

# Behind the “Powderworks”: Hannah Josephson and *The Tin Flute*

**S**ome time in the fall of 1946, when she was working on the English translation of *Bonheur d'occasion* for the New York publisher Reynal and Hitchcock, the version which would also be published in Toronto by McClelland & Stewart, the American translator Hannah Josephson committed an unfortunate mistake. She was almost halfway through the book. The young heroine, Florentine, her thoughts full of Jean Lévesque, has just heard Emmanuel Létourneau's declaration of love and wiped his kiss off her lips. Eugène, her brother, has enrolled in the army; her father, Azarius, is out of work. Her little brother Daniel's illness is quickly worsening. Fore-shadowing the increasingly dramatic tensions of the novel, the start of the next chapter is marked by the fierce squalls of the close of winter:

La fin de l'hiver s'entourait de nuages et de soudaines rafales. Tôt cet après-midi, des nuées basses s'étaient amassées sur le versant sud de la montagne et les vents avaient chargé le bas quartier.

Vers huit heures du soir, *la poudrerie se déchaîna*. Les volets disjoints battaient; on entendait parfois comme une déchirure de zinc au toit des maisons; les arbres noirs se tordaient avec des craquements secs au coeur de leur tronc nouveaux; les vents crépitaient sous des poignées de grenade. Et la neige continuait à tourbillonner . . . (Roy 1945 197, my emphasis)

Guided by European French usage, or simply unaware that “poudrerie” is the Quebec word for snowstorm, Josephson translated the portentous phrase, “la poudrerie se déchaîna” by “the powderworks exploded”:

The winter was coming to an end in overcast skies and sudden squalls. Early that afternoon, a bank of clouds settled on the south slope of the mountain and the wind swept down on Saint-Henri in the valley.

Toward eight o'clock in the evening *the powderworks exploded*. Loose shutters banged; from the roofs of the houses came the sound of tin being ripped off; windowpanes rattled under a fusillade of musketry; trees writhed and cracked in agony; and the snow went on falling.<sup>1</sup>

This unfortunate mistake would seal Josephson's fate in Canadian literary history for over half a century. Her translation would later be considered "dated" (Stratford, Introduction) and criticized for "grave errors in interpretation" (O'Connor, "Translations" 1127). Josephson would also be faulted for not leaving place names such as Pointe-Saint-Charles in French (Sutherland 12) and for using standard English for the anglicisms and archaic expressions in the speech of Roy's working class characters (Montpetit 141). However, her "powderworks" blunder is considered her "most famous" (Ricard, *A Life* 264). This mistake is inevitably mentioned when her work is discussed (Godard 514; Montpetit 139) and has given Josephson her unenviable reputation as the author of a "notoriously poor" translation (Kousta 1125; O'Connor, "Translations" 1127, my emphasis). By itself, or as a symbol of her "unfamiliarity with Quebec" as an American (Kousta 1125), this mistake has obscured the immense popular success of the novel in English. Despite the status of *Bonheur d'occasion* as a classic in English as well as in French (Calder 992; Walker 105), Josephson and her translation have been summarily, and I believe unjustly, dismissed in Canadian literary and translation circles.

Contemporary translation theories now recognize that no translation is perfectly faithful, that the translation process is never neutral (or error-free), and that judgements of translations are themselves value laden. Since the 1970s, translation scholars have shifted their focus from a primary interest in issues of linguistic equivalence and evaluation to a broader analysis of the macro-structural relationships between the source culture and the target culture (Toury). From this perspective, comparisons of translations and originals, rather than serving to qualify the translations themselves as good or bad, become a way of identifying the sites of cultural difference and the implications of convention and ideology (Venuti; Bassnett). A specific strand of feminist translation scholarship has also developed that seeks to reclaim the lost or neglected history of women as translators (Krontiris).

Inspired by these approaches in translation studies, I look behind the "powderworks," so to speak, in order to offer a broader framework for understanding Hannah Josephson's project as the first, and only American,

translator of Gabrielle Roy. Based on preliminary findings of research for a biography of Josephson, which will include a comprehensive reassessment of the literary, intercultural, and ideological dimensions of her translation of *Bonheur d'occasion* and its reception, this study necessarily raises more questions than it answers. Even at this stage, however, this hitherto uncharted episode in Canadian/American literary relations clearly has much to reveal about the history of literary translation in Canada, and about how issues in Canadian nationalism and translation theory may well have affected critical readings of Gabrielle Roy's seminal novel in English.

