

Translating the Two Solitudes

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The ramifications of translation are political as well as literary and linguistic. Translation embraces cultural and social realities and touches the heart of interaction with the Other; thus it is hardly surprising that the prevailing metaphor for translation in Canada is that of a bridge between two solitudes.⁶⁵ This metaphor became rooted in Canada's collective imagination after Hugh MacLennan selected the phrase as the title of his novel about English-French relations, which was published in New York in 1945. Eighteen years passed before the French translation by Québécoise Louise Gareau-DesBois appeared in Paris. The temporal and geographical circumstances surrounding the publication and translation of *Two Solitudes* are far from

unique: before 1982, approximately 75 per cent of the French translations of English-Canadian literary authors appeared in Paris. Government translation, by contrast, has always been performed in Canada.

Government Translation

Section 133 of the British North America Act of 1867 recognized Canada as a bilingual country with French and English as its two national languages. Prior to 1980, however, bilingual production of official documents and other government publications was essentially confined to the federal government, the Quebec government, and, after 1969, the New Brunswick government. Elsewhere in Canada, government translation was marginal or non-existent.

Translation services related to the federal government in Ottawa were decentralized in the 1910s, with Parliament, the Post Office, and the Secretary of State producing the bulk of translations. Translators enjoyed enviable working conditions and were considered privileged;⁶⁶ sometimes a position as translator was passed down from generation to generation within a family. In 1920 some ninety translators were affiliated with the federal government. Their efforts were supplemented by a further thirty when Parliament was in session, mainly to facilitate the publication of bills, proceedings, and debates.⁶⁷

Under the British North America Act, Quebec was required to publish its laws and parliamentary proceedings in French and English. In 1920 the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly had a team of about a dozen translators for both French and English. In addition to laws and parliamentary journals, the Quebec government translated official reports, tourist guides, and other documents for the general public. Most permits and forms were also printed in both languages. These translations were done by the staff of the relevant department or contracted out.

In the 1920s the status of French began to improve. With communication increasingly facilitated by radio and cinema, more and more francophones were demanding bilingualism. In 1927 Ontario repealed Regulation 17, legislation which since 1912 had restricted teaching in French to the first two years of primary education. At the federal level, bilingual postage stamps (1928) and currency (1937) were adopted. In 1934 the Conservative government created the Translation Bureau to bring all federal translators together. Many francophones expressed misgivings about this approach; they would have preferred to see a more generalized presence of French in all departments. Not until the Second World War did the bureau become fully functional. It employed 175 translators in 1948, a number that soon

increased to 300.⁶⁸ In addition to producing translations, the bureau also issued many guides to Canadian usage of bilingual terminology.

The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1963–9), whose recommendations gave rise to the Official Languages Act (17-18 Elizabeth 2, 1969, c. 54), established the translation of all federal publications as standard practice. Political will was the determining factor in this expansion.⁶⁹ Between 1965 and 1975, the number of translators rose from 350 to 1,300, and university language programs underwent a similar expansion. Nonetheless, the federal government remained an essentially English-speaking institution that communicated only partially in both languages.⁷⁰ Although a quarter of the public service was French-speaking, relatively few of these employees produced materials in their first languages. Indeed, only 10 per cent of the translation was done from French into English.

In 1964 a translation service was established by the Department of the Provincial Secretary of Quebec. It started slowly because of the difficulty of recruiting professional translators, whose services were needed by the federal government, the private sector, and the Montreal World's Fair, Expo 67.⁷¹ The law making French the official language of Quebec (LQ, 1974, c. 6) and the Charter of the French Language (LQ, 1977, c. 5) did not reduce official publication in English, nor the need for government translators. In New Brunswick the legislation that made the province bilingual (18 Elizabeth 2, 1969, c. 14) gave a strong impetus to the publication of official French translations. In 1972 Quebec and New Brunswick were the provinces employing the largest numbers of translators, twenty-five and twenty-four respectively. Ontario at the time had eight translators and Saskatchewan one, while the six other provinces had none.⁷² After 1980, following a ruling by the Supreme Court and a reawakening of the francophone communities in the West, Manitoba had to catch up.⁷³ At the provincial level, bilingualism in official publishing thus appears to be a phenomenon essentially related to French Canada, with little penetration of English Canada.

Bridging the Two Cultures

Before 1920, two English-Canadian literary works were translated into French, while ten French titles were translated into English. Of 48 works translated in Canada between 1920 and 1960, 39 were translations into English and 9 into French.⁷⁴ In addition, during the 1930s and 1940s, all books by Grey Owl (Archibald Belaney), the popular pseudo-Indian, were translated in France. By 1981 there were 300 French translations of books by 240 English authors, more than a third of them (115)

novels.⁷⁵ Five of Canada's best-known writers – Stephen Leacock, Mazo de la Roche, Malcolm Lowry, Leonard Cohen, and Mordecai Richler – were translated and published in France. In the 1970s, Canadian translations of Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence, and Robertson Davies began to appear.

