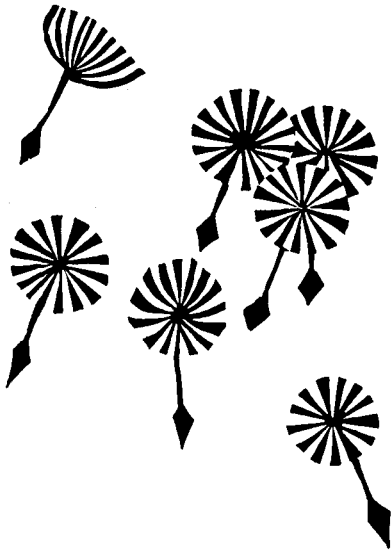


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Summer, 1988



TRANSLATION

A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA MEDAL FOR CANADIAN BIOGRAPHY

1987

In 1987 Canadian biography continued with its diverse nature, honing in on a variety of figures that make up the Canadian social, political, and literary mix. Some of the more notable included Farley Mowat's fascinating *Virunga*, Sandra Djwa's extremely readable *Politics of Imagination* (on F. R. Scott) and Mary Meigs's *The Box Closet*. There were autobiographies of high calibre with George Woodcock, P. K. Page, and Pierre Berton's candid *Starting Out*. David Pitt's excellent *E. J. Pratt: The Master Years* confirmed the Selection Committee's decision to award him the Medal when the first volume in this two-book biography appeared in 1984.

* * *

This year the Medal goes to Paula Blanchard's *The Life of Emily Carr*, from The University of Washington Press and published simultaneously in Canada by Douglas & McIntyre. Eight years ago Maria Tippet presented Carr's career in a highly detailed historical dimension. Blanchard moves into a psychological biography, examining with insight Carr's responses to what happened to her, reminding readers again that what is important about biography is not what happens to people that counts but how they handle it that matters. There is no doubt that Paula Blanchard understands the complexities and ambiguities that make Carr fascinating from so many different points of view — for the artist, the writer, the human being. This is a stimulating contribution to the continuing interest in one of British Columbia's, Canada's, and the world's greater artists.

D.S.

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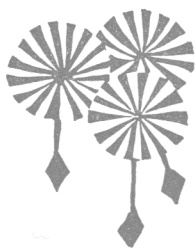
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WITHIN AILING DISTANCE

I THINK DICKENS'S *Hard Times* went out of fashion a few years ago when hard times themselves went out of fashion. There was a time, we like to think, when people began to believe in possibility, and in the possibility of alternatives to enclosed lives. When jobs were available. Work was constructive. Children were considered a resource. Brains were considered a resource. Money was available for ideas. Thoughtfulness went into human relations. And the open ideas of progress and improvement did not seem bizarre.

Somewhere along the line, all that changed. Children became a commodity again. Work became a privilege. Money became restricted to those who would not question what it did or where it came from. Human relations and brains both became peripheral as the closed idea of categorical functionality took over from the sparkling chaos of imagination.

When enclosure lives, choice dies. *Hard Times* has come back.

Hard Times is a brilliant book, of course, full of extravagant sentiment and acid aspersions — despite which, it's hard to appreciate simply aesthetically, for it asks to be read not so much as fictional invention as a fierce and clear-sighted indictment of social stupidity. The world that Dickens savages is one that makes wealth and family connections the only arbiters of power *and therefore of value*. It's one that permits pollution and restricts children's education *as though neither of these were consequential acts*. Such a world gives authority to particular versions of evidence, and uses the *names* of patriotism, factuality, science, and the Almighty as buttresses to a private and exclusive agenda of social organization. This world works invidiously, for by appealing *in name* to the moral integrity of ordinary people, it gathers credibility, but only so that in effect it will be able to exclude such ordinary people from real opportunities to live decent lives. The Almighty is made the rhetorical shill in a socioeconomic con game. The Golden Rule turns imperceptibly into the Rule of Gold — which is somehow justified in public by the name of necessity.

Sound familiar? The temptation to quote Dickens directly is irresistible. There is, to begin with, his wonderful travesty of an educational system in which knowledge is reduced to data — unrelated and unexamined data, data unprobed for its inevitable ramifications — and the individual person is reduced to numeric abstraction:

"Bitzer," said Thomas Gradgrind. "Your definition of a horse."

"Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth." Thus (and much more) Bitzer.

"Now, girl number twenty," said Mr. Gradgrind, "you know what a horse is."

