesn't exist. Not a love, long salted fingers. Cow manure in the air. I am awakened by the impression that everything except him cumming in my ass is a bother. Mom upstairs from me excited and me who dreamed of her being crushed by a car with automatic transmission. The driver with thick glasses screaming between her organs, how awful, over and over. It smells like gas. They poured it on the bee's nest, now the chickens run around in a frenzy. I feel faint, mom. In my dream you were retarded, you took me for someone else, you were possessive of me, you told the nurses on duty that I was your prince, and they squinted so that I would look like him, your suitor, and you smothered my beard in kisses. Corrupt night, night of white thunder over bats. You're exaggerating. I'm going out, run along, I'm going to

breathe in particles and lick my lips, that's my technique, sometimes it works. The vibration of him. I spend my time looking for empty spaces where I can destroy myself. Dodging those big moths. There. We call the doctor. The same one from the knife experiment? Waking up so deep in thought. You need to test her drives, you need to hold the knife by the handle and slowly approach to see that you won't really do it. What a strange method, mom, I was a hair away from cutting you. The wind blows and carries her scent to me. Mother Nature brings it to me all the way to the stable. Would you do me a favour and calm down. What kind of Mother Nature, just eight rooms. Dung carries you. Radioactive rays, pollution, carries us. Vice. Brush your hair, fix yourself up and we'll go out. Did you see the juice that forms little by little between the rocks start to fall? I want that mess, that clammy thing that doesn't let you walk, that doesn't let you live.

HERE WE ARE in the guest room, big and bare. The echo of a swarm of hornets and flies, of birds with long beaks like horns, the sound of all their songs at once. Mom straightens her ashy blond hair, in bed, carefully. Her nightgown is a tunic. Should we still go sailing? The accumulation of stones in these kinds of houses, built centuries ago, the dampness of the pipes stuns us. We go to the pub. It's closed, it's a night spot, how many times do I have to tell you, drunks don't see daylight. Mom shifts her position, puts her legs up against the wall again. Tries to soothe the impossible feeling. And we laugh, we'll be tempting ourselves soon enough. Two drowsy maniacs. We go sailing. And we push ourselves and throw ourselves out of the house, equipped like we're going on an adventure to Niagara. We walk to the river that runs along the shacks and fields full of pits. We bring a stick to shoo them away, but the hunters' dogs bark at

us the whole way. Ever since the last time one bit mom in the ass while she was biking, she holds me close as we walk. We untie a plastic raft and go up and down the river. We row over the waves, trying to conquer the turbulence. We sail under the Roman bridges, along the riverbank that leads to the medieval towns, we pass the churches, under the thick warm rain. For hours we don't do anything but let ourselves float. Sometimes the channels overflow and mom gets scared, the wind starts picking up. Soon there are waves, whitecaps, swirls, we don't know how to move or read the river, we paddle on our respective sides. The wind blows us to the edge and the raft is pushed into the soft earth. Mom is unconscious. I could let her sink and head back home, call 911 at midnight from the payphone at the gas station and tell them I lost her in the flood. And they'd cover me in a grey blanket and take a statement, fingerprints, I'd cry on some convict's shoulder. Or I could help her get off and climb. We take shelter on a round island. We stand in a puddle of mud and afterwards we have the urge to take off our clothes and run high and low, followed by buzzing. We cross the plains like islands in a green sea and at one point I see her crouch down and become a native.

MOM SLEEPS WITH HYPOTHERMIA under blankets and hot water bottles. If her temperature rises, emergency room. If she has a seizure, helicopter. If she dies tonight, funeral. I'm sitting in the blueish chair in front of the door, on the table there's a plate of cheese and sweets. And the mourning sets in while she still lives. The cats and parrots of the neighbourhood are silent. Little by little the stench of childhood come back like potions, a hunting trail with huge trees of fragrant wood and vertical or conical tops. The antique shops, the greenhouses, the mills of the construction sites, the summer houses, a tunnel dug with old shovels in a small cedar

wood. Everything always full of mold. Everything, always, fungus, rust. Mom lifting me up onto her shoulders so I can eat from the tree, mamita having me walk on a fallen log, teaching me about sex, anxiously waiting for me to get addicted. Eager for me to grow, measuring me with a crayon against the wall. Mom happy when a bra strap crosses my back and I start saying dirty words. Mom smiling the day a man followed me into the woods, and told me, don't be scared. The day a man followed me through the spiral stairwell promising to show me a baby picture. Satisfied when I started doodling boners on the desks at school. Anxious to be able to smoke together in the evenings like two chimneys, go for drinks at a pub full of tattooed sailors, laugh in the bar like two hysterical small-town hicks and touch their biceps. And thirsting over the babes in the men's room. Dancing a bolero with me holding me tight, unafraid of the authorities writing her up again and having to come back and get me hanging her head in shame. Trying to sweet-talk like the others at the precinct. The summer days are so long, aren't they? Soon winter arrives, the light that suddenly goes out at four in the afternoon and the deaths by hanging. I want to throw away my childhood like those balls that owls spit out with the remnants of teeth and brains that they can't swallow.

I WOULD SHUT MYSELF IN WITH HIM in the darkest, gloomiest, tightest spaces in the world. I travel toward him all night like an infernal refrain. Like a blood clot. I lose everything from the neck up. I am full, not full, stuffed, not stuffed, stuck. I continue the excursion. Now I see handsome men, well-proportioned, I don't feel a thing. They pass by me and they are owls. My body relaxes in front of them. I can't bear to think that mom had debilitating hot flashes. One after another, in bed, all day. And that she left me on the see-saw with sunscreen on while she

went to eat his hairs, one by one, like pythons. I can't bear to think that grandma slept with mom and that they secreted the exact same smell on the same side of the mattress. The soaked threads of the pillowcase. That mom would go braid the neighbours' hair just so she could pick at their dinners. Or that she acted like a liberated woman, running all over exchanging her thirst for cheques. Everyone should sleep alone, like me, and not touch me any more than I touch myself. One morning, bitten by jealousy, by the spectres of jealousy, I wake up before anyone else. At six. Light shining in with a glare and little birds on the clothesline. The freshly polished furniture, the tablecloth free of dessert stains, a material silence over things. I go over to the hammock. I spend three hours there thinking. Flying high with a fever. I barely touch the grass, I wade through it, the taste of candy and hairless pussy. Thinking of that jealousy. Of that heat when mom caresses someone else. Laughs with someone else. Of that unbearable heat of listening to her moan like she's pissing herself, me waiting for her on playgrounds, jumping on the pipes, singing upside down. As I rock in the hammock, I decide that I won't be jealous of her anymore, I see that day from my childhood, something in the pot was boiling, a stew or a freshly slaughtered goat, something was toasting over the coals, when I regained control of myself. I get down, I come out of the cloud. At twelve they call me in to wash my hands.

I CHECK THE PHONE AND NOTHING. Not a single message written all weekend after the red room. Not a single missed call after being penetrated standing, after levitating. After the hand around my neck and the succulent stubble. After the explosion of the impossible. The plainly impossible. Nothing, I repeat to myself; nothing, I repeat. And I look at the phone. And I leave it. And I look at it again. I repeat the sequence. Checking it, becoming enraged, scaring myself,

leaving it on the ground, checking it again. Leaving the phone upside down on the table, on the ground, picking it up full of ants, blowing so that none of them get inside, not seeing anything. The world suddenly looks like a dark clouded sky. This is the crucial moment when someone sensible would go out. Get some air, stretch my legs, and charge. And it would be the start of a new story in a new place. Some cash, a suitcase full of clothes, a few fake IDs, that's enough to start over. I'm still under thirty, that's young. I say hi to the neighbours, nice to see you and I head to the door, I say hi to mom, without fearing the whump of an arrow. Another state, another life, another person, learning the reflex of turning around when they say my new name, neither feminine nor masculine. Try out new signatures, change the way I dress and wear my hair. And sleeping this very morning on a mattress like a stranger. Or widening my eyes. I bring the home-made sweets and take long mental trips. I'm afraid of the next time I look, but there has to be something. I'm afraid of saying, "mom" when she wakes with a start in the middle of the night. Afraid of hearing, "hija" in her shaky voice. And a flood comes and all over again it's a naked morning in the round plastic basin, mom celebrating my two emerging tits. At twelve years old, I'd finished dinner and against the sky there were antennas, wings, buzzing. I went out to see the darkness, to take a dip, I wanted to extract sap, nectar, and with my hands on my naked body everything was so beautiful and new and the electricity fell to the water, leaving me alone. It was the first time I masturbated out of fear, until I saw her. She'd been huddled in her fur coat, with the cigarette put out and gesturing to tap the ash anyway. Like a capybara that doesn't want to be seen and becomes grass. And she started applauding the perversion of love, louder and louder, bravo baby, you're the light at the end of the tunnel, I'm proud of you, you're already a female flower, bravo hija, you're almost a woman. I covered myself and ran away.

WITH THE SUMMER HANGING OVERHEAD I open one eye in the middle of the sunrise. Here and now a night of infernal sun. The house acts as a warm nightmare. I take a quarter of a pill. I walk around with horrific eyes, I turn around like a goat to look for her from all angles. Her silk sheets are mysteriously cold, her wigs hung up, her heels in order, her dresses ironed. I have this bitterness in my mouth, this treacherous taste of reality. I'm losing my footing. I don't find any solutions, only thirsts for carnage. The remedies are probably baited hooks, everything is out of control, yesterday or even today as I watch the landscape unfold, everything starts to become a memory, a burned breeze. Everything is an archipelago. In my home there are jars of formaldehyde filled with rats. Mom picks them up with a shovel and shoves them off with a thick-bristled brush. She's the one who puts them in the jar, I don't know where she got the formaldehyde prescription, but she injects them and marvels when she wakes up and notices the organs and entrails have turned into a rigid corpse. Look, this little baby rat is solid as a rock. What would happen if we drank a few spoonfuls? We'd have to try injecting ourselves with formaldehyde in the carotid and take blood from the jugular while we're alive, anesthetized, right? You said that we could choose the way we're embalmed? Mom isn't in the bathroom, she isn't combing her hair in the hammock, she isn't reading a rural decoration magazine in the kitchen, she isn't drinking decaf in the hallway. Every hole is covered in twisted branches, maybe that's it. I'm only a few years old and mom examines my teeth and brushes them till they bleed. I'm a little older and mom builds me a little cabin without a roof between the snakes. I don't reach the chair and I quickly find her on all fours. There are bugs in her bedroom, they first appeared in those days, bugs that can resist the heat. They bite our faces, our hands. We don't know what they are, so we buy something that creates a poisonous fog. The salesman suggested that we flip the mattress over and take all the clothes out of the closet, I'll follow the instructions

to a tee placing her jars and remedies in a row. While something boils in the pan I'll close doors and windows and I'll throw it out. Where is she now. Something shakes in the bushes, I need to go out and take care of my little plant, I need to brood in my nest. You could already tell what kind of mother she'd be, you could picture her climbing the hill with her baby over her shoulder. Not wanting to know the sex at the third month, not wanting to know if it has a deformity. I wonder if she acted like she wasn't pregnant while she had me inside her, if deep down she thought she was carrying an almond. I turn on the flashlight, cover myself in bug spray and head out to look for her. Afterwards, we'll eat cold hare and it'll stagnate on the palate. Afterwards, the dirty cutlery in the dishwasher, and we'll wake up all over again. But later one Sunday we smoke in the open air among the pheasants left out there by the hunters.