Perhaps the first and most compelling question is precisely why such a small translation error should have proven so costly. Certainly, "la poudrierie déchaina" would have been more correctly translated by "the snowstorm unleashed its fury."<sup>2</sup> Saint-Henri is usually situated at the foot of the mountain, or in the lower part of town, as opposed to "in the valley." Nonetheless, these seem relatively minor inaccuracies or infelicities in a passage that is generally effective in rendering the dramatic intensity of the moment. Furthermore, the context itself attenuates to some degree the negative effect of the "powderworks" error. As Edmund Wilson has observed, "No powderworks has yet been mentioned, but the explosion is given for the moment a certain plausibility by the description that follows of crackling trees, rattling shutters and tearing roofs" (173-74). This atmosphere is reinforced by the "poignées de grenade" of a neighbouring sentence in the original French text,<sup>3</sup> not to mention the generally ominous backdrop of the war, both in the book and in the minds of the translator and her initial readers.

Nor can one cite poor sales or lack of literary recognition as contributing factors in the criticism of Josephson's work. In fact, her American translation played a key role in ensuring the success of *The Tin Flute*, and more importantly in furthering Gabrielle Roy's career. As François Ricard records, reading the translation in manuscript form, John Beecroft of the Literary Guild of America, "sensing a best-seller" (*Une Vie* 283, translation mine), decided to include Gabrielle Roy's novel among the "Book of the Month" selections. Signed on 18 December 1946, the Guild's contract with Reynal and Hitchcock would guarantee initial sales of 600,000 copies, and Roy a minimum of \$46,500 in royalties, offering her the financial independence that would enable her to live as a writer. On 2 June 1947, with Reynal and Hitchcock's assistance, Roy would sign another lucrative contract for almost \$67,000, this time with Universal-International Pictures for the movie rights for the book (Ricard, *Une Vie* 282-84).

The impact of Josephson's translation was not restricted to the American context. In the period immediately following World War II, when many French literary figures had taken refuge across the Atlantic, fame in the United States also facilitated celebrity in France (Sirois, "Prix littéraires" 147; Godard 499). In 1947, Roy received the coveted Prix Fémina for *Bonheur d'occasion*, becoming the first Canadian writer to win a major French literary prize. Back at home, it was Josephson's American translation that earned Roy the Governor General's Award in the same year, only books written in English (or translated from French) being eligible at the time.

### Skirting the "Powderworks"

Exactly how criticism of Josephson's translation came to coalesce around the "powderworks" mistake, and the precise evaluative criteria involved, are not easy to determine. Peggy Hitchcock, the wife of the American publisher, herself brought the manuscript of the translation to Gabrielle Roy in Montreal in December 1946. Roy's biographer suggests that the author "only glanced at it for lack of time and because she had total confidence in the translator. She showed it to Hugh MacLennan, however, who told her that the translation was good" (Ricard, *A Life* 264).<sup>4</sup> In a letter written to Bill Deacon on 29 May 1947, MacLennan would express some reservations (Lennox 251), although his wife, Dorothy Duncan, published a glowing review of the book in *Maclean's* the same month. While Duncan may have written her review on the basis of the original text, it is more likely, in Antoine Sirois' assessment, that she consulted the English manuscript read by MacLennan (Sirois, "Gabrielle Roy" 471). As his biographer Elspeth Cameron has noted, despite the publication of his famous Montreal novel, *Two Solitudes*, in 1945, MacLennan was himself far from fluent in French (169). His literary stature may nonetheless have influenced Gabrielle Roy, who was impressed by Duncan's article. It is "the most complete, most intelligent article that anyone has written about me,"<sup>5</sup> she wrote to her agent's secretary, Francine Lacroix, in July 1947 (qtd. Ricard, *A Life* 266).

On what MacLennan's concerns were based, and perhaps more to the point, to what degree they were shared by McClelland & Stewart, are unclear. Was the evaluation of Josephson's translation a factor in the choice of Harry Binsse as translator of *La Petite Poule d'eau* published by Beauchemin in 1950? Ricard states only that "since Hannah Josephson, who had translated *The Tin Flute*, was not available, the publishers had turned to Harry Lorin

Binsse" (*A Life* 316).<sup>6</sup> What is evident is that neither reservations about the translation, nor the fact that the original had in the meantime been revised, prevented the republication of the Josephson translation on several occasions. McClelland & Stewart would include the novel in their New Canadian Library Series in 1954, and the book would be reprinted in 1958, 1959, 1961, 1964, 1965 and two times in 1967 (Sirois, "Gabrielle Roy" 469).

