

TRANSLATION & PARODY

Quebec Theatre in the Making

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ALITTLE MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS AGO, the Québécois theatre emerged, so called to mark a break with the French-Canadian theatre that had preceded it. Its appearance coincided with the emergence of a national consciousness defining itself in opposition not only to the anglo-Canadian hegemony, but also to the linguistic and cultural heritage of France. Simultaneously with this development there appeared a new trend in translation, the main area of which was the theatre.

The following study is an attempt to describe a particular group of such drama translations for which Jean-Claude Germain's *A Canadian Play / Une plaie canadienne* (1983) is a paradigm. *A Canadian Play / Une plaie canadienne* is paradigmatic first of all by virtue of its title, a parody of translation which ridicules the perverse effects of institutionalized bilingualism. It imitates those *cadavres exquis* or hybrid forms created by federal translation, as for instance in the toponymic expressions fusing English and French: "Maple avenue des Erables."¹ Above all, it denounces the copresence of the two languages that results in French being everywhere over-shadowed by English. By way of metonymy the title also evokes the official texts emanating from Ottawa, in which the two languages are placed side by side in a way that is far from being innocent or innocuous, for English, reflecting the large number of speakers of the language, occupies the place of the original language. French follows as a translation, weakened and distorted, like an echo. In these texts, French has no autonomous existence. It is at the margin of English, which it duplicates, and the more it duplicates English, the more it becomes an unacknowledged imitation.²

Bilingualism, then, is a curse. It is a Canadian curse, and the adjective is significant, for it contrasts with the term *Québécois* to designate the federal reality which is the cause of this curse. The latter has well-known historical origins, namely the defeat of Montcalm and the French-Canadians in the battle of the Plains of Abraham and their subsequent subjection to English colonization. *La plaie canadienne* thus also represents the unhealed wound caused by this humiliation.

The title *A Canadian Play / Une plaie canadienne* thus may be parodic, but it is also extremely dysphoric. As a title, it is paradoxical in form, but eminently

doxological in that it reinforces the *doxa*, the point of view, the mode of discourse concerning the Québécois condition.

Behind Germain's parodically formulated title is a play whose explicit intention is to exorcise, through laughter, the federalist evil which forces the Québécois to become Canadians, that is to say "*des Français qui parlent anglais*" (1983; 91). It is worth noting the double focus of an alterity, an otherness, which implicitly suggests that as a factor creating alienation French cultural hegemony is to be rejected on the same grounds as English domination. To become Frenchmen who speak English is tantamount to rejecting one's specifically Québécois identity, to becoming assimilated, thus fulfilling the vow taken by an Englishman who, a century ago, sealed the fate of Quebec. *A Canadian Play* puts this man on trial: Lord Durham, sent by England to investigate the province following the nationalist uprising of the *Patriotes* (1837-1838); a man who in his report to Queen Victoria described the Québécois as a people without a history and without a culture, whose assimilation was to be accelerated to guard against any secessionist impulses.

In the play, the spectre of Lord Durham faces his judges, and in the course of this symbolic trial the dramatist lets him speak the following lines:

Je n'ai fait que *translater* la réalité! Je suis venu! J'ai écouté! J'ai regardé! Et dans mon rapport à sa Majesté, je n'ai fait qu'une *translation*. . . Qu'une *tra-duc-tion* de la réalité! Que vous avez *retranslaté!* *Re-tra-duit* à votre tour! Dans vos mots! A votre guise! Croyez-moi! Votre histoire, si vous tenez absolument à en avoir une, ne souffre pas d'une maladie des symboles, mais d'un abus, d'un *e-x-c-è-s de tra-duc-tion!* . . . c-e-s-s-e-z de *tra-dui-re!* Il faut se dire soi-même, si l'on ne veut pas *être dit par les autres!* (1983; 52)³

APART FROM ITS TITLE, Germain's play itself is paradigmatic in that it is explicitly based on translation as metaphor. But this metaphor is negatively charged, for the translation is a *calque*: *traduire* and *translater* are used interchangeably. Notwithstanding etymological justification, the verb *translater* is put into the mouth of an Englishman. It must therefore be seen as a fault, a poor translation, and, in the figurative sense, as a noxious act.

Metaphorically, translation in this case thus signifies degrading change, the *altération* which comes about through contact with *altérité*, with the Other as witnessed in the juxtaposition *A Canadian Play / Une plaie canadienne*. The Other, the Foreigner, who is represented by the English-speaking world,⁴ is perceived as a devouring hegemonic figure whose presence at one's side results in degradation and loss of identity.

