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# The Trope of the Translator

## (Re)Writing History in Heather O'Neill's *The Girl Who Was Saturday Night* and Claire Holden Rothman's *My October*

Over the past several decades, the relationship between anglophones and francophones in Quebec has become increasingly depolarized. Immigration, globalization, and waning support for the sovereignty movement in the years since the defeat of the 1995 referendum have changed the political landscape: Sherry Simon has described contemporary Montreal as a "polyglot and hybrid culture" in which the old notion of 'two solitudes' no longer holds (*Translating* 8). In 2008, the Bouchard-Taylor commission released a landmark study of intercultural relations in Quebec entitled *Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation*, asserting, "Having discussed at great length what separates us, it is now time to explore the other facet of what we are and what we can become" (25). Given this conciliatory rhetoric, it is surprising to note the sudden proliferation of anglophone and francophone novels and films dealing with two of the most antagonistic episodes in Quebec's history, namely the October Crisis of 1970 and the 1995 referendum. While these works attest to the persistence of the old conflicts in twenty-first-century memory and imagination, an examination of fictional engagement with these divisive historical events reveals that many contemporary writers are reevaluating, rather than reanimating, narratives of cultural division.

This essay focuses on two anglophone novels, Heather O'Neill's *The Girl Who Was Saturday Night* (2014)[1] and Claire Holden Rothman's *My October* (2014). While the skirmishes that serve as their backdrop are traditionally associated with the "divided country" disparaged by Mordecai Richler in his book *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!* (1992), I argue that O'Neill and Holden Rothman encapsulate the anglophone desire for *rapprochement* within the

context of Quebec's "shift to a form of diversity paradigm" (Bouchard 40). They do so, first, by criticizing sovereigntist ideology, which both writers depict as an outmoded and divisive product of the past. They then attempt to represent and bridge the gap between cultures through translation, which is a structuring element of *Saturday Night* and a driving theme in *My October.* While both novels highlight the dangers of misunderstanding or uneven power dynamics inherent in translation, I contend that their ultimate endorsement of translation reveals a distinctly anglophone optimism regarding the possibility of reconciliation.

## Post-Sovereigntist Ideologies

*Saturday Night* and *My October* are products of what Linda Leith has called Montreal's "Anglo Literary Revival" (10). After a period of decline that Leith attributes to the rise of Quebec nationalism and resultant dismissal of the English language, Anglo-Quebec writers have returned to prominence and commercial success over the past two decades. While there is no common aesthetic, "nothing that could be considered a 'school,'" these writers are nevertheless united in their promotion of "a more inclusive understanding of Quebec society" (Leith 156; 166). Simon has also recently observed a "changing relationship to Quebec literature and what it represents," pointing to the proliferation and success of francophone writers in English translation, as well as "a more prominent role" for Canadian translators ("Joining"). At the institutional level, this *rapprochement* has resulted in the creation of bilingual events such as the Blue Metropolis literary festival, founded by Leith in the late 1990s, and the inclusion of translated literature in competitions such as CBC's Canada Reads, the Scotiabank Giller Prize, and the Griffin Poetry Prize. These events and awards have strengthened anglophones' awareness of their francophone counterparts, popularizing writers such as Nicholas Dickner (Canada Reads winner, 2010), Kim Thúy (Canada Reads winner, 2015), Samuel Archibald (Giller Prize finalist, 2015), and Catherine Leroux (Giller Prize finalist, 2016) in English translation.[2] By the same token, francophones "have been showing increased interest in English-language writers and greater acceptance of their place in Quebec literature," as illustrated when Mavis Gallant was awarded Quebec's most prestigious literary prize, the Prix Athanase-David, in 2006 (Leith 160). This recognition of an anglophone writer marked a shift away from the long-held conviction, expressed in no uncertain terms by the esteemed literary critic Gilles Marcotte in a 1998 essay, that no anglophone Quebecer would ever

win the award. Marcotte's prediction, as well as his further assertion that "[i]l n'existe évidemment pas telle chose qu'une littérature anglo-québécoise,"[3] have in recent years been superseded by a growing mutual recognition between the proverbial solitudes (Marcotte 6).