Both the original and the translation, it must be remembered, had initially been received "most favourably" in English Canada (Sirois, "Gabrielle Roy" 473, translation mine). A reviewer for *The Winnipeg Tribune* considered Roy's style "simple and effective, the strength of her French writing showing through in translation" (G., J.M. 12). Edith Fowke, writing in *The Canadian Forum*, declared the book "one of the most satisfying and adult novels yet to appear in Canada" (93). While she noted that the text is "sometimes stilted and awkward, sometimes not in key," and wondered "how much this is a result of the translation," she nonetheless concluded "these are minor criticisms. The book as a whole is a powerful piece of work" (93-94). Reviewing *The Tin Flute* for *Lectures*, Vera Dammann, on the contrary, had only praise for the translation: "Hannah Josephson has done a good translation. In certain passages, I even find she has corrected some of the heaviness of the style of the original. Furthermore, she has not attempted to render French-Canadian speech by American slang, and for that she should be congratulated" (247, translation mine).<sup>7</sup> Except for a quick criticism of the "somewhat silly" English title, an anonymous reviewer for the *Catholic Record* lauded the "penetrating pen of Gabrielle Roy to whose credit goes the writing of one of Canada's first big literary achievements" ("Canadian Novel" 2).

Against this generally positive backdrop, the first significant criticism of Josephson's translation would appear to be signed by Alan Brown, who would himself translate several works by Roy for McClelland & Stewart in the late 1970s and 1980s. In an article published in 1956, Brown criticizes the Josephson translation, citing some "mistakes of interpretation": "odd" for "curieuse," "insufferable" for "pus durable," "thingamajig" for "zing-et-ling" (64-65). These seem quite minor quibbles; Brown's own interpretation might be questioned on some of these points. No mention is made of the "powder-works" blunder. Brown's primary criticism is directed at Josephson's translation of the dialogues of Roy's working class characters: "Their speech may present some difficulties to English-speaking readers who spurn (as they should) the translation" (64). He does not elaborate on any further reason

for distrusting the translation, other than the inadequate rendering of “Street-French in Montreal,” noting in this respect that the “translator admittedly had a hard assignment” (64).

In his 1958 introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of *The Tin Flute*, Hugo McPherson raises the issue of translation only in general terms. Praising Gabrielle Roy’s “flair for capturing with an uncanny fidelity the accent and idiom of French Canada (whether rural *patois* or Montreal *argot*),” he offers a short reflection on the difficulties of rendering such speech patterns in English: “Unhappily, the reader of the English translation must take this gift largely on trust, for the market-place French of Quebec is no more to be translated than such familiar English as: ‘I’m feelin’ kind of droopy’; or, ‘Yer loaded, aintcha, ya lush!’” He concludes that “We must be prepared, then, to believe that certain awkward expressions are not Miss Roy’s blunders but the inevitable defeats of translation” (ix).

While this might be taken as an indirect criticism of the Josephson translation, McPherson attaches it rather to a further reflection on the “translation of profanity which, in French, often employs religious expressions” (ix). He ends with a compliment to Josephson: “Very often, however, the French comes through beautifully by undergoing a sea-change” (x). One might add that McPherson himself is not without making a slip of the translator’s pen. In the same text, he inaccurately observes that the Lacasse family name “means ‘box’ or ‘locker’” (McPherson 1958: vi).<sup>8</sup> In his remarks on *The Tin Flute* in *The Literary History of Canada* (1965), McPherson makes no criticism of the translation, noting only that Roy’s “work, in translation, has been so influential that it cannot be ignored” (703).

