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Marginal Voices and Liminal Spaces:
Helen Maria Williams' Translation of de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*

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Abstract

This paper deals with Helen Maria Williams' preface to and translation of Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1788). Both paratext and translation allowed Williams to comment on her practice and express her opinions on the socio-political context in which she lived. Kathryn Batchelor's (2018) paratextual framework and Silvia Kadiu's (2019) reflexive methodology will be first applied to the analysis of the preface and then to the additions, omissions and alterations of meaning that are found in the target text but not discussed in the paratext. The paper will eventually outline Williams' approach to translation and highlight her agency as a translator.

Keywords: translation; paratext; reflexive translation studies; early modern women translators, Helen Maria Williams.

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1. Introduction

Paratexts and translation have traditionally played a marginal role in the humanities, either on account of the liminal place of the former in the physicality of a book, where they appear and function as thresholds to the text they refer to, or for the supposedly derivative status of the latter, as translation was often considered an unoriginal rendering or imitation of its source text. This paper aims to show that in the case of Helen Maria Williams' preface to her own translation of Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* (1788) neither the "voice of the translatress" (Agorni 1998) nor the space of the paratext play such a marginal role. In order to do so, Kathryn Batchelor's (2018) paratextual framework and Silvia Kadiu's (2019) reflexive methodology will be applied to the analysis of both preface and translation. This integrated approach will prove to be particularly befitting in highlighting how Williams acquired agency through her practice.

As a matter of fact, even though she translated *Paul et Virginie* while she was incarcerated in Paris under Robespierre's Reign of Terror, Williams managed to subtly convey her feelings about the socio-political situation of France and her moral standpoint. The preface was written after the translation itself, allowing her to point out the constraints in which it was pursued and the alterations she made to the source text, namely the omission of some philosophical passages and the inclusion of her own original poems within the translated text. However, these are not her only changes since, as the analysis will show, she avoids mentioning other additions, omissions and alterations of meaning in the translation.

2. Translation and Paratexts

In *Reflexive Translation Studies* (2019), Silvia Kadiu outlines a comprehensive description of the reflexive approach she adopts to translate a selection of texts by Susan Bassnett (2006), Antoine Berman (1998), Henri Meschonnic (2007) and Lawrence Venuti (1995) that deal with translation theory. In so doing, she demonstrates how the translational practice should always be informed with a reflection on the theoretical perspective the translator operates

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from. Indeed, for the scholar "theorising takes place during the translation process itself, in the act of undertaking a translation and attempting to articulate our experience of it, of facing a translation dilemma and reflecting on possible solutions" (Kadiu 2019, viii). Whenever such a reflection is found in a translator's preface, it is useful to compare what is stated in the paratext to what is done in the translation by means of a contrastive analysis of the source text (ST) and target text (TT). The paratext, thus, is pivotal in this kind of approach and its functions have to be thoroughly evaluated before dealing with the assessment of the translated text.

In *Seuils* (1987), Gérard Genette, the forerunner of paratextual studies, addresses translation only occasionally and considers it as a practice with some paratextual relevance which "serve[s] as commentary on the original text" (Genette 1997, 405). Since the publication of his seminal work, scholars like Kovala (1996), Gürçağlar (2002), Armstrong (2007), Elefante (2013), and Batchelor (2018) have tried to adapt and revise Genette's theoretical framework to translation studies, first and foremost because he does not consider translations as independent texts. In particular, Kathryn Batchelor (2018) outlines a new framework that classifies paratexts according to the following categories: time, senders and addressees, function, space, and substance. In this paper, only the first three will be employed, as the remaining ones are concerned with digital and audiovisual domains.

The first category regards the temporal labels used to describe when the paratext is "consciously crafted" (*Ibid*, 156) in relation to the text it refers to:

- *Pre-ST*: a paratext written for the ST before the first publication of the ST;
- *With-ST*: a paratext written for the first publication of the ST;
- *Post-ST*: a paratext written for the ST after the first publication of the ST;
- *Pre-TT*: a paratext written for the TT before the first publication of the TT;
- *With-TT*: a paratext written for the first publication of the TT;
- *Post-TT*: a paratext written for the TT after the first publication of the TT.

