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TRANSLATION AS A KEY TO CANADIAN LITERATURE

LIKE ALL NEW WORLDS, Canada came into existence by means of translation procedures.[1] This is plainly evidenced in the *Relations* of that contemporary of François Rabelais, Jacques Cartier, whose sober description of the St. Lawrence river and coastal shores of the Maritime provinces mediated two modes of perception. In his effort to find equivalences,[2] he noted: "they cal a Hatchet in their tog *Cochi* and a knife *Bacon*: we named it *The Bay of Heate*."[3] Cartier assisted in creating a fiction of the new world, and, as a consequence, permitted the translation within the guise of non-fiction, to enter the polysystem of old-world writing. Thus the Canadian Book of Genesis is at once part of two worlds, entering a polysystem in a moment of intense activity, and initiating another at a zero grade. It carries, then, a special and ambiguous significance: it is at once an example of translation as a primary and secondary activity.[4]

As if demonstration were needed, no translated work enters an unprepared scene, and in the instance of Cartier, his text unknowingly prepared a scene which poses one of the more curious problems in translation studies. Canada shares with many other countries the dubious fate of being officially bilingual. This means that it has at its disposal all the necessary bureaucracy to ensure that all governments are at the disposal of those whose first language is either French or English. One would think, then, that the translation of literary texts would be a vigorous activity in Canada, but the facts are clearly otherwise. It has been argued that during two sample years, 1972 and 1973, 27 and 45 literary translations were produced, as compared to 504 and 432 in Belgium and 949 and 886 in Denmark.[5] To put these statistics into perspective, it should be borne in mind that the populations of Belgium and Denmark are approximately ten million and five million, while Canada has a population of some twenty-five million. One might possibly deduce from these statistics that bilingualism does not necessarily favour translation. What they reflect in Canada, at least, is the mutual disinterest that both language groups generally share for each other's literature. Beginning with Pierre-Joseph Olivier Chauveneau as long ago as 1876, the situation that obtains between the two cultures has been felicitously compared to the double staircase in the Château de Chambord in which two people can spiral around each forever and never meet.[6]

It has been suggested that the role of translation is to bridge the gap that such a metaphor contains.[7] A perusal of Philip Stratford's somewhat dated *Bibliography of Canadian Books in Translation* (1977) makes it clear that, while the situation may have improved since 1960, the bridge is far from finished. First of all, the majority of translations are

from French into English. Second, the majority of these are non-fiction. Of the literary genres, fiction, of course, preponderates, but even this fact requires contextualisation:

> Among the nineteen [English] novelists translated from 1800 to 1970 (of whom ten could be said to be all important), three giants stand out: Arthur Hailey, Malcolm Lowry and Mazo de la Roche. Titles by these three account for over half the English-Canadian novels translated. All these works were published in Paris or Geneva.[8]

Leaving aside the fact that Lowry's status as a Canadian writer may be disputed, Stratford's observation takes us to the core of the Canadian cultural problem. Canada appears to have no centre: not only Paris, but also London and New York may be counted among its cultural foci. For example, it was not until 1961 that any of Gabrielle Roy's novels were translated and published in Canada. Again, taking 1960 as a turning-point, Stratford notes that prior to that time "a total of 21 French-Canadian titles were translated and published in Britain and the United States, as opposed to 49 published in Canada; for the same period 12 English-Canadian titles were published in France, 11 in Quebec."[9]

It might be remarked that the attitude of Québec toward the rest of Canada has traditionally been diffident at best, and that greater interest has been shown in British and American literature. Yet even their literatures have not been translated in Québec, and the reader without English is subject to both market and publishers' choices.[10] For the most part, however, in both French and English Canada, decisions about literary translations are made by publishers, and, as Larry Shouldice has demonstrated, most of these decisions are politically dictated.[11] Finally, it should be remembered that the quantum change in the number of titles translated since 1960 is a result of support of the Canada Council which continues to operate at "arm's length" from the federal government.

The significance of these facts depends primarily upon how they bear upon even the simplest communications model. All transactions between the two polysystems represented by the French and English literatures of Canada are mediated by publishers and the financial support available to them: their decisions are mediated by their perceptions of the market. While it may be said that the English reader is fairly well served, it should be remarked that this depends upon the genre and the press-run. Nonfiction dominates the market, as I have said, followed by the novel, most of the latter appearing in the New Canadian Library series of McClelland and Stewart. French-Canadian theatre is very well represented in English Canada and, because of its innovative character, it may claim to be a primary activity. Poetry in a more marginal measure is also of a primary character, but most of it is produced by small presses with a limited run. Non-fiction also predominates in Québec. By far the majority of French translations of the novel appear in the Collection des Deux Solitudes of Le Cercle du Livre de France in Montréal. English-Canadian drama is practically non-existent, nor is the interest in poetry of a high order. Thus the presence of literary translation from English Canada in Québec cannot be said to reach beyond a secondary level.[12] If it is true that the exchange of translation in