Moreover *traduire* does not mean to express the Other or to wish to do so, but rather the opposite — *to be expressed by the Other* and thus to be *dispossessed of one's own language*: this is the effect of federal bilingualism. To be expressed by

the Other can also imply no longer being able to speak oneself, no longer having words of one's own. The French language is thus to be driven back into the sphere of Otherness, of the foreign, to make for the emerging or the creation of Québécois as a language.

The translation metaphor recurs in various forms throughout the play as an act of duplication controlled from the outside, an act that is sometimes coercive and always despoiling. The metaphor is thus linked to the theme of specularity that permeates all discourse on *québécoité*. This specularity, manifesting itself in the translation process, really serves to bring the Other to trial, for the Other's function is inescapably that of a model whose very presence creates a specular relationship marking inferiority, that is to say a relationship which is destructive. In this relationship the Other is not an object of knowledge, nor does it represent a pole of dialectic opposition to oneself. The Other is a mirror in which one seeks to find one's own image. But the Other is deceptive either in only reflecting his own identity or else in producing but *une image abîmée* in the sense of Gide's use of the term: that is to say this identification of oneself is only the reflection of the shadow of the Other, to use Germain's own expression (1983; 23).

One may thus seek to examine how this relationship with the Other determines the alterations to which foreign dramatic works — or works perceived as foreign — are subjected to permit their admission into the new Québécois theatre and to make them fit the new canon. More precisely, what are the transformational schemata that become operative in the paradigm furnished by *A Canadian Play / Une plaie canadienne* in which translation is treated as an entropic figure of duplication? Or rather, since the issue of taxonomy which this question ultimately implies is of secondary interest here, what is the true motivation behind these forms of translative entropy, apart from the laughter that they seek to provoke?

The relevance of this question becomes apparent when one examines the title of Germain's play more closely, for it fuses two operations which, in principle, are mutually exclusive: translation and parody. Indeed, translation basically aims at a perfect coincidence between the original and the translated text, and thus excludes any palimpsestic effect. Parody, on the other hand, demands that the hypotext be recognizable in the hypertext, that is to say it demands that that which is parodied be present in the parody itself. *A Canadian Play / Une plaie canadienne* is parodic because of entropy in the translative operation. This entropy consists in the iconic translation of an element within the utterance, which at the same time is translated semantically. This iconic quality resulting from a maximum phonetic coincidence, produces a radical semantic opposition between the two utterances, since the *lexème* "play" whose denotation is euphoric and play-ful is replaced by "plaie," which includes two *sémèmes* or two meanings which are both dysphoric: curse and wound. The parody resulting from this manipulation lends an auto-referential quality to the utterance. Like Magritte's pipe, but in the opposite sense,

this parodic utterance (which is not, *a priori*, a translation) in its duality nevertheless affirms "This is a translation." And since it refers to itself as a translation, this double utterance takes on a metadiscursive meaning, as has been indicated at the beginning of this study.

IN QUEBEC THEATRE, there is a subsystem of works straddling original Québécois productions and translated foreign works. This kind of theatre is based on a particular form of entropic translation, the type that provokes laughter. A few representative examples of this type of theatre may permit us to examine the metadiscursive function of this deviant translation process. The question may be put as follows: What is it in these texts that constitutes what Oswald Ducrot (1983) has described in terms of pragmatic semantics as *le grand discours*, the more or less illocutionary discourse that the dramatist⁵ addresses to the intended audience by way of *le petit discours*, that is to say the dialogue that takes place between the play's protagonists?

In some cases, as in the example already mentioned, only the titles are affected. But the fact remains that there are many such titles: *Don Quickshot*, *l'homme à la manque*, *Manon Lastcall*, *Emile et une nuit*, *Roméo et Julien*, *Rodéo et Juliette*, *Le Cid maghané*, *En attendant Trudot*, *L'Alphonse faite à Marie*, etc. These titles both invoke and trivialize titles of canonized works that are being recontextualized to fit the Québécois reality, but it is a particular reality and one which is socially marginal (the drug addict, the bar hostess, the tramp, the homosexual). Or else — and the effect is the same — these works are reactualized in a social environment in which a language is used which has separated itself from the French of France, a language which is recognizable in its Quebec specificity: *joual*. It is interesting to note that these titles designate Québécois works which — apart from Ducharme's *Cid maghané* — bear no intertextual relationship, neither of form nor of content, to the works which, according to the titles, are to be parodied. As the relationship is purely nominal, these titles assume a purely appellative function in a media-like process of publicity-seeking, the effect of which is to draw attention to the Québécois work by invoking the famous foreign literary monument. The Québécois work rests on the fame of the foreign masterpiece not only by way of identification and equation, but also by way of antithesis: the classic becomes an object of derision to the audience of the new play as it appears invalid or "outdated" in the sense that it has become an inappropriate vehicle for the expression of *la québécoité* or the Québécois status.