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As for the category of "senders and addressees", i.e. those who write the paratext and the public it is meant to, Batchelor distinguishes between translators and other senders, and between source culture addressees and target culture addressees. When it comes to the functions of the paratext, the scholar partially draws on Annika Rockenberger's (2014) application of paratextual theories to the context of videogames because it "draws on a vocabulary with which translation scholars are likely to be familiar thanks to the popularity of functionalist translation theories" (Batchelor 2018, 160), and identifies the following fourteen functions (*Ibid*, 160-161):

- *Referential*: the paratext establishes the legal and discursive fingerprint of the work;
- *Self-referential*: the paratext draws attention to itself;
- *Ornamental*: the paratext is decorative;
- *Generic*: the paratext categorises the work (also as a translation);
- *Meta-communicative*: the paratext reflects on the text and/or on translation;
- *Informative*: the paratext reveals intentions and/or clarifies culture-specific references of the ST;
- *Hermeneutical*: the paratext widens or restricts interpretative options;
- *Ideological*: the paratext promotes or takes distance from a certain viewpoint;
- *Evaluative*: the paratext demands value and cultural significance;
- *Commercial*: the paratext advertises or praises other products;
- *Legal*: the paratext informs about legal entitlements or establishes its legal rights and obligations;
- *Pedagogical*: the paratext establishes standards for behaviour;
- *Instructive, operational*: the paratext guides the reception of the text;
- *Personalisation*: the paratexts adjusts elements to personal needs in the case of interactive paratexts.

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The meta-communicative function is particularly relevant in this paper because a paratext can also be a "metadiscourse" and/or a "metatext", where "the former represents commentary on translation as a phenomenon, while the latter is commentary on a specific text" (*Ibid*, 151).

The combination of a paratextual framework and a reflexive translation studies perspective is especially insightful in the study of Early Modern women translators since many of them, like Helen Maria Williams, could seldom theorise and comment on translation explicitly in an essay or a book, and consequently had to resort to metadiscursive and/or metatextual reflections in the paratexts that were published together with their translations[1].

3. Helen Maria Williams' *Paul and Virginia*

Helen Maria Williams (1759-1827) was a late eighteenth-century English intellectual who was considered controversial for her progressive political views. Living for most of her life in France, her home became a social salon that welcomed and spread the French Revolution ideals of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* in which she continued to believe even during the Reign of Terror, when she was incarcerated for her opposition to Robespierre's despotism. Not only did Williams believe in peace and grieve that "insensate rage" of war, which the "purest blood inscrib'd on glory's page" (Williams 1823, 142), but she also supported the Société des amis des Noirs, an abolitionist society that – as reported by Williams herself in *Letters from France* (1791) – addressed the National Assembly as early as in 1790 as follows: "[Mons. Mirabeau] has proposed the abolition of the slave trade to the National Assembly […]. The Africans have not perhaps long to suffer, nor their oppressors to triumph. Europe seems

[1] On the importance of paratexts and translations for early modern women, see Robinson 1995, Agorni 1998, Delisle 2002, Belle 2012, Belle and Hosington 2018, Bland and Brown 2013, Orr 2023.

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hastening towards a period too enlightened for the perpetuation of such monstruous abuses" (48-50).

Williams' political engagement is documented in the eight volumes of fictional letters she published between 1790 and 1796, which chronicled the unruly times of the Revolution and its aftermath. The epistolary genre, which was deemed particularly suitable for women, allowed Williams to blur the line between the public and the domestic spheres by opting for a personal and confidential form of writing through which she focused on political and social issues as well. The *Letters* demonstrate that, although she became less euphoric about the bleak period of the *Terreur*, Williams never stopped believing in the ideals that had first inspired the Revolution, and she never "concealed [her] admiration of the great and exalted principles in favour of the human race which the revolution was destined to establish" (Williams 1803, xxiv).

