

## Translating the Lieutenant Nun: (Re)reading and (Re)writing an Early Modern Text and Body

I'm very pleased to have been invited here this evening to talk to you all during LGBT History month and thank you Tam for inviting me. I'm going to talk about a seventeenth-century soldier known as the Lieutenant Nun and the memoir they wrote in a bid to prove that living in a gender which has been assigned to you has been a struggle for many people for centuries. While trans issues have recently witnessed an explosion of interest, people have long transgressed the rules of binary gender.

Looking at an early-modern text brings questions of whether 'trans' can be a 'trans-historical' phenomenon to the fore. William Spurlin (2017: 173) asks: 'are the very terms used for gender and sexual identities in one language necessarily reducible to equivalents in other languages, particularly when one works across historical periods [...]?'. One could make an argument that if trans is a trans-historical phenomenon there is no need to historicise early texts and I argue that early-modern texts can be labelled 'trans' (even though this category was not available to the writers themselves at the time); I see this as a new way of describing something that has existed for centuries but which has only recently been given a name. Furthermore, in my research, I look to Walter Benjamin's translation theory that translation is the source text's afterlife to argue that translations affect their sources and therefore a queer translation makes its source retrospectively queer. I do argue, however, that, while it has always been possible to be trans, what it means to be trans, and the consequences of publicly identifying as 'different', change over time. The early-modern text I examine here is trans but I also acknowledge that this is perhaps a different kind of 'trans' (that all kinds of 'trans' are in some ways individual) and this acknowledgement is queer: 'Attention to these very transgressions, these slippages of signification, these

differences, when we work across languages and cultures is, in effect, a comparatively queer praxis' (Spurlin 2017: 173).

For the purpose of this talk I take 'trans' to mean 'transgender or transsexual' and 'to be inclusive of a wide variety of identities' (GLAAD, 2014) and I define a 'transgender' person as 'a person whose identity does not conform unambiguously to conventions of male or female gender, but combines or moves between these' (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2017). So for me, transgender is one of many different types of trans identity.

I see Catalina de Erauso's 1646 memoir as the story of an early 'transgender warrior', even though 'transgender' didn't exist as a category in the seventeenth century. The memoir is written in Spanish and Erauso constantly shifts between using masculine and feminine gender markers – unlike English, Spanish requires a gender marker on nouns, adjectives and past participles. For example, if I were to say 'I am happy' this would be 'soy contenta' (the 'a' on the end indicating that I identify as a woman) anyone identifying as a man would say 'soy contento' – as Erauso is somewhere in between they use both.

Because of these switches I'm going to use epicene pronouns to refer to Erauso throughout this talk as I do in my thesis. In my thesis I look at 6 trans texts in total, they are all originally written in French, Spanish or English. I compare two early modern transgender memoirs (one of which is Erauso's), two intersex texts (from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries) and two agender texts (from the 20<sup>th</sup>). I compare the English translation of Erauso's text with the translation of the French memoir of the Chevalier d'Eon de Beaumont who switches in the same way as Erauso and who is often thought to be the 18<sup>th</sup> century's most famous transvestite (I don't agree with this assessment but that's for another talk!). Because I'm often referring to two people at once I don't use 'they' as an epicene pronoun but use 'ze'

(she/he) and 'hir' (him/her) instead. Because I'm only going to talk about Erauso here I'm going to use 'they' which is more common than 'ze' and 'hir'.

So, in this talk I am going to tell you a bit about Erauso's life and then explain how their memoir presents multiple problems for translation. I shall then consider how the memoir has already been translated before I move on to considering what you can do practically as a translator with a writer who shifts between masculine and feminine grammatical gender in English. I shall end with a demonstration of my own experimental translation of Erauso's text.