Many twenty-first-century Quebec writers are inscribing this burgeoning exchange in their work by revisiting historical episodes of acute antagonism between anglophones and francophones. According to Robert Dion, the prevalence of works about the October Crisis highlights the ongoing attempt to grapple with this "événement fondateur du Québec contemporain" (88).[4] Recent examples include Maxime Raymond Bock's collection of short stories *Atavismes* (2011) and director Mathieu Denis's film *Corbo* (2014), as well as the three texts discussed by Dion—Louis Hamelin's *La constellation du lynx* (2010), Carl Leblanc's *Le personnage secondaire* (2006), and the film on which the latter is based, Luc Cyr and Carl Leblanc's *L'otage* (2003). The 1995 sovereignty referendum is another "deeply divisive" event that has recently made a resurgence in contemporary fiction (Behiels and Hayday 665): *Saturday Night* joins a list of primarily anglophone titles that includes Zoe Whittall's *Bottle Rocket Hearts* (2007), Ontarian writer Elizabeth Hay's *His Whole Life* (2015), and the film *Quebec My Country Mon Pays* (2016) directed by John Walker.

Contemporary writers are not the first to have recognized the symbolic potency of these two issues, which have in fact served as ideological touchstones for writers and artists since the events of 1970. Dominique Lafon has documented the evolution of theatrical depictions of the October Crisis, finding that whereas a first wave of 1970s productions likened the FLQ members to mythological heroes, subsequent playwrights tried to bring about a "collective exorcism" of the past (31). Along similar lines, Jacques Pelletier has characterized the French-language novels of the 1970s and 1980s on this topic as "expressions involontaires d'un malaise" (180),[5] arguing that their authors inscribe their sense of ideological "failure" and "defeat" by privileging the human drama over political events (34). In the anglophone context, several scholars have shown how, from the 1960s to 1980s, fear surrounding Quebec's separation from Canada was distilled in over forty works of speculative and dystopian fiction that anxiously imagined that reality, including William Weintraub's *The Underdogs* (1979) and Hélène Holden's *After the Fact* (1986). According to Allan Weiss, these dystopian novels were particularly prevalent in two distinct periods: immediately following Charles de Gaulle's inflammatory 1967 "Vive le Québec libre!"

speech, widely understood as one of the inciting incidents of the October Crisis; and pursuant to the election of the sovereigntist Parti Québécois in 1976 (53). Weiss argues that "the motivation of fear may also explain one element of Québécois fantastic fiction that a few critics have commented on: the surprisingly small number of francophone works on this theme" (53). He notes that fear lies behind the writing of fantastic literature about Quebec separation by both linguistic groups, with one side afraid it will happen and the other side afraid that it will not. As Ralph Pordzik elaborates, "English language writers seem to feel the greatest need to explore the possible results of separation when the likelihood of its coming true is greatest" (par. 7).

The anticipatory anxiety of these earlier anglophone fictions, written in a genre that imagines future possibilities, can be contrasted with the retrospective view taken by Holden Rothman and O'Neill. *My October,* which is set in 2001, examines the significance of the October Crisis for the generation shaped by the terrorist attacks of 9/11. In the novel, the Crisis figures as a historical event: it is the subject of a high school research project undertaken by one of the main characters. Though *Saturday Night,* by contrast, is a (near) historical fiction, the gap between the temporality of the action and that of the reader establishes a structural irony. While the characters anxiously await the results of the impending referendum vote, the reader is already aware of the outcome. O'Neill mines this temporal disjunction for comedic effect in her satirical novel. The narrative is focalized through nineteen-year-old francophone Nouschka Tremblay, who communicates her culture's shared hope that her people, who "had been shit upon for generations," will finally achieve independence:

> We were packing our bags. There was nothing that they could say now. Now they were trying anything to make us stay. Like a lover who was trying to talk reason into you as you were throwing your clothes into a suitcase, they went from saying soothing, reconciliatory, sweet things to calling you a complete idiot and telling you that you'd regret it for sure. Well it was too late for all that. (279)

Here, the humour is created not only by the outlandish simile (a hallmark of O'Neill's prose) depicting Canada as manipulative lover, but also by the bathos of Nouschka's tirade, which, given the inevitable outcome, is reduced to a child's empty threat to run away from home. The sense of inevitability and powerlessness is reconfirmed when, after building up 350 pages of anticipation, O'Neill requires only two small sentences to shatter her characters' hopes: "But that night the Non side won fifty-one percent. And Nicolas [Nouschka's twin brother] woke up knowing that nothing was going

to change" (350). O'Neill substitutes humorous satire for the fearful anxiety characteristic of earlier treatments of Quebec's separation.