I WALK ALONG THE MAIN ROAD not knowing whether to continue straight on toward the river bend, walk across the open field to the shepherds' house, cross the path toward the airplane hangar. Or take up in the pig farmer's house, the one who's starting to lose it. Mom didn't leave a trail. I wander away from the house and move about the steppe like a militiawoman with leather holsters and ammo to take down a regime. She must be eating plants, one by one chewing them not leaving her mouth empty for even a second. I smile. Mom must be skipping along. I'm surrounded by a plague of water insects, beehives. I'm surrounded by bacteria. I'm on my feet and have the urge to tear it all down with one clean chop of the stem. Sweating, dripping, seeing a huge trunk come down on me. The flashlight shines. I wander further and the metallic blade compels me downward. I would cut it all down with my steel tongue. I run, I run like a rabid Viking, I run like a purification, striking staggering stabs with my knife. I clear-cut and forcibly

rip deep roots out of the fragile earth, I cut branches, I cut the air. I throw myself into a hot spring, a sauna in the middle of the hill. Mom, I'm leaking, I'm gushing, and it's a fight against a jaguar. Little by little the dead wood of each tree collapses and only the low-growing grass and shrubs remain. She doesn't turn up here either, not in the open field, not hidden under the mushrooms like hallucinogens. Always the same, her hidden and the little girl holding the hand of a stranger stroking her veins. Mamita, mamita, I ask from door to door. Mamita, mamita, I call in the shops. Always the same act, mom opens the window, makes catastrophic noises but in the end she'd be alive, and I'm shaken for days. Her and her drills. Me naked or in little pink panties. The ditch trips me. I speed up. I skid. I still don't cross paths with anyone and already what they call the day starts to show itself. White trees. Hills. White trees. Hills, hills, white trees. Maybe she's waiting for me with fresh-made bread and marmalade. Maybe she's wearing an apron and is speaking clearly. And above me are flying saucers. No idea if all of these are species native to the forest, if they're used for pulpwood, if they grow fruit or they're exotic, palm trees, pines, vineyards, laurels or poplars. I don't think of the origin of the world or of learning appellations. A plane takes off. Two men fill themselves with splinters, collect eggs, feed critters. Where the hell is she. Why does the day go on. On my way back I make out two legs under the bridge like a goat without wool. I approach, she looks at me, she steps back and finishes filling the little puddle with her vulva. We scream a vowel under the bridge so that it echoes. Many blond daughters and many blond mothers running to meet each other. Daughters and mothers who are polished.

5.2 Part 2.

MY PERFORMANCE AT WORK IS CATASTROPHIC this morning, the manager's exact words. Does he not see what's right before his eyes? Is there no cognitive process? Where do these words come from? I wander through the parking lot, forgetting to take my uniform off. But I don't find my car. It's grey like all the others. Now I can't find it. Just like mom and grandma couldn't find me at the campground and I spent the night sleeping with the sheep and their eyes were unsettling marbles. I walk into the supermarket until the picture of the three of us walking at full speed comes to me. Why is it this memory that comes to me now and not another? He and I are driving on a rocky road, every two or three pebbles we stop to kiss. I see him but I don't see the car. What make is it? I see his tongue. Did I have something stuck to the windshield? I stand there in front of the cones, next to the cash register, stunned. None of the children seem intrigued by the grocery bags. Fucking small-town kids. Slobbering kids holding their mothers' hands. Kids that are already dead in their school picture. I hear my name ring out over the loudspeaker. Ma'am. Ma'am, they call me. I need to answer the supervisor's order, I'll be written up. I am a liquidated item. I'm the old lady that comes to browse the Christmas boxes. I see that I'm being approached, detained in this supermarket because of my uniform, they ask me for prices, I jog across the parking lot, I run and jump over the hoods of the cars.

I PLAN OUT HOW TO GET HIM HOT. I focus on him. My dirty, tainted hand haunts me, the signal is disrupted. Dejected, with a long face, I continue to lose my grip. She notices something strange all the way from the garden, her hands buried in the roots, she can't believe what she sees. What are you doing here at this hour? You haven't taken enough of a vacation already?

You're unbelievable. The housewife returns with lettuce and beets, looking nice and maternal. Get up from there, get up right now. The weak, watery mind of a child. It's all in those early experiences of dreamy summer holidays. We'd go fishing in dried-up streams and be shitting ourselves from hunger until we'd find a guy with a rod late into the night and she'd score some dinner. Before me, who'd be running around the little towns with my belly grumbling, sitting on the church steps with my legs spread apart, spitting cries for help onto the ground. Or stealing bread from the dumpster. Mom going door to door. Mom in clogs with wooden heels. And me asleep, my face in a bowl of spaghetti with sauce or in tuna with oil. And me asleep, drooling onto the tables of the tavern where they'd dance with their pelvises and smoke unfiltered tobacco. Stop wasting your time. She wakes me from the dream with a blow to the chest. They sent you home? It's not like school, mom. What did they tell you this time? Tell me exactly what you did, let me call them, let me talk to the supervisor so I can explain. Did they punish you? I ride the wave of my fever. Way up in the control tower, nothing interferes. She talks to herself, drones on about how work is bread-and-butter, that work keeps us sane as I remain blissful in my mania. Here he comes over to me, jerking himself off, and I have him on top of me, spread out like a star, smelling me. When's the last time you got any, mom? You're dirty, you're a pig and he has his way with me and gives me a good slap that sounds fierce. The feeling of falling in love, when they put it deep inside you, mom. The fabulous bliss when they put it in all the way and take it out and then enter you again, like they're rescuing you from a swamp. That's it, he puts it in me and when he takes it out but then comes back to me, comes back and I'm afloat. That refrain of being rocked in his arms, but here on the other side of sex, that refrain too is infinite. Cacophonous. Mom, you need the rapture of sex. The velocity of veins during sex. The fanatic gestures, stabbing, the highest keys of the piano. It's unlike praying, unlike meditating.

Mom comes at me with her nails. She flays me like a Chinese dog in a suburban pound. The horror of us staying here in the ruin. If they turn off our lights what do we do. And without gas? And the freezing mornings with no heating? And eating a little rabbit with mustard, once in a while, followed by a little drink in some trendy bar? And leather shoes and handbags? Considering the speed at which my grandparents and great-grandparents died off, it shouldn't take us long to get there. We'll die young and sexy, we'll be the prettiest ones in the morgue. And she gives it to me again on the same cheek. She grabs me by my legs, she drags me across the yard. I'm not in this world; I'm in another, much, much more heavenly. Infinitely heavenly. Celestial. The world of sexual sway. Of idiotic purring. The possessed, gated world of sex. You see that I learned the lesson. She has tremendous strength and she can barely shake me. She doubles down, agitated, asthmatic, she doesn't know how to make me react anymore. But I despise this life where at a certain hour in the kitchen the water breaks into a boil.

SOMETHING BITES MY FACE. I have no room left inside of me. Mom kisses me goodnight, the child in her belly like a washing machine. Everything starts to slowly come undone, the baby scratches itself, loses weight, you were here, she says as she stuffs her face, right here, come feel. You devoured me to the bone. Her hair is brushed and it looks beautiful on her, she looks radiant for having made me. But I see her with low energy, an old lady that gets exhausted just from taking out the trash. Tomorrow you'll get up early and I'll take you. My mind holds objects in the air, suddenly I discover that the roof is really high up. I show mom my hands in the light. They're lovely. We'll get through all of this, and she puts lotion on me, finger by finger, wrinkle by wrinkle. Tomorrow morning we'll sort it out, I'll make you a nice American breakfast.

Goodnight, she tucks me in, a caress of the forehead from the immoral blonde. With the story of the wolf with the rocks instead of baby goats or the one about the cows like stakes, vaccinated, castrated, deloused. But the only thing I'm thinking of as I hear her go to bed is a snowy night in the country. I don't know why, but I think of the snow slowly falling at night in the country.

GERMAN SAUSAGES, FRENCH TOAST, SCRAMBLED EGGS, ground cinnamon, everything crisp and seasoned. It doesn't change when I'm running late and lazing around beneath the sheets. She accompanies me to the washroom, she turns on the light for me, she sits me down on the toilet, my little legs hanging over the edge. She is divine this morning with her hair braided in a bun, her pearl necklace and her pleated dress. She spreads pine needle perfume, adjusts my blouse, fastens my little sandals. She looks for light music, beach music. We go along, humming any old tune, through the synthetic wood factories, the industrial zones with their wholesale toy stores, the gardening stores that sell patio furniture with their steel watering cans and ceramic tubs. We park in the empty lot next to the stack of metal shopping carts where she takes me for a walk and treats me like a pet. She takes my hand but I let it go. She's nervous, she comes to my gymnastics exam and she knows that I'll fall when I do the triple jump on the balance beam. She closes her eyes when I fall. It's alright, that's it, and I take a few steps forward but she takes two steps back. And she comes in, I try to distance myself, to look like a customer, I go straight to the changing rooms. She smiles at everyone, makes her way to the counter. The employees and supervisor realize that she's my mother before she even opens her mouth. I go into the stall, lock the door, get undressed, I can still smell her. Mom's exact perfume. I get changed quickly and push the door open, there are already customers looking at

themselves in the mirror and spinning around with the coat hangers. They gesture to me from the counter, it's a fact, mom is annoying them with her explanations and idioms, they want to kick her out of here but they don't know how. Mom gesticulates, pulls her hair back, leans her chest on the counter, she thinks she's winning, she thinks she's a distinguished woman. One customer sticks with me, we move like ticks. Satisfied, she observes my entire conversation about sizes, prices, and fabrics. She delights in my agony. I drag her to the alarm detectors, I push her along, I see her leave with her purse hanging from her shoulder and take a seat in the car to wait for me in the sun.