By 1980, however, when McClelland & Stewart published a new translation of *The Tin Flute* by Alan Brown, the decision was publicly attributed to the ill repute into which the Josephson translation had fallen. In his preface, comparative literature specialist and literary translator Philip Stratford observes, “After thirty years the rather old-fashioned version of *The Tin Flute* by Hannah Josephson has become dated. It reads like a mid-forties film” (Introduction n.p.). In 1992, in the only existing article-length study of the two English translations of *Bonheur d’occasion*,<sup>9</sup> Marie Montpetit “supposes” that the “new translation of the work was required because certain errors had been noticed and needed to be corrected, including the famous *poudrerie* translated as ‘powderworks’” (139, translation mine).<sup>10</sup> Like Brown, her primary focus is on the translation of dialogue: she questions Josephson’s decision to use standard English. The “anglicisms and archaisms”

of working-class Montreal spoken French, she argues, are “inseparable from the content of *Bonheur d’occasion* because they contribute to emphasizing the themes developed in the novel” (145, translation mine).<sup>11</sup> Her criticism also extends to Brown’s own translation. By “failing to render anglicisms and archaisms adequately, both English translations indirectly reduce the socio-economic dimension of the novel” (146, translation mine).<sup>12</sup>

Undoubtedly, the most definitive judgement is that of John O’Connor in the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* in 1997. Critical, as well, of Brown’s “highly unsatisfactory retranslation,” he reserves his harshest words for Josephson’s translation, citing, without providing any specific examples, “its grave errors in interpretation throughout.” Furthermore, he observes, “Roy’s major revisions to her novel in the 1947 French edition immediately made the Josephson translation [published in the same year!] as obsolete as it was unreliable” (1127).

Such judgements remain characteristic of the current status of Josephson’s translation in both English and French-language literary criticism in Canada. At the same time, inexplicably, given how adamant these criticisms are, and the cultural icon status of *Bonheur d’occasion* and *The Tin Flute*, in the almost 60 years since both first appeared, the translation has attracted little scholarly analysis. There has been only one article-length study of the translation of dialogue in the Josephson and Brown translations, focusing on the treatment of archaisms and anglicisms, no in-depth comparison with Brown’s version, and no attempt to assess objectively the different cultural, economic, and political factors that condition her particular translation process. Even the basic questions as to who Hannah Josephson was and how she came to be connected with *Bonheur d’occasion* have not been asked. The snowstorm has taken its revenge, it would seem, and in a certain symbolic irony, Canadian scholars have left her out in the cold.

### **The American View**

Hannah Josephson fares little better in American scholarship; if she is mentioned at all, it is as the spouse of Matthew Josephson, an important and highly visible American literary figure. In the early 1920s, the Josephsons were part of the wave of American writers who headed to Paris. There, aligned with French Dadaists, Matthew edited two short-lived but highly contentious international journals devoted to artistic experimentalism, *Broom* and *Secession*. During the 1930s, back in the United States, he became a frequent contributor to the *New Republic*, *New Masses*, and other left-wing journals.

This was also the period when he wrote his best-known work: *The Robber Barons*, a “now classic muckraking inquiry into the accumulation of great American fortunes in the 19th century” (Whitman 334). A prolific writer “with a generalist approach to the art of letters,” he was a “successful popular historian, biographer and journalist” (Shi 1). The French connection was to remain a fundamental element of his career, leading to biographies of Rousseau, Zola, and Stendhal. As his *New York Times* obituary points out, “unlike many of his countrymen whose café friends were mainly other Americans, Mr. Josephson took the pains to make friends with French writers and artists” (Whitman 334).

Hannah, who married Josephson in 1920, at the age of nineteen, and lived with him for the rest of her life, has suffered the historiographical fate of many other spouses of public men. The heading of her obituary in the *New York Times* reads, “Hannah Josephson, Author, Dead at 76,” acknowledging her important study of the Lowell girls of the Massachusetts textile mills, *The Golden Threads*, as well as her biography, *Jeannette Rankin: First Lady in Congress*. However, the capitalized subtitle is revealing of the perception of her secondary stature: “Wrote With Her Husband Biography of Al Smith—She Was Also Editor, Translator and Reporter.” Interestingly enough, in the article itself, a passing mention is made of her role as the translator of “Gabrielle Roy’s *The Tin Flute*” (Anonymous 1423). Unlike her husband, Hannah does not merit an entry in the *American National Biography*.