### Erauso's Life

Erauso was born in 1592 in the Basque region of Spain to a traditional family who were a clear reflection of the gender roles of seventeenth-century Spain; her brothers were all in the army, one of her sisters was married and her three unmarried sisters were sent to a convent. At the age of four Erauso too joined a convent. However, at the age of fifteen they escaped the convent and began dressing as a man. They took the name of Francisco de Loyola and spent some time in Northern Spain as both a page and a shopkeeper. After narrowly escaping being discovered by their father while they were working for a family friend, Erauso travelled to the Americas where they fought for the Spanish army. Throughout the memoir Erauso comes face to face with family members who don't recognise them. In the Americas they accidentally killed their own brother in a night-time duel, they stole, gambled, dodged numerous marriage proposals, duelled constantly, and escaped prison numerous times. After they were badly wounded, Erauso confessed to being 'biologically' female. They returned to Spain where they were lauded as the 'Lieutenant Nun' and they received a soldier's pension from the king and dispensation from the pope to continue

dressing as a man. They either wrote down their memoirs or dictated them to an amanuensis and returned to the New World where they lived out their days as a mule driver called Antonio de Erauso.

Despite the fact that Erauso chooses to spend the last 20 years of their life as a man, I argue that no decision should ever be made about whether they are male or female, masculine or feminine. I argue that they go through a constant process of becoming and unbecoming. I take this notion from Kathleen Winter's line in her intersex novel *Annabel*: 'People are rivers, always ready to move from one state of being into another. It is not fair, to treat people as if they are finished beings. Everyone is always becoming and unbecoming'.

The notions of becoming and unbecoming are also taken from Gilles Deleuze who explains his notion of becoming using Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (2010 [1865]); Alice, who takes potions to both grow and shrink, is 'not bigger and smaller at the same time. She is larger now; she was smaller before. But it is at the same moment that one becomes larger than one was and smaller than one becomes' (Deleuze 1990: 3). For Deleuze (1990: 3):

This is the simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present, becoming does not tolerate the separation or the distinction of before and after, or of past and future. It pertains to the essence of becoming to move and to pull in both directions at once: Alice does not grow without shrinking and vice versa.

Erauso is not feminine before and masculine after but both at the same time. For Deleuze there are no binary terms and I will argue that a conception of binary terms as different actualisations of one and the same duration could be applied to the notions of 'cisgender

‘and ‘transgender’ and of ‘writing’ and ‘translation’, all four made up of continuous acts or performances and therefore undecidable.

I label Erauso ‘undecidable’. I use the term ‘undecidable’ in preference to those of ‘ambiguous’ or ‘undefined’ because it situates my work within the fields of literary criticism and postmodernism, and specifically aligns it with the work of Jacques Derrida. The concept was first introduced by Kurt Gödel in 1931; it ‘proposed that in any formal system, that is, any system constructed by rules, there would be certain propositions that could neither be proved nor refuted by finite logical procedures, while still remaining meaningful. Such proposals were called “undecidables” (Froneman 2010: 294). According to Derrida, a reading of a text can only take place if undecidability is maintained, where there is an aporia, ‘where to make a choice is to cheat the text, cheat meaning’ (Dick and Wolfreys 2013: 300).

### Erauso’s text

Any text is undecidable but I argue that transgender texts are quintessentially undecidable texts. The main research question of my thesis asks how translation can deal with sexual and textual undecidability. All of the texts I look at are undecidable because they contain unreliable narrators, open endings and multiple intertexts.

For me, undecidability is an inherent characteristic of texts written by or about transgender people and translation is the best place to explore and represent this undecidability. It is best conveyed in translation because translation is not a simple transfer of meaning from one text to another where the end result is fixed. Instead, as Clive Scott has argued, ‘translation should be a process of continuous variation and becoming, which slips outside the mechanisms of choice, variant and intertext into those of metamorphosis’ (2014: 14). I use the translation of trans identity to investigate the idea that textual and sexual

undecidability, which is revealed and celebrated in the translation of trans identity, is actually present in all texts and bodies, whether 'trans' or not.

As I have already noted, Erauso's text is a transgender text and it's even more undecidable than most because the original doesn't exist.

Today there are three versions of Erauso's autobiography in existence, each supposedly transcribed from that original document. According to Michele Stepto, the original manuscript was kept by the Urbizu family of Seville for a century after it was written; in the eighteenth century this manuscript was copied by Cándido María Trigueros and then this version was again copied by Juan Bautista Muñoz in 1784 (1996: xlv). This transcription is held in the Madrid Royal Academy of History. The title of the manuscript in Madrid claims that it was 'written by herself on the 18th of September 1646 on returning from the Indies to Spain [...] arriving in Cadiz on the 18th November 1646' (1784: 206, my translation).