I RUN MY FINGERS THROUGH MY HAIR A FEW TIMES, I shake myself out of my drowsiness in the changing rooms with the full-length mirrors. Many times throughout the day the sky is too bright, too dizzying, and her always sitting in her recliner. Through the window I can see her going into the supermarket and leaving with a little can and a sandwich. But in the evening with her heavy pearl necklace weighing her down, she's a burn victim. But afterward, the full parking lot and a few employees watching her sleep or drool through the windshield. I stay where I am, going to the room every minute or so to check if she's caught fire from the little red light. They intercept me, what I am doing in the bathroom all the time, I need to attend to the customers, put away merchandise, be visible. Mom dead in the sun and me in this grey metal casket. Mom decomposing into pink and me in this freezer. Mom is pearls bouncing around in the parking lot like rattles. I start listening to the piano, if he doesn't write to me in the next minute I'll throw myself onto the carpet. If he doesn't write to me before closing time, I'll claw at myself. It's already almost time but my fingers are unbuttoning. Half my body sticking out and

the stares of others upon me. They approach, before they can touch me I go to the little torture chamber and grab my phone. The use of personal communication devices is not permitted during work hours. And they look at me with pity. A crazy lady that comes to tear the fetus out of its gestation. They look at me with fake understanding. You didn't finish your shift. You're practically naked. And I leave. I throw myself out through the automatic door and its blades. I run, I run like a prized sicko from hell. I run on the pavement boiling like an athlete with new legs, I run to let the evil in me spill out.

SHE PULLS OVER AND SLAMS ON THE BREAKS. Looks at me. I know she would stab me with a sewing needle but her face and mouth are too dry. These may be her last moments so I hold her tight. What did you do, you idiot, and she gives me back my seat. I put my foot in the glove compartment and fill it with dirt. I'm done with them, what of it? What, what of it? And now? They say you can't use your phone during the work day. You can get out and work too, eh. It's dangerous for her to be stuck in a small space, so when the fumes hit me, I get out. She gets out too. She needs water. A whole pitcher. I try to make a scalding drop of Coke fall between her lips. Gather some spit. I don't have any. Let a little accumulate, you don't know how to conserve saliva? You wouldn't last more than a minute in the desert. Why the fuck would I want to last more than a minute in the desert? Can you imagine me in the desert? She tries to fan herself with her hands but she can't and she leans on the car and moans. Who's the real idiot? She reaches her arm out towards me but I dodge her with ease. I'm done for good with the rite of childhood, I have karate moves. I'm not your slave, your little Indian girl taken from faraway lands, I'm out, go drop off a resume at *Mr Buffalo*, at *Go Sport*, at *Tao Chi*, the new spot in Chinatown, they put

you in knee-high boots with red laces and you don't need to know how to speak English. Free lunch for two on your birthday. They don't reach my knees, the boots with laces. And she bursts out crying. I move in closer. Don't be afraid, ma, here you can live off of nothing, we have land, we have water, we have vegetables and natural light, what more could we ask for? Two failed Bedouins. Whisky, oysters, convertibles? Her parched face doesn't let me answer. Her face that craves alcohol, the face of a hysteric that they won't let die or lose desire. She keeps crying into my collarbone and I get a cramp. We're going to keep living. But how, there are unpaid bills all over the house, they aren't going to take you at any other store in the area, where can we go, how will I be able to drink, where are we going to stop. A hoard of motorcycles gets onto the roundabout.

THE HYENAS CHASE EACH OTHER AROUND as they watch us, our feet under the rows of green. The call of the pack to assemble. Look how they tug at the little one's truffle, look how sick these hyenas are, can't we hit them with something from here? This sucks, says mom as she looks toward the forest, and she goes to sit in the hammock. What do you want to get them with, a homemade Molotov? How much cash do we have left? She's already forgotten her young, that's how quick she is, she can't even see the remains decomposing in the barn. I'm not a provincial bank, I'm not a fucking savings account. And mom makes her pouty face, and I think about comforting her. They have a huge advantage, the women with soft, smooth hair, usually honey-coloured and clean-smelling. They can say the nastiest things, be total tyrants, but you'll still want to run your open hand through their hair. How long do we have, how much longer will we be able to live? We could live entire decades without the pathetic wage you would waste on

the gondolas with synthetic products. Me, at my age, I'm not going to start cooking, growing old before my time, I prefer the little box with the magic cube. If we'd kept on eating those little plastic boxes, we would have exploded. How much do we have left, that shouldn't be a hard question for a smart girl like you. I leave and she follows me; I always think that if I stop short she'll break her teeth. I empty out the bags and purses, the jewelry box that's full of wads of cash. I count it all out on the couch cushion, separate them by colour, set the bigger coins aside. She counts again, wets the bill, her tongue green and pink. I watch a breeze rock the air behind the thick glass. Her hands fall, her fingers open. Not even three thousand. We either eat or fill the tank. I'm not going to sell anything, I can't get rid of my mother's dresses, she says. She starts whining, although she tries to stop herself, they're sewn by hand, she was 15, she made them by candlelight. Now she loves that bitch. Now the stitching has her all emotional. I leave before her tears have a chance to hit the mattress. A 'where are you going' soon follows. I jot down the secret number. I move further and further away from as the phone rings. My life hangs on an idiotic thread. He answers in a whisper, from his cubicle, just when mom kicks me in the jaw. I'm in a meeting with a client who represents 40% of our annual revenue, I was thinking of you. So what if you were thinking of me? Who understands men's depraved logic? I was going to text you. So what if you were going to text me? Is that a joke? I was going to tell you I missed you, the client's giving me a look, his investments are crucial to the financial stability of... So what? I need to see you today, I don't have work and I'm wearing really nice panties. Today may not work, how do the panties smell? I need it to be today, your clients will each be lined up in their respective tombs, and my panties will be pulled up my ass crack. Just for a little bit, no more than two hours, I can't get home late, my tongue spreading your ass cheeks apart, my finger inside your tight little asshole, tonight I need to go get... and I hang up, picturing the clients'

widows leaving the rotten flowers of memory on their graves. The crocodile tears of the funeral rite with the black clothes, the sombre mood, the speech about how things'll all be better up there in heaven. Mom appears, tangled in the cord of an old iron. I'm going to start tidying up this pigsty, she says, her hair tied back. It's time to make this place a home. What, you're leaving? I'll be back in a couple hours. I'll be expecting you at dinnertime, and she turns around and walks away with the step of a happy housewife, as though she really is one. The exact hour that I plan to meet him is so beautifully sordid, like diving headfirst into a shallow stream.

I DON'T THINK I'VE EVER REALLY THOUGHT OF ANYTHING all my life. I kick little pebbles along the side of the road. Now I am a mob of nocturnal birds. Now I am an impossible horrible marvelous night. Now a hollow avalanche. People go back to their homes after chatting in the public offices or commuting by train from the city and they leave their newspapers behind rolled up into tubes on the seats. I make a slight movement with my head that means I'm greeting them. A driver offers to bring me closer. We exchange two or three words. Like the cars of my childhood where men touched themselves as they asked me how to get to the railroad crossing. That dull movement. Mom's belly reared mourning, gestated mourning, grew a carnivorous plant and here I am divine in my shorts and my fitted top. But I am an amnesiac without him, purged. Men waste so much time while they sleep and bathe their feet. I think of the genitals of mom and the man screwing and I become a child again. I think of our hairy genitals inventing children. There goes a mother with her hands behind her back. There goes another one biting her baby's neck. The clouds don't save me today, don't inhale me. Less than five minutes left. How can this be described. Less than three minutes left. A car goes by. The

wind soothes the pack. I can't be here. Here he comes. He pulls up. And it's like dropping heavy suitcases from a long trip and watching my fingers throb.

THERE YOU ARE, GOOD, SHE SHOUTS. I thought you'd run away on horseback with your knight in shining armor. Judging from your tired face, you had a good time. Well, I mean, you both did, it's not like you were in bed alone, but really, you could have been more contemplative with me, with all this today for you tomorrow for me. We weren't in bed. What's this? Are we moving to a castle? Where do you do it, then? Don't tell me you do it in the abandoned barn. Can't you imagine anywhere other than a barn or a bed? The stable, but it's filthy, full of the snot and shit of preschoolers. Workers could see you too, I don't recommend it, I know what I'm talking about, I doubt that hygiene has changed in twenty years. What are you saying. Does it shock you that your mother was a pig once too? I used to fool around and come home stinking with my face strained. And I'd hide from your grandmother inside the wagon or I'd throw myself onto the bed like you, to relive it all. I don't want to talk about this, why is this mountain in front of the door? When you go inside you're going to faint. I think it's the first time in my life that I've read a whole cleaning product label in one sitting, to me detergent and disinfectant were the same thing, turns out, no, I learned many things during your absence, I imagine that you did too. Well, I'm not asking for details, positions, how many times... if you tell me it was good, that's good enough for me. You won't believe me but I actually enjoyed cleaning like I was possessed. Did you make us a blank slate with bleach, mom? Vacuuming can be enchanting, sweeping too, it frees you of those persistent thoughts. Madness is so lovely, I really recommend it! I organized your pairs of shorts by how well they fit you, as soon as we can we're going to the fair to buy

you a bra with an underwire, yours are falling apart, just between us, they give you old lady tits. Pull them up to your neck, push them together, so they look like one big tit. If I were good with my hands I'd make you some myself. Alright, say something, let me pass, it's going to be hard to get in with all this, excuse me. I start selling tomorrow. I'm sure in *Villechaud* or in *Bohème* we'll find buyers. You can tell by the type of pools and the security gates, on top of the fact that they all have those little pebbles in their driveways. You can also tell by the breeds of their pets that these are classy families. I like to stop on my bike and say hi to the gardener, the owner of the house, exchange a few short words, how are you doing sir. I made you dinner, without a single drop of mayonnaise. Mom, is it just me or are you a bit tipsy? You're blabbering, you haven't stopped for a breath since I got home. I had two cups of tea, that's it, afterwards I collapsed onto the patch of mint plants to meditate and listen to the rooster, by the way, the rooster is saying something when he sings, listen closely tomorrow. Go to bed, mom. At the end of the day, just like when you leave a casino, doesn't sex seem repugnant to you? It doesn't let you meditate, not during, not before, not even after. And you say it was just tea. It was just tea, cinnamon and green apple tea, sprawled out among the tall mint plants and I was thinking, hija, I was thinking, you know what I was thinking? I was thinking of a golden island and of someone smiling at me on the water, all around everything is festering, I see the scaly tails of the fish struggling on the hot sand.

