Jane Koustas

PRESENTATION

In the introduction to *Two Solicitudes*, a study of Canadian letters that she co-authored with Victor Lévy Beaulieu, Margaret Atwood explains the title as follows:

> This is of course a play on Hugh MacLennan's famous observation about Canada's "two solitudes," and it captures the true spirit of that remark — a remark which was originally used as an epigraph, but often taken out of context. It comes from Rilke's *Letter to a Young Poet*, and reads as follows: "Love consists in this, that two solitudes protect and touch and greet each other." In our conversations, I believe we acknowledged the solitudes. We also acknowledged the greeting. If there were more solicitude on both sides of the great linguistic divide, we would all be a great deal better off.[1]

Both Atwood and Lévy-Beaulieu demonstrate extraordinary interest in, and knowledge as well as understanding of, the "Other" culture. They suggest both the possibility and desirability of reevaluating and reinterpreting the overused and misused notion of "two solitudes," the leitmotiv so frequently evoked to define relationships between Canada's two "founding" nations. Indeed, the increased and long overdue awareness of the First Nations' heritage and the tremendous richness, diversity and complexity of the contemporary Canadian cultural fabric call into question such simplistic and Euro-centric representations of the nation.

In *Échanges culturels entre les deux solitudes*, a collection of essays on translation in Canada, Marie-Andrée Beaudet also discusses both the meaning and intent of Rilke's metaphor. As does Atwood, she questions the common interpretation. Used to signal conflict and friction, it was meant instead to point to the need for genuine respect and exchange in order to foster understanding. Underlining the role of literature in such an exchange, Beaudet states:

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[1] Margaret Atwood and Victor Lévy Beaulieu, *Two Solicitudes*, Trans. Phyllis Arnoff and Howard Scott, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1998, p. xi-xii.

> Au départ, la métaphore des "deux solitudes" vise à convoquer la littérature et plus précisément les savoirs de la littérature. Car, il n'est pas inutile de le répéter en ces temps dominés par une pensée étroitement économiste, la littérature est un savoir sur le monde, notamment un savoir sur la façon dont les hommes et les femmes vivent en société, entrent en relation et se créent des représentations d'eux-mêmes et des autres (...). Rappelons que l'auteur de *Two Solitudes*, Hugh MacLennan, convoque lui-même ce savoir de la littérature en empruntant au poète Rainer Maria Rilke le titre de son roman. L'exergue se lit ainsi : "L'amour, c'est deux solitudes qui se protègent, qui s'éprouvent et s'accueillent l'une et l'autre".[2]

Both studies, one by important authors from the two major linguistic and cultural communities, and the other by academics from both sides of the linguistic divide, point to the need for a more accurate interpretation and application of Rilke's metaphor. It is worth noting that the two works were published within a year of each other.

While the plea for solicitude, however, clearly comes from both English and French speaking communities, translation in Canada remains politically and socially charged. Jacques Ferron offers another perspective on MacLennan's use of the Rilke metaphor and underlines the obstacles, namely the imbalance of power, to ever achieving such idyllic coexistence. He states:

> (...) car si nous parvenions à réduire à peu de choses et même à éviter les contacts avec le dominateur, donnant lieu aux "two solitudes" de Hugh MacLennan, ces deux solitudes n'étaient pas similaires et l'inégalité qui les marquait, solitude des dominateurs et solitudes des dominés, se reconstituait dans toutes les places qui nous étaient propres où les plus hauts dominés se vengeaient des dominateurs sur les plus dominés.[3]

Indeed, the close relationship between translation trends and traditions in Canada on the one hand, and political strife and struggle on the other is widely recognized. In his introduction to Jean Delisle's *La*

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[2] Marie-Andrée Beaudet, ed., *Échanges culturels entre les deux solitudes*, Québec, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1999, p. ix.

[3] Jacques Ferron cited in Betty Bednarski, "La traduction comme lieu d'échanges" in *La Traduction comme lieu d'échanges*, ibid., p. 134.