Rima de Vallbona (1992: 3) sees this as potential proof that it is not an exact copy of Erauso's original text because there is irrefutable evidence that they arrived in Cadiz in 1624. While this could have been a mistake in transcription it certainly adds to the feeling that what we have in front of us, in the Madrid manuscript, is significantly removed from Erauso's hand, perhaps so much so that we cannot really call it Erauso's memoir at all. While the text might be embellished in places and simply wrong in others, Erauso did exist, they did pen, dictate or inspire a written account of their life and according to Vallbona it is even said that Erauso themselves handed the manuscript to the editor Bernardino de Guzmán in 1625 (1992: 2). The three extant manuscripts are, however, all we have to go on.

Two copies of Erauso's text have been published based on the Madrid manuscript; the first, *La Historia de la Monja Alférez, doña Catalina de Erauso escrita por ella misma* [the story of

the lieutenant nun, Miss Catalina de Erauso written by herself], was transcribed by Joaquín María Ferrer in 1829. Ferrer claims to have transcribed his version from a text held by his friend Felipe Bauzá which itself was copied from Bautista Muñoz's manuscript (Ferrer 1829: xvii).

He explains that the copyist made mistakes with place names, character names and dates which he corrected by comparing authentic documents (Ferrer 1829: xxiii). While Ferrer seems to have thought that he was 'correcting' mistakes, others have thought he was compounding them: according to Manuel Serrano y Sans, Ferrer's edition of the text is 'without interest or literary value due to being plagued with anachronisms and absurd inventions' (in Vallbona 1992: 2, my translation). Ferrer's publication also departs from the manuscript by dividing the story into twenty-six chapters when the Madrid manuscript has only twenty.

The second version of Erauso's text based on the Madrid manuscript is entitled *Vida i sucesos de la monja alférez, Autobiografía atribuida a Doña Catalina de Erauso* [Life and Events of the Lieutenant Nun, Autobiography Attributed to Miss Catalina de Erauso] and my investigations in Madrid have confirmed that this text, edited by Rima de Vallbona, was faithfully transcribed from the manuscript currently held in the Madrid Royal Academy. That Vallbona's title claims that what we are reading is the autobiography 'attributed' to Erauso (in contrast to the title of the Madrid manuscript (and therefore Ferrer's text) which assures us that what is in front of us is 'written by [Erauso] herself'), will become more and more germane as my discussion of the text's authorship develops.

In the 1990s Pedro Rubio Merino discovered two more manuscripts purporting to be Erauso's autobiographies in the Santa Iglesia Cathedral of Seville. Rubio Merino published

both manuscripts together in a text entitled *La Monja Alférez: Doña Catalina de Erauso, Dos Manuscritos inéditos de su autobiografía conservados en el Archivo de la Santa Iglesia Catedral de Sevilla* [The Lieutenant Nun: Doña Catalina de Erauso, Two Unedited Manuscripts of her Autobiography Kept in the Archive of the Holy Cathedral of Seville]. The first Seville manuscript is entitled *Vida y sucesos de la Monja Alférez, Da Catharina de Erauso* [Life and Events of the Lieutenant Nun, Miss Catharina de Erauso]; the second is untitled. I shall henceforth refer to them as Seville M-1 and Seville M-2. Rubio Merino believes that the two manuscripts, which were found at different times and in different locations, were copied by the same amanuensis even though the variations are ‘notable and frequent’ (1995: 18, my translation). Having seen the Seville manuscripts myself I can attest to the fact that they were written by the same hand.

Although both Seville M-1 and M-2 vary from each other, the stories contained in each are similar which makes Rubio Merino think that a previous manuscript was the source for both copies (1995: 17). Rubio Merino assures his reader that ‘the edition which we make today of the two autobiographical manuscripts of the Lieutenant Nun, aim to maintain maximum fidelity to the original text’ (1995: 46, my translation). Though of course the term ‘original text’ must be used with some caution, as there is no ‘original’ text to be faithful to. What Rubio Merino’s publication is faithful to is the two manuscripts he discovered, not to Erauso’s ‘original text’, wherever that might be.