During her imprisonment, she followed the advice Bernardin de Saint-Pierre gave his readers on the necessity of finding a refuge in literature in difficult times: "au milieu de tant de passions qui nous agitent, notre raison se trouble et s'obscurcit; mais il est des phares où nous pouvons en rallumer le fambeau: ces son les lettres" (De Saint-Pierre 2019, 198-199)[2]. Nonetheless, there were some limitations to the *lettres* as well, because "the resources of writing, and even reading, were encompassed with danger" (Williams 1819, v), as Williams declares in the preface to her translation of *Paul et Virginie*. The pastoral novel is set in what was known under French rule (1715-1810) as Île de France (renamed Mauritius when it was conquered by the British in 1810), an island that, according to De Saint-Pierre, was still unphased by European trends and vices. The French author, inspired by his own visit to the island, represented it as a pastoral paradise, where human beings could live in harmony with nature.

[2] "In the midst of so many passions, by which we are agitated, our reason is disordered and obscured: but there is an ever-burning lamp, at which we can rekindle its flame; and that is, literature" (Williams 1819, 131-132).

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The two main characters, Paul and Virginia, are raised by two outcast mothers, Margaret and Madame de la Tour, who find comfort and friendship in their similar conditions and assemble their cottages in a secluded area of the island, where they live with their faithful slaves, Marie and Domingue. Their little *société* and their way of living is repeatedly compared to European society after Virginia is sent to France, which is represented as the embodiment of hypocrisy and corruption. The novel was indeed inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine et le fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755) and his belief that one can be pure only in uncontaminated natural landscapes. In her translation, Helen Maria Williams manipulated what at first may look like an 'innocent' pastoral novel so as to subtly comment on post-*Terreur* France without overtly doing so.

4. Analysis of the paratext

The first part of the preface deals specifically with the socio-political context in which the translation was pursued, while the second presents metatextual reflections on the translation itself. Six out of the fourteen functions identified by Batchelor can be found in Williams' preface, namely the generic, the meta-communicative, the informative, the hermeneutical, the ideological, and the instructive function. Moreover, since it is signed in "Paris, June, 1795", i.e. the date of publication and not the period of time in which the translation was carried out, the paratext can be classified both as 'with-TT' and 'post-TT'. Indeed, it locates the translation both spatially in the French prison and temporally in the fall of 1793, even though the jail is never mentioned:

> The following translation of 'Paul and Virginia', was written at Paris, amidst the horrors of Robespierre's tyranny. During that gloomy epocha it was difficult to find occupations which might cheat the days of calamity of their weary length. Society had vanished; and, amidst the minute vexations of jacobinical despotism, which, while it murdered in *mass*, persecuted in detail, the resources of writing, and even reading, were encompassed with danger. The researches of domiciliary visits had already compelled me to commit to the flames a manuscript volume, where I had traced the political scenes of which I had been a witness, with the colouring of their first impressions on my mind, with those fresh tints that fade from recollection: and since my pen, accustomed to follow the impulse of my feelings, could only have drawn, at that fatal period, those images of desolation and despair which haunted my

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> imagination, and dwelt upon my heart, writing was forbidden employment. Even reading had its perils; for books had sometimes aristocratical insignia, and sometimes counter revolutionary allusions: and when the administrators of police happened to think the writer a conspirator, they punished the reader as his accomplice. In this situation I gave myself the task of employing a few hours every day in translating the charming little novel of Bernardin St. Pierre, entitled 'Paul and Virginia;' and I found the most soothing relief in wandering from my own gloomy reflections to those enchanting scenes of the Mauritius, which he has so admirably described. (Williams 1819, v-vii)

After fulfilling Batchelor's generic function by recognising the translation as such, this section seems to present an accurate depiction of France during the "gloomy epocha" and the "fatal period" of Robespierre's "tyranny". Williams writes with an almost solemn tone, painting a picture of violence, fear and censure, and explicitly places herself both as an eyewitness to this despotism and as a reporter. Indeed, she had already written an account of the political changes she had witnessed that was destroyed by the Jacobins during a house search. Even though she was naturally drawn to write again, she would have been censured (or worse) if she did. In this passage, the informative and ideological functions can be identified as well, since Williams explains the context she worked in and, at the same time, distances herself from the radical Jacobin positions.