Of these texts, only Réjean Ducharme's *Le Cid maghané* (1967) is a real parody. As the title indicates, it is a parodic deformation of one of the greatest classics of French literature. The parody is based to a high degree on the translation of

Corneille's elevated language into the Québécois sociolect known as *joual*, the language of the proletariat, a mixture of English and French:

Corneille

CHIMÈNE: Dis-moi donc, je te prie, une seconde fois
Ce qui te fait juger qu'il approuve mon choix. (1961 [1637]; 20)

Ducharme

CHIMÈNE: Dis-moi le encore une fois ce qui te fait
croire qu'il trouve mon chum si smart. (1967; 1)

While Corneille's literal text does not have the same cultural significance in Quebec that it has in France, the parody itself can only work if the parodied text is recognized. In Ducharme's version, it is not so much the letter of the text as the diegetic elements that are parodied, the plot fragments likely to be remembered. One such element is the slap scene which in Ducharme's play has been transformed into a bar-room brawl:

Corneille

LE COMTE: Ton impudence,
Téméraire vieillard, aura sa récompense.
(*Il lui donne un soufflet*)
...
Fais lire au prince, en dépit de l'envie,
Pour son instruction, l'histoire de ta vie;
D'un insolent discours ce juste châtement
Ne lui servira pas de petit ornement. (1961 [1637]; 21)

Ducharme

LE COMTE: Tu mérites une bonne claque sur la gueule.
Elle s'en vient. La voilà, Catche là! (*Claque sur la gueule.*
Don Diègue tombe, se relève)
...
(*Il lance la perruque de Don Diègue dans un coin*)
Tu diras au prince que tu t'es fait scalper par un
Iroquois. Ça servira d'introduction à ta première leçon
d'histoire sur l'Amérique. (1967; 14)

The famous Corneillan dilemma is also posed and resolved prosaically by Ducharme's protagonists:

DON RODRIGUE: Si je tue le père de ma blonde, je perds ma blonde. C'est immanquable. Il y a pas une fille au monde qui est "willing" de sortir avec le gars qui a tué son père. Mais si je le tue pas le père de ma blonde, je passe pour un sans-coeur. C'est maudiquement compliqué, mon affaire. Si je tue pas le père de ma blonde, je perds ma blonde. C'est immanquable. Il y a pas une fille au monde qui est "willing" de sortir avec un gars qui laisse tout le monde donner des tapes à son vieux père. Mais si je tue le père de ma blonde, ma blonde aimera pas plus ça. C'est maudiquement compliqué, mon affaire.

Si je regarde ça comme il faut, mon affaire est pas si compliquée que ça. Je perds ma blonde "anyway," que je tue le père de ma blonde ou que je le tue pas. Je serais bien fou de me priver de tuer le père de ma blonde. (*Il sort victorieusement*) Où c'est que tu es, effronté? Montre-toi donc, baveux! Qu'ils viennent les maudits si c'est pas des peureux! (1967; 17)

These extracts reveal that linguistically the transformation of the text is not so much a translation as a free transcoding. But in turning Corneille's text into *joual*, the parody actualizes the characters and their antecedents, their words and their deeds. Like Rodrigue, the bum, the rascal, Chimène could be a heroine straight out of the pages of the tabloid *Journal de Montréal*; the same is true of all the other characters as well: the *infante-midinette*, Gormas and his mafia, Don Fernand, the gay. All these elements make up a social picture of which one can say that it reveals the alienation of those who dwell in it:

Le dramaturge se sert du *Cid* pour lire — et critiquer — la société Québécoise, plus que de celle-ci, et du *joual* pour relire Corneille. (1981; Mailhot 214)

However, the blind spot in parody, particularly in its modern form, is the intention that motivates it.⁶ As Ducharme has declared, speaking of Corneille's tragedy: "*J'avais pour but de la rendre plus compréhensible et plus de par ici, moins sérieuse et plus laide.*"⁷ In the first degree, the disfigurement of Corneille's text appears as a naughty joke; it is the moustache traced over the *Giaconda's* smile.