Though set in a period of great support for the sovereigntist movement, *Saturday Night* repeatedly undercuts this ideology by associating it with a bygone era. Overhearing a newscaster discussing the possibility of a second referendum, Nicolas exclaims, "Oh turn this shit off . . . It's so boring and repetitive. Quebec will never, ever have the guts to separate . . . Look at all those sideburned monkeys from the past" (129). Later, Nouschka describes these same political leaders as "broke philosophers in their old suits, driven by children from their small houses, in which they had been brooding over manifestoes for years" (338). This idea of sovereigntism's obsolescence is personified by Étienne Tremblay, a washed up *chansonnier* whose songs about the lonely piece of tourtière and the man with twenty-five kids are depicted as the parochial products of a former time. Deadbeat father of Nouschka and Nicolas, Étienne is "as famous for his fall as he was for his songs" (132). Though he was once a celebrated folk hero, Étienne has drunk away his money, spent time in prison, and is now leading a quasi-itinerant life of poverty. Étienne's downward spiral emblematizes the trajectory of the sovereignty movement more generally: a minor character astutely claims that Étienne and his family "were invented by the subconscious of a people prior to the first referendum. They are a direct result of a revolutionary, surrealist, visionary zeitgeist. They are wandering around now like animals whose habitats have been destroyed" (65). Insofar as Étienne embodies the cultural antagonisms of a previous historical moment, it is possible to argue that the very existence of a conciliatory novel such as *Saturday Night* is predicated on his downfall.

In *My October,* Holden Rothman offers a similar political critique using the identical conceit of a cultural icon who has passed his prime. The character Luc is a composite of famous writers of the Quiet Revolution, including Hubert Aquin and Réjean Ducharme: like the former, Luc has previously been awarded and refused a Governor General's Award for his work (56), while the title of Luc's seminal novel *Tanneur tanné* evokes the latter's famous 1966 novel *L'Avalée des avalés*, as Michel Basilières notes.[6] Since the defeat of the 1995 referendum, however, the revolutionary energy that used to animate his novels has devolved into "stiff and lifeless prose" full of thinly veiled symbols such as fatherless children and parricide (4). The plot of *My October* is animated by the clash between Luc's hardline nationalism and the values of his wife, Hannah, and his son, Hugo. By contrast with Luc's stated "allegiance

to the language of Quebec" (47), Hugo (and to a lesser extent, Hannah) encapsulates the shift to a social paradigm that, according to Gérard Bouchard, "praises diversity, warns against the tyranny of the majority, relativizes memory, tends to trivialize identity, and is somewhat critical of the nation" (17). Where his father glorifies the FLQ members as heroes, Hugo likens them to Osama Bin Laden and the terrorists who have so recently flown their "hijacked planes . . . straight into Manhattan's two tallest towers" (226); where Luc laments that "[p]eople no longer believed in things. There were no values anymore, nothing was absolute" (133), Hugo registers his concern about the second-class treatment immigrants receive in his *pure laine* French private school (146). Hugo's pluralist values place him in conflict with the worldview on which his father has built his career.

The issue of language is of course at the heart of this clash: Luc's dogmatic "allegiance to the language of Quebec" is at odds with his anglophone wife and bicultural son (47). When Hugo speaks English, he does so "in defiance of Luc" (174). During a family therapy session ironically focused on "nonviolent communication," Luc rages, in French (though his words are presented in English), at the anglophone therapist selected by Hannah:

> Did you fail to notice that the language we speak here is French? You are not a prisoner, after all. You can go back to California any time you wish. You can move to New York, or Toronto, or Halifax, or Calgary, all very pleasant locations. But if you stay in this one, if you choose to live in my city, in my nation, you will have the courtesy to speak to me in my language. Or you will not speak to me at all. (134-35)

Though this speech is symptomatic of the admittedly reductionist cultural stereotypes that proliferate in *My October*, Luc's tirade is nonetheless meant to embody a hardline stance out of step with contemporary ideas about linguistic diversity in Quebec, where pluralistic rhetoric has supplanted the dualist model of cultural interaction: the Bouchard-Taylor report outlines a social vision in which "[p]lurilingualism is encouraged, at the same time as French is the common public language. . . . It is up to each individual to . . . define as he sees fit his relationship to the common or any other language and to adopt it in his own way" (120). In fact, statistics from the Bouchard-Taylor report show that there are currently more allophones (12.3%)—i.e., people whose mother tongue is neither French nor English—than anglophones (8.3%) in Quebec (201). In contrast with Luc's linguistic purism, I contend that both *Saturday Night* and *My October* position translation as a more generative model for cultural interaction than the hardline stances they associate with the past.