As a result, what we can glean of Hannah Josephson’s life through published sources comes to us primarily through the prism of her relationship with Matthew Josephson. Not unexpectedly, in the only comprehensive biography of the latter, *Matthew Josephson, Bourgeois Bohemian*, by David E. Shi, Hannah’s connection with Gabrielle Roy recedes within the emphasis on American literary history. Shi describes Hannah’s activities in 1946 and 1947, when she was busy translating *Bonheur d’occasion* and watching her translation soar on the best-seller lists in the United States: “Still vivacious and attractive at middle age, Hannah was an amazing woman, at once a caring wife, concerned mother, efficient house manager, gracious hostess, research assistant, and intelligent conversationalist” (237). Of the heady times she must surely have had with *Bonheur d’occasion*, there is no mention. We do learn that Hannah had begun “a career of her own, first as translator of Aragon and then as a historian and biographer” (237). In December 1947, Matthew Josephson remarked that “Hannah also aspires to be an ‘author’ . . . A year later he again complained that Hannah’s literary interests interfered



with his own freedom, as well as affecting their relations together.” During this period, Hannah, it seems, was “always fatigued, and distracted, and even ill at times” (237).

Nor does the fact that a good part of her writing and translation was done in collaboration with her husband serve her cause. Together Matthew and Hannah published *A Season in Hell: The Life of Arthur Rimbaud* (1931), a translation of Jean-Marie Carré’s essay, *La vie aventureuse de Jean-Arthur Rimbaud*, and *Memoirs of Egotism*, their rendition of Stendhal’s *Souvenirs d’égotisme* (1949). In both cases the introductions are signed only by Matthew Josephson. Curiously, for the volume of work by the French Surrealist poet that Hannah co-edited with American writer Malcolm Cowley, *Aragon: Poet of the French Resistance* (1945), she herself signed the introduction, and the division of editing and translation work is clearly delimited. A sign of changing times, or readjustments within the Josephson household, *Al Smith: Hero of the Cities, A Political Portrait Drawing on the Papers of Frances Perkins* (1969) is presented as co-authored by Matthew and Hannah Josephson.

However, this exception does not rescue her from her double handicap with respect to American scholarly interest: her role as literary spouse and her activity as translator. In both cases, she is defined outside, and in relation to, the male realm, in her function as companion to men and reproducer of texts. In a curious irony, Josephson, whose own writings sought to reclaim the forgotten history of the Lowell mill girls and Jeannette Rankin’s efforts on behalf of peace and women’s suffrage, has herself fallen into the same lost space from which she has rescued other women. Dismissed as a translator, she has fared no better as a biographer.

### **De-fusing the Powderworks**

Roy and Josephson both had experience as journalists; both spent time in France; both exhibited a left-wing understanding of social problems; and both were especially sensitive to women’s issues. Of course, such intermingling strands of commonality and difference do not prove that Josephson and Roy had a similar cultural and political vision of otherness. That the American translator, through her personal background and values, shared, at least to some degree, Roy’s *vision du monde* does not necessarily ensure that she was a particularly perceptive reader, or translator, of *Bonheur d’occasion*. That being said, in so far as some of their shared social and feminist values can also be found at the heart of the novel, it is difficult to justify the reductive dismissal of Josephson’s translation current in Canadian literary criticism.

Clearly, much more research is needed to uncover fully what lies behind the “powderworks.” This essay identifies some of the directions such research might take. First, the development of the “powderworks” criticism is worthy of more scrutiny. Following the paper trail of the criticism and determining more precisely its context and motives would be instructive. In this respect, one might well explore the role played by Gabrielle Roy’s subsequent Canadian translators in discrediting the Josephson translation.

Brown would seem to be among the first to systematically attack Josephson’s translation. The first specific, published reference to the “powderworks” occurs apparently in an article by Harry Binsse, who replaced Josephson as Roy’s translator in 1950. Writing in the 22 September 1962 issue of the *Montreal Star*, Binsse discusses the financial and linguistic difficulties raised by literary translation between English and French in Canada. Since “translations cost money,” and the Canadian market is small, he observes, it is useful to tap into “the United States and British markets,” but this requires “persuad[ing] a New York and a London house that the book is marketable for them as well as in Canada, and this process can be costly and time-consuming” (2). Within this American/Canadian publishing context he then broaches the quality of Josephson’s translation:

This brings us to a second difficulty, the pitfall—often leading to pratfalls—in the language itself. At the beginning of Chapter XII of “The Tin Flute,” Miss Roy, in describing a blustery late winter afternoon in St. Henri, remarks that “la poudrierie éclata [sic]. . .”<sup>13</sup> meaning that powder snow began to fly. In the English version this appeared (and continues to appear) as: “Toward eight o’clock in the evening the powderworks exploded,” which is all the more startling since neither before nor after, in the whole length of the book, is there the slightest allusion to a powderworks. Of course, the excellent new Canadian Dictionary or the Canadian edition of Cassells would have spared the translator this boner but at the time they did not exist, and who, even today, has ever heard of either in New York? (2)