These iconoclastic transformations deride classical tragedy, yet one cannot say that they are derived from what Linda Hutcheon (1985; 55) calls a *polemical ethos*, directed against Corneille. And to a certain point the *satirical ethos* itself seems limited and in part doubtful. *Le Cid maghané* is anything but a realistic representation of Québécois society. On the contrary: it represents a larger-than-life puppet-show image of a heterogeneous social environment, dwelt in by character collages in period costume, whose *québécoité* amounts to a geographically identifiable mode of expression rather than typically Québécois forms of behaviour.

Be that as it may, this parody breaks to pieces a work that is part of the cultural legacy inherited from France. Thus the parody spurns the model and underlines the foreignness that the latter henceforth takes on. This defamiliarization is accentuated by the functional alternation between *joual* and French, for the Québécois text is segmented by passages that the actors are to play with a French accent.

NORMALLY, THE AIM OF TRANSLATION is to bring closer what is foreign to us. In this case, it has the opposite effect, namely to distance the French classic and in fact to supplant it from the Québécois field of literature, thereby enriching the latter by a Québécois work. This substitution is accompanied by a

change in genre, since French tragedy is eliminated in favour of a Québécois (farcical) comedy. In fact, the rewriting of Corneille's text is carried out through a media-like process: the original text is subjected to the attention-getting principles of the tabloid papers. In thus realizing its author's programmatic intentions, *Le Cid maghané* belongs to a category of drama which one might call *sensationalist theatre*. This dramatic category is right in line with the *neoculture* claimed by the new Québécois society wishing to free itself from the cultural domination of the "old countries":

La paléoculture, élitique, conservatrice, fétichiste, est appropriation privée, musée, contemplation, jouissance solitaire; la *néoculture* — ni "sous-culture" ni "culture de masse" — est partage, consommation immédiate, communication généralisée, accomplissement de la communauté. (1981; Mailhot 212)

Governed by the imperatives of this neoculture, which has itself been institutionalized in the form of discursive norms and structures (1981; Belleau 17), the dynamic of the Québécois theatre system in the making permits the interpretation of isolated, seemingly unclassifiable phenomena such as the adaptation of a turn-of-the-century vaudeville play, the text of which, though written by a Québécois author, was modelled according to the French codes of literary drama:

Félix-Gabriel Marchand, "Les Faux Brillants"

DUMONT (*très agité*): Ouf! Je suis hors de moi! . . . Ces débats me surmontent. S'il fallait s'arrêter aux histoires qu'ils content, Nul étranger n'aurait accès à nos salons. Non, positivement. . . . (1977 [1899]; 180)

Jean-Claude Germain, *Les Faux Brillants de Félix-Gabriel Marchand*

DUMONT: SPAS POSSIBBE! . . . Çé pas possibbe! Moué, ça m'fait mourir des discussions dmême! . . . Çé pas possibbe . . . s'y fallait écouter toué-z-histouères qui sra-content sus à Grande Allée . . . à chaqu'fois qu'y a un étranger qui débarque du bateau, y faudrait s'embarrer dans nos maisons pis enfarmer toué filles en âge de smarier dans leu chambbes! . . . Pis après ça, le plus drôle, çé qutout lmonde s'étonne quant-y nous prennent pour des-z-habitants! (1977; 29)

Translation, then, becomes a matter of creating a Québécois work, in the true sense of the word, for not only has the title of the play been changed, the name of the author has changed as well. To be repatriated, readmitted into Québécois theatre, the original work, though made in Quebec, has had to undergo a change in the linguistic code. In fact the transformation goes well beyond a mere change in the level of discourse from literary verse to everyday prose: the new text becomes the medium through which *la québécoité* (as opposed to *la francité*) may be specifically defined.

This transcoding which is necessary to reappropriate foreign works, or works considered to be foreign, is correlated with a set of massive changes in the original text, reflected in the way these texts are anthologized and expanded. A good ex-

ample of this can be found in Jean-Claude Germain's *Le Buffet impromptu ou la nôsse chez les propriétaires de bungalow*, an adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *Die Kleinbürgerhochzeit*. The following are excerpts from the original text and from the French version which was most probably used as a model:⁸

Brecht, *Die Kleinbürgerhochzeit*

DER VATER: Onkel August starb an Wassersucht!