Canada is unsystematic and sporadic at best, it does not follow that the translator's function and his/her bearing upon the two polysystems is not under certain constraints. And these are constraints, I wish to add, that underscore and affect the lexical and semantic constraints at work in translation of any kind. Thus the shift in emphasis that has occurred in translation studies away from the source text and towards the target text in the last decade is of significant theoretical value. If nothing else, it situates translations according to the system within which they are operative and thus restores them to the position they continually seek within the general complexity of literary communication.[13] Thus, judgement is dependent upon the constraints within which the translator works, and, as I have suggested, the translator frequently is not the free agent one might imagine him/her to be.

The situation that obtains in Canada, furthermore, is useful for scrutiny within the context of world literatures, if for no other reason than its constraints are not the same as those that exist between sovereign nations. In fact, exchange by way of literary translation in Canada is governed by three general responses: affirmative, negative, and hesitant. The latter two dominate in Québec, and thus they constitute an interference in the smooth relation between the two polysystems. We are not yet, however, in a position to make these generalisations more precise, given the current state of translation studies in Canada. To clarify my point, I wish, nevertheless, to raise three examples of the situation and to indicate through them the relation of the translator to the communication system within which he/she operates.

The negative attitude toward translation into French-Canadian is not something that can be ignored, but its pragmatic analysis can only be made indirectly.[14] One answer to this dilemma has been proposed by Jacques Brault in what he calls a "non-traduction." The point of his proposal is to leave the source languages somehow untouched by the betrayal of translation. Thus he would avoid the sinister implications of George Steiner's "hermeneutic motion" that "invades, extracts, and brings home."[15] But can the relation of power that translation generates be entirely avoided? Brault's answer is a delicate combination of Hegel and Harold Bloom:

> Nontraduire, c'est la fidélité qui aspire à l'infidélité. Un texte nontraduit reste trouble (troublé/troublant), il n'arrive pas à départager sa dépendance et son indépendance. Son projet (orienté vers la lecture) se rattache à son trajet (d'écriture); son origine oriente ses choix. Mais, ceux-ci, à leur tour, l'éloignent de son commencement. Un sens-fils cherche à tuer le sens-père pour enfin laisser être la relation père-fils comme tierce réalité, la *seule* désormais viable.[16]

The new text is what he calls an "inter-texte."[17] The object is to avoid the categorical binarism of translation theory: "*Je*," as he asserts, overcoming in his turn a *sens-père*, "ne serait plus un autre."[18]

I have drawn these statements from an anthology of translations made by Brault himself. As a translation, it raises, naturally, a number of useful questions. It consists of a selection from four poets, two American and two Canadian. The only sources given are general titles in an epilogue, forcing the reader to see them as oriented toward an inter-text, if not the target language. Despite the fact, however, that one can understand the ideological basis for Brault's position, the results are perhaps closer to the source language than the glossing would wish us to believe. As an example, let us consider Margaret Atwood's "Axiom":

	Axiome:
Axiom: you are a sea.	tu es océan
Your eye-	tes pau-
lids curve over chaos	pières s'incurvent sur chaos
My hands	
where they touch you, create	mes mains là
small inhabited islands	où elles te touchent
	parsèment
	de petites îles habitées…
Soon you will be	
all earth: a known	bientôt tu seras
land, a country	terre entièrement
	: une contrée
	connue un pays[19]

The major variations employed are not semantic but grammatical. Brault avoids periods and commas, and slightly redesigns the poem on the page to modify certain emphases. Thus "là" in the second stanza focalizes the object, "parsèment" connotes a more continuous activity than "create," and the happy alliterature of "contrée/connue" underscores the act of contact. These infidelities, however, are insufficient to constitute a practice that supports the theory. But the theory is, nevertheless, significant for it serves as a strategy to avert the possible interference of the target polysystem.

An opposing view has been independently developed by D.G. Jones, for many years active in the editing of *Ellipse*, a periodical devoted to mutual translation of English and French poetry. For Jones, the act of translation is a response to the Other by which it is called into existence. As he observes, "we translate so that we may exist, so that our partial identity may be recognized and reinforced in each other's eyes."[20] Nor does he hesitate to assume the full responsibilities of Steiner's "hermeneutic motion" which would end in a state of "effective communion."[21] The existential nationalism implicit in Jones's view has, of course, its dangers not shared by his francophone compatriots, but I leave that to one side in order to consider in what respect his practice would match his ideology. According to Kathy Mezei, Jones's strategy is "to adhere to the original syntax and

seek semantic equivalence, but always to keep his ear tuned to the rhythm and resonance of the line in English; this is his communion."[22] Communion in practice, then, appears less political than in theory: it operates primarily on the level of language.