### Translation as Method: *The Girl Who Was Saturday Night*

If, as Simon asserts, "[t]he expression 'translation without an original' stands as a richly suggestive figure for Montreal writing," then *Saturday Night* is a case in point (*Translating* 144). In Simon's view, Montreal writing bears the traces of the "bilingual or multicultural matrix" from which it emerges (*Translating* 144). This is certainly true of *Saturday Night,* which is set across the street from the events of O'Neill's first novel, *Lullabies for Little Criminals*: both plots unfold at the intersection of Rue Sainte-Catherine and Boulevard Saint-Laurent, which has long been considered the junction of the francophone and anglophone "districts" of Montreal (*Translating* 5). In *Lullabies,* language is unproblematized: characters speak English and French interchangeably, and the author has stated that "language just didn't matter" to her during the process of composition (qtd. in Freure); like her characters, O'Neill grew up straddling the two worlds. These divisions are much starker, however, in the second novel, where language is central to the identity politics of pre-referendum Montreal.

Given this context, the decision to use English—what Nouschka calls "the language of colonialism" (O'Neill 203)—to represent French-speaking characters has important ethical ramifications. According to Lawrence Venuti, all translations, but particularly those from the anglophone world, do "ethnocentric violence" to the source text insofar as they involve the "forcible replacement of . . . linguistic and cultural differences" (14). *Saturday Night* is at first glance an obvious target for such a critique, insofar as it is written in English, presumably for an anglophone audience. However, a possible defence can be found in Venuti's prescription for an "ethical" translation, wherein the "the illusion of transparency" is dispelled by what he calls the "foreignizing translation" (16). The foreignizing translation "resists dominant values in the receiving culture so as to signify the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text"; this "resistancy" (Venuti's term) can be achieved through experimentation with "lexicon and syntax, [as well as] registers and dialects, styles and discourses" (18). Though O'Neill's case is admittedly particular insofar as there is no original French source text, the "foreignizing" of language in *Saturday Night* arguably produces the same disruptive effect endorsed by Venuti (18). The anglophone reader is thus invited to "visit" the francophone world of the text, but perpetually reminded of her status as cultural outsider.

One way the novel creates this effect is by drawing repeated attention to the irony and artificiality of its central conceit. When Nouschka gets a job at

Place des Arts "despite [her] terrible English," she summarizes her telephone conversations with patrons for the reader: "There will be evening-time presentations down the line in the season that comes just after winter . . . with the blossoms in it?" (203). This stilted English, which stands out from the perfect fluency with which Nouschka narrates the rest of the novel, reminds the reader of the act of translation on which it is predicated. Though this passage is primarily humorous, the political dimension of translation is more overt in a scene that takes place at the Unity Rally, the famous gathering attended by over 100,000 Canadians three days before the second referendum. Responding to "a placard saying QUEBEC WE LOVE YOU! DON'T LEAVE US!," Nouschka quips: "They might have thought to write it in French, but what can you do?" (327). This sly remark, which recalls the real criticisms that were levelled against the "self-centred Englishness" of the rally (Warren and Ronis 16),[7] implicates readers by aligning them with the hapless placard-bearer; to a certain extent, it also accuses them, in their capacity as readers of an English-language text, of a similar cultural erasure. In both of these examples, the gap emerging from the contrast between the transparency of English for the anglophone reader and the pragmatic and political challenge it poses for the narrator problematizes the reader's position of cultural dominance.

Another instance of "resistancy" is produced through repeated occurrences of non-translation. The novel is peppered with French idiomatic expressions ("*Mais t'es complètement malade!*" [7]; "*Elle est conne, monsieur!*" [39]) and cultural artifacts (the novels *Bonheur d'occasion* and *Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel*; the television show *La Petite Vie*). These references not only add texture to the novel's francophone milieu, but also confront the reader with the distinctness of Quebec's language and popular culture. A comparable effect is achieved by means of the opposite strategy, when O'Neill translates literally the religious curse words, called *sacres*, specific to the working-class sociolect of *joual*: "'My Christ of a coffee machine is broken, tabernacle of the chalice,' Loulou yelled out from the kitchen" (142). The irruptions of non-translation, on the one hand, and unidiomatic translations of *joual,* on the other, defamiliarize the text and thus resist the colonizing power of English language and culture. For the anglophone Canadian, the discomfort of encountering these unfamiliar or inaccessible references may create a sense of alienation that may in turn foster empathy for the desire of Quebec francophones to be *maîtres chez nous*.[8] Though the text's ideology is ultimately conciliatory, O'Neill nevertheless suggests that

any *rapprochement* must be predicated on the recognition of uneven power dynamics and acknowledged cultural differences.