In the second part of the preface, the focus shifts to the translation itself:

> I also composed a few Sonnets adapted to the peculiar productions of that part of the globe, which are interspersed in the work. Some, indeed, are lost, as well as a part of the translation, which I have since supplied, having been sent to the Municipality of Paris, in order to be examined as English papers; where they still remain, mingled with revolutionary placard, motions, and harangues; and are not likely to be restored to my possession. With respect to the translation, I can only hope to deserve the humble merit of not having deformed the beauty of the original. I have, indeed, taken one liberty with my author, which it is fit I should acknowledge, that of omitting several pages of general observations, which, however excellent in themselves, would be passed over with impatience by the English reader, when they interrupt the pathetic narrative. In this respect, the two nations seem to change characters; and while the serious and reflecting Englishman requires, in novel-writing, as well as on the theatre, a rapid succession of incidents, much bustle and stage effect, without suffering the author to appear himself, and stop the progress of the story; the gay and restless Frenchman listens attentively to long philosophical reflections, while the catastrophe of the drama bangs in suspense. My last poetical productions, (the Sonnets which are interspersed in this work), may perhaps be found even more imperfect than my earlier compositions; since, after a long exile from England, I can scarcely flatter myself that my ear is become more attuned to the harmony of a language, with the sounds of which it is seldom gladdened; or that my poetical taste is improved by living in a country where arts have given place to arms. But the public will, perhaps, receive with indulgence a work written under such peculiar

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> circumstances; not composed in the calm of literary leisure, or in pursuit of literary fame, but amidst the turbulence of the most cruel sensations, and in order to escape awhile from overwhelming misery. (Williams 1819, vii-viii)

The first striking element of this section is that Williams wrote some sonnets and added them to her translation, as if they were written by one of the main characters, Madame de la Tour. Batchelor's instructive function is here noticeable, since she gives the reader a key to interpret the text, i.e. the fact that those poems are not written by de Saint-Pierre. Williams comes back to her "last poetical production" near the end of the preface, confessing to the reader that she may have lost her touch with English, not only because she lives in another country, but also because her "poetical taste" could not be "improved by living in a country where arts have given place to arms" (resuming to the political commentary as well).

As thoroughly discussed by Krontiris 1992, Robinson 1995, and Pender 2012, the rhetoric of modesty was mostly used by early modern women translators in relation to their gender to explain the potential inaccuracies of their translations. On the contrary, rather than referring to her gender, Williams warns her readers that the flaws in her translation may be due to the "peculiar circumstances" in which it was carried out.

After mentioning the sonnets, Williams changes topic and reveals that the omission of several passages of the source text is the only liberty she took in the translation, which implies that she does not consider the interpolation of her poems as such. In her opinion, the omissions are understandable because she had an English reader in mind while translating the novel. Even though her ear may not be accustomed to the English language anymore (as she professes, humbling her sonnets), she still discerns what an "Englishman" requires and how he differs from a "Frenchman". This statement fulfils Batchelor's hermeneutical function as it contains an explanation of her decision about the translation process. Furthermore, it can be related also to the scholar's distinction between senders and addressees, since Williams herself stresses the differences between the French and the English readership. On the whole, the preface fulfils the meta-communicative function, as

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it "includes reflections on translation and/or the difficulties of the translation process" (Batchelor 2018, 160).

Helen Maria Williams did not choose to translate *Paul et Virginie* "in order to escape awhile from overwhelming misery", but, on the contrary, to have the opportunity to comment on that misery, i.e. the troubled political situation in which she lived, making her text "embroiled in the politics of its own near future, providing, through the subtleties of translation, implicit commentary upon the politico-military violence ongoing between Britain and France" (Sigler 2012, 577).