What is more difficult to measure is the impact that the collection Mezei discusses, *The Terror of the Snows*, has had upon English-Canadian poetry. It was published by an American press and, to my knowledge, has not been widely circulated in Canada. Moreover, as the editor of the series announces with unwitting irony, these poems by the Québec poet Paul-Marie Lapointe are being brought "to the attention of American and English readers,"[23] and nowhere in his foreword is either Canada or Québec mentioned. That statement certainly modifies any sense one might have of communion other than what exists generally in the evocation of language. It is precisely at that point, however, that the fundamentally existential sense of Jones's position manifests itself: communion is a kind of dissolution into the Other by means of two interacting language systems. Translation is "the freedom to escape from our particular, limited, separate identities."[24] Such a statement would go far in English Canada to explain anglophone interest in Québec, as well as its desire to rediscover itself in the other culture.

This would appear to be a curious situation in which two translators espouse opposing positions and yet translate in a surprisingly similar fashion. As Gideon Toury has argued, however, such positions possess a "pre-systemic" value and serve an important function in the exchange between the two polysystems.[25] In fact, one might say that for Brault such statements, convoluted and careful as they are, are an almost necessary attribute of the translated text itself. Without them, the process of reception could have been of a different order. Jones's statements, by contrast, serve as an effective way of responding to the frequently asked question, "What does Québec want?" by suggesting how Québec, in fact, is something that the rest of Canada needs and, thus, should want. In either case, then, these statements are unquestionably significant as a part of the translation process. They are, to return to an earlier metaphor, the infrastructure of the bridge.[26]

Although my choice of Brault and Jones, both poets and translators, may seem generically limited, their attitudes may be taken as generally representative. Exchange between the literatures appears to require a certain kind of commentary. Sometimes such pre-systemic statements became, as David Hayne has demonstrated, more evident in the translated text itself. Thus Philippe Le May's nineteenth-century translation of William Kirby's *The Golden Dog* was constantly adjusted to fit what Le May took to be the requirements of his audience. But this was Le May's manner, and when he translated Longfellow's *Évangeline*, he remarked: "Je n'ai jamais prétendu faire une traduction littérale. J'ai un peu suivi mon caprice. Parfois j'ai ajouté, j'ai retranché, parfois; mais plutôt dans les paroles que dans les idées..."[27] If we consider carefully, however, the situation as I have described it, it would be incorrect to apply judgements of an a *priori* character to Le May's work. Historical context and the ideologies it engenders could very well have decried the literal rendering as neither adequate nor acceptable.[28] It is not, I

should add, the desiderata of prescriptive theory which determines the success with which a translated text enters a target language. And Le May was a success.

I do not wish to conclude upon the exception of one success story. In fact, a summary of my examination of literary exchange by means of translation in Canada is more mixed. I would enumerate the main points as follows:

1. Since 1960, the serious rise in translation activity may be attributed to the Canada Council;
2. The majority of publishers' decisions on texts to be translated are made more for political reasons than for financial reasons;[29]
3. The preponderance of translations is weighed more toward English than French;
4. A fair percentage of texts continue to be published outside Canada, making it difficult to measure internal impact;
5. Differences in the ideologies of the two major polysystems provide a basis for necessary pre-systemic statements;
6. These same differences suggest that, except in rare instances, the majority of literary translation in Canada is a secondary activity of the respective polysystems.

Clearly, much work remains to be done, particularly on translations made prior to 1960. Indeed, the role of pre-systemic statements has yet to be analysed in the way they deserve, namely, as part of the reception strategy of the target culture. Finally, the space that I could not give to the presence of translation from other languages must be developed in order that the full representation of translation in Canada may be elaborated.

Notes

? The author wishes to express his gratitude to José Lambert for the various strategies employed in this paper.

1. For translation and other new worlds, see Tzvetan Todorov, *La conquête de l'Amérique: La question de l'autre* (Paris, Seuil, 1982).
2. On equivalence, see Raymond van den Broeck, "The Concept of Equivalence in Translation Theory: Some Critical Reflections," in *Literature and Translation: New Perspectives in Literary Studies*, eds. J.S. Holmes, José Lambert and R. van den Broeck (Leuven, Acco, 1978), p. 29-47.
3. The original French version of this text remained undiscovered until 1867, the year of Canada's confederation. I cite the version by John Florio that has endured the longest: *Two Navigations to New France* (1580; rpt. Amsterdam, Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1975), p. 18.
4. Cf. Itamar Even-Zohar, "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem," *Literature and Translation*, p. 117-27.
5. These statistics are drawn from Ray Ellenwood, "Some Actualities of Canadian Literary Translation," *Translation in Canadian Literature*, ed Camille La Bossière

(Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, 1983), p. 61. Cf. Philip Stratford, *Bibliography of Canadian Books in Translation: French to English and English to French/Bibliographie de livres canadiens traduits de l'anglais au français et du français à l'anglais*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa, Humanities Research Council of Canada/Conseil canadien de recherche sur les humanités, 1977), p. ii.