Then there is Dickens's exposé of irrational literalism, which suppresses imagination, which restricts possibility to images that accord directly with restricted empirical perceptions, and which converts reality to an illogical system of binary divisions that nevertheless masquerades as logic:

"I'll explain to you, then," said the gentleman, after another and a dismal pause, "why you wouldn't paper a room with representations of horses. Do you ever see horses walking up and down and sides of rooms in reality — in fact? Do you?"

"Yes, sir!" from one half. "No, sir!" from the other.

"Of course, No," said the gentleman, with an indignant look at the wrong half. "Why, then, you are not to see anywhere what you don't see in fact; you are not to have anywhere what you don't have in fact. What is called Taste, is only another name for Fact."

There is Dickens's reflective aside after his outline of a functionary's ideal syllabus (which can never be anything more nor less than a parroted list of names, points, and boundaries, for to be other is to open up to possibilities, for which of course there are no safe and predigested rules):

Ah, rather overdone, M'Choakumchild. If he had only learnt a little less, how infinitely better he might have taught much more!

Wonder, in these circumstances, is unacceptable behaviour. Concern for others is deemed unprofitable, financially and *therefore* emotionally. Other people consequently come best to be seen as objects to arrange on a balance sheet, for that removes the temptation to become attached or curious or concerned or involved. And yet *does* such a world function? Dickens is clear:

Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial. The M'Choakumchild school was all fact, and the school of design was all fact, and the relations between master and man were all fact, and everywhere was fact between the lying-in hospital and the cemetery, and what you couldn't state in figures, or show to be purchaseable in the cheapest market and saleable in the dearest, was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen.

A town so sacred to fact, and so triumphant in its assertion, of course got on well? Why no, not quite well. No? Dear me!

No.

Utilitarianism, Dickens demonstrates, will ultimately destroy itself. But it's a hurtful process, for unhappily it makes victims of millions of ordinary people along the way. The hurt, therefore, is fundamentally *unnecessary*. That's why we have

to recognize the utilitarian model for what it is: an insidious means of intellectual, economic, and emotional coercion. It's a way of making ordinary people think they have no option but to go along with a named authority. It's an undeclared system of control. We have also to deal with it. We can do so in part by exposing the irrationality of so many of the current Institutes among us, the shrink-tanks of private interest, and by ridiculing the Authorities' infatuation with absolutes in an ongoing age of change.

If we do, then one day, perhaps, we'll be able again to read Dickens for pleasure, and not see what he has written just as a diagnosis of our own disease.

W.N.

LOVE, HE SAID

Susan Musgrave

In Spain, sixteen years ago,
I sat under a twisted pear tree
writing doomed poetry.

At night I put on black
and went down into the peaceful village.

My eyes, he said, were like
terrifying raped blossoms.
I loved him because so much was always lost
in translation.

Love, he said, is taking a long time
always. In my room where we lay
for a small night above the peaceful village
I think, looking back, I understood him.

TEXT AND CONTEXT

Some Reflections on Translation with Examples from Quebec Poetry

D. G. Jones

TO TRANSLATE A POEM, I say to myself, I must first discover its meaning and then translate that into my own language. In certain ways, however, this is impossible.

The meaning of a poem does not reside in the poem alone, but in its relation to other poems, other forms of language, the whole semiotic code in which the author lives. Its meaning is largely a matter of the way it confirms, nuances, or subverts that code. If it merely repeats the code it is an empty cliché; if it bears no recognizable relation to it, it is nonsense; if it does something in between, it becomes meaningful.

For Pierre Nepveu to call a poem "Pepsi" is right away to mark a difference from the previous generations of Quebec poets or Quebec poetry. The poem begins:

pop et pop et pop
pop-corn et populaire
pop-si
toute la journée
rongées par la fumée
la bouche en sang les yeux cernés
dans l'église incendiée
on a chanté
pop et pop

The poem means that the content, rhythm, texture of Quebec life has been profoundly altered by the invasion of another language or code, English North American pop culture. The meaning of the poem depends on the relation of French to English (the invasion of the English is obvious); it depends on the relation of the poem and its French to previous poems (this is not the vocabulary, the rhythm — the kind of rhyme and reason — one finds in poems by Anne Hébert, Saint-Denis Garneau, Alain Grandbois, Emile Nelligan — except for lines five, six, and seven); it depends on the relation of certain words or images to those in previous Quebec poems and the language of Quebec generally (Miron writing of "ta maison hantée de l'âme," Giguère of "Nos châteaux livrés au feu," Lapointe of "Le vierge incendié"). In the context of traditional Quebec culture, its traditional

code, the jazzy English is like a bunch of be-bopping or discoing teenagers in a burned-out church. Does this carry the meaning that the traditional Quebec culture is being desecrated or that it is undergoing a liberation, or both — is it satirical or lyrical or ironic? This would require more exploration still of the poem in relation to the context.