5. Analysis of the translation

The reflexive translation studies approach adopted in this section will show how the target text is imbued with Williams' ideological and moral standpoints. It will also prove that the omission of long philosophical passages is not the only change to the source text by presenting examples of other omissions, additions, and alterations of meaning. As a matter of fact, Williams adds elements that, far from being void extensions, enrich the target text. The most obvious ones are the sonnets she declares to have inserted. Even though there were originally more (she notifies the reader in the preface that some of them were censured and never recovered), there are still eight sonnets in the English version dedicated to love, disappointment, simplicity, the strawberry, the curlew, the torrid zone, the calbassia-tree, the white bird of the tropic. Since these poems are about pastoral topics, it may be implied that the censured ones were overtly political. However, some references to the current status of France may be found in the remaining sonnets as well. For example, the "Sonnet to disappointment"[3] can be read also in relation to French society, as it could refer to Williams'

[3] "PALE Disappointment! at thy freezing name / Chill fears in ev'ry shiv'ring vein I prove; / My sinking pulse almost forgets to move, / And life almost forsakes my languid frame: / Yet thee, relentless nymph! no more I blame: / Why do my thoughts 'midst vain illusions rove? / Why gild the charms of friendship and of love / With the warm glow of fancy's purple flame? / When ruffling winds have some bright fane o'erthrown, / Which shone on painted clouds, or seem'd to shine, / Shall the fond gazer dream for him alone / Those clouds were stable, and at fate repine? / I feel, alas! the fault is all my own, / And, ah! the cruel punishment is mine!" (Williams 1819, 29). Henceforward, de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie* will be referred to as "ST" and Williams' *Paul and Virginia* as "TT".

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feelings about the deterioration of the Revolution ("the ruffling winds [which] have some bright fane o'erthrown" may be a reference to the Reign of Terror, which brought a cloud on the ideals she shared with the revolutionary movement), and about her imprisonment, since she concludes by exclaiming "I feel, alas! the fault is all my own, / And, ah! the cruel punishment is mine!" (TT 29). Furthermore, only the "Sonnet to Simplicity" is introduced by a single line, while the others are preceded by a (more or less) long introductory paragraph, which further expands the text.

Moreover, these are not the only additions to the target text; in the preface Williams does not mention that she 'took the liberty' of inserting words or sentences where she thought they would fit. Most of the times, it is only an adjective that aims at reinforcing a concept or an emotion; the most recurrent ones are "dear" and "beloved" added to "frère" (2 times, "dear brother" TT 36; 70), "mère" (1 time, "dear mother" TT 93) and "ami" (4 times, "dear friend" TT 101; 178-179; "beloved friend" TT 162; 163).

However, there are also times in which she interposes a whole sentence, such as in the case of "faiblesse" (ST 103) that becomes "misled by the weakness of a tender heart" (TT 7). These kinds of expansions enrich the text and make up for the only liberty Williams states to have taken with her author and believes fit to acknowledge, i.e. the omission of long philosophical reflections. Nonetheless, not every omission is a "philosophical reflection" that interrupts "the catastrophe of the drama" (Williams 1819, viii). Some of the most common ones are short inconsequential phrases, such as:

- "Devant toute la famille rassemblée" (ST 115);
- "Toute couverte de forêts" (ST 120);
- "Chacun y employait son caractère particulier" (ST 137);
- "Souvent, dès le lendemain" (ST 197);
- "Cet homme ne revint que le soir" (ST 200);
- "Pour entrer dans le port" (ST 231).

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Nonetheless, there are instances in which the omission of a word or adjective does not seem casual, as when she does not distinguish between "yolof" or "maroon" slaves, even though there are three occurrences in which she uses "maroon negroes" (TT 41; 42; 42), which makes it unclear why it is translated only in some passages. In addition, there is also a case in which she omits "négresse", when talking about Marie: "fut la Négresse Marie" (ST 168) is translated as "was Mary" (TT 102). Considering that at this point in the story we are fully acquainted with the character's relationship with Paul and Virginia's family and her role in the 'little society', and taking into account Helen Maria Williams' support for the rights of black people and the Société des amis des Noirs, it might be a clever way to demonstrate that race is not relevant nor necessary to underline.

Other short omissions that regard philosophical or moral remarks include:

- "Un mal n'arrive guère seul" (ST 147);
- "Quand le cœur d'une fille est pris, son amant n'a plus rien à lui demander" (ST 158);
- "Tout homme qui a eu beaucoup à se plaindre des hommes, cherche la solitude" (ST 180).