While it can be argued that *Saturday Night* performs the counter-hegemonic work outlined by Venuti, it is nevertheless productive to complicate this reading by flagging the novel's sites of "ethnocentric violence." A key problem lies in the reduction of *joual* to a campy string of idiosyncratic expletives, which ignores the troubled history of a sociolect that evolved through colonial contact with English. As Louise Ladouceur observes in her study of translations in the Quebec theatre, the difficulty of translating *joual* is not only that there is no linguistic equivalent, but that English is, "moreover, incapable of expressing the ideological statement made by recourse to the colonized idiom" (213). The problem is illustrated in the failure of translations of Michel Tremblay's plays to retain their biting social commentary. Ladouceur argues that "once translated and stripped of the ideological implications of the use of *joual,* Tremblay's plays evoke a traditional image of Quebec, picturesque and nonthreatening, a perception more akin to what could be viewed as 'universal' from a Canadian point of view" (214). The same criticism can be extended to *Saturday Night,* both in the specific instance of Loulou's *sacres* and the novel's quaint aesthetic more generally. Though the narration, according to the author, communicates "the way Nouschka understands the world . . . the way a 19-year-old understands history, where she only remembers the catchy bits" (qtd. in Freure), the result is an undeniably depoliticized view of a society at one of the most political moments in its history. By distilling politics through the lens of an "egocentric" nineteen-year-old (qtd. in Freure), O'Neill neutralizes and universalizes the pointed political conflict that serves as the novel's historical backdrop.

While these criticisms cannot fully be dismissed, they also expose the conciliatory ethos that, I maintain, animates the use of translation in *Saturday Night*. This thesis is supported by the novel's conclusion, in which Nouschka begins a romantic relationship with Adam, an upper-class anglophone from Westmount. In the final scene, Nouschka arrives home to find Adam waiting for her on the stairs to her apartment: "After all the polemics and the debates about the two official languages of Canada, here was an English boy sitting in a stairwell, looking to be loved by a French girl" (402). This tableau functions as a metaphor for the novel as a whole, both in its substitution of the personal for the political and its ultimate message of cultural reconciliation. These qualities, and in particular the affirmative ending, mark the novel as the product of an anglophone imaginary: as Ladouceur points out, the concept

of translation has, since the Quiet Revolution, had different connotations among Quebec's anglophones—who have regarded it as "neutrally friendly, motivated simply by a curiosity for the other culture"—and francophones, for whom its colonial overtones have been inalienable (211-12). The image of potential intercultural harmony that closes the novel is arguably a product of the same sense of security that Canada's dominant anglophone culture has always enjoyed. Nevertheless, I contend that, in setting her novel in a francophone milieu, O'Neill takes aim at anglophone hegemony. By revisiting the 1995 referendum through the lens of translation—with its twinned danger of ethnocentric violence and potential to intervene—*Saturday Night* affirms the value of intercultural negotiation while remaining attuned to its complexities. This conciliatory message stands in stark opposition to the threat of separation, which the novel depicts as the desire of a former era.

### Translation as Theme: *My October*

Whereas translation is the primary mode of *Saturday Night,* it is one of the major themes of *My October.* Its main vehicles are Hannah and Hugo, who straddle cultures and thus serve as counterpoints to Luc's uncompromising nationalism. Hannah is a translator in both literal and figurative senses, having built her professional and personal identity on translation between English and French. She has "won prizes" for "brick-like tomes on the lives of Gabrielle Roy and René Lévesque, . . . essays and publications about Quebec culture and history, . . . [a]nd, of course, her husband's entire oeuvre" (53). Her career was launched when she won a Governor General's Award of her own for her translation of Luc's *Tanneur tanné*, which, in contrast with Luc's refusal, she "accepted with gratitude" (56). Through this work, Hannah has helped make francophone artists and intellectuals accessible to the anglophone world.

That her professional practice is inextricable from her interpersonal circumstances, however, bears out the insight of Kathy Mezei, Sherry Simon, and Louise von Flotow that "many of the translation activities most vital to Canadian cultural life take place in zones that lie outside the realm of government and mobilize energies of a very different nature" (3). Hannah's personal affiliation with Luc enables her to traverse the solitudes but also compels her to disown key elements of her identity: she divests herself of her anglophone heritage by adopting Luc's last name (a relatively uncommon practice in Quebec), distances herself from her parents, and speaks to her son in French. This extreme divestiture recalls the "servant-translator"

paradigm that, according to Susan Bassnett, abetted the colonial aspirations of nineteenth-century Europe by establishing "a hierarchical relationship in which the SL [source language] author acts as a feudal overlord exacting fealty from the translator" (16). This power dynamic is established from the outset, when Luc takes his young protégée under his wing in defiance of his editors' desire for a more renowned translator. From that day forward, Hannah adopts the ancillary role of her husband's *porte parole,* describing herself as Luc's "official English voice" (53).