FIRST WEEKDAY IN A DECADE THAT I'M NOT WORKING, I stay in my soft feather bed, drinking flat Coca Cola. Something swallows my heart, something strikes it. I can't tell if it's her taking off with the car first thing in the morning that's bothering me. It's not him either. The day

after, I'm quenched, I'm balanced. So what is it. I read the sky like a biblical verse. I see myself crushed, upside down, my face flattened in the filth. I'm not hungry. I'm not tired, I don't feel like fucking. I'm not cold, I'm not nauseous, I don't want to be put into another body, and yet, something is swallowing my heart. I saw mom pulling out of the driveway with the window covered with things. Wish me luck, she shouted, her elbow sticking out, *merde*, like backstage at a play, and she left, with a broken tailpipe. The carbon monoxide making shapes in the air. I try not to think of her return, her messy, sweaty hair, her mascara running, drinking to soothe her failure. Money, *hija*, we need money, she said before going to sleep. Right, money and keeping up with the bills and evading taxes with grace, things we don't know how to do. And appeasing the neighbours' complaints with our alluring mother-daughter act. Welcome them in baby dolls, a coarse finger on the lower lip, those were the good times. A couple of useless women like those old widows who don't even know how to sign a cheque. I want to levitate an inch off the ground. Not to reach spiritual heights, supreme bliss, Mount Olympus. To become weightless, feel myself come undone. An inch off the ground for just one evening. It's not self-loathing, saying why did I have to be born, it's so easy, a stray bullet lost in the ether, a bullet in the ankle, passing the time with mom hitting each other in the extremities and increasing the prize when we get closer to the chest and ending up near the mound, the private cemetery for women with no brain mass. Mom would happily play along with the table talk, beer with lime and olives as a farewell. To dissipate tonight, that's what I was lost in when I heard the first cries of hysteria.

YOU'RE SWALLOWING YOUR WORDS, I can't understand a thing. She's jeering from the car. What happened. The car's been turned into a junkyard, mom shrieks without letting go of

the wheel. They may come here, we have to go. Where, why. I manage to open the door for her and get her out. Her face is bare, she's having trouble breathing. I was driving along, a humble and cute little house, between the other more eye-catching ones on the hill. I was passing through, I wanted to show him what I had and give him the prices but first he insisted that we drink something. Why would you get yourself into trouble? We were in front of the park, around the time the kids go out to play and there are people doing pull-up exercises on the bar, the ones that give you really toned abs. Get to the point! Don't keep dragging it out! But the thing is you don't have the slightest idea how to get to the point! But when I went in and the blinds were shut, this unsightly man jumped me! I could swear that he wanted to pin me to the table. You could swear, or you swear? He hurt me, he wanted to grab me by my feet, but I ran, I ran through his house searching for an exit, I ran through the backyard. I'm covered in bruises. I swear to you, I thought I wouldn't be able to start the car, ten times I had to put the key in and try to turn it. Define unsightly. You mindlessly repeat whatever you hear and you just never get it. Are you kidding me? And what did this hideous man want? To kill me, what else would he want, are you stupid? But why. What does it matter why, he wanted to kill me, why does there need to be a why. Or is there a why for raping on all fours on a table, dismembering, putting the victim in a trash bag and throwing it on the side of the road until the garbage truck comes by, really I swear I don't understand you, I raised you to be so naïve. I mal-raised you. I anti-raised you. Can you stop swearing and making up words? Did you sell anything? None of them had cash. Let's bring everything inside, take a long bubble bath and let's forget about the sales, neither of us has the soul of a salesman. Neither of us has a soul. Let's start an organic farm. Right, because we have green thumbs, I can already picture everything planted backwards. It was a good idea, I keep thinking that properly executed, it's a good idea, that guy had a container in his room that

smelled like dead cat, can you believe it, what solitude does to you. We bring everything inside and put it away in silence. We make pasta with walnut oil and eat our dinner, covered in insect repellent. Mom smokes as she slurps up the noodles, the pan in her hand, without chewing, like old folks. We are born to chew on resentment, in these moments I want to see the world end, she sighs, maybe that's the key, for the apocalypse to hit and for everything to start anew. And why not? No, the question is why, yes. No, the real question is why the fuck would everything start anew. So it wouldn't all be so terrifying. Do you realize that that old man that took himself for a monk could have finished me off just like that?

WE GO OVER SELF-DEFENSE TECHNIQUES. Life is a bitch in heat but sometimes it offers the impossible. It offers me a demonic purity. It offers me to Him. Eh? And what the hell does that have to do with anything. You go into the woods, hija. I love him so much I could squeal like a disgusting pig. We practice. I go into the woods. You go into the woods. I walk along calmly until I see the trailer with the naked old man. Outside are pots and cans. Outside are the remnants of filthy starry nights. And a military uniform. Dirty old man. Let's not judge him just yet. I see him naked, seared skin, varicose veins, sagging flesh, an old man. Maybe the last of the hippies, a pedophile, a gambling addict. Or a fugitive, or he's undocumented. Or someone's amnesiac grandfather who wandered off from his garden to go fishing a decade ago and who no one reclaimed, it happens. Is he hard? For now, no. I go around the side, acting like I'm not watching him, like I'm just one of those people who goes out for a stroll or a jog or to contemplate by the pond with the raft or the leaves that float like oars. Is he hard now? No, mom, he's just staring at me. Is he an immigrant? Don't be racist! Well don't be an idiot. And now?

He's getting hard. Yes. He's got something sharp in his hand and on the tip of his tongue. The stubble of his unshaved face. The wind blows hard. It doesn't blow, it inhales us. And what are you doing? What am I doing. You hit him in the neck, one clean blow right where he can't develop muscle. One solid blow. Or you gouge his eyes out. With both thumbs. Really plunge them in there. Or you go for the balls. Neck, eyes, balls. Yes. And I quickly look around for a flat stone to hit him with. In the temple. One blow to the temple but so that he doesn't even realize you've picked up the stone, you have to be quick. You can't miss. And then I run. You fly into the opposite direction of the foliage, don't lock yourself into the mill or in the trailer next door, you run diagonally toward the field and look for the shepherds' house.

I JUST DREAMED OF HIM about to escape in a truck. I found the key. Hallelujah. Wake up. We don't need the apocalypse anymore, there's something even better still. Stop shaking me, I'm going to kill you, mom. Alright, alright, but get up, I boiled you some water, I'll get something ready and I'll tell you. What time is it. There is no time when there's enlightenment. What the hell are you saying, God, get up. Up. Time does not exist after sleep. What the hell are you talking about? I saw him in that cargo truck flipped over on the ground like it had spiraled, he was driving on an iridescent and mountainous road, I'm certain that he was making his way toward us, that's something you just know without really knowing, and he was moving away, this is the important thing, he was moving away from his family. Iridescent? Nothing mattered to him, not his fat cat clients, not his father, not that insipid woman. He left them the house, the car, the property, isn't that amazing? And he was coming for us, my son-in-law. Mom breathes like a fish out of water. Isn't that huge? The bedroom is pierced by random drafts of icy heat. Are you

sane? I'm asking seriously, right now, can you say that you're really sane? What are these questions. Why are you hurting me? Do you want a certificate of sanity stamped by the Ministry? How long has it been since he started seeing you. How long has it been since you started devouring each other like two dirty mutts without holding back for even a second to cough or take a leak. A year and a half. Right, a year and a half, that's more than a reasonable amount of time. Or didn't you see that giant snake eating a crocodile after five hours of intense struggle. And, well, he should have taken the leap, he should have come to get you on his knees. None of those bouquets bought on the side of the highway. None of those knockoff necklaces. None of these little one-word texts. That's none of your business. But now we have an emergency. And yes it's an issue of mine. Any issue of my daughter's is an issue of mine. One of these days you'll know if you have one. Meet up with him, ask him when he's going to leave her, because you know what happens, it isn't easy, want me to tell you something? No, please, I don't want to hear it. Well I'm telling you anyway, the question was rhetorical, to set me up. Is he still giving it to her? How often? In what positions? Who initiates? Always in missionary or do they get creative? How long does the act last, what is he thinking about? Because this refrain of he's fucking her reluctantly, for me, no way. He fucks her, he gets hard, he finishes and that's it. Mechanical or lyrical, he gets hard and finishes. And it isn't fair. I jump on her and grab her by the neck. We fight in bed between the sheets and our skins. I'm not going to ask him that, never in my life. You want to shit on me, you want him to leave me, you want me to end up like you. And mom throws herself at me, and I grab her, and she tries again. I leave the room and sit down on the ants. I can't stand this depressing smell, an unwashed pot. And I go back to the scene of the crime and I open the door with the mirror on it and I already know that mom has thrown herself from the bed, for dramatic effect. I throw clothes, I throw things in the bag at random, I

fill it with tights full of runs, with slippers, with panties. I pick up the bag and the fury of my empty stomach makes my forehead pulse. I leave, I should have left a long time ago. I don't hear a response. I'm leaving. And I cross the dining room, incredibly I cross it, mom's dining room from when she was pregnant one entire winter, the dining room of my birth on towels and bandages, the dining room of my first bloody cry as I exited the hide, a long while, with my head sticking out. I cross the kitchen where we comforted one another, this is where my grandmother died on the ground and we decided to bury her and our clan shrunk in size. I cross the garden, it's a miracle, I cross the garden. Farewell to the insatiable appetite of puberty, of touching myself in the yard, farewell to delivering myself to him like he's the only thing in the world. I cross the garden where I once ran speaking in tongues. The red and black garden of the drama and jealousy of the day of my first kiss. Mom asked me if there was tongue, if it seemed forked. Grilling me, but tongue how? Like a whirlpool or a vacuum? Did you have some gum beforehand? But also the radiant evenings, as certain as slicing your finger off with a knife. Mom emptying my chamber pot. Mom smelling my armpit, shaking me to test my sweat. I pass the crooked trees, each tree is an era of climbing, the three of us, the two of us picking secret raspberries and blackberries one by one from the branches before the albino blackbirds can steal them. I walk through the gate like a cocky cowboy.