6. Cf. David M. Hayne, "Comparative Canadian Literature: Past History, Present State, Future Needs," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue canadienne de littérature comparée*, III. 2 (Spring 1976), p. 116. For a discussion of other metaphors, see E.D. Blodgett, "The Canadian Literatures as a Literary Problem," *Configuration: Essays in the Canadian Literatures* (Downsview, Ont., ECW Press, 1982), p. 13-38.
7. Kathy Mezei, "A Bridge of Sorts: The Translation of Quebec Literature into English," *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 15, 1985, p. 201-26.
8. Stratford, p. iv.
9. Stratford, p. 2, note 3. For more current statistics, see "Traduction littéraire et 'image' de la littérature au Canada et au Québec," *Translation in Canadian Literature*, p. 47-60.
10. Cf. Stratford, p. iv.
11. "On the Politics of Literary Translation in Canada," *Translation in Canadian Literature*, p. 73-82. For another view of the political context in general, see François Péraldi, "Fonction politique de l'opération traduisante," in *Translation and Interpretation/Traduction et Interprétariat*, ed. Michael S. Batts (Vancouver, CAUTG, 1975), p. 53-60.
12. See Giguère's conclusions, *Translation in Canadian Literature*, p. 58-60.
13. Cf. Anton Popovic, *Dictionary for the Analysis of Literary Translation* (Edmonton, The University of Alberta, Department of Comparative Literature, n.d.).
14. See Ben-Z. Shek, "Quelques réflexions sur la traduction dans le contexte socio-culturel canado-québécois," *Ellipse*, no. 21, 1977, p. 11-17.
15. George Steiner, *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York/London, Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 298.
16. Jacques Brault, *Poèmes des quatre côtés* (Chambly, Éditions du Noroît, 1975), p. 34.
17. Brault, p. 69.
18. Brault, p. 70.
19. Margaret Atwood, *Selected Poems* (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 78. Brault, p. 55.
20. D.G. Jones, "Grounds for Translation," *Ellipse*, no. 21, 1977, p. 84.
21. Jones, p. 84.
22. Kathy Mezei, "The Scales of Translation: The English-Canadian Poet as Literal Translator," *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa/University of Ottawa Quarterly*, 54, 2, April/June 1984, p. 81.

23. Paul-Marie Lapointe, *The Terror of the Snows: Selected Poems*, trans. D.G. Jones (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsbourgh Press, 1976), p. ix.
24. Jones, p. 84. I treat the implications of Jones's and Brault's positions at greater length in "How Do You Say Gabrielle Roy?" *Translation in Canadian Literature*, p. 13-34.
25. Gideon Toury, "The Nature and Role of Norms in literary Translation," *Literature and Translation*, p. 92.
26. Cf. Shouldice, *Translation in Canadian Literature*, p. 75, who cites Sheila Fishman's "Translator's Note" in Roch Carrier, *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* (Toronto, Anansi, 1970), p. 3. The metaphor of the bridge that governs Mezei's article, "A Bridge of Sorts" (note 7 supra), may be found in *The Poetry of French Canada in Translation*, ed. John Glassco (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1970), p. xxii; G.V. Downes, *When We Lie Together* (Vancouver, Klanak, 1973), p. 11; and a pre-systemic statement of some length is made in the Preface, *Poems of French Canada*, trans. F.R. Scott (Burnaby, Blackfish, 1977).
27. Cited in David M. Hayne, "Literary Translation in Nineteenth-Century Canada," *Translation in Canadian Literature*, p. 39.
28. Cf. Toury, *Literature and Translation*, p. 88-89.
29. Richard E. Braun cites a response from an "editor of a great Canadian press" which suggests that translations excite feelings that go beyond normal financial considerations: "Passions rage over translations in a way in which they do not rage over anything else..." See "Translation: The Problem of Purpose," *MLN*, ix, 6, December 1975, p. 784.

Reference: José Lambert and André Lefevere (ed.), *Translation in the Development of Literatures*, Bern – Berlin – Frankfurt am Main – New York – Paris – Wien, Peter Lang / Leuven University Press, 1993, p. 239-247.