In particular, the last one introduces one "long philosophical reflection" (Williams 1819, viii) on solitude, which is the fifth of ten long passages omitted in the translation. Some of these may be, along with the sonnets, the censored parts of the translation. For example, the fourth passage (ST 142-143; 144-145) recalls how Paul and Virginia spent their happiest days, baking for the village, taking care of the poor, especially when sick children were involved – as Virginia says, "on ne fait son bonheur […] qu'en s'occupant de celui des autres"[4]. This passage ends with a brief critique of Europeans:

[4] "You can only be happy […] if you take care of other's happiness" [translation mine].

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> Vous autres Européens, dont l'esprit se remplit dès l'enfance de tant de préjugés contraires au bonheur, vous ne pouvez concevoir que la nature puisse donner tant de lumières et de plaisirs. Votre âme, circonscrite dans une petite sphère de connaissances humaines, atteint bientôt le terme de ses jouissances artificielles; mais la nature et le cœur sont inépuisables[5]. […]
>
> Après tout, qu'avaient besoin ces jeunes gens d'être riches et savants à notre manière? leurs besoins et leur ignorance ajoutaient encore à leur félicité. Il n'y avait point de jour qu'ils ne se communiquassent quelques secours ou quelques lumières: oui, des lumières; et quand il s'y serait mêlé quelques erreurs, l'homme pur n'en a point de dangereuses à craindre[6].

These words remind of Rousseau's philosophy, whose ideas are evoked also in the fifth long omitted passage (ST 180-181; 181-183) about solitude, where there is another denunciation of the European way of life, even though it is not explicitly named as such. The sixth passage (ST 186-200) is more overt in its critique, as it consists of excerpts from a dialogue in which Paul is comforted about Virginia's absence by another character. Since she is in France, the country becomes object of discussion, but the only reference to it found in the translation occurs when Paul exclaims that he will follow her, and he is warned that as an illegitimate child he could never have a great future in France (ST 186-187; TT 126). Thereafter, there are longer omissions in this conversation, which seems to imply that Helen Maria Williams reconstructs the dialogue by translating only few paragraphs. Nonetheless, it is fair to suppose that it is one of the censored parts of the translation because it contains a critique of Europe (in some points) and France (in particular) that was rooted in Rousseau's philosophy. France is depicted as a place full of depravity, only devoted to wealth, where virtue has lost its way and not even literature nor God can be of any help. The eighth omitted passage (ST 219-226) takes place during another dialogue between Paul and another character, who tries to give comfort to the former after Virginia's death. In this case, the

[5] "You Europeans, whose spirit is filled from childhood with so many prejudices contrary to happiness, cannot conceive that nature can give so many lights and pleasures. Your soul, confined in a small sphere of human knowledge, soon reaches the end of its artificial fulfilments; but nature and heart are infinite" [translation mine].

[6] "After all, why would these young people need to be rich and learned in our own way? their needs and their ignorance increase their bliss. There was no day that they did not give each other some help or some light: yes, some light; and when involved in some troubles, the pure man has no danger to fear" [translation mine].

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passages contain theological reflections which have likely been omitted by Williams herself. This applies also for the remaining ones; hence, among the ten long passages which are not found in the printed translation, three were probably censored (the fourth, fifth, and sixth) and the rest willingly omitted.

Furthermore, there are hundreds of changes in which the meaning of a word is altered or entire sentences are reformulated. Most of them can be ascribed to three main themes: 'morality and virtue', 'passions and feelings', 'places and people'. As for the latter, the first example regards the setting of the novel, Île de France for Bernardin de Saint-Pierre but Mauritius in the English translation:

> The actual island of Mauritius, called Île de France as Williams was translating, would become a British holding in 1810; the British government would restore the Dutch name Mauritius in 1814. It is significant, then, that Williams sets the story in "Mauritius" so-called, while Bernardin sets it on the "Île de France": she thus accomplishes at the literary level what the British government would achieve in actual fact some twenty years after (Sigler 2012, 576).