5.3 Part 3.

I LEAVE HER THE CAR, the keys in the ignition and a bit of cash on the seat. What she needs to keep from starving to death for a couple days. What she needs to get a few bottles and some scraps to eat. Or to take advantage of the summer sales and buy shoes and lycra tights at the supermarket. She loves revisiting clothes from past seasons. It's hot and hasn't gotten dark yet, just a little longer on the winding road. I pass cyclists, hunched over like rodents. I keep moving forward, if I'm not held back even a second, if no one gets in my way, I can make the 9 o'clock train. Without dinner, but I'll make it and I can get off in one of the towns or at the terminal. I think of him. Several times I think of texting, of calling. But he has to do it, it's on him. I'm encouraged by the brightly lit American steak restaurant signs with entire families standing in front of them. I get to the station just in time, without a chance even to buy the fare, I get on, it takes off, I'm sitting and the ground is passing by. No news. I think of him. I try to vary my cognitive tendency, to twist and distort it, what would mom be doing, if she'd be inside the house or in the woods, if she's still alive, but I only think of him. The first town goes by and I don't get off. A young man sitting in the seat in front of me looks at me and asks me something. I take a moment to answer and the young man doesn't look at me anymore. An officer patrols the platform, I smile at him and cross my legs for him. It works. Thanks, mami. None of the towns appeal to me, none of the houses, none of the colours, so I get off at the terminal. I don't know where to find somewhere that's open, or if there's a hotel somewhere, I'm hungry, I feel isolated, but I only think of him. Never, I realize now that I read the sign, never have I been in this city or in any other city for that matter, apart from medical visits, check-ups, deliveries. I've never been to a city and come back awake. But I go back. I catch myself. I think I'd keep thinking of him even if someone were attacked with a club right now in front of me. I sit down on the sidewalk

and send him a text; I'm alone in a strange city, I left home, I need you. With my backpack over my shoulder I walk down the main street against traffic. Bliss. A light breeze, a symphony. I rest by a canal. I have dinner in a pizzeria covered in roses in front of a movie theatre. And when I look at the water under the bridge, in that precise heaven, I don't think of him.

BUT IN THE END, like the swing of an axe the drilling in my skull resumes. He hasn't written, he hasn't called, he hasn't appeared. Where is he. What's he doing. With whom. I pay the bill but I don't even look at the waiter's face. Does he have a face? I can see that they hear me out and prescribe me the strongest stuff and I sleep on the train ride back, my cheek imprinted with the pleats of my drool-soaked skirt. The waiting room is hot, the babies eat pear candies and have asthma, she fans herself with her fan. She always explains my symptoms, her own, the doctor prescribes, I open my mouth. The two of us drinking hot chocolate on our way out or on the carousel, to celebrate. For an indeterminate amount of time I don't look for a hotel but I'm nowhere. I walk along past window displays, print shops, repair businesses, dry cleaners. An entire life spent locked inside the darkness of a shop, the iron key ring, the control panel, the staircase that leads to the dumpster. The little washroom. The cleaning products, dusting and polishing the shelves. A whole life, the shift schedule, the sound of the blinds being pulled up and down, the little bell when customers enter and leave. The fitting rooms, the trail of smoke coming from the last one. Going out for a quick smoke when the owner leaves to go to the bank. I'm here inside and I'm many pounds heavier, my bra digs into my skin. I have my wrapped-up lunch, I drink a Coke at the counter and I have hot dreams on the grass. Faced with the woman in the lobby I don't know what to say. She's waiting. How many people? How many nights? The

green floral wallpaper like sharp pointed thorns, like knitting needles, reminds me of mom. Of Mom's flair. Of the grim morning marked on the kitchen calendar with a cross to drive the stranger out from within. Of the night when they rolled the dice with grandma and we decided it'd be better to be three in the house and to avoid an early and suspicious death and so they raised their glasses of vodka and then they lit the candles and roamed the house like shadows. Of the moment it started raining, from the light drizzle to the fat droplets until the downpour, and grandma put her to sleep and then the ghost appeared.

ARE YOU ONE OF THOSE LESBIANS? Grandma asked with her jaw dropped when at fifteen I still didn't have a boyfriend or any suitors in sight. And mom looked at me in a way I don't even want to think about. I lean on the railing along the street, deserted apart from an Asian restaurant that no one has entered or left over several hours. I wonder if they're all dead inside their fish bowls, if it was a slaughter to settle some debts. I expect to see the red spurt out from the key slot like an artery. The phone is empty. I see him with her in the bathroom. I think of him so much that I have no air left to invoke him. A whirlwind of resentment rises inside me as dusk falls. And then I see the aura of dad. What is dad. I've never said this. I see that it's a tall blond who spends his time finding new places to stick his dick. The day begins as it did yesterday, I eat, drink and barely sleep. A dog gnaws on car tires. Alarms go off and scatter the birds. The big ugly birds call, criss-cross each other, swoop down, attack each other, move through the sky, on the rooftops and rafters. To what end. Which bird is which, how can you know if the one swooping down is one and not another. The mid-morning sun stings my eyes. Hot blood, the jaw of the dog destroying tires, this mattress, dad catching salmon or selling motors for boats, dad

dressed in leather, smoking outside the entrances of theatres that play romance movies waiting for some woman, all of it could be true. The only thing you get out of a bed is being inside of someone. Dad with mom knocking back a cold malt beer when they first met. And then another, and another, emptying grandma's fridge as she spies on them. Dad showing her his balls from the arm of a tractor, dad smelling like a daycare, mom entranced by the platinum hair of this 6'3 misfit that takes her out to decapitate snakes. And then, a few days in a row, the same jacket and the same shoes that captivated mom, his concentrated odor. And they end up fucking on the couch.

ONE OF THE THREE IS ALWAYS WATCHING ANOTHER GO AT IT. Grandma watching mom with this pauper from the North, mom watching me with the swarthy guy with a silver ring, me watching them both, separately, each of them in a room and the little girl wandering around the house with a box of chocolate cereal. The little girl on her tippy toes, trying to reach the knives. Afterwards, they shower, they open windows to air the place out, they throw their underwear into a bucket. And they smell underneath their fingernails and they kiss me, euphoric, with a lit cigarette between their lips. And they tell each other all about it, whispering the racy details. I liked going into their rooms to inspect, jumping on their rickety mattresses, discovering what they'd forgotten under the bed. I walk around this city of bulrushes, of palm trees and roots that split the streets and patios. I've already spent a whole day without listening to either of them and it's like hot clouds hanging in the air. Imagining that I had a mother who wore dresses with belts with buckles, a mother addicted to the luxury of coastal casinos, imagining a cowboy coming to rape me on the side of the highway and devour me until I lose my footing. The

treetops sway and it's that dune covered in seashells with the rough tarp shared by grandma, mami, and me. A trio of colorful plates on top of the clams. Three chubby backs covered in sunscreen. Three vaginas full of sand by the end of the day. Finally I settle on a tavern. The ham and lobsters on display in the window may not be in great shape, but I order them anyway, I sit at a dark table, the ashtray overflows. I'm still confused as I go over the menu, the waiter looks at me with interest. I'm confused by the path of the sun, this shadow, in this tavern, in this city. The phone rings. I instinctively hit the button with my mouth full of grease.

PROMPTLY SPITTING onto the pavement, the lobster falling bit by bit all over the alleyway. Skipping all the way to the hotel bathroom and brushing my teeth and tongue. Hopping into the bath, lathering up, straightening my hair, making myself alluring, stepping into my high heels to meet him, ready to receive him all perfumed, in front of the movie theatre. And succumbing to love. Trapped in his hands, hanging in his idiotic air, so profoundly idiotic that I can't even follow the movie's subtitles. That I don't manage to perceive any irony. What is irony. What is perceiving. I inhabit this internal patio of simpletons that make crafts and laugh one on top of the other, playing leapfrog. I'm the textbook picture of the girl in the hospital, with the man in the white coat restraining me, the relatives who come visit us are far away. I'm a barn full of newborns at the ranch. Tiny bugs float in my glass. This goes on, the luminous fragility, it goes on, while he stays and walks around with me, discovering the city, eating, undressing and becoming entangled. This exists, penetration is moonlight and all the rest is grime. And I don't understand but the succession of events dictates a conclusion and the two of us are sitting in his car near the station and something he tells me fogs up the windows. He says something but I'm

squeezing the key in my palm and I hear nothing. He kisses me, but he needs to talk. I kiss him, but he asks me to let him speak. Says it's urgent. I feel my hair fall out as I hear that his wife is in the final trimester of her pregnancy.

WHAT IF I'M ORPHANED BECAUSE OF HIM? What if she's on top of grandma with a wooden cross and a note? What if the house is gone, and there are foxes drinking from a stream in its place. The train home crosses Siberia in winter. My head is bare. I have this obsession with brutalizing myself. I exit the train running but my knee buckles and I fall. Hate is very little. Him paying me to make up for it, that isn't enough. His wife loses the baby, leaving her sullied with secretion. Too bad, clean it up with a tea towel. Or the ninth month comes, and on that long-awaited day the morochito with a name and a cradle prepared, with a decorated welcome sign, but dead. A minor detail. Or the sonogram comes out well, the nervous system is still developing, everything normal, the little feet, the nuchal scan, the involuntary fetal movements, the amniotic fluid is lovely, the cervix, divine, but when it comes out, it's Siamese and stuck to a dog. Or, it's born healthy, the cry of this animal act and shoving it into your tits when it's covered in shit, the ride home for all three of them to their cozy home with the sterilized bag, combs for flaky skin, the post-partum girdle, the nose cleaner and the whole useless arsenal and the acetaminophen. But then, while they're sleeping, she smothers it, it happens ma'am, says the nurse. Autopsy in the capital and then bury it in the children's cemetery. Glancing at the infant tombs and pumping her breasts. And the grief with its stages, there are no stages except blowing yourself up in the open country and your entrails spattering. Pig. Foul woman. Degenerates. How could he have penetrated her; how could he have cum. Mom told me so. Mom knows about these

things. Mom predicts. He said it was mechanical, like eating when you're not hungry, that you can eat while retching. I'm here. It still looks like a house. There are still windows and walls and a chimney. I don't see flames engulfing the tallest trees. The fire truck isn't there with a ladder leading up to the roof, nor are they carrying her out on a stretcher.

I WALK IN TREMBLING, at first glance everything looks to be in order. But as I move along, details. The gas half-on, dish towels stuffed under the door, the windows boarded shut, the bathtub faucet dripping. A faint foul smell coming from the fridge. Not a single one of mom's things. Not a single accessory. I'm under a cascade and I hear nothing, I can't seem to see through the violent flow. No one in the dining room, no one in the hallway, no one in her bedroom, no one in mine, my bed made, no one in the basement among the open bottles, no one on the patio or hanging from the rafters. Right, I'm an orphan, and I see myself in front of my parents' nest, liberated, an orphan with power, a hysterical happiness. I'm an orphan, or rather, I'm a married woman, or rather, I'm hungry. Going outside, smelling everything for the first time, beginning my rebirth. I walk straight through the field and I leave the desolate house behind. I walk around and search high and low for her, looking up at the sky in case she's hanging from a parachute, from the wing of a warplane, naked and blazing in the branches. I walk, following a maternal instinct that isn't real. I take charge. Living without her. Moving on to the highest speed of panic. But she must be able to feel me, the pack that lick each other after the hunt. Living out my last few minutes with her before shooting myself. What will it be like, dragging myself all the way to the marble shelf. What will it be like, leading up to the drawer,

the bullets, the case. What will it be like to arm death. In the distance, stone balconies and red hills. And the inertia of ponds.