Now, even if we begin to approach the meaning of the poem, can we really translate it into English?

If we translate this into English and present it by itself to an English reader, it will automatically change its meaning, or much of it. The obvious intrusion of the English into the French will simply disappear. The “pepsi,” “pop,” “pop-si,” and “pop-corn” will serve primarily to reinforce an already accepted part of the code — not to subvert it. In so far as it does appear to collide with the images of smoke and bags under the eyes and a burned-out church, it does so in a way that is confusing, melodramatic, and not very convincing or meaningful — unless the reader is very conservative, more than usually religious, perhaps anti-American. To give the poem what is a normal straightforward translation is not to translate the meaning — since this text in an English context changes its meaning.

Of course, if the reader is really interested to learn, or already knows, something of Quebec and its poetry, she may then translate the poem, imaginatively, back into its Quebec context. At that point the English translation is just one helpful step within a larger exercise in translation.

THE LINES FROM NEPVEU suggest the near impossibility of translating the meaning. An example from Anne Hébert may suggest the difficulty of finding the meaning to translate.

Hébert writes a poem called “La voix de l’oiseau,” which begins:

J’entends la voix de l’oiseau mort
Dans un bocage inconnu.

The bird sings somewhere to the right of the darkness that surrounds her: “Île noire / Sur soi enroulée. / Captivité.” The poem ends:

De moi à l’oiseau
De moi à cette plainte
De l’oiseau mort
Nul passage
Nul secours

Only recently did I recognize the extent to which this strange business of a dead bird singing in some unknown grove may be understood in the context of a poetic code developed in poems by Nérée Beauchemin, Pamphile Lemay, Louis Fréchette,

and, above all, “Le vieux chêne” by François-Xavier Garneau, the father of Quebec history and the great-great-grandfather of Anne Hébert’s cousin, Saint-Denys Garneau. Basically the tree in Garneau’s poem is a symbol of memory, of the continuity through time of the past, which includes the collective identity of French Canada. It is a tree with a bird, “l’oiseau du ciel,” which in itself and in its song mediates between heaven and earth. In this context, Hébert’s poem means that the continuity between heaven and earth, past and present, is broken or blocked. And the speaker appears less trapped in the present than in the past — a black island of trees murmuring in the dark. It is then an island of the dead, where the speaker is a prisoner cut off from the divine and from the living world of light and song.

Of course, one can arrive at something of this meaning by reading the poem in the context of Anne Hébert’s work as a whole. The idea of being trapped and victimized by the dead past, of finding liberation through recognizing her own more or less willing enslavement to it — this is evident in “Le tombeau des rois” (where a bird, wounded but not dead, turns like her heart towards the living light).

We may also glimpse something of the meaning in so far as the poem participates in a larger symbolic code in which birds are spirit messengers — from whom the speaker is here cut off. But in that context the poem is rather vague and skimpy. It is like the fragment of a larger poem in which a more fully developed bird/tree symbolism gives it a rich and particular resonance, a fairly precise negative meaning.

This same bird/tree symbolism, now including Anne Hébert’s contribution to its development, is part of the context of Paul-Marie Lapointe’s “Arbres.” This is an important poem within the context of Quebec literature and culture, not only because of its amplitude, variety, and verve, but because it gives this whole symbolism a new positive development. It re-establishes the continuity between past and present, heaven and earth, bird and human — we end with a cosmic world-tree, its branches full of nests, full of children. Much of the poem’s specific meaning lies in this positive reversal of a symbolic code as it had developed over several generations.

I DON’T MEAN TO IMPLY that Hébert or Lapointe is fully conscious of the precise relationships between their texts and the inherited code. In good part the writer works intuitively, adjusting the language as one might adjust a suit of clothes to make it fit, or, as Wallace Stevens would say, to find a satisfaction. In this sense the writer, too, is hardly ever fully or consciously aware of the meaning of the text.

If that is true of the author, it is generally even more true of the translator — though the rare translator may, in fact, have a scholarly grasp of the context that

is more conscious and detailed than the writer's. That would be an ideal situation, but it is one seldom realized. One may confidently say that, as a rule, the translator does not know the meaning of what he is translating.