Traduction au Canada/Translation in Canada, Jean-François Joly notes:

> (...) The history of translation is closely linked to the history of the country: our profession has played a more important role in Canada than in most other countries in the 450 years covered by Dr. Delisle's investigations and it still does today.[4]

From the creation of Jacques-Cartier's Iroquois-French lexicon to contemporary multilingual texts, translation has been the tool of the conqueror, and of the conquered as well as of the cultural bridge builder. The two "founding" nations were separated by religion and legal and cultural practices but language was, and remains today, on the forefront of political debate. Similarly, language remains a distinctive feature of multiculturalism as well as an important issue for the First Nations. Therefore, in the Canadian context, translation has been viewed as more than a literary practice or tradition. It is instead a reflection, if not an instrument, of prevalent social and political forces.

In her insightful article, appropriately titled "Culture as Translation," Barbara Godard quotes translation scholar Edwin Gentzler who identifies the Canadian case as an ideal example to illustrate the link between cultural, political and linguistic power struggles and translation practice. He notes:

> The complicated question of Canadian identity — problems of colonialism, bilingualism, nationalism, cultural heritage, weak literary system — seems to provide a useful platform from which to begin raising questions about current translation theory.[5]

In *Impossible Nation: the Longing for a Homeland in Quebec*, Ray Conlogue, Quebec arts correspondent for the *Globe and Mail*, laments English Canada's "antipathy" towards Quebec and its "failure to build a bilingual country" or, it can be deduced, to bridge the two solitudes. He carries on a long tradition of associating translation practice with questions of national, political and cultural identity, harmony and

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[4] Jean Delisle, *La Traduction au Canada/ Translation in Canada*, Ottawa, Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1987, p. 12.

[5] Barbara Godard, "Culture as Translation" in *Translation and Multiculturalism*, ed. Shanta Ramkrishna, Delhi, Pencraft International, 1992, p. 157.

understanding. As do other scholars before him, notably David Hayne and Philip Stratford, he quotes Quebec's first Prime Minister, PJO Chauveau who, in a 19th Century essay, compared the strange, oblique glance of the "Other" from the double twisting staircase of Château Chambord to the conditional, accidental comprehension between French and English Canada. Conlogue cites, "English and French, we climb by a double flight of stairs toward the destinies reserved for us on this continent without even seeing each other, except on the landing of politics"[6].

While they do not arrive at the same bleak conclusion, other literary and translation scholars concur with Conologue to the extent that they view the success of translation as a measure of cross-cultural interest. Pierre Hébert's study of English language anthologies of Canadian literature that comprehend French language literature in translation includes an introduction by George Mercer Adam. In his 1887 *An Outline History of Canadian Literature*, the latter noted that a knowledge of Quebec literature in translation could help in "promoting that entente cordiale between the two peoples, without which there can be no national fusion (...)"[7]. Sherry Simon and Carolyn Perkes[8] point out the political messages conveyed in prefaces to translations. Simon notes, "Historically, prefaces to translations of French-Canadian literature into English tend to underscore the humanistic functions of translation insisting on the political desirability of increased comprehension between the peoples of Canada"[9]. Even scholars who merely attempt to catalogue translations feel compelled to comment on their political relevance. Guy Sylvestre, Brandon Conron and Carl F. Linck in *Canadian Writers*, published in 1972, note, "Placing both

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[6] Ray Conlogue, *Impossible Nation: The Longing for a Homeland in Canada and Quebec*, Stratford, Mercury, 1996, p. 8.

[7] Pierre Hébert, "Présentation" in *Cultures du Canada français*, no 9, 1992, p. 15.

[8] Carolyn Perkes, "Le Pays incertain en traduction anglaise, 1960-1990: seuils et écueils de l'identité littéraire au Québec", *Études canadiennes*, 41, 1996, pp. 41-56.

[9] Sherry Simon, "The Language of Cultural Difference" in *Rethinking Translation*, Lawrence Venuti, ed. London and New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 161.

French and English writers side by side needs no explanation and no defence in a country which is ever more conscious of its bilingual nature"[10]. In her *Bibliography of Criticism of English and French Literary Translation in Canada*, Kathy Mezei quotes F.R. Scott who stated, "translation is not an art in itself, it is also an essential ingredient in Canada's political entity"[11]. A lengthy entry is devoted to translation in both editions of *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, in itself a testimony to its importance in Canadian letters. The author, John O'Connor, identifies translation as a "compelling necessity for cultural and political encounter and dialogue. As such it has become "(...) the very representation of the play of equivalence and difference in cultural interchange"[12]. Clearly, representing the Other in an attempt either to bridge the two, or more accurately multiple, solitudes or to respect the spirit of Rilke's metaphor, and thus demonstrate more solicitude, has become a question, and indeed a measure of, political and cultural tolerance and good will.