IF A PILOT WERE TO SEE US FROM UP ABOVE, he'd fall, he'd let himself plummet straight down to the green chaos. My heart hammering, stabbing, my arms spastic, I go forward, trembling all over. And it's like driving through a field full of vultures and stepping on the gas until I burst into a whirl of flames. I roam through space but firmly rooted in the ground I feel her vibrations and her impurities. I fall at her feet. The hooves of the beast. I'm sorry, mom. I'm sorry for my betrayal. Yes, that's exactly what it was, she says sternly. I know. I'm sorry, mamita. Looking at each other we are two bees hanging in the air like objects. I don't know if I'll be able to forgive.

THE TRUTH ABOUT PASSION, hija mía, is how impossible is. Hey, no, mom, I already know all that. Shhh. I'm saying that if it were possible, it wouldn't be possible, that's something I learned the day I climbed into that car with my backpack over my shoulder and told my tall handsome blond, I'm going with you, I'm your possession, I want to die in your arms, and I never saw him again. Or, I mean, it's possible, because it's impossible. But I already know. Shhh. Knowing all this by heart, that suffering the impossibility of a passion is what makes it passionate, we keep fighting to make it possible again. But why, dammit? Alright now, I'll let you speak. Shhh. Because we women are like that, stubborn and possessed. That's how we are, hollow. We don't want to suffer, we hate suffering, we're terrified of our hearts beating through

our whole bodies and of the asthma attack when they announce that they're no longer in love, that they aren't getting accustomed to our scent, or any of those stupid things, but if we don't suffer there is no passion. By suffering, we make the impossible possible, we make passion itself. In those rare moments when suffering, the terror of losing him, of him being someone else's, disappears, this I know well because there were days, listen to me, there were days, the only days in my entire idiotic life, when this blond boy would bring me hand-made gifts, little matchboxes, painted worms, branches of different shapes, in those days he would kiss me hard and it felt like his wet tongue would stay stuck to me until I dissolved. So, in those days I didn't suffer at all, whole evenings spent by the lake without suffering, but I didn't enjoy myself either. Falling in love is the ultimate death sentence. Falling in love is a flood with an electrified shelter. I'm not sure you understand me. I'm not sure if I'm making myself clear, now you're old enough. I would always say to myself, wait till she's out of diapers, wait till she can speak properly, wait till she gets her period, till her first time, to tell her, and I never could. Falling in love is throwing yourself in front of a six-foot snake. I wasn't able to teach you in time, please forgive me. You did teach me, mom. I failed at everything, I started your childhood backwards. I should have brought you up properly, not let you stick your hand into the shell and pull out the slug. But no, seeing you was enough for me to understand. I listen to her, stretched out on the moss, a fine layer of vegetation covers me like sand. I lie there like a mammal with floppy ears covering its eyes. I am enveloped, upholstered, and between us is a cliff and the water climbs and trickles down.

ALL NIGHT I PLAN MY REVENGE. All night. Bastard. Coward. Son of a thousand bitches. Son of a thousand bitches, ma? Fine, son of a whore. And throwing the empty bottles consumed in my absence into the dumpster one by one, I see that we are born by mistake. One evening tossed together in whatever position, out of clumsiness, out of vice, after indulging. The nurse tempted by his stroke patient. That we are born out of frailty, children that spawn like little sparks in space or early in the morning, without looking at their faces, someone with a screw loose, like mom now grinding up bottles with her sticky hands. With every fatal blow she whispers the plan to herself, the possibility of leaving all this shit behind, of tearing ourselves away from his cock like a bulldozer digging out a family that's been buried by a hurricane. And then after that, stay still hija, you've got a bug stuck to your eyelid. I have this madness in me mom, that makes me want to rip out my eyes and heart when desire makes me lose my head and my grip. Shut up, drama queen. Don't be so crazy. Did he call you, at least? Did he comfort you? Did he say, I love you? Not even. And you're whimpering about ripping out I don't know what and going on about losing your grip. Don't worry, she's going to lose it, she's not going to term, I'm not a witch but I do know these things. That's exactly what I thought! That it'll fall from between her legs, that it'll be a stillbirth! And we'll celebrate the coincidence by dancing a nice waltz, and kicking around the unborn kid's head. Did he ask you if you wanted one? It's normal, you're pushing thirty. He didn't offer to give you one? One second of giving you his sperm in appreciation at least, as an offering. Okay, don't start again, don't give me those strawberry eyes, we're going to distract ourselves by preparing everything step by step, it'll be like seeing glaciers shift live in front of us, a major spectacle, enough of blankly staring at the horizon like a dumb cow. For this I need you to cooperate. Go shower and come back fresh and clean. Don't even think about touching the phone, I'll tell you when it's the right moment to send him the first

message. You have to make them wait so that they'll react. Now go! and she gives me a good slap on the ass. A bright and heavy avalanche is destroying everything inside me, mom. What could be transcendent after you've levitated, how could someone want to live through this. Just go already, don't talk so much that you confuse yourself with your own words. Brilliantly chopping down the poisonous plants with the beautiful hollow stems. I can't. Sticking my nose into the mud, into the remains of the savage urges of stags. What am I going to do, mom. Get into the bathroom already! Are you deaf? Moving through a body and coming back on a storm, the hot burden thrust onto my shoulders.

DON'T BE AFRAID, don't be afraid, what are you even afraid of now, a sudden urgent electric shock. He's not rearing his head because he's holed up waiting for your signal, he's the one who should be afraid of your reaction, you have the upper hand, come on. And that other one with the belly, now he won't touch her with a ten-foot stick. A pole, mom. Alright, stick, pole, call him already. Don't make me crazy, don't indoctrinate me, go away. I'm not indoctrinating you, I'm educating you, and I need to listen, I need to give you ideas, I'll gesture to you. I don't need ideas, go away or I'm not calling. And I head down the path, mom plays solitaire on the table full of coffee stains. I watch her shuffle the deck, wetting the corner of the card, cheating. I walk with the phone burning me. I walk so far that I pass by two deserted villages and I circle the cemetery, the mausoleums and the jugs of hot water. I don't call yet, I walk around, the marble and granite shops, their wax and polish for floors and tombs. Cleaning services and decorative items for graves. Ready to cremate the whole world. The sky looks separate from the earth. I look for his messages but it's empty, she's deleted everything. I go in past the gate. Four teens carry a casket,

it's hot and their sweaty hands make them stop. They don't seem to think. As though they were hiking on a path in the mountains and enjoying the view through binoculars. Afterwards they'll go to lunch with their families and every minute that goes by will make them forget that they've just buried a body. That that body once moved. They put the coffin down in the shade of a poplar tree. I call. I lose all notion of the maternal instructions. What does extortion consist of, exactly. How much was I supposed to ask for. Imagining him here, imagining myself carrying his weight, that I have to rest in order to carry it. He picks up. I can't speak, but he recognizes me. He was waiting for my call, he was waiting to hear if I was alright, he was worried. He gives no loving words and the fever rises and soon I move my bruised lips and I'm her. I need to see you, even if it's just to say goodbye. Right, he says, I understand. That voice of someone who isn't possessed. Disgust. An aversion to this life that's about to be born. Having stiffened to the point of nausea, having been a smooth shark and now the old familiar tune as the staff clean our hotel rooms. Shaking the bedspreads out the window. The empty bedside table. The vacuum on the rug. And that plain woman he belongs to. Urge to bury him. Urge to dismember him. But he doesn't propose a day, doesn't propose a place, doesn't propose a time. I'm a virgin that lives with her mother in a trailer, in the winter they rub up against each other like whales. I'm that woman who eats duck liver with her hands and broken fingernails. That woman who laughs and throws herself into the gale. My cunt shut until I grow old. And when one snowy morning she finds her mother laying flat with an insect crawling out of her open mouth, she throws herself onto her to kiss her. And eats the insect like ice cream. The young men leave the cemetery. Tomorrow, I'm free. I swallow my pride. And I need help paying a few expenses, you know, they fired me unfairly from my job after ten years, it was discrimination, I'm going to sue the pants off them and I'm going to win, and I'm going to buy myself a speedboat and travel through all the islands,

that's right. But for that I need to pay a lawyer and right, he says he understands the situation, what kind of discrimination. I don't even clarify. How much do I need. He'll get the money, he'll get back to me when he can, he knows a really good lawyer and accountant. What a man won't do to get rid of a woman. Of that burden. It's all so obvious. Be reasonable, stay calm. Set a date within ten days, note it in the agenda, without losing my balance. He'll come see me, but there's just one thing, he'll need to leave early because they have plans that they can't cancel at... and I hang up. Logically, he's already speaking to me in the plural.

THIS ANXIETY THAT SCREWS INTO MY FINGERS. The meeting place is the same, under the bridge between the anarchist graffiti and the whores' phone numbers. There's no definition, this isn't a wait. This is the nothing before the apparition. A day of lactating lethargy. Mom holed up at home praying on her knees on the floor tiles. Mom still waiting for Him to come in. The guy who left her in flames as she faced the burning branches. The one who walked out on her just when she was about to pop and who laughed at her with a cigarette hanging from his lips. Mom going over the sequence and getting into the closet. Mom checking the blade on last time. The first time she's overseeing something, that something excites her. Here he comes, he doesn't turn the motor off, he pulls over swiftly, he doesn't kiss me, he gestures like he's double-parking. I get in and I obey and the juicy kiss comes after the automatic movements. How are you, how's your mother, how have you spent these past few days. I brought you the money in cash, you can count it, pay me back when you can, don't worry about it. Pure garbage. I don't answer. It's hot out, he says. Finally a real summer day, of midnight dips in the pool and grilling lunch in the open air. All the air conditioners are overloading the city, not here? In the city you

wouldn't put up with this heat. I take the cash and put it in my purse without looking at it. I need you to come over to help me, I don't have anyone, it's terrible. What's happening. It's terrible, it isn't possible for two women to live like this, and mom left, I don't have anyone. What's happening, don't scare me. An infestation, all over the house, but especially in the kitchen. Of ants? Of those filthy little white rodents. That's disgusting, but what can I do about it, I know even less than you about that stuff. Help me, it's the last thing you can do for me. You don't have neighbours, or the firemen? My neighbours are dying. The firemen won't come anymore since mom called them 30 nights in a row with different excuses, don't get me started, kittens on the roof, the radiator on fire, a baby crying from inside a suitcase. It's their duty to come, it's a public service. Mom harasses them, it isn't their duty to be harassed. I'd prefer to go somewhere else, you know, I feel more at ease in a neutral space, and he kept talking but I pulled him close and bit his ear. And the car only goes in reverse, stuck in a ditch, the wheel spinning. We do it quickly, without looking, you lift and I pull, I have latex gloves. You have to hurry because they're going into the fridge and that'll be the end, they're going to finish with our rations. I've never put on latex gloves. It'll be better than seeing the baby fluids hang between your hands. That's revolting. I can't, I'm not capable. And I look at him and kiss him, captured by this happiness that's born from nothing, only for a moment, before it goes away as it must. I hope you understand me, he says, I'm here but... yes, I know. She's already old to be a mother, I couldn't deprive her of that, not after so many years together, it would be like burying her alive, yes, of course, I understand. If I left her now she wouldn't be able to find anyone else, it's even late to freeze her eggs. Her eggs are drying up and the least I could do if I no longer desire her, is to give her.... sorry to interrupt you, leave the car inside please. I prefer outside, no, inside is better, otherwise the kids might scratch it up with screwdrivers or water guns, they aren't used to

such a new model. I was saying that one has a moral obligation to his partner of so many years, I can't discard her like an unwanted object, she's not a toy, even if I don't desire her anymore, I'm not repulsed by her either... sorry to interrupt you again, is there a sunroof? That's actually what made the difference from the other ones we saw, we both went crazy for the see-through roof. For sure they'll take magnificent trips down the coast, along the breakers, the little one like an ice cream cone with half its body hanging out. So, you understand? Can you put yourself in my shoes? Come, come with me and cover your nose with this, it stinks.