The complicated textual history of the memoir makes it difficult to come to any definitive conclusions about the text and aptly mirrors the difficulty of coming to definitive conclusions about the identity found within. And the fact that this identity is hard to define is caused by the various manuscripts: gender usage is not only inconsistent within the texts but is also

inconsistent between the texts. As you can see here the same sentence can be found in Ferrer, Vallbona and M2 and then another in Ferrer, Vallbona and M1. In the first instance, the sentence 'I was two years well-treated and well-dressed' is masculine in Ferrer and M2 but feminine in Vallbona. In the second instance the sentence 'I was entered in a book as a Roman citizen' is masculine in Ferrer and Vallbona but feminine in M1.

This makes translation that focuses on transgender identity tricky – which of these do you take as the 'source'? Or, as I shall discuss later, can you use all four? I did some quantitative analysis to find out just how much the texts differ. The majority of the texts have more masculine markers than feminine (Seville M2 cannot help us here as it's unfinished). Now, I don't want to use this to argue that Erauso was more masculine than feminine but to show that there is a definite switching. I think that a) the Anglophone reader deserves to be aware of these switches but also that b) Erauso deserves to have their transgender identity recognised and celebrated in a translation into English.

Erauso's memoir has been translated into English twice. First by James Fitzmaurice-Kelly in 1908 and then by mother and son duo Michele and Gabriel Stepto in 1996. Fitzmaurice-Kelly's translation is entitled 'The Nun Ensign' and was translated from Ferrer's less accurate version. The Steptos also used Ferrer as their source, despite Vallbona's being available in 1996. Their title is 'Lieutenant Nun: Memoir of a Basque Transvestite in the New World'. I think that labelling Erauso as a transvestite is unjustified, I argue that it is the switching between grammatical genders that makes Erauso transgender – indeed sometimes they use feminine grammatical gender while dressed as a man. The Steptos' translation, however, doesn't show any of these switches and doesn't convey the fact that Erauso's undecidable identity reaches the language they use.

## Erauso's gender

Showing undecidability in translation is important because Erauso used their writing as a unique outlet to express their shifting gender at a time when they had to outwardly present themselves as one sex or another and appear to make a definitive choice.

Erauso presented themselves in a manner which contradicted their biological makeup and this made them unusual: while Erauso was accepted and allowed to live as a man (an unusual outcome in a time when usurping a male role could be punished with death), they were seen by their contemporaries as a curious spectacle. After Erauso had been discovered to be a woman they could not walk the streets for people wanting to see them, they say: 'We entered Lima after nightfall, but nonetheless there were more people than we could cope with, all curious to see the Lieutenant Nun' (Erauso 1992, 113, my translation).

It is important to historicise trans identity and it is possible to assess the seventeenth-century contexts in which Erauso was writing but it is not easy to say how Erauso would have seen their gender. Were masculinity and femininity seen as binary opposites or were they considered to be on a spectrum in early-modern Spain? My extensive research shows that the jury is still out on this one. What I take from my research into early-modern gender conceptualisations is the fact that Erauso was transgressive and that's why their switches must be included in any translation. I don't suggest that a 21<sup>st</sup>-century reader must know how gender was seen in Erauso's time to truly understand their transgression. As Marjorie Garber (1996: xxii) states, 'we read from where we are, and from our own cultural and historical position'. We must accept 'the impossibility of fully reconstructing and reentering the culture of the [seventeenth] century, of leaving behind one's own situation' (Greenblatt 2005: 5). The reader's modern knowledge must be taken into consideration and we must

ask: 'How do we work with translating terms for naming genders and sexualities in comparing texts and cultures of the past which may not be translatable to modern understandings of gender or to contemporary understandings of gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer difference?' (Spurlin 2014: 205).