The place of the "Other", the tension between the two solitudes, the need to look beyond them and the importance of translation as a symbol both of conflict and solicitude is considered in the present volume of *TTR*. From studies of early translations of *Maria Chapdelaine* to that of French and Italian versions of *Fugitive Pieces*, from Molière in Manitoba to Tremblay in Toronto, from the difficulties and importance of translating Inuktitut to the reception of Quebec feminist writers in English Canada, the articles included in this volume, through their study of trends and traditions in Canadian translation practice, all invite reflection on the two, or multiple, solitudes and the bridges or gulfs between them. Annette Hayward's "La réception de la littérature québécoise au Canada anglais 1900-1940" provides an excellent point of departure from which to consider more recent cases of reception or misrepresentation, such as that outlined in André

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[10] Guy Sylvestre et. al., *Canadian Writers/Écrivains canadiens*, Toronto, The Ryerson Press, 1972, p. vi.

[11] Kathy Mezei, *Bibliography of Criticism on English and French Literary Translations in Canada*, Ottawa, Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1988, p. 3.

[12] John O'Connor, "Translation" in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, Eugene Benson and William Toye, eds. Toronto and New York, Oxford University Press, p. 1132.

Lamontagne's study of Jacques Poulin and in Barbara Godard's discussion of Quebec feminist writers. W. Terrence Gordon's comparative study of the French and Italian translations of Anne Michael's widely successful novel, *The Fugitive Pieces*, takes the debate beyond the French-English dichotomy and considers specific text-based translation problems. The particular challenges and tremendous importance of theatre translation as a dynamic force on the Canadian literary landscape are considered in Glen Nichols' introduction to his *Catalogue of Canadian Theatre Translations.* While Louise Ladouceur highlights the overwhelming influence of Michel Tremblay, Nicole Mallet, in her study of Regnard, Molière and Jonson on the Canadian theatre scene demonstrates the importance of other voices and other perspectives from which to consider translation. The function of translation as a political and social responsibility is clearly demonstrated by Marco Fiola and Denise Nevo in their study of the many languages of the North. While the two "founding" nations may continue to debate in political, cultural and linguistic arenas across the nation, the very survival of First Nations' languages is in severe peril in their own homeland. Frequently blamed for the rift between the two solitudes while simultaneously, and paradoxically, summoned to reconcile them, translation might be the salvation of the languages of the North while, at the same time, the cause of their demise. The need to translate to and from English illustrates the stronghold of the dominant culture. However, it has also increased awareness of the complexity and fragility of the languages of the North and, hence, of the need to study, support and preserve them. It is important to recognize that while much of translation scholarship focuses on literature, most translation activity occurs outside this field. Sylvie Vandaele's article on biomedical translation draws attention to important contributions beyond the boundaries of literature.

In his 1979 article entitled "Canada's Two Literatures: A Search for Emblems," Philip Stratford offers his own interpretation of Chauveau's Chateau Chambord metaphor. He states:

> He (Chauveau) might have seen that the whole purpose of Chambord's double staircase, the excitement and enjoyment of it, depends on two parties mounting together, separately, each extremely conscious of the other, though invisible to him. Yes, if you rush up the stairs too fast, intent only on that meeting at the top, you miss the

> poetry of the experience; and in missing the poetry you may miss the point too.[13]

Thanks in part to Stratford's own contribution to translation scholarship and translation practice in Canada, it is entirely inaccurate to claim, as did Conlogue, that the two, and indeed multiple, cultures remain unglimpsed by the "Other" or "Others". This is well illustrated by the articles in this volume. These studies are testimony as well to the value of the time taken and the effort invested in assessing, appreciating and analysing the "poetry of the experience."

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[13] Philip Stratford, "Canada's Two Literatures: The Search for Emblems," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature,* Vol. 6, no. 2, 1979, p. 137.