It was rarer for English-Canadian poets to be translated into French in Canada; Leonard Cohen, John Robert Colombo, and Dennis Lee were among the lucky few before the situation changed radically in 1969 with the creation of *Ellipse* at the Université de Sherbrooke. This journal's mission was to present the works of English-Canadian and Quebec poets in translation; by 1980, after twenty-six issues, *Ellipse* had published some fifty translated poets. The journal instigated a new mode of poetry translation in Canada, creating a space for dialogue and networks of sociability between pairs of literary writers from the two main linguistic groups, such as Gaston Miron and F.R. Scott. In the 1970s, a truly bilingual community arose among authors and translators, particularly feminists, with anglophones translating franco-phone novelists and theorists. This *complicité*, sense of common cause, which gave rise to some very original thinking about translation, would peak in the following decade.⁷⁶

Theatre presented an entirely different situation: until the 1980s, French Canada displayed very little interest in English-Canadian drama. Only eleven plays by nine authors, including David Fennario, John Herbert, and John Thomas McDonough, were translated, almost all of them dealing with Quebec or Montreal.⁷⁷ Many more French plays were translated into English, especially those of Michel Tremblay.

Non-fiction – biography, history, and literary criticism – was the only genre in which the number of titles translated from English to French exceeded the number translated from French to English. Of the 170 known titles in this category, the majority date from the 1960s and 1970s, and were predominantly historical, cultural, or socio-political studies dealing with aspects of Quebec. Books by Northrop Frye, Peter C. Newman, Marshall McLuhan, Marius Barbeau, Stanley B. Ryerson, and Merrill Denison were also translated into French.

On average, one literary translation from French into English was published per year from the beginning of the century to the 1960s.⁷⁸ Two-thirds of this meagre output consisted of novels by such authors as Louis Hémon, Maurice Constantin-Weyer, Roger Lemelin, and Gabrielle Roy. Often criticized for their poor quality, many of these translations were by foreigners and reflected a lack of familiarity with Canada. It was not until the mid-1970s that better translations appeared, thanks in part to the financial assistance of the Canada Council. In the 1960s the rate of literary

translation into English increased sixfold; translations included twenty-seven novels, five collections of poetry, three plays, and nine works of history and literary criticism.⁷⁹ Philip Stratford observed significant progress with regard to the novel: ‘... prior to 1900 seven Quebec novels were translated; in the next sixty years 36 titles were added, a little more than one every two years; in the next decade, 1960–70, twenty new novels were translated, an average of two a year; from 1973 to 1982, 89 translations of Quebec novels were undertaken, almost nine per year.’⁸⁰

Significance of the Canada Council

The landscape changed radically in 1972 with the establishment of the Canada Council’s translation grants. Conceived in a spirit of national unity, this program incited major advances in the practice of translation in Canada. As Philip Stratford recounted in 1983:

Since the Canada Council’s programme began in 1972, almost five hundred new literary titles have been translated, more than all the years before. Forty-five French publishers have been involved, fifty English ones. The work was done by 110 Franco-phone translators and 100 Anglophones, a third of whom now have two or more translations to their credit. A significant change, whose results may be far-reaching, is that the old 2-to-1 ratio (two French books translated for every English title) no longer applies: in five of the past ten years more books were translated into French than into English, and the overall totals are equal.⁸¹

The Canada Council program inspired related initiatives and developments: the creation of the Canada Council Translation Prizes in 1973; the founding of the Literary Translators’ Association of Canada in 1975; the first edition of the *Bibliography of Canadian Books in Translation: French to English and English to French*, by Maureen Newman and Philip Stratford (1975); the introduction, in 1977, of a translation section in the annual ‘Letters in Canada’ issue of the *University of Toronto Quarterly*; improvement in the quality of criticism, which now took into account the specific nature of translations; the initiation of serious discussion of the meaning of literary translation in Canada; and the creation of several publishers’ series devoted to translations of Canadian literary works. Individual translators such as Sheila Fischman became known in their own right.