I argue that the past is translatable to modern understandings if we see the translation of very old source texts as a rewriting of the past; indeed, this helps us to see that all translation, no matter how old the source, is a rewriting of the past: the source text is not a historical artefact but a living body of words. These words can be re-written but not overwritten. A re-translation of Erauso's texts can counter the fossilization of seventeenth-century gender identifications but can also be a locus of trans engagement today by allowing past conceptualizations of gender to engage with modern ones. Through translation, the source text can be 'reinserted into a vivid here and now as an active intrusion' (Scott 2014: 29). The translator is an intruder on the source text, an 'inventive interventionist' who can rewrite an original from any perspective they choose (Boase-Beier and Holman 1998: 14). Is it, however, going too far to rewrite a text, written in a time when 'transgender' and 'queer' did not exist as terms, from a transgender perspective, or with a queer agenda? Sherry Simon asks, 'what would be the result of a translation which blatantly redirected the intention of the original text, consciously contravening its intentions?' (1996: 15). She goes on to state that 'feminist translation implies extending and developing the intention of the original text, not deforming it' (ibid.: 16). However, translation is perhaps always a 'deforming' of the original text as it can never be wholly 'faithful' to it and translation is a political act, a manipulation and we can appropriate texts through translation for political agendas. A translation with a queer agenda is not about 'faithfully' portraying the source text but about using that text, appropriating its content, to influence how people see gender

today. In order to use Erauso to shine a light upon gender today it is necessary to look more closely at their own gender identifications in their writing and how they used their writing as part of their identification.

### Translation

As you can see from this example, the Steptos don't show the fact that on page 9 Erauso uses masculine gender in 'tratado' and 'vestido' and in this example on page 83 Erauso uses feminine gender in 'cogida' and 'confusa'.

In the introduction to her translation Michele Stepto says that:

'There are several challenges facing the translator who would render Catalina's memoir in English. One, at least, is insurmountable – there is no English equivalent for the gender inflections of the Spanish adjective, which make a primary, grammatical notation of gender with practically every sentence, thus setting up a drumbeat of sexual self-identification that reverberates from one end of the text to the other. The fact that Catalina almost invariably uses masculine endings to describe herself is lost in English, as are those rare moments when she chooses a feminine ending' (1996: xlvi).

Stepto is clearly aware of how important this grammatical use of gender is and yet she marks it down as an inevitable loss in translation into English. She then, however, goes on to say that 'it has always seemed to us that the best translations were those that hewed most closely to the original text [...]. For this reason, nothing has been added here, nothing left out' (1996: xlvi). Well I think that something has been left out, and even she admits that something has been left out, and it's something pretty big too!

Translation is often discussed in terms of loss because people get stuck on the idea that the translation must be a replica of the source. Translation always involves loss of some sort because it can never be a replica but it also always involves gains elsewhere. It is always something creative and it can never portray the 'true' meaning of the source text because the source text itself has no 'true' meaning. But having said that all translation involves loss, I don't believe that Erasmo's switches do have to be lost.

In order to keep Erasmo's use of grammatical gender the translator needs to be creative.

Translation as a creative act entails more than a transfer of meaning into another language: 'the translated text no longer forms a dependency on the original text, but actually transforms it, subverting radically the binary between original and copy. This [...] calls attention to the performativity of translation' (Spurlin 2014: 206). So the performativity of both gender and translation lead us to reconsider the idea of an 'original' text or body. For Judith Butler (2004a: 127), gender is 'a kind of imitation for which there is no original; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself'. There is no original way to be a woman or a man. The trans person reveals that gender is a product of previous acts which it needs to stay alive. This idea can be directly linked to translation and to Benjamin's (2012 [1924]: 76) ideas on the afterlife of translation: that the translation continues the life of the source text. For Clive Scott, the purpose of translation is not to clarify a difficult foreign text for a new reader but to add to the source text's journey through time and that is why translation should be multiple. The source text is the 'avant-texte' and 'translation is not an act of preservation (of a definitive text) nor an act of recall (of a text that inevitably belongs to the past), but an act of forward propulsion and of reimagination' (Scott 2014: 52). It is through acts of translation

that the 'original' text remains available, but, the idea of the original is a myth; translation is not a copy of an original but a copy of a text which is also copied from former texts because all authors are influenced by other authors. For example, Erauso was influenced by Picaresque texts, religious autobiographies and soldier's journals.

So in order to be creative, and to see my translation as a way of propelling Erauso's text into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I designed a font using the symbols of Mars and Venus which was then created for me by a professional typographer. This allows me to easily show when a word is feminine or masculine in the original.