DER MANN: Prosit!

DER VATER: Prosit! Wassersucht. Erst war es nur der Fuss, eigentlich nur die Zehen, aber dann bis zum Knie, das ging schneller als das Kinderkriegen, und da war schon alles schwarz. Der Bauch war auch aufgetrieben, und obgleich man tüchtig abzapfte. . . .

DER MANN: Prosit!

DER VATER: Prost, prost! . . . abzapfte, es war schon zu spät. Dann kam noch die Sache mit dem Herz dazu, die beschleunigte alles. Er lag also in dem Bett, das ich euch geben wollte, und stöhnte wie ein Elefant, und so sah er auch aus, ich meine die Beine! (1966; 19-20)

Brecht (trans. J.-F. Poirier), *La Noce chez les petits bourgeois*

LE PERE: Oncle Auguste est mort d'hydropisie.

L'HOMME: A votre santé.

LE PERE: A votre santé! L'hydropisie. D'abord ça n'était que le pied, à vrai dire que les doigts de pied, mais ensuite jusqu'au genou, c'est allé plus vite que de faire un enfant, et là tout était déjà noir. Le ventre aussi était ballonné, et bien qu'on ait sérieusement ponctionné. . . .

L'HOMME: A votre santé!

LE PERE: Santé, santé! . . . ponctionné, c'était déjà trop tard. Puis encore en plus est arrivée l'histoire avec le coeur, elle a tout accéléré. Il était donc allongé dans le lit, que je voulais vous donner, et gémissait comme un éléphant, et il en avait l'air aussi, je veux dire les jambes! (1979 [1963]; 16)

And this is the Québécois adaptation, in which the elements reproduced have been italicized to indicate the extent to which the text has been expanded:

Brecht (adapt. J.-C. Germain), *Le Buffet impromptu ou la nôsse chez les propriétaires de bungalow*

LE PERE: Chpeux jusse en raconter une à fois, Simone! Fait que . . . scomme jdisais . . . mon grand-t-oncque Hu-on . . . spas un secret . . . yé morre dla goutte!

(*paqueté Oscar intervient*)

LA MARI DL'AMIE DFILLE: Bon ben on va prendde une ptite goutte à la santé dl'oncque Yvon!

LA PERE: Pas Yvon! Hu-on . . . Hue-donc à la rigueur . . . ouais . . . fait qu'yé morre dla goutte . . . ça commencé par le pied ça . . . en fait pas tellement le pied comme lé-z-orteils . . . pis dé-z-orteils . . . en passant par le pied ben sûr . . . ça monté dans lgenou . . . pis là dans ltemps qu'on met pour faire un ptit . . . ça stait répandu partout . . . la peau tait toute marbrée nouère pis lvente s'est mis à

gonfler . . . y-z-avaient beau y faire des ponctions . . . spas aussi souffrant qudes ponctions lambert . . . mais.

LE MARI DL'AMIE DFILLE: Vou-z-avez ben raison, monsieur Simoneau, y a pas dmeilleure remède pour la toux! As-tu compris Gisèle?

LE PERE: Des ponctions?

LE MARI DL'AMIE DFILLE: Ouais! Le syrop Lambert! Dodds pour l'estomac . . . Madelon pour la tête . . . Sen-Sen pour l'haleine mais pour le rhume çé LAMBERT! Madame Simoneau, *y a un verre qu'yé veuf icitte*, pis qu'y aurait lgoût dfaire une passe à veuve!

LE PERE: *Ouais. Fait que . . . scomme jdisais . . . y ont eu beau syphonner l'estomac à tour de bras . . . ça sarvait pus a rien . . . y était trop tarre! Son coeur stait mis à sauter dtous borres pis dtous côtés comme un lapin en chaleur pis dans ltemps de ldire y était rendu au pied de la pente dousse* comme y disent à Québec . . . un ben belle ville ça . . . çé mailheureux qu'y aient eu l'idée dla construire sus une falaise pis dfaire des rues si étroites . . . entoucas . . . *Y était étendu dans son litte* pis y grognait comme un cochon dans l'auge . . . justement *dans l'litte que jvoulais vous donner . . . y splainait comme* un cochon à l'abattoir . . . un cochon? *un éléphant* plutôt . . . pis y avait pas jusse la toune de l'éléphant, *y en avait l'air aussi . . . les jambes surtout. . .* (1976; 45-46)⁹