Secondarily, in the case of these two poems also, it is next to impossible to translate their specific meaning into English for the ordinary reader in Toronto or Calgary or Los Angeles. Trees have been encoded in a quite different way in several generations of Canadian poetry — a tree is really lumber. And the farther west one goes the less anyone is overwhelmingly crushed by the tyranny of the past. The context is different, so the meaning of the poem will be different.

Of course, some readers may have glimpsed, many may have read of, and most may be able to recognize, the possibility of such an experience. To explore such possibilities is no doubt the ultimate role of literature. But when the poem moves into a new context one can never be sure just what meanings the reader may discover in it, just what imaginative possibilities he or she may find to explore.

A corollary to all this is that some poems may be more translatable than others, or more translatable into certain contexts at certain times, (*a*) because they carry more of their context within themselves or work with more broadly conventional, perhaps more archetypal, elements, or (*b*) because the two linguistically different cultures share for the moment certain interests, certain general features in their semiotic codes.

IF THE TRANSLATOR doesn't translate the meaning of a text, since he really doesn't know the meaning, what does he translate?

A possible answer is that she translates the meaningful elements of the text — those graphic, lexical, syntactic, formal, and rhetorical features that make whatever meaning the poem has, to the extent that they amplify or alter or violate the inherited code.

Of course, the translator is once again thrown back to the question of context. If she doesn't know the inherited code, how can she tell whether it is a cliché or a violation — an element with a certain meaning or not? From one point of view, this question is irrelevant; whatever the meaning of any element, it is there whether one knows the kind of meaning it carries or not; all one has to do is translate what is there. But, the question becomes relevant when the translator looks for the equivalent in the target language. If she doesn't know how the element relates to the past usage in the original code, how can she tell what is an equivalent in the target code? One can never escape from some measure of circularity and impossibility. One can never be sure one knows what one is doing.

But neither, in the full sense of the word, can the author.

This is to reaffirm the point that translation, like writing poems, is an art — one must work intuitively beyond one's conscious means.

And this is to say also that one is inevitably creating and not just translating meaning. No matter how much knowledge of the context one brings to the text, no matter how sensitive one is to all the meaning-making elements in the original, no matter how resourceful one is in finding equivalents in the target language, by translating the text into another linguistic, literary, broadly semiotic context — which inevitably ramifies beyond any possible awareness and control — one inevitably changes the meaning of the original, creating a new meaning. One neither knows the meaning of what one translates nor the meaning of one's translation. But, except when one utters banalities, or works within very closed or technically arbitrary systems, this is the normal situation. We are all language pushers and looking for a fix.

It is often assumed that when we are dealing with a poem or a translation we are dealing with packaged meanings. Rather we're dealing with meaningful packets of print or language, whose implications are always to some degree indeterminate. It is not *a truth* to be passed on truthfully. That may relieve some of the pressure on translators. It also may allow all kinds of approaches. Like the poem, it may be approached as complex play, as political gesture, as relief from pain, even the pain of boredom. Pop!

THE COBS FATTEN, BUT EVERY SO OFTEN

John Steffler

Mountains come back to these soft lands,
these dairies. Still after millions of years
their ghosts march through the sky at first light
seizing the last of the darkness in crags
and chasms, rolling grey
foothills over the sun.

Earth trembles again, black
cracks split the air — overhead the outline of horned
crowns, flint weapons, shoulders armoured in skins
of bears — rough mockery rumbles down,
the old power to ravage and burn.

SPEAKING WHITE

Literary Translation as a Vehicle of Assimilation in Quebec

Kathy Mezei

IN GILLES ARCHAMBAULT'S 1970 novel, *Parlons de moi* (Le Cercle du Livre de France), the disaffected narrator says:

Puisque depuis que j'ai des opinions politiques définies, je me refuse à parler cette langue [anglais] à moins d'y être obligé. (13)

How ironic then that this poor narrator is forced twelve years later to speak entirely in English when the novel is translated (betrayed?).¹