It's important for the reader to see how Erauso plays with standardised grammar, how they are being transgressive but translating transgender identity has to be about more than how to translate Spanish words that end in either an 'o' (masculine) or an 'a' (feminine). I also wanted to find an extra-linguistic translation process that attempted to show not only Erauso's multiple source texts but also to highlight the multiplicity of every text and body. In order to show that every body is in a constant process of becoming and unbecoming, I think it's helpful to look to the graft, the idea of a layering of identity because Erauso's feminine identity is never entirely forgotten. This echoes the way that every text is also in this process – made up of layers of multiple other texts, especially in translation as the source text is always there, haunting beneath the surface.

### The Palimpsest

Jacques Derrida claims that 'to write means to graft. It is the same word'. If we take 'graft' here to mean 'attach layers' we can directly compare this to how Jean Bobby Noble sees 'transed bodies as grafted where one materialization is haunted by the other, as opposed to crossing or exiting'. With the graft we can eliminate ideas of an 'original' text or gender as

Derrida says: 'each grafted text continues to radiate back toward the site of its removal, transforming that, too, as it affects the new territory'. The 'first' text or body is not left behind but transformed by the new text or body, subsumed but not forgotten. Indeed, in this process of becoming the 'first' text is shown to have never really been 'first' at all.

The graft is exemplified by the palimpsest which also demonstrates a fluidity of gender and genre. This is important because Erauso indicates in their memoir that they experienced an oscillation between the masculine and the feminine and there is an oscillation between source text and translation that goes both ways because the source text influences the translation but the translation also modifies the source text, as seen in Benjamin's theory of the 'afterlife' of the text and as I mentioned earlier with the idea of a queer translation making its source queer.

Palimpsests were created as early as Egyptian times when a shortage of paper was dealt with by erasing text from used parchment or papyrus to make room for new texts. They were used on a domestic scale by the ancient Greeks and the Romans and the practice came to an end in the fifteenth century with the increased availability of paper (Dillon 2007: 13). The erasures were often imperfect and the old text would reappear centuries later underneath the new text. The old text could be mathematical and the new religious as with the Archimedes Palimpsest: in the thirteenth century a tenth-century manuscript written by Archimedes was erased to make room for a book of orthodox Christian prayers. Both texts are now visible (see Dillon 2007 and Easton and Noel 2010).

The Archimedes palimpsest is a demonstration of how the palimpsest is 'an involuted phenomenon where otherwise unrelated texts are involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupting and inhabiting each other' (Dillon 2007: 4). The texts we are

interested in here – the Spanish source texts, the English translation and their intertexts –are not unrelated however. The texts underneath influence and inspire the text on the surface and so they are even more entangled – one cannot exist without the other. This idea of purposefully flagging up the intertextual nature of the source text in a translation works well with these particular texts because any translation carried out today would have to be a retranslation: ‘Because retranslations are designed to challenge a previous version of the source text, they are likely to construct a more dense and complex intertextuality so as to signify and call attention to their competing interpretation’ (Venuti 2013: 104).

Any translation of Erauso’s text has to be a retranslation of a memoir in which ‘the writing and rewriting of the self over a period of time through constant revisions [...] confounds the notion that there is one definitive or fixed version’ (Anderson 2011: 8). Erauso may not have written all the versions of their autobiography but their text has been constantly revised – there is no definitive, ‘original’ version. Multivocality is highlighted in the palimpsest, as Sarah Dillon says: ‘the texts which inhabit the palimpsest’s surface [...] cannot be hierarchically ordered, or dissociated; they are not separate predicates; they are not the essential attributes of the palimpsest’ (Dillon 2007: 43). Many people talk about gender as a core or an essence and the palimpsest could help to dispel notions of the ‘essentiality’ of gender, or highlight the idea that any essence is complex and undecidable.

Gender is not binary but acknowledging this does not preclude the idea that somebody ‘knows’ they are a woman even if they were assigned the male sex at birth. It is the revelation that gender does not follow from sex, that it is not determined by genitals which makes it possible for these seemingly incompatible positions to co-exist.

For Butler (2014), an identity politics is necessary because ‘sometimes we do need a language that refers to a basic, fundamental, enduring, and necessary dimension of who we are’. Her new ideas suggest that if somebody wants to see their gender as essential, this would not be ‘wrong’ but neither would it be ‘wrong’ to conceive of one’s gender as fluid.