As is often the case when Quebec authors-cum-translators do not know the language of the original text, the Québécois version has probably been effected on the basis of the French translation and not on the basis of Brecht's text — this is symptomatic both of the relationship to the original works and of the fact that the French texts are to be rejected as being foreign; the original texts must thence be reappropriated by way of a Québécois (made-in-Quebec) translation. What is involved here is an actual re-working of the language of the source-text, apart from and beyond the change in level of discourse that the Québécois version required. In seeking to reproduce the characteristics of Quebec's *petit-bourgeois*, who do not speak the same way as French *petits-bourgeois*, the Québécois adaptation introduces irrelevant transformations. Why write *morre* (mort), *penite* (pente) or even *dousse* (douce), since the difference is purely phonetic, and is mainly due to a diphthongization of vowels? How can the graphic disappearance of the silent "e" (*gnou* vs. *genou*) be justified, since it is not pronounced in French either? These irrelevant deformations are manifestations of an ideological symptom in the sense that they construct the sham of the particularity of "Québécois" as opposed to the French of France.

Here the translative operation produces a target-language as well as a target-text. This target-language is produced as a sort of *between-ourselves code* which permits identification of members of the Québécois community. This code is simultaneously presented as a cipher, a code of exclusion, which is part of a programmatic project: "A country, a people, a language."

Expansions in the form of puns, metaphors and digressions function as so many signs of recognition:

LE MARIE DL'AMIE DFILLE: Ouais! Le syrop Lambert! Dodds pour l'estomac. . . Madelon pour la tête . . . Sen-Sen pour l'haleine mais pour le rhume çé Lambert. (1976; 46)

The recalling of these old *Québécois* ads are signals that only members of the community can decipher. The original text, laden with all the elements necessary to reinforce, by way of humour, the cohesion of the group sharing the same values, is treated as a pure commodity geared to a specifically targeted audience. Alienated from itself, the original has simply furnished a thematic sketch for a *Québécois* play destined for home use.

Moreover, when at the end of *La Nôsse* the character representing Brecht reproaches the protagonists for not having respected his play, the bride's father retorts: "*Quand on change de pays faut s'adapter*" (1976; 63). Brecht is nevertheless successful in his demand that his play be staged in the original. But at the very moment when he announces to the public "*Mesdames et messieurs LA NOCE CHEZ LES PETITS BOURGEOIS dans la version originale de BERTOLT BRECHT,*" the curtain is lowered, and according to the stage directions the *Québécois* protagonists go in pursuit of the characters of "*the French version*" in order presumably to drive them off the stage:

il [Brecht] sort: tout le monde sauf Oscar, Renée et la mère se livre à un joyeux exercice de distanciation brechtienne, poursuivant les personnages dans la version française de la pièce. (1976; 64)

In other words, the author's rights are categorically denied the foreign dramatist whose text cannot be presented on the *Québécois* stage. What is more, these stage directions as well as the dialogue equate the original with the French (made-in-France) version, hence the Foreigner who has been chased off the stage and reduced to silence is first and foremost the Frenchman acting as his spokesman.

THE QUEBECOIS ADAPTATION in this case becomes a censure of the voice of the Other, not retaining anything but whatever *la québécoité* can recognize or hear in it. *Hamlet, prince du Québec* by Robert Gurik, functions according to these principles. As an anthologizing translation, this parody of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* selects elements of the original (italicized in the following excerpt) in terms of their diegetic capacity to express a *Québécois* situation, that is the usurpation of the francophone power by *l'anglophonie* (the Anglophones):

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

GHOST: *Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate beast,*
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitrous gifts, —
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power

