

Translating Women's Silences¹

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Anita Desai's latest story collection, *The Artist of Disappearance*, includes a novella titled "Translator, Translated." In it, a naïve young woman begs a former classmate, who now runs a publishing house, to give her the chance to render a beloved Oriya author into English: "She is such a great writer and no one here even knows her name. It is very sad but I am sure if you publish a translation of her work, she will become as well-known as – as – Simone de Beauvoir!" (Desai 2011, 58). It is no accident that the great feminist theorist is referenced here; gender and translation have long been closely linked. Translation makes it possible for us finally to see the previously invisible, hear the previously unheard, countering at least some of the effects of linguistic, cultural and gendered obscurity, but these acts of transmission or transcreation are often problematic. Important questions need to be addressed: who chooses what gets translated? Into which languages? From which languages and cultures? Who dares speak for whom? What is my own complicity?

This paper will briefly discuss some very different examples of my work in the area of "women in translation", such as helping bring to light previously unknown women's voices from India's Orissa province, suggesting non-existing readings that (if only they did exist) might have allowed women's silence to be broken in inspiring ways, and bearing witness to the great range of responses to Classical Japanese women's writing through exploration of its highly complex Western translation history.

¹ An earlier version of this article was first presented as the keynote lecture for the St. Jerome's Day Conference, September 30, 2014, at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.