Hannah's self-effacement also recalls the "translator's invisibility" targeted by Venuti in his foundational book of the same title. Venuti is critical of translations where "the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or . . . essential meaning" (1). There are two problems with this kind of translation: first, the illusion of transparency inhibits the experience of cultural difference, which is the basis for an ethical encounter; and second, it further marginalizes English-language translators, "seldom recognized, poorly paid writers whose work nonetheless remains indispensable because of the global domination of . . . English" (13). Hannah reveals a problematic invisibility in her reflexive use of the famous Italian phrase *traddutore tradditore*, "the translator is a traitor," which conveys the widespread suspicion of the Derridean *différance* between an original and its translation.[9] For Venuti, the recognition of *différance* creates the necessary space for creative production (Venuti 13); for Hannah, who sees her production as "derivative," it is an obstacle to be overcome (274). Though the reader is never given access to her translations, Hannah's ancillary self-perception recalls the patriarchal dynamics in her marriage, which are reinforced in several scenes where Luc bullies her into silence (Holden Rothman 114; 133-134). In both her personal and professional life, Hannah's (anglophone) voice is subordinated to that of her (francophone) husband.

Hannah eventually intuits this connection, splitting up with Luc at the end of the novel and simultaneously recognizing that "her career as a translator was over" (331). She outsources the final chapters of Luc's latest manuscript to a student in Concordia's translation program and embarks on an independent, autobiographically inflected writing project (which turns out to be the novel we have just read). Hannah's decision to escape her subservient role by abandoning both her marriage and her vocation is revelatory insofar as "the areas where translation breaks down . . . are equally important to examine" (Simon, *Translating* 9). Simon Harel has

written extensively about the need for writers to stage failed intercultural encounters in order to counteract the "lexique stéréotypique de l'harmonie interculturelle"[10] that sidesteps zones of tension and conflict (11). In depicting the failure of Hannah and Luc's marriage to "do away with the old divisions of language and culture, and make for them a space in which to live and work, side by side" (57), Holden Rothman offers a cautionary tale about the dangers of facile reconciliation fantasies.

*My October* nevertheless counterbalances this depiction of "failed translation," to use Simon's turn of phrase (*Translating* 74), with the more optimistic portrait of Hugo's ability to mediate between his two primary inheritances. Where Hannah has had to renounce her name to distance herself from the notoriety of her father—a famous prosecutor charged with jailing suspected FLQ militants—Hugo reclaims this heritage, choosing to call himself Hugh Stern, an anglicization of his first name plus his mother's disavowed maiden name. In revisiting the events of the October Crisis as part of a school project, Hugo will leverage his experience to relate a different story than the epochal clash of cultures that made his grandfather a public enemy and necessitated the family's flight to Toronto in the late 1970s.

Hugo is originally assigned the project as penance for bringing an unloaded gun to school, an act of rebellion stemming from his struggle to assert his identity. At the outset, he is convinced that his teacher "didn't want Hugo's thoughts on the matter. He wanted his own view of history handed back to him. Word for word" (154). Against his teacher's desire for a veneration of the FLQ militants, Hugo is determined to write a narrative of the October Crisis, and of the militant Jacques Lanctôt in particular, that will "lay out the violence so plainly that no one, not even . . . his father, could deny it" (226); a product of a post-9/11 generation "for whom the word *suicide* was, as likely as not, followed by *bomber*" (226, emphasis original), Hugo cannot accept the glorification of the FLQ by his father's contemporaries. However, he decides to switch topics when he visits his anglophone grandparents and discovers that they are old friends of James Cross.[11] Now eighty, Cross has led a life away from the spotlight but agrees to grant Hugo an interview, which he flies to England to film, assisted by his father, and ultimately screens at his school to great fanfare.