In her November 9, 1985, *Le Devoir* article, "Speak White: de l'accusation à la nécessité," Natalie Petrowski describes how speaking white — English — has become both chic for young people, and a financial necessity for rock and other art groups. To speak English, to speak white, "parlez avec l'accent de Milton et Byron et Shelley et Keats," as Michèle Lalonde wrote in her famous 1968 *poème-affiche*, has long been a sensitive issue in Quebec: a sign of the contamination of racial purity in the 1920's and 1930's, of Quebec's awareness of her colonized status in the 1960's and 1970's, a marker of the ambitions and economic realities of the 1980's.² Note the difference in Roch Carrier's use of English in the title of his 1968 satire of French-English relations during World War II, *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* and in René-Daniel Dubois's contemporary play, *Being at Home with Claude* (1985). In the above *Le Devoir* article, Dubois is quoted as saying:

Je sais que le *nec plus ultra* jeunesse outremontoise, c'est de parler anglais et de refuser tout ce qui est français. Ce n'est pas mon cas. Mon titre joue sur l'ambiguïté d'une situation, celle d'être québécois et d'être poigné dans une vue américaine. (28)

For this reason, language as sign, reflector of culture is a recurring subject in Quebec literature, as well as on the political front.³ As Ferdinand de Saussure pointed out:

The culture of a nation exerts an influence on its language, and language, on the other hand, is largely responsible for the nation.⁴

How, in the light of Quebec's sensitivity to the presence and infiltration of English into its language and culture, have literary translators dealt with this problem?

On one level, are they betraying Quebec literature merely by translating it into the oppressor's language, and on another level, how are they resolving linguistic allusions and word-plays, in particular the significance of English as sign in the source text? Are they, through the act of translating, diminishing or even erasing the cultural difference between Quebec and English-Canada?

There appeared in 1977 in *Ellipse* (21), an understated but significant article by Ben-Zion Shek ("Quelques réflexions sur la traduction dans le contexte socio-culturel Canado-québécois") in which he comments on the role of translation, where official documents were always translated from English *into* French, in reproducing the political relationship of dominator and dominated. Shek uses the term *diglossia* to describe this hazardous linguistic (and cultural) situation, in which one language and linguistic group dominates and attempts to assimilate the other language and group. In the collection of essays, *Diglossie et littérature*, to which Shek refers, Alain Ricard defines diglossia:

La diglossie est à l'origine une situation linguistique dans laquelle les fonctions de communication linguistique sont réparties d'une manière binaire entre une langue ancienne culturellement prestigieuse, dotée d'une tradition écrite, nommée variété haute (H), et une autre langue sans tradition écrite, largement diffusée et dénuée de prestige ou variété (B)... Cette distribution différentielle est d'abord ce qui fait la diglossie... La diglossie est une situation sociale... Il nous paraît cependant nécessaire d'insister... sur la dimension conflictuelle du terme de diglossie et les implications de ce conflit sur les conditions de production, de fonctionnement et de réception des textes littéraires. ("Introduction" 13, 14, 15)⁵

Then in 1983, another perceptive article investigating the notion of translation as betrayal in the Canadian context appeared. This was E. D. Blodgett's "How do you say 'Gabrielle Roy'?" (*Translation in Canada, Reappraisals: Canadian Writers*, Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1983). Blodgett quickly noted the importance of Shek's warning, but, in examining the concept of diglossia and the role of literary translation, took their implications one step further. He suggested that the otherness, alienation, difference that concerned Shek are immensely significant and should therefore be *preserved* through translation. "Through interlinearity," he asserted, "the foreign character of the text, the text as Other" should be underlined. "By avoiding similarity," the target text "avoids assimilation... Difference would be preserved through dialectical exchange" (25). In other words, while, like Shek, Blodgett would like translation to avoid the stigma of being branded as a vehicle of assimilation, he sees translation thriving precisely on differences, by rejecting or (subversively) foregrounding assimilation.

Recently, a Quebec writer, Chantal de Grandpré, expressed alarm over the tendency of English-Canadian critics to engulf Quebec literature into the mass of Canadian literature as the latter gropes towards its own national identity.⁶ De Grandpré points out that, through critical articles and translation, a revolutionary

writer like Hubert Aquin is depoliticized, decontextualized, removed from the specificity of his Quebec context, transformed into a figure of bland universality, and normalized within the English-Canadian scene:

L'occultation du politique, remisé dans un au-delà du réel anglo-saxon, donne aussi l'illusion qu'on fait monter Aquin d'un cran, qu'on le place dans la constellation prestigieuse de l'universalité. (55)

According to de Grandpré, the translation of the titles of Aquin's novels demonstrates this assimilation. The situation, she claims, has deteriorated from Penny Williams's *Prochain épisode*, which respects the original title to the point of not translating it, to Alan Brown's "accurate" rendition of *Trou de mémoire* by *Black-out* and *L'Antiphonaire* by *The Antiphonary*, to Sheila Fischman's translation of *Neige noire* as *Hamlet's Twin*, which is a deliberate and inappropriate anglicization of Aquin and ignores the signification of "snow," a dominant image in Quebec literature.