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, cooperation may have been the word of the day, but there is no doubt that the 1950s and 1960s were marked by increasing efforts, in both Canadian Anglophone and Francophone communities, to develop national literary institutions. Resulting frictions between Canadian and American publishers were not uncommon. To what degree these frictions, and Josephson’s status as an American, affected the assessment of her work, needs to be addressed. One might also ask whether there was not some modicum of self-interest behind the criticisms by Brown and Binsse as Canadian translators vying with American translators for limited translation opportunities.

It would be useful to ascertain whether there was any attempt on the part of McClelland & Stewart (and if not, why not) to revise the translation in keeping with Gabrielle Roy's own revisions of the original text, and to correct any small infelicities in the translation arising from Josephson's lack of familiarity with Montreal topography. O'Connor's assessment, for instance, that the translation was "obsolete" as soon as it was published, given Gabrielle Roy's "major revisions" to the original in 1947, would seem excessive. As Sirois points out, Roy's initial corrections were in fact relatively "minor," involving changes to only some "200-300" words ("Roman" 133).

Attributing the need for a new translation only to weaknesses in the Josephson version does not appear to be completely transparent. In a letter written to Gabrielle Roy on 20 December 1976, Jack McClelland first links the idea for a new Canadian translation to the Canadian political situation. "I think its publication might be effective in terms of the problem of Canadian unity," he writes Roy, ". . . you are unique in being the only Canadian writer who has totally bridged the gap between the two cultures" (Solecki 218). No mention of translation issues is made, and the letter ends on a more commercial note:

We will be starting early in the new year to distribute books directly in mass-market paperback. I believe that 250,000 copies of the new translation of *Bonheur d'occasion* could be sold in English-speaking Canada in a very short period of time, and I feel sincerely that this could have a useful effect on understanding our country. (Solecki 219)

In her reply, Roy refers to "your continuing interest in a new translation," suggesting that the initiative was indeed the publisher's rather than her own. While in agreement that Alan Brown "is the man for the job" (Solecki 220), she expresses some reservations about the project and its commercial (and political) success:

I myself hesitate a great deal, though, for naturally I would love to work with Alan at some time or another—a good translation, a really good one, can only be achieved at that cost, I think—I dread plunging myself in that big book of which I am truly weary. . . . I wonder if you are not under an illusion when you expect another boom of this book. . . . And I can't see that it could do much to draw us together. (Solecki 220-221)

Obviously, the reasons behind the new translation are far more complex than the "powderworks" error so often evoked, involving, no doubt, inter-related political, financial, and editorial considerations.

Changing Canadian discourses on translation since *The Tin Flute* was published have possibly also affected opinions of the translation. In an article published in 1988, O'Connor admits to having "happily accepted Hannah Josephson's version of what Gabrielle Roy had to say," when he "first encountered French-Canadian literature—*The Tin Flute*, as it happens—in translation in high school." It was "in 1970-1971," he continues, while registered in "the Master's program in Canadian Literature at the Université de Sherbrooke," that he was "taught to be far more skeptical about the accuracy and reliability of Canadian translations" ("Violets" 115). This may reflect in part the political tensions of the period in Quebec, and a new perception of the need for accuracy in translation (Claxton); it may also be related to issues raised by Brown and Binsse or broader debate within the translation community.

The 1970s were a key period in the history of literary translation in Canada (Whitfield, *Writing* 8-11). While French-English literary translation was initially viewed as building bridges between the two cultural communities (Stratford *Literary*), it was also beginning to be attacked for being assimilative, and not sufficiently sensitive to Québécois cultural difference. In an article that captures some of these tensions, E.D. Blodgett suggests that Roy "has been translated so assiduously that it often takes Anglophone readers a long time to discover that her novels, Englished as *The Tin Flute* and *Where Nests the Water Hen* (to name the most English), were composed in French. That may be the translator's ideal, but it is assimilation with a vengeance" (26-27). This claim springs exclusively from Blodgett's approach to the theory of translation; he offers no empirical evidence in the article to back it up. A more recent analysis by Barbara Godard on how works by Gabrielle Roy, Anne Hébert, and Marie-Claire Blais circulate in English, based on concepts from the French sociologist Bourdieu, offers another example of how theory may precipitate conclusions. Godard claims that Josephson's translation has not only "contributed considerably to the 'quiet assimilation' of *Bonheur d'occasion*, by transforming the novel into a universal drama celebrated by American critics for the intensity of its 'romantic pathos.'" The textual effects of that manipulation established a model of ethnocentric translation for books translated in the United States and imported into Canada" (514).<sup>14</sup> Again, no empirical evidence is offered to substantiate such a generalization.<sup>15</sup>