By contrast with the ideologically driven films of an earlier generation, such as Michel Brault's *Les Ordres* (1974) or Pierre Falardeau's *Octobre* (1994)—which emphasize, respectively, the Canadian government's infringement on civil liberties and the necessity of political violence—Hugo's decision to tell a

human story places him in line with contemporary challenges to nationalist narratives. His film shares traits with several recently released francophone books and films dealing with the October Crisis, including condemnation of the FLQ's violent tactics and a marked concern for its victims. This same sensibility is present in Maxime Raymond Bock's story "Carcajou" ("Wolverine") from *Atavismes,* where the abduction and torture of a federal cabinet minister is temporally shifted into the present century and divorced from its political context; the effect, as Pasha Malla correctly claims, is that "the episode becomes less an act of revolution than a purging of personal impotence and its attendant anger." Denis's biopic *Corbo* similarly undermines the nationalist narrative by denouncing violence, highlighting the senseless loss of the sixteen-year-old FLQ militant Jean Corbo, who died accidentally while setting off a bomb. The film's reproof is underscored by its focus on Corbo's identity struggles as a child of Italian immigrants: it ultimately suggests that his actions are motivated less by ideology than by the desire to fit in with his peers. Another component of Hugo's critique, likewise on display in Cyr and Leblanc's film *L'otage* and accompanying book *Le Personnage secondaire*, is the reframing of Cross as a victim. Dion has noted how Leblanc's attention to Cross's Irish identity (Cross was born in Dublin) challenges the "axiological-ideological" view of him as a figurehead of British imperialism and thus unworthy of public sympathy (96). Similarly, the Cross of Hugo's film states, "I've been a pawn . . . in your history. Maybe now, I'll be a face. Not the British diplomat, not the imperialist, but a man. A husband. A father. A human brother" (328). As in *Corbo* and *L'otage/Le Personnage secondaire*, Hugo uses cross-cultural experience as the basis for contesting a monolithic nationalist ideology.

Hugo's film, like other twenty-first-century francophone cultural products, demonstrates how depictions of the October Crisis become touchstones of contemporary cultural values. Hugo inscribes his pluralist sensibility by revisiting, and retelling, one of the sovereignty movement's foundational narratives. His bicultural heritage—emblematized in his "perfect" English, "not betraying any hint that he had been raised and schooled in French" (328)—gives him a privileged, politically neutral position from which to traverse the solitudes. Hugo presents the film in English with French subtitles, literally "translating his words into neat French print" for the francophone audience at his conservative French academy (Holden Rothman 326). Its warm reception ("everyone was on their feet, hooting and whistling and stamping" [329]) symbolizes the movement toward a more integrative social paradigm.

If Holden Rothman can be praised for her critique of the facile intercultural fantasy, as symbolized in the failure of Hannah and Luc's marriage, Hugo's hyperbolic success must admittedly be faulted for its contrasting lack of nuance. It is highly improbable that an amateur film on a historical topic would draw a "television crew from Radio-Canada" (321) and move an audience of schoolboys to near hysterics. It is equally unlikely that Cross would grant privileged access to a high-schooler and that Luc, a fervent sovereigntist, would be an enthusiastic participant in the making of such a film; as Michel Basilières rightly notes in his review of *My October,* the trip to film Cross is a far-fetched plot point that allows the author to stage a "reconciliation" between father and son. The logical leaps are, in this sense, evidence of Holden Rothman's desire for a reconciliation that extends beyond the family to encompass Quebec society as a whole. Though *My October* is ostensibly about the age-old conflicts, its ending suggests a desire to transcend these divisions.

## Conclusion: A Conciliatory Ethos

*Saturday Night* and *My October* represent the movement beyond "the discourse of Anglo angst and outrage" that, according to Gregory Reid, typifies many texts of the pre-referendum era (64). In contrast with an earlier generation, whose discordant affects were encoded in Richler's *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!* and numerous dystopian contemplations of Quebec's separation, O'Neill and Holden Rothman display a conciliatory ethos, channelling the political depolarization noted by Leith, Simon, and the authors of the Bouchard-Taylor report. Francophone writers are likewise registering this shift: Dion argues that recent fictions about the October Crisis use "le point de vue du *hic et nunc* pour revoir les significations qui ont été conférées au passé historiquement" (97).[12] He demonstrates how writers like Carl Leblanc and Louis Hamelin use different but related strategies to contest both the "monopoly" of historical memory, on the one hand, and the specific, ideologically driven narratives of the October Crisis, on the other (88). It is possible to make similar claims about Raymond Bock's *Atavismes* and Denis's *Corbo,* which encode their critique of ideological violence in their revisionist histories and thereby contribute to the mounting evidence of waning nationalist sentiment in Quebec.[13]

If a conciliatory sensibility is arguably implicit in the deconstructive historiographical strategies of francophone writers, it is by contrast overt in the depictions of cultural crossover that appear in anglophone novels.