On this point I follow Butler’s 2014 proclamation:

No matter whether one feels one’s gendered and sexed reality to be firmly fixed or less so, every person should have the right to determine the legal and linguistic terms of their embodied lives. So whether one wants to be free to live out a ‘hard-wired’ sense of sex or a more fluid sense of gender is less important than the right to be free to live it out, without discrimination, harassment, injury, pathologization or criminalization – and with full institutional and community support.

This view is important in a world where trans people experience their identities in very varied ways. What I wish to take from Butler’s views on trans identity is that these different, yet equally valid, positions on sex and gender can be explored through trans literature and the representation of transness in writing. Furthermore, the notion of a ‘core’, of originality, of passing and of ‘interpreting’ meaning (of making assumptions based on what we ‘see’, be that a body or a text) are all notions that concern translation scholars. Gender is stable yet fluid, dichotomous yet multiple, conservative yet radical and, because of these contradictions, is queer. Translation is all of these things too and it is the juxtaposition of trans embodiment and translation that helps us to see that translation is fluid, multiple, radical and queer.

It is the palimpsest that can exemplify how the body and the text can be so undecidable.

According to Sarah Dillon, the palimpsest is like a hymen, it holds the two texts involved both

together and apart. If we use the Archimedes palimpsest as an example, the mathematical text on the bottom is a feminine geno-text and the religious text written on the top is a masculine pheno-text. These are held together by the membrane of the palimpsest itself. In a translation the source text is the feminine geno-text and the translation is the masculine pheno-text. Like Erauso, the translation is therefore actually both masculine and feminine. The texts now 'exist in a hymenic fusion or marriage which at the same time preserves their separate identities and inscribes difference within the heart of the identity of the palimpsest. The vellum of the palimpsest thus represents the 'inter' – the between of the texts – a between that is no longer that of difference, but of identity, an identity redefined as, and traversed by, difference' (Dillon 2007: 97).

I see trans experience as the 'between of bodies', a between that is characterised by queer notions of identity as unstable. According to Dillon, the palimpsest has a role in the queering of textuality, writing, reading and identity because it is 'a figure for the poststructuralist notion of the *spectralized* subject, "queer" and "the palimpsest" can be understood as structurally comparable figures for the essential involutedness of identity, be it sexual, gender or racial'. Identity is a complex thing and the confusion produced by the palimpsest demonstrates this.

While the confusion of the palimpsest is perfect for thinking through ideas of identity as involuted and writing as made up of multiple voices, a true palimpsest based on Erauso's work might not find a publisher!

So the question is: how does one create a readable palimpsestuous translation?

In order to create a readable experimental translation I have made my own palimpsest which involves layers of text made from acetate paper. My translation is entitled *The Life*

*and Adventures of Catalina de Erauso: 'The Lieutenant Nun'* incorporating the titles given to the work by Bautista Muñoz and Ferrer, Vallbona and the Steptos.

The first layer is Vallbona's 'supposedly' seventeenth-century reading (supposedly, on the basis that the Madrid manuscript was actually transcribed in the eighteenth century). The second layer is Ferrer's nineteenth-century transcription. The third layer is made up of my translation notes distinguished by being in red font and the fourth layer is my twenty-first-century translation; each 'page' of my translation therefore actually comprises four pages altogether. Because Ferrer and Vallbona's versions of the story are so similar it is possible to have each page of the source texts and the translation map roughly on top of each other by using different fonts and font sizes. For example, each page of the first four-page section ends in Erauso mentioning their profession as a nun: 'i entonces se trató de profesión' (Vallbona), 'y entonces se trató de mi profesión' (Ferrer), 'and then I was meant to become a nun!' (my translation). There is an extra, invisible, layer to the translation as well because the ultimate layer of any text always belongs to the reader and the text and the trans identity are written anew with every reading.

My research aims to show that all bodies and all texts are in some ways undecidable – the job of the translator isn't to uncover the essential meaning in the source text and replicate it in another language because there is no essential meaning to any text. And no body has an essential gender core either.

I argue that no text or body is ever finished and texts and bodies are both haunted by the ghosts of former and future texts and bodies. To represent this in translation I have looked at the palimpsest. Translation is a great medium through which to look at sexual and textual undecidability because it shows that the source text and the body are never finished, both

are being constantly reread and rewritten and a source text that was written 400 years ago is still teaching us about what it means and has meant to be trans.