HE ENTERS, WATCHING EVERY STEP THAT HE TAKES, the gravel grinding under his feet. What's up. You don't like the austere décor of my home. You don't like our rural feminine esthetic. No, it's not that, I feel weird, we've never been here together. It's a joke, I find this place repugnant, soon I'll move far away and you'll see how I decorate my house. Yeah? To the city? I have projects. Let me know and I'll help you find work. Mom isn't coming, don't worry, I won't make the official introduction today. Come in, come on in. Leave your shoes in the vestibule, throw them on top of the rest. He takes them off, goes to the washroom, I realize what he's probably thinking to himself at the sink as the water runs. Every little drip is a trap. I too am thinking of a Plan B in case he takes off through the window. The house is equipped, there are wires, chains, shovels, even an old tractor. I wait right outside the door for him, I ambush him. And the family of little white rats? The latex gloves? I guide him through the hallway and throw him down onto my bed.

I SHOW HIM MY FLAT STOMACH, this is where I want him to finish. They're festering behind the pantry, I'm waiting for the whole family to die and then we can go. And the performance begins, licks, gropes, movements. But everything is tense, cold, anguished. But everything is this wallpaper of thorned flowers. I try to inject passion, we make love once. Then twice. He's tired, his sciatica's killing him. What the fuck is sciatica. Take some painkillers. I'll bring you a glass of water with mint, the chlorophyll will do you good. When the weight of the world falls over the room, which had been heavenly just moments before. I leave him semi-erect on the mattress. I leave naked. Mom is spying through the keyhole of the closet, I open it a little. Was it good? she asks. Do I let you have one more or do we go now? Did he kiss you with tongue? Enjoy it. Did you manage to...? Mom, you're disgusting. As long as he made you cum, that bastard. But what do you think? You were great with that stuff about the rats, I was ready to run and find one. The house is silent. Nothing to indicate that there's a naked man in a woman's den, let alone him, who voluntarily came and put himself there. If he could stay here for ten years, intact, evergreen in my bedroom, lying there, then everything would be lovely and peaceful and I would happily let him have his little babies. Take them out into the country to look for pinecones, boil crabs, splash around in the streams. His phone rings and startles us. Cover up, will you? Your tits are distracting me, how did your nipples get so big, they're sticking out, God, bigger than grandma's, where did you come from. And they're so dark, you look like you were adopted. Was I adopted? You're an imbecile. You, adopted, don't you see that the two of us are a single drop of water? Two, mom. She gives me her shirt. We tiptoe over to the door, two ballerinas in tutus totally lost on the stage. He whispers something, words of paternal tenderness. Blah blah blah say the happy couple. You're jealous, hija, that's what keeps us from existing. I'm not jealous. You're jealous, I'm jealous of him too, jealous of all the other women

without children, jealous of a breeze, jealous of the world. Like cows after giving birth I'm still hanging by a thin thread that I leave all over the house. I put on panties and I hear him call me, first he says my name then he shouts it. It's now, says mom, something scares him. Did he bring you the cash? Shhh, what does that matter. And he must have credit and debit cards, too. Cheques, bonds. Can you forge his signature? Get him to sign something. You want me to ask him for his passwords and PINs too? Get it and I'll leave, I'll grab everything, you just get it. Hurry up, don't just sit there drooling. Make it quick. Just a little more and I'll go. You're going to throw everything away just for some dick and he'll be hers. Her taste. Her eyes. Just a little more. And I walk back into the room with the glass of water and a sprig of mint.

WHY ARE YOU GETTING DRESSED? It's getting pretty late, if you want I'll help you and then we can go for a drink at the little bar by the river. I'm giving you drinks right here. But I need a change of scenery. Let's go to the backyard then. Whatever you want, normally you like watching the boats go by, telling the different motors apart. Yes, that was before. You're still angry. No. Disappointed. No. The fact that I have a child with her doesn't mean that..., I get it. I couldn't deprive her of the possibility, she was born for this, to be a mother, not like you. And what am I like. You're divine. You're radiant. You're in another category, you're not a mother. She's been a mother since birth. Really, having a child is nothing more than that, know this. I had just listened to the most beautiful declaration of love in my life, having a kid is nothing. And he kissed me, and it stunned me, for the first time he was the one who kissed me, and once again we were two stars in the sky. And I almost forget that mom is waiting for me behind the chicken coop ready with all the tools. And I think, how stupid of me, he drank from the glass and I didn't

put anything in there to put him to sleep, haven't mom and I watched enough movies. I'll need to be fierce, I'll need to grow thicker skin. Our minty mouths, and I kiss him again, and again.

I SHOW HIM WHERE I USED TO PLAY AS A KID, we walk around and he takes my hand, mom must think she's hallucinating. And we go into the cave where I used to hide as a little girl so I wouldn't have to watch our old neighbours castrate the animals or hang them up by their hooves. I show him the hideout where I used to spy in the winter when they would take the carcasses out by sleigh. My trench where I would assemble and throw grenades. He shows an interest in my past, in that foul fatherless pit, he examines the trees I used to climb like a scientist with a magnifying glass. For a second it's all backwards, the metal sheet splitting mom's delicate spine. And then he and I having dinner by candlelight, having kids that swing higher and higher, sharing a cigarette and blowing smoke up to the stars. I watch her making desperate gestures from up there. A clucking sound catches his attention and he makes his way over all by himself, without me having to tell him the stupid thing about wanting to show him the orchard. He walks, his long legs leave their imprint in my grass. He walks away from my childhood. Later I'll kiss the ground and spend my days laying stretched out on his footprints, madly in love. Mom is still up on a stone bench behind the vineyard, his back is turned. The awning covers us, the patio doors, the top of the grove sways. Me in the middle. The psychotic raised arm gesture, the pointed elbow. The weight of the machete like an infant being protected from a fall. Mom is befuddled. I can't acknowledge her, I can't give her the nod, I can't raise my hand and give the signal. And she goes ahead on her own, jumps from the bench energetically and gives one first stab with the knife into the back of his neck. And pulls it out. Right there he's looking for me, I

can still save him, make him my husband, the owner of the farm with the key ring and the rifle, I can still try to be a good orphan. Sex is revolting, he starts coughing up water and blood, his head is already turned backwards. Mom climbs on top of him, come here, for fuck's sake, come here, do something yourself, she whines. It's time to act and I can't even take a step. I don't have it in me, mom, I'm wearing a scruffy blue smock and I can't enter the classroom. I even can't manage to say my own name. Come here, fuck, and she gives it to me by the handle, it's heavy. I raise the machete with all my love, with all my dying heart. The rusted machete against the clouded sky strikes once into his stomach, again, she says, and I raise it and let its weight fall onto his chest, again, she says, and I raise it and I embed it into his neck, that's good, that's enough, don't get bloodthirsty, deep breaths, now let it go, relax. Beside me a flat stone, I want to throw it at him, erase his face. That's enough, she says, you can rest now.

WHAT IS THAT THING, I don't want to be crass but that thing is a sour pickle, horribly beautiful. Let's see, yes, it's strange, a fruit out of season, a vegetable in the sun. I never said anything, but now that I've seen his cock I think this explains it all. Someone looks at me with appetite, there is sun too, I'm wearing shiny leather shoes with buckles, my bangs over my eyes, open to the whirlpool, I'm wearing a checkered skirt and I'm disguised. Who's looking at you, hija? Something out there is watching me during the festivities and afterward, as things start to fall, glasses, porcelain plates. Look, the dick is scorched, it's burning up, it's like a zucchini or an anchovy, it's so funny. Interesting effect, it looks like that's the first thing to go. An uncle, a neighbour, a friend of grandma's? There's something that pulled me, I could feel it in my gut but you didn't even notice, you'd make me play in the back seat of the car anyway. Could someone

desire something so much they'd destroy it? I have this compulsion to ask when I already know the answer. Asking like someone picking lice from a child's head, and keeps going and going until there aren't any left and the child screams bathed in vinegar, his head completely bald. I ask while knowing and dig my nail into my scalp. The first times I saw you in my life, as a newborn, you were so pure, golden with green eyes that looked alien in a certain light. The nurses in the hospital would stop to congratulate me when I'd come for check-ups, the anesthesiologists, the staff, I'd uncover you a little more so they could see how well-made you were, how perfectly symmetrical you'd come out, I was so proud, but at the same time, it was strange, like you weren't mine, one number less or more and it would be called a mistake. When I drove a few miles out of town, the two of us so alone and defenseless on the snow-covered road, I would have left you there. Or on a beach, that's what I was thinking, with the rising tide, so you would be swept up until lightning struck, if I could somehow be promised that he would come back to me. Like a quick bribe at a guarded border crossing. I give this to you, you give that to me, we move along. Like the mother who tells her baby girl, don't be a moron. How can I put it? Not out of cruelty, I hope you understand, but so they would give me back what I lost. You don't have to, you don't have to explain at all. Give me a big hug. I gave birth to you, but you could have given birth to me just as easily, you know?