Certainly, the relation between the translated text and the social, literary, and cultural values of the target culture is at the core of descriptive translation

studies. For the proponents of this approach, which texts are translated, and how they are translated, reflect the dominance of target culture norms (Bassnett 6-8). To establish the particulars of *The Tin Flute*, it would be important to situate Josephson's translation with respect to American literary and social values during the immediate post-war period. An analysis of the American reception of the translation, compared to similar reception studies in French and English Canada, could expose some of the differences in how both publics read the book. This approach would offer a broader understanding of the cultural (i.e. Canadian vs American) issues at work in the Canadian evaluation of the Josephson translation. It would also identify any ways in which Josephson's translation and her relation to American literary traditions served (or not) to enhance the American reception of the book and trouble the Canadian waters. Such an analysis could also be extended to a comparison of her translation with that of Alan Brown. One of the motives behind the new Canadian translation may have been to realign the French original with respect to changing reader values within English Canada. As McClelland's letter to the author suggests, notwithstanding financial considerations, the new translation was, in effect, a way to re-launch the classic.

Such a macro-structural approach would not be complete without delving into the context in which Josephson herself worked: The impetus for her involvement in the project; the nature of her relations with her publishers (in New York and in Toronto) and with the author;<sup>16</sup> the conditions, financial and other, under which she prepared the translation; and her approach to the translation itself. Nor should it be forgotten that when Josephson embarked upon her translation of *Bonheur d'occasion*, she was already an accomplished translator, with at least one edited anthology of translations and three book-length translations in print. Besides her collaborative work with Matthew Josephson and Malcolm Cowley, these included Louis Aragon's *Les Voyageurs de l'Impériale* (1941) and Philippe Soupault's *Le temps des assassins* (1946), both substantial volumes. The Aragon book alone is almost 600 pages in length. Nor had her translation work gone unrecognized outside the United States. In 1946, under a slightly different title, *Aragon: Poet of Resurgent France*, Pilot Press of London released a British edition of the anthology she co-edited with Cowley.

An examination of these earlier translations would provide useful insight. cursory analysis suggests that Josephson's work on Aragon and Soupault is most closely linked to their political activity, and more specifically to their

role in the French resistance movement, as opposed to their poetry and contribution to the Dadaist movement. For the Aragon anthology, Cowley edited the poetry and Hannah the prose. The two texts she herself translated are both short essays, including “An Appeal to French Intellectuals,” written by Aragon as head of the National Committee of Writers (Southern Zone), and a moving article entitled simply “Free!”, published by Aragon after the liberation in the underground resistance newspaper, *La Drôme en Armes*, that he published with his wife, Elsa Triolet. One catches something of Josephson’s tone, and motivation, in her introduction to the anthology. After reference to Aragon’s “poems of heartbreak, . . . his poems to Elsa his wife and his country,” she writes: “This book is presented by several of Aragon’s friends in homage to the poet and the fighter, whose achievements in a period of terror and catastrophe may well give heart to men and women of good will everywhere” (Josephson and Cowley xi).

Grounded in the emotions generated by World War II, this uplifting appeal to “men and women of good will” finds an echo in the often collaborative nature of Josephson’s work as translator. The Aragon anthology contains translations by Rolf Humphries, Kenneth Muir, Louis MacNiece, Sally Wood, William Jay Smith, Grace Wallace, George Dillon, Stephen Spender, and Waldo Frank. *A Season in Hell* includes previously published translations of poems by Rimbaud by J. S. Watson, Jr., Lionel Abel, Joseph Shipley, and T. Sturge Moore. From 1949 to 1965, in a natural extension of such initiatives, Josephson was librarian and editor of publications at the American Academy of Arts and Letters Library in New York. Research may confirm whether through her numerous literary connections she was acquainted with contemporary American theories of text and translation. Matthew Josephson, for instance, corresponded with Amy Lowell, an early associate of Ezra Pound, an important influence within the American translation workshop tradition (Gentzler).