Other examples include:

- "Habitation" (ST 170; 201; 202; 211 215; 216) or terrain (ST 102; 106) > "plantation" (TT 5; 11; 105; 134; 136; 148; 153; 154);
- "Habitant(/s)" (ST 124; 206) > "planters" (TT 40; 141);
- "Créoles" (ST 142) > "natives" (TT 65);
- "Noirs" (ST 156) > "slaves" (TT 84);
- "Société" (ST 161) > "family circle" (TT 91);
- "En leur" (ST 126) > "on those good white people" (TT 43);
- "Favorable à la santé des Blancs" (ST 218) > "favourable to the Europeans" (TT 157);
- "Bâtard" (ST 162) > "natural child" (TT 93).

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Similarly to the omissions of "yolof" and "maroon", in these examples there is not a visible rationale for Williams opting for these translations instead of literal ones like 'inhabitants' or 'society'. The only consistent case occurs with the translation of "bâtard", which is recalled in the very next sentence with "mot de bâtard" (ST 162), translated as "this last expression" (TT 93).

An interesting sentence regarding 'morality and virtue' is pronounced by Paul, when he says: "Elle [Virginie] est tout pour moi, ma richesse, ma famille, ma naissance, tout mon bien" (ST 166). In her translation, "She is everything to me, riches, birth, family, my sole good!" (TT 99), Williams inverts the list order, as if going from the least to the most important element. Another example regarding virtue is "malheur qu'en m'écartant de la vertu" (ST 106), translated as "I have only known misfortune by wandering from virtue" (TT 12); here, the point of view shifts, since in the French text it was misfortune that made Virginia go astray from virtue, while in English she knows misfortune just because she wandered from virtue. Other similar instances are:

- "Fille sans vertu" (ST 165) > "unhappy, that I am" (TT 98);
- "Vertueuse" (ST 213) > "amiable" (TT 150);
- "Sage et malheureuse" (ST 104) > "virtuous and unhappy" (TT 8).

The literal translation of these terms does not seem to be dictated by the meaning of the words, but rather by whether Williams wants to underline the possession of those qualities.

Many are the examples in which 'passions and feelings' and their related concepts are altered and de-emphasised by the translator, among which:

- "Et un feu dévorant la saisit" (ST 149) > "her imagination again grew disordered" (TT 74);
- "Ton amour" (ST 158) > "your feelings" (TT 88);

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- "Passions" (ST 162) > "sensations" (TT 94);
- "Hors d'elle" (ST 167) > "half distracted" (TT 100);
- "Hors de lui" (ST 168; 197) > "distracted" (TT 102); "his heart throbbing with delight" (TT 130);
- "Mon âme est déchirée" (ST 167) > "My heart is broken" (TT 101).

Williams downplays emotions in order to adapt the passionate and metaphorical language of the source text to the English taste, as when she replaces the 'devouring fire' of the French version with 'disordered imagination'.

The examples presented in this section have shown that, far from being limited to what she discusses in the preface, the omissions, additions, and alterations of meaning in Williams' translation point to an interventionist approach that results in a form of rewriting through which her beliefs and ideas can be conveyed.

6. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that, whether for ideological reasons or not, Helen Maria Williams' changes to the source text of *Paul and Virginia* are not limited to the omission of several pages of "philosophical reflections" (Williams 1819, viii). By applying a reflexive approach and comparing her statements in the preface to her actual practice, it is possible to infer that she considered translation as a form of adaptation and rewriting. This is supported by the fact that while she does not consider the addition of the sonnets (and their introductory paragraphs) as a liberty, she has no hesitation in omitting several philosophical passages. Moreover, she never mentions her other changes, such as the many additions, the omissions which are not related with philosophy, and the many deliberate alterations of the meaning of a word or rephrasing of whole sentences.

Williams successfully manages to place herself at the centre of the political discourse of her time thanks to her 'marginal' translation practice and the 'liminal' space of the

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paratext. On the one hand, in the preface she retroactively explains why she chose that text, and how and where she translated it. On the other, the translation gave her the opportunity to express her political ideas in a context in which "[e]ven reading had its perils" (Williams 1819, vi). Finally, the joint analysis of the paratext and the translation allows us to thoroughly assess how Williams acquired agency through her interventionist approach.

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