So to seduce! — *won to his shameful lust*
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen.
 O Hamlet! what a falling-off was there
 From me, whose love was of that dignity
 That it went hand in hand even with the vow
 I made to her in marriage; and to decline
 Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor
 To those of mine!
 But virtue, as it never will be mov'd,
 Though lewdness court is in a shape of heaven,
 So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd,
 Will state itself in a celestial bed,
 And prey on garbage.
But, soft! methinks I scent the morning air;
Brief let me be. Sleeping within mine orchard,
My custom always in the afternoon,
Upon my secure hour thy uncle stole,
With juice of cursed hebona in a vial,
And in the porches of mine ears did pour
The leperous distilment; whose effect
 Holds such an enmity with blood of man
 That swift as quicksilver it courses through
 The natural gates and alleys of the body,
 And with a sudden vigour it doth posset
 And curd, like eager droppings into milk,
 The thin and wholesome blood: so did it mine,
 And a most instant tetter bark'd about,
 Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust,
 All my smooth body.
Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand,
Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatch'd;
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
Unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd,
No reckoning made, but sent to my account
With all my imperfections on my head:
 O, horrible! O, horrible! most horrible!
 If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not;
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned incest.
But, howsoever thou pursu'st this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught; leave her to heaven,
 And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,
 To prick and sting her. Fare thee well at once!
 The glow-worm shows *the matin to be near,*
 And 'gins to pale his uneffectual fire;
Adieu, adieu! Hamlet, remember me. (1962; 877)

Gurik, *Hamlet, prince du Québec*

LE SPECTRE (CHARLES DE GAULLE) : Oui, ce monstre adultère qui a su gagner à sa passion le coeur de ma reine chérie, dont toutes les apparences témoignaient de la vertu. Mais *ne ranimons par les plaies à jamais ouvertes*, je sens l'air du matin, il me faut faire vite. Endormi dans mon jardin après le dîner, *ton oncle muni d'une orange* me surprit dans mon sommeil et *força le fruit dans ma bouche jusqu'à l'étouffement*. C'est ainsi que je fus en dormant dépouillé, par la main d'un frère, de la vie, de la couronne et de mon épouse et relevé du monde sans les grâces du ciel, sans les derniers secours de la religion pour mes péchés flagrants, sans les prières implorées par les cloches des mourants et envoyé devant le juge suprême avec toutes mes fautes accumulées sur la tête. *Hamlet*, ne laisse pas la couche royale devenir celle de la luxure et d'un inceste maudit. *Ne laisse pas le Québec pourrir sous la botte de ce profiteur qui pourrait te laisser croire qu'il te comprend et qu'il t'aime*. Mais, par quelques moyens que tu te décides d'agir, ne souille point ton coeur et que ton âme ne trame rien contre ta mère. Abandonne-la au ciel. Adieu, le matin va se lever, adieu et souviens-toi *que vive un Québec libre*. (1977; 49)

The anthologizing of the original text corresponds to a self-regulation in the translative operation following the constraints imposed upon discourse by the ideological field of *québécoité*. It is accompanied by referential substitutions (“*Denmark is a prison*” / “*Québec is a prison*”). The Shakespearean characters are changed into allegories or *personnages à clé* playing an active role on the political scene in Quebec or in Ottawa. Similarly, the expansions (which I have italicized) reactualize Shakespeare’s tragedy:

Ton oncle muni d'une orange me surprit dans mon sommeil et força le fruit dans ma bouche jusqu'à l'étouffement. (1977; 49)

The orange, which has replaced the poison poured into the king’s ear, evokes the reactionary faction of *l'anglophonie*, those unconditional proponents of the British Crown called Orangists. The fruit forced into one’s mouth, then, is English, the language whose hegemony results in the assimilation of Francophones.

THE PARODY BECOMES a double translative operation in the sense that it also involves a shifting from fictive narrative to the experienced reality sifted through the social discourse, in passing from one text to the other. From a pragmatic point of view, this operation which is at once translative and parodic accentuates the shift from *petit discours* to *grand discours*: the allocutionary element in *Hamlet, prince du Québec* is in no way problematic. But it contains a double aspect; while it refers to the Québécois audience, it also encompasses the latter’s adversary in the personification of *l'anglophonie*. Whence the agonistic nature (1983; Angenot 34) of this discourse, a discourse of action, the object of which is

not just any "truth" concerning the empirical world, but that of the political, economic, and cultural alienation of a Québécois society which feels captive to British colonialism.