Whatever the precise results of such research, this first glimpse behind the “powderworks” offers a far more intriguing vista than the general dismissal of Josephson’s accomplishments would imply. Indeed, we need to re-assess not only her rendition of *Bonheur d’occasion*, but also her literary contribution as biographer and intercultural agent. As a symbolic return of the repressed—her work straddles four distinct and conflicting literary institutions (French, American, English-Canadian and French-Canadian/Québécois)—retrieving her story from under the snowstorm may not only lead to a better understanding of how Roy’s work has been read in English,

but also provide a closer view of the uncertain “powderworks” of intercultural communication.

#### NOTES

- 1 Gabrielle Roy, *The Tin Flute*, Translated by Hannah Josephson, 1947. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, New Canadian Library No 5, 1969, 98. My italics.
- 2 This is merely a suggestion to capture the sense in English of the French expression. As in many translation contexts, there are a variety of possible, accurate translations.
- 3 Interestingly enough, in what Gabrielle Roy considered her final revised version of the novel, the word “grenades” has been replaced by “grenaille” (153). For details on the different editions of the novel, see Antoine Sirois’ “*Bonheur d’occasion*, Roman de Gabrielle Roy,” 133.
- 4 The French reads as follows: “n’y jette qu’un coup d’oeil rapide, faute de temps et parce qu’elle fait entièrement confiance à la traductrice. Elle le montre cependant à Hugh MacLennan qui lui dit que la traduction est bonne.”
- 5 The French reads as follows: “l’article le plus complet, le plus intelligent qu’on ait rédigé sur moi.” Letter to Francine Lacroix, the secretary of Gabrielle Roy’s agent, Jean-Marie Nadeau, 15 July 1947.
- 6 The French text reads as follows: “comme Hannah Josephson, la traductrice de *Bonheur d’occasion*, n’est pas disponible, on a recours aux services de Harry Lorin Binsse.”
- 7 The French text reads as follows: “La traduction de Hannah Josephson est bonne. Par endroits, je trouve même qu’elle corrige quelques lourdeurs de style de l’original. Du reste, la traductrice n’a pas essayé de rendre en argot américain le parler populaire franco-canadien. De cela, elle doit être félicitée.”
- 8 The word “casse” literally means breakage. Used in the frequent, familiar expression, “il va y avoir de la casse,” it is more aptly translated by “there’s going to be some rough stuff.”
- 9 Although its title might suggest a more technical study, “How do you translate ‘regard’? Rewriting Gabrielle Roy,” an article by Lorna Hutcheson and Nathalie Cooke, addresses “the translation of her public image across the cultures of French and English Canada” (118).
- 10 The French quotation reads as follows: “Nous supposons que la nouvelle traduction a supplanté l’ancienne parce que certaines erreurs avaient été signalées et devaient être corrigées, par exemple, la fameuse poudrière devenue « poudrière ».”
- 11 The French reads as follows: “Les anglicismes et les archaïsmes sont inséparables du contenu dans *Bonheur d’occasion* parce qu’ils contribuent à accentuer les thèmes exploités dans le roman.”
- 12 The French reads as follows: “Le gommage des anglicismes et des archaïsmes dans les deux traductions anglaises a diminué la dimension socio-économique du roman d’une façon passive.”
- 13 Binsse has himself made a slip of the pen here, and quoted Roy’s text incorrectly.
- 14 The French reads as follows: “la traduction, réalisée pour l’éditeur américain et reprise par l’éditeur canadien, a beaucoup fait pour faciliter cette ‘assimilation tranquille’ en transformant *Bonheur d’occasion* en un drame universel célébré par les critiques américains pour l’intensité du ‘pathos de l’amour.’ Les effets textuels de cette manipulation

- établissaient un modèle de traduction ethnocentrique pour les livres québécois traduits aux Etats-Unis et importés au Canada.”
- 15 Recent work on twelve important contemporary Canadian Anglophone translators, including Godard herself, would suggest that a variety of translation models are at work, none of which is directly linked to Josephson’s translation. See Whitfield, *Writing between the Lines*.
- 16 The Fonds Gabrielle Roy includes only one letter from Josephson to Roy, written in 1946. While this pales before the extensive correspondence between Joyce Marshall and Gabrielle Roy, it would seem in keeping with the sparse exchange of letters with her two other translators, Alan Brown and Harry Binsse.

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