The latter can be distinguished from their francophone counterparts by the recurring motif of translation, which functions as the method of *Saturday Night* and a driving theme in *My October.* The motif of translation is also present in other recent anglophone texts. Whittall's *Bottle Rocket Hearts* depicts a romantic relationship between an English-speaking woman and a French-speaking woman on the eve of the 1995 referendum. In the documentary *Quebec My Country Mon Pays,* which examines the legacy of the Quiet Revolution, filmmaker John Walker sends two young women—one anglophone and one francophone—on a blind date of sorts, with the task of discussing their differences. The prominence of translation in these works is consistent with Simon's insight that "English-language crossover figures are more numerous than francophones" because, since the 1960s, "the anglophone minority has been actively looking for ways to redefine its membership in francophone Montreal" (*Translating* 16).[14] Holden Rothman (a professional translator herself) and O'Neill (a writer who operates at the juncture between English and French) can accordingly be connected to a lineage of intrepid Montreal writers such as A. M. Klein, John Glassco, and Gail Scott, who have explored the passages between the proverbial solitudes. At the same time, the sudden visibility of translation in contemporary anglophone writing undoubtedly attests to the "new prominence" of translators and translations in Quebec culture (Simon, "Joining").

While *Saturday Night* and *My October* are diagnostic of Quebec's evolving sociopolitical landscape, their use of a translational lens to reframe former sites of conflict also has an important normative function. Prominent historian Jocelyn Létourneau has written extensively about the intimate connection between historiography and cultural understanding, arguing that "[t]he challenge Quebecers have to meet now is . . . to distinguish what in the past should be re-acknowledged and what should be 'de-acknowledged' in the name of the values and contexts of the present" (10). In Létourneau's view, Quebec can only successfully move into the future if its sheds the "trio of misery, melancholy, and re-foundation" that characterizes its origin stories (104). Though the stakes of this challenge are obviously different for the francophone audience Létourneau is primarily addressing, his call to arms resonates also for anglophone writers who revisit Quebec's foundational conflicts. By replacing the "discourse of Anglo angst and outrage" (Reid 64) with the motif of translation, O'Neill and Holden Rothman offer alternative histories that acknowledge the hardships of intercultural contact, but nevertheless affirm the desire for *rapprochement* in the present moment.

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NOTES

1 My analysis in this article builds on my previous review of *The Girl Who Was Saturday Night*, published in *The Puritan* literary magazine.
2 A nomination for a major award often has a significant impact on book sales. BookNet, which tracks marketplace data, has documented the "Canada Reads effect," noting that "[w]hile all Canada Reads contenders experience steady sales prior to the debates and a spike during debate week, there is a significant increase in unit sales and on-order quantities for the winner" (Senner).
3 "there is clearly no such thing as an anglo-Quebec literature." All translations mine.
4 "foundational event of contemporary Quebec"
5 "involuntary expressions of discomfort"
6 Luc also shares a last name with René Lévesque, the famous premier (1976-1985) and founder of the Parti Québécois.
7 Jean-Philippe Warren and Eric Ronis discuss the language politics of this incident in their article "The Politics of Love: The 1995 Montreal Unity Rally and Canadian Affection," noting the "dismay at the 'English' colouring of the rally" (16).
8 "masters of our own house"—a famous Quiet Revolution era slogan.
9 As Derrida writes, "the multiplicity of idioms actually limits . . . a 'true' translation, a transparent and adequate interexpression" (218).
10 "stereotypical lexicon of intercultural harmony"
11 James Cross (1921-) was a British diplomat who was kidnapped by FLQ militants and held from October 5 to December 3, 1970. He was later released in exchange for the safe passage of his abductors to Cuba.
12 "the point of view of the *hic et nunc* [here and now] to revisit the meanings that have historically been conferred on the past."
13 A 2016 Angus Reid-CBC survey showed that 82% of Quebec residents (and 73% of the francophone population) agree with the statement, "Ultimately, Quebec should stay in Canada"; 64% of francophones further agree that "the issue of sovereignty is settled, and Quebec will remain in Canada" ("Majority").
14 Montreal-based writer Guillaume Morissette, whose novel *New Tab* was shortlisted for the 2015 Amazon First Novel Award, is a notable exception. It remains to be seen whether Morissette is the vanguard of a larger shift within francophone literary culture, and whether translation's "new prominence" in Quebec will encourage further boundary crossings (Simon, "Joining").

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