Other elements grafted onto the elements taken from the foreign text by the translation thus function as homogenizing glosses entirely rooted in the dominant discourse. As in *Le Cid maghané* or *La Nôsse chez les propriétaires de bungalow*, the glosses "carnivalize" the text, provoking laughter from the audience. This laughter is an integral part of the shared code, the *between-ourselves* code. What it does is to reinforce the cohesion of the group on which it also exerts an illocutionary force, since it contributes to the doxological and ideological effectiveness of *le grand discours*. The original — foreign — text is simply a tangible medium, as passive as are advertising media. The Other of the foreign text has no more right to self-identity than to self-expression, other than to express Québécois reality, unless it is a matter of mediating the political aspirations of a group seeking to supplant the old hegemony:

Le respect du texte écrit, de la pensée spécifique d'un dramaturge ne devrait intéresser que les artisans serviles et paresseux, de troisième classe. . . . Je paierais bien volontiers sans rechigner des droits d'auteur à Eschyle ou à Shakespeare pour certaines structures dramatiques réussies; mais pour ce qui est de la psychologie d'un personnage du XVI^{ème} siècle ou d'un clair de lune élizabéthain ou même du panthéisme grec, les reproduire est pure complaisance, pour petit public de littérateurs, ces voyeurs de l'esprit, un luxe et non une nécessité, et le théâtre ne prend vie que de nécessités.

Quand les dramaturges québécois auront trouvé une armature, une structure théâtrale qui nous soit propre, à l'égal de notre épine dorsale, nous aurons non seulement une dramaturgie authentique mais aussi un pays. (1969; Levac 16)

This attitude towards foreign works is reflected in Quebec's literary system, resulting in an alteration of the latter's components. The examples analyzed above show that the notion of a foreign work is now taken to include the French tradition, indeed even the French-Canadian. Moreover, foreign theatre in translation has ceased to form a homogeneous, clearly delimited whole, for translation no longer imports the works in their entirety, but in fragments. In this disarticulated form they become reusable material for building the new Québécois theatre. Translation thus contributes simultaneously to the disintegration of the old canonic nucleus and to the formation of a new dominant theatrical canon.

What becomes increasingly clear is that translation is an important axio-ideological factor in regulating the interaction between what we call literature and the other forms of social discourse. But it is no coincidence that this homogenization can be observed primarily within one specific area of the literary system, that is, the theatre. Indeed, the quest for Québécois specificity or *québécoité* encompasses the search for an identifiable code of one's own, different from *franco-français* or "franco-French," on which Quebec theatre used to be based. But the difference

between *franco-québécois* (French spoken in Quebec) and *franco-français* (French spoken in France) is mainly phonetic; and while this difference is entirely relative, as it varies according to the socio-cultural level of its speakers, one can readily see why theatre has become the preferred area of translation: as the most "oral" of literary genres, it is the only one in which this difference can actually make itself heard.

NOTES

- ¹ For a detailed analysis of this phenomenon, see Martine Léonard and Françoise Siguret (1972; 56-71).
- ² "Les anglicismes . . . ont en fait une valeur thématique. Ils dénotent un langage honteux qui ne peut s'assumer, un langage mal habité et difficilement habitable. Presque toujours, ils signalent une prétendue lacune ou impuissance du français . . . et le regret de devoir malgré tout l'employer. Personne de sérieux ne soutiendra qu'une langue est supérieure ou inférieure à une autre. Aussi s'agit-il d'un phénomène essentiellement culturel. . . . La parole inférieure, irréalisable, a charge de dire une réalité pour laquelle la parole dominante est seule jugée apte. Ça parle doublement ici, et en même temps. . . .
 "Dans un même langage, une parole dominante irréalisée, une parole dominée irréalizable" (1984; Belleau 71).
- ³ My italics.
- ⁴ In Quebec, foreign names, no matter what their origin, are usually anglicized when they are pronounced. The significance of this phenomenon, which is particularly striking in French-Canadian radio and television, has been analyzed by André Belleau (1984). Cf. note 2.
- ⁵ Just as the author or dramatized narrator of a novel must not be confused with the biographical author, the notion of dramatist ought to be replaced by the term "semiotic narrator" (1981; Kryszinski 117). In theatre, the semiotic narrator also encompasses all aspects of dramatic representation. René-Jean Poupart (1976; 77) uses the term *surdestinateur* to describe "la conjonction des interprétations complémentaires du metteur en scène et des acteurs" (the conjunction of the complementary interpretations of the stage director and of the actors). The translator thus also fits the category of *surdestinateur*.
- ⁶ On the relationships between translation and parody seen from the perspective of "entropic" translations, in particular Antonin Artaud's translation of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, see Brisset (1985).
- ⁷ Quoted by Laurent Mailhot (1981; 213).
- ⁸ Indeed this would be the standard French translation of Brecht's play for which all the rights are reserved to Les éditions de L'Arche.
- ⁹ The spelling is faithfully reproduced from the manuscript.

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