In the fall of 1972, Montreal publisher Pierre Tisseyre initiated the *Collection des deux solitudes* to acquaint French-speaking readers with the most significant works

of English-Canadian literature. The first title to appear, Emily Carr's *Klee Wyck* (1973), was translated by Michelle Tisseyre, editor of the series, who also issued French editions of titles by Morley Callaghan, Robertson Davies, Margaret Laurence, Mordecai Richler, Brian Moore, and W.O. Mitchell. In 1977 the same publisher launched the *Collection des deux solitudes*, juvénile, the first title of which was *Jacob Deux-Deux et le vampire masqué*, Jean Simard's translation of Mordecai Richler's captivating children's story. In 1978 this series was renamed the *Collection des deux solitudes, jeunesse*; its new editor, Paule Daveluy, published *Chemins secrets de la liberté*, her translation of Barbara Smucker's historical novel of the Underground Railway.

Also in Montreal, Harvest House, which in 1965 had issued *Ethel and the Terrorist*, David S. Walker's translation of Claude Jasmin's novel, established its French Writers of Canada series in 1973. Its titles included Jacques Ferron's *Dr Cotnoir: A Novel*, translated by Pierre Cloutier, and Anne Hébert's *The Torrent: Novellas and Short Stories*, translated by Gwendolyn Moore. Other publishers followed suit, including McClelland and Stewart, Oberon Press, Coach House Press, and Talon Books, and on the French side, Les Éditions Héritage, Hurtubise HMH, and Québec Amérique. In addition to the substantial financial assistance provided by the Canada Council, this vitality reflected the increased interest in translated works arising out of developments in the political situation in Québec.

If it is true that literary translation offers a site for meeting and dialogue, it still remains difficult to assess accurately the cross-cultural repercussions of translations. The quantitative evidence shows that, in literature and in the humanities, Canada's 'two solitudes' significantly expanded their interest in one another through the 1970s.

- 46 Canada, Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, *Report*, 223, 222; see also P. Litt, *The Muses, the Masses, and the Massey Commission*.
- 47 In 1967-8, for example, it granted \$595,559 to the performing arts, while literature received not a penny. The Ontario Arts Council did not hire a literary officer until 1969.
- 48 McLuhan cited by Mavor Moore in 'You Can't Toot Your Own Horn If You Have No Horn to Toot,' *Globe and Mail*, 28 December 1985, p. D1.
- 49 M. Vipond, *Mass Media in Canada*, 62-4.
- 50 Department of Communications (DOC), *News Release*, 18 June 1986, p. 3, cited in R. Lorimer, 'Book Publishing,' 21.
- 51 R. Ellenwood, 'Government Funding'; P. Aldana, *Canadian Publishing*, 36.
- 52 P. Audley, *Canada's Cultural Industries*, 91, 124; R. Lorimer, 'Book Publishing,' 21.
- 53 P. Aldana, *Canadian Publishing*, 38-42.
- 54 Between 1908 and 1960, the council convened fewer than ten times. See L.-P. Audet, *Histoire du Conseil de l'instruction publique de la province de Québec*, 166.
- 55 P. Aubin, *Les communautés religieuses et l'édition du manuel scolaire*, 23.
- 56 F. Landry, *Beauchemin et l'édition au Québec (1840-1940)*, 177-8.
- 57 P.-É. Farley, *Livres d'enfants*, 8-9.
- 58 BNQ, MSS-061, fonds Société des écrivains canadiens (SÉC), 'Memoire de la Société des écrivains canadiens à la Commission royale pour l'avancement des arts, des lettres et des sciences au Canada,' 20 October 1949.
- 59 S. Bernier, 'Prix littéraires et champ du pouvoir: Le prix David, 1923-1970.'
- 60 J. Vincent, 'Le Conseil supérieur du livre, du rapport Boucharde à la loi 51.'
- 61 P. Tisseyre, *Lorsque notre littérature était jeune*, 156-8. Relevant documents in the archives of the CSL include memos and papers regarding this law, many of which appear to be the work of Tisseyre. See ANQM, fonds Conseil supérieur du livre.
- 62 J. Vincent, *Les tribulations du livre québécois en France (1959-1985)*.
- 63 'Les difficultés de l'édition,' *Le Devoir*, 13 November 1954, p. 23.
- 64 P. de Bellefeuille, A. Pontaut et al., *La bataille du livre au Québec*.
- 65 K. Mezei et al., *Bibliography of Criticism on English and French Literary Translations*, 3.
- 66 F. Méléka, 'Le bureau des traductions, 1934-1977' *Meta* 22.1 (March 1977): 59-60.
- 67 Canada, Archives of the House of Commons, Mr Hocken, *Return to an Order of the House of the 19th April, 1920*, Sessional Paper no. 154, Ottawa, 1920.
- 68 J. Delisle, *Bridging the Language Solitudes*, 17-28.
- 69 J. Delisle, 'Serving Official Bilingualism for Half a Century,' 7.
- 70 P. Cardinal, 'Regard critique sur la traduction au Canada,' *Meta* 23.2 (June 1978): 143.
- 71 M. Robins, 'Service de la traduction,' 54.
- 72 C. Romney, 'Enquête sur la traduction en 1972,' *Meta* 19.2 (June 1974): 118.
- 73 G. Jourdain, 'La législation bilingue au Manitoba,' *Meta* 47.2 (June 2002): 255-6.
- 74 P. Stratford, ed., *Bibliography of Canadian Books in Translation*, ii.
- 75 R. Giguère, 'Translations: English to French: To 1981,' in OCCL, 1124.
- 76 J.J. O'Connor, 'Translations: French to English,' in OCCL, 1128-32.
- 77 See R. Giguère, 'Translations: English to French: To 1981,' in OCCL, 1123-5.
- 78 J.J. O'Connor, 'Translations: French to English,' in OCCL, 1127.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 P. Stratford, 'A Bridge between Two Solitudes,' 10.