BEFORE, WE MADE LOVE, AND NOTHING. Sometimes, a body is nothing more than sex, a child of sex. It doesn't happen, it doesn't come, nothing. One last kiss and I grab what's left of his face and smash it in. After I finish his phone rings and pierces my skull. Like in train wrecks, when suburban folk get off like monkeys onto the tracks to empty the purses of the dead. Her

water broke, she's crowning, she's waiting with her legs open for him to run, she's waiting for his hands for the glutinous act. She cries out, my love, my love, my life. But her cries are nothing, I deserve him more than she does. He belonged to me, not to the one who trapped him with her reproductive organ. We look at each other and mom gives me an approving look and I smash his phone. I hope it gets tangled in its cord. I hope it gets strangled. The chickens gather around thinking there will be a feast. The foxes and deer will come down to the path later for their share. There's enough for everyone, devour the remains. Slurp it up, you beasts. We're innocent. We're the victims, Your Honour. And the final moment arrives, when the breathing stops, like one day, in the blink of an eye, no more. A silence made of clicks and buzzes comes down on us like a downpour. He was an arrogant pig, mom says. A brutish person, without morals, I say. A pussy, nothing more than a pussy. Mine a bourgeois, yours an unstable libertine, two scumbags. But actions are paid for in life, and she tugs the words out of my mouth. He was so he was so he was so so handsome that it made me sick, mami. The sound of planes flying overhead and falling. We could drive down the highway, past the windmills and the river. See his mangled body from overhead. The animality, the earth, sex, it all comes back little by little, like the palate of a former smoker. I raise my head up toward the sun and grab myself by the neck for the first time without planning it, I have good news mom, I've hanged myself. We spend the evening examining his corpse. You've finally stopped hounding him, she notes.

BY MIDNIGHT everything is clean and ready. The table set up to play cards. Soft music and everything appears to dance. Mom comes through in an apron with a tray full of chicken wings. I set the glasses as the sound of a cork pops. The grass freshly cut, the barn locked, no tools in

sight, no evidence, no shortcuts. Everything in its right place, new clothes, the others already hung up. Clink clink, here's to us, I say, looking at the horizon that swallows us, and she nods. Like we're in a five-star restaurant, but more intimate. The money hidden away, the keys to the new car on the table. We didn't break our backs working for nothing, she says suddenly. I want to try out the sunroof on the provincial roads. I want the smoke from the big city that hangs over the suburbs. I want an ATM, a quick stop at a local mountain gear shop and to fill the tank at the furthest gas station. Mom puts on an oven mitt, leans over to serve me and she's ten years older, she's a grandmother with sagging tits serving chicken with onions. In a few days we'll have hundreds of little tomatoes, we can offer them to the neighbours, of course, I say, and cooking strawberry tarts and bring them over when they're still warm, to their houses. Of course, with black sugar. We talk as though we're being spied on or the phone is bugged. We talk about how we'll put the house in order, about the division of household chores, about settling debts, about paying taxes, about trying to get more involved in the necessities of rural social life. Integrate ourselves into the community, in short. Maybe we could start caring for the terminally ill, donate clothing to hospices, devote our time to those who suffer most. We'll start with the autistic, she said excitedly, let's give haircuts to the invalids I added, and I don't know how we didn't shit ourselves laughing.

THE CHICKEN ALREADY FINISHED, THE SILVERWARE CROSSED ON THE PLATES, the edges of the glasses covered in drool, everything stacked and ready to be devoured by repetition. We're chatting in the kitchen, the sink overflowing with foam, I'm handing her the dishes and she's drying them, when we hear a noise. We both freeze. And then another sound,

clearer this time. Footsteps, says mom. A robber. Someone's trying to get in. Or scale the side of the house. Mom drops the dishcloth and leaves the room. I spy on the road through the peephole. She comes back with the car keys, we approach the door. The window from the house next door is strangely illuminated. But no one appears. They snitched, we're leaving, says mom, no time to pack a bag, grab the wad of cash. What? And I'm amazed to find that I don't want to leave him. That I don't want to be away from him, not even a kilometer away from him. Not even for one night. It might be idiocy but just now I realize that I want to spend the rest of my life with him, mami. And you think now's the time for professions of love? Want me to call the priest so he can pronounce you man and wife? I'm not ever going to move and if one day I have a child, and I shut up. Mom, I want a child by him. If you did you would have remembered that before, my dear, you're losing it. If I ever have a child it'll be next to his grave, and my child will play on his odor. Yes, he'll love his smell. He'll worship it, he'll be what makes the grass grow. Are you finished? And when it reaches that dreaded age I'll scratch with my nails. I'm not going mom. Go alone and stay calm, I'll wait for you here and I look at his shoes lined up next to ours. We're waiting for you. But mom he pushes me outside, we're not here for lovers' quarrels, someone witnessed the scene, someone knows, do you understand that, get up and she pulls me inside. And get up is one time when I was 8 on our way home from camping and all along the road I looked at the lamp posts wanting to be electrocuted. My hand on the door handle ready to open, calculating how I'd fall and roll into the ditch, already seeing myself mangled outside the car, calculating the push wouldn't lessen the impact. Mom was singing at the wheel and, though I didn't take my hand off the door, I never opened it. I'm coming, I tell her, may you rest in peace. And we left without turning the lights on.

WE DRIVE DOWN THE HIGHWAY and everything is so black, so solitary, as sure as children blindly crossing a river and dying. Were we mistaken? There doesn't seem to be anyone. The neighbour's light is off. Was it on or were we imagining it? Let's head back just in case, if not, we go back and board up the house. Mom, we're in the country. So what. It's a little town full of old farts, buried in the depths of the world. You never know, there's old people of all sorts. The car at 20 km like an animal at death's door. We've almost turned around, returning to the sheets, the moths and one last cold beer when we see something cross the street. A really fast thing made of air, something that moved and it didn't look like legs. You saw that, right? Did it have two legs? I couldn't make it out. Mom steps on the gas, the motor cuts my hypnosis short. We go out to the industrial zone.

WE DRIVE STRAIGHT THROUGH THE ROUNDABOUT. A patrol car hidden in a little bush flashes its lights at us a few times, an arm waving out the window, a command. I can imagine the face of the young officers waiting since their graduation to run into two ladies like us in the middle of the night. Stop, stop. But the chase is on and mom speeds up on the ramp to the parking lot. Mom is playing roadrunner, mom is eating fruits and vitamins like Pacman, mom is dodging the street signs and reverses down a side hill that leads to the river. Are those sons of bitches coming? Yes, mom, they're coming, where do you think they're going, fishing? And they're going to see, they're going to make us pay for this, remember, at some point it's going to catch up to us. What is? I don't want anything. Have you ever won anything in your fucking life? No? Alright, then now is the time. Hang on tight and open the roof, honey. What a nice car. And mom goes over the edge and a bunch of rocks fall and make crystalline sounds. And the birds

and tadpoles scatter. And I can't think of anything else anymore. I don't feel my own brain anymore. There's no way we'll still be alive in an hour so I hang on tight and scream and hit her with a closed fist, but without any hope, without any meaning. With no desire, I look at everything without saying goodbye, but I'm not even in this world. Not a single image flashes before me, I don't know what living consisted of. There was no childhood, no solved enigmas, no words of comfort, just the stuffy rooms, the smell inside her shoes. The car is falling apart, crashing into the old houses, the flower beds, the tractors. Logs and leaves. The car jolts at top speed toward what, where, mom keeps going, flooring it. Are they behind us, are they catching up? I turn around but the pressure makes my head so heavy, my head that's turned into a helmet while my skull is far away. We destroy everything in our path, with everything hitting the windows and sunroof, until we're halted by a pile of intertwined branches and the car is thrown backwards and forwards and gets stuck in the swarm. Sirens. Woo-woo-woo. Mom climbs out on all fours and splinters split her face in half. I crawl out, I roll over, all scraped up. We are whole and bloodied. Let it all burn, wreck it all, says mom and she still wants more.

6. Conclusion

According to Berman, translations should be evaluated on ethical and poetic grounds (Simon 34). An ethical translation requires respect for the original text and for the reader, “and for the reader’s need for complexity” (Simon 34). He also specifies that respect for the source text should include a dialogue with it, and even a confrontation (Simon 34). For a translation to be successful on poetic grounds, the translator must create an aesthetic object: “Berman uses the expression ‘*faire texte*’ or ‘*faire oeuvre*’” (Simon 34). Due to the particular nature of my approach to translating *La débil mental*, Berman’s grounds for evaluation are problematized. If madness is, in the words of Foucault, “*l’absence d’oeuvre*”, then how is it possible to “*faire oeuvre*” when translating a ‘mad’ text. The desire to give voice to madness and release it from its silence is, as Derrida points out, problematic and naïve due to the fact that language itself has been developed by reason, and inherently betrays the mad when it is used in an attempt to speak for them. In my role as translator, I have been entrusted with the voice of female madness and tasked with conveying it using language; from the perspective of Derrida, my task is inherently doomed and contradictory.

Harwicz’s novel uses language to demonstrate how language fails to allow madness to speak. Her experimentations with grammar, punctuation, and style paint a picture of the troubled, traumatized mind of the hysteric. In order to convey this in the target text, I struggled to find a balance between making my text mirror the chaos and confusion of the narrator’s muddled mind, and producing a translation with literary value, or what Berman refers to as “poeticity” (Simon 34).

From a feminist perspective, my task was equally complicated, and raised the question of what constitutes a feminist text. On the one hand, *La débil mental* is written by and about a

woman, and centres female sexuality; on the other hand, the novel is full of misogynistic language and sexist statements about gender roles. The female protagonist is, however, a victim of patriarchy, and her seemingly anti-feminist words and behaviours serve the narrative by demonstrating how misogynistic language and patriarchal values are internalized by women, warping their self-esteems and distorting the way they perceive themselves. Harwicz also shows us how this leads to madness.

The notion of hysteria bridges the two components of my translation approach. Delvaux's central argument in *Femmes psychiatisées, femmes rebelles* is that women with mental illnesses can only fight the silencing imposed on them by writing their own experiences. *La débil mental* is a highly subjective account of a woman's experience with mental illness, and Harwicz reinforces this by manipulating language – language that, as feminists point out, has been developed by patriarchy to speak for women while implicitly robbing them of their own voice; and that has been developed by reason to speak for madness, resulting in a similar erasure. Female madness is silenced in its own particular way, reinforced by cultural assumptions and stereotypes that deal largely with sexuality and expressions of emotion and desire in women.

The interventions that I made in my translation were slight adjustments that conformed to my reading of the novel, and the particular themes I aimed to explore and draw attention to. My non-interventions were arguably more significant, as Harwicz's writing style is deliberately difficult to follow, which gives the reader the same difficulty that the narrator encounters when trying to make sense of her own experience. In my approach to translating this text, without any clear strategy defined that would capture the silenced voice of female madness and allow it to speak uncensored, I deferred to Arrojo's assertion that "the only kind of fidelity we can possibly consider is the one we owe to our assumptions, not simply as individuals, but as members of a

cultural community which produces and validates them” (1994, 160). My interventions in the text were motivated by a desire to stay faithful above all to the politics of my particular approach. I translated this text according to what I perceived as the most central literary themes in the novel: women, hysteria, sexuality, and silence.

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