- 81 Ibid., 12.
- 82 T.H.B. Symons, *To Know Ourselves*, 1:12.
- 83 S. Campbell, 'Nationalism, Morality, and Gender,' 142.
- 84 L. Groulx, *Correspondance, 1894-1967*, 3:471; 488; 509, note 12; 521.
- 85 Canada. Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences, *Report*, 15-16.
- 86 S. Djwa, *Professing English*, 311; and F.R. Scott, 'Introduction,' 8-9.
- 87 R. McDougall, 'Reprinting of Canadian Books' and J. McClelland, 'Reprinting of Canadian Books,' *Ontario Library Review* 41.3 (August 1957): 183-92.
- 88 J. Wadland, 'Voices in Search of a Conversation,' 58.
- 89 J. Melançon, 'L'enseignement littéraire et ses effets de marché,' 122.
- 90 Canada, Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, *Report*, 2:281-2. See also M. Trudel and G. Jain, *Canadian History Textbooks: A Comparative Study*.
- 91 Canada, Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, *Report*, 2:283.
- 92 A.B. Hodgetts, *What Culture? What Heritage?* 1, 44, 5-6, 43, 103.
- 93 A.B. Hodgetts and P. Gallagher, *Teaching Canada for the '80s*, 1-2.
- 94 Ibid., 2.
- 95 LAC, MG 31, D 190, Robin Mathews, 'Research, Curriculum, Scholarship, and Endowment in the Study of Canadian Literature,' 4. This paper was presented at the Association of Canadian University Teachers of English in May 1972.
- 96 T.H.B. Symons, *To Know Ourselves*, 1:1.
- 97 M. McCormack, 'Preserving and Providing Access to Canada's Printed Heritage,' 7, 9.
- 98 J.E. Page, *Reflections on the Symons Report*, 5-6, 190, 14.
- 99 T.H.B. Symons and J.E. Page, *Some Questions of Balance*, 2.
- 100 See M. Cambron, 'Présence de la littérature nationale dans l'enseignement primaire au Québec.'
- 101 Ladies Auxiliary of the Lunenburg Hospital Society, *Dutch Oven: A Cook Book of Coveted Traditional Recipes* (Lunenburg, NS: Progress-Enterprise Company, 1953), 6.
- 102 E. Fowke, 'Personal Odyssey,' 46.
- 103 F.M. Mealing, Review of *Sbornik: Dukhoborcheskikh Psalmov, Stikhov i Pesen* (A Collection: *Doukhobor Psalms, Hymns and Songs*) and *Book of Life of Doukhobors*, *Canadian Folklore canadien* 3.1 (1981): 89.
- 104 E. Fowke and C.H. Carpenter, *Bibliography of Canadian Folklore*, ix.
- 105 See J.-N. De Surmont, *La bonne chanson*.
- 106 H. Creighton, *Life in Folklore*, 63, 80.
- 107 E. Fowke, 'Personal Odyssey,' 41.
- 108 The National Museum of Canada became the Museum of Man in 1968, and the Museum of Civilization in 1986.
- 109 N.V. Rosenberg, 'Gerald S. Doyle Songsters,' 46.
- 110 J.J. Connor, 'Legend of Joseph Montferrand.'
- 111 B. Powell, 'Saskatchewan Community Histories.'
- 112 See E. Driver, 'Cookbooks.'
- 113 Donald J.C. Phillipson, 'John Murray Gibbon,' in *CE* (2000), 976.
- 114 [M. Waddington], *Canadian Souvenir View Albums*.
- 115 M. Langford, 'Introduction.' See also P. Couvrette, 'National Film Board Stills Division'; and A. Thomas, 'Canadian Nationalism and Canadian Imagery.'