Given that assimilation of Quebec by English-Canada and America is a political issue, and given that translators (as Shek, Blodgett, and de Grandpré have emphasized) may contribute to this assimilation through the act of translating, and more precisely, through how they translate, what can be said about the special case of the recurring non-translation, or mis-translation of English from the original French-language texts? Is this slippage a vehicle for assimilation? Are translators speaking white, not only by the mere act of engaging in translation, but further, by how they translate or do not translate specific speech acts?

I would like to approach this problem from two directions — the first subjective and pragmatic, and the second, objective and theoretical.

FIRST, IN UNDERTAKING two different translation projects over the last few years — the annual "Letters in Canada" review of translations in the *University of Toronto Quarterly* — and an enumerative bibliography on literary translation in Canada, I have noticed that many of the English translations I read participate in a subtle subversion of Quebec culture in that the use of English in speech acts, phrases, words, dialogue in the French-language poem, play, or novel is rarely acknowledged in the target or receptor text. Yet for the author of the original text, this English usage was intended as a highly symbolic signifier.

The pragmatic approach would be to note the frequency and examples of this particular case of assimilation and to chastise the translators accordingly. But since literary translators in Canada now are, on the whole, skilful, dedicated translators, familiar with Quebec culture, often living in Quebec, we need to understand the complex factors behind this tendency. I do not believe that most translators wish

to participate in the assimilation of Quebec culture. This brings me to my second, more theoretical and objective perspective: what do we understand by translation and translation studies? Can this understanding help us to comprehend this specific, recurring translation act? In the early days (1950's and 1960's) of critical reflection on literary translation in Canada, reviewers were often unilingual. They discussed translations as if they were original English texts, ignoring the translator and the fact that translation was a dialectical process, that the text they were reading was a metatext composed of a source text and target text, and what Blodgett calls an inter-text⁷ — the play/relationship between the two. Then, due perhaps to federal bilingual policies, critics in the 1970's, conscious of the origins of the text they were reading, concentrated on pointing out inaccurate equivalences, betrayals of meaning, lack of fidelity to the original on the one hand, or listing examples of too literal substitutions on the other. Now I see critics⁸ concerned not so much with translation as interpretation (or with the question of meaning in translation in the shift from source to target text) as they are with translation *as* meaning, and with how a translation means in relation to how a source text means:

Translation can hardly solve the problem of meaning if any question remains about that meaning of terms that define translation itself.⁹

This shift of course corresponds to current critical theory's "slow movement away from interpretation, in the sense of 'finding out the meaning of a literary work' as the central problem to be solved in literary theory"¹⁰ and to the dispute over the nature of meaning:

Derrida's rearticulation of philosophy and translation is obviously not designed to evacuate meaning entirely. But his concept of textuality displaces the very notion of *how* a text means. . . . Derrida's own ingenious translations . . . are attempts to render all the often contradictory meanings of a term in such a way that crucial logical complexities are not oversimplified.¹¹

We are back to Blodgett's insistence that translation incorporate difference and not similarity in order to avoid assimilation. The significant questions facing translation studies are no longer equivalence, or the conventional triad of *fidelity vs. faithful vs. literal* in translating texts, questions which all centre on the extraction and recreation of meaning in the sense that the translator-interpreter has perceived a meaning in a word or phrase or paragraph or title and recreated it in the target text. As George Steiner commented, the translation process, moving from source language to receptor language, resembles the linguistic and semiotic model of sender-to-receiver, since "in both schemes there is 'in the middle' an operation of interpretative decipherment, an encoding-decoding function of synapse."¹² But there is more to the translation process than the hermeneutic encoding and decoding Steiner speaks of; we must consider as well the factors which influence the production of meaning in the source text and target text; we must consider the

function of both source and target texts. That is, the translator must consider *three* referential systems — the particular system of the text, the system of the culture out of which the text has sprung, and the cultural system in which the metatext will be created.¹³ The translation that ensues is the result “of a complex system of decoding and encoding on the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic levels” (Bassnett-McGuire 38).

As *reader* of the source text, the translator is a producer of meaning of the source text since the translator has a personal history and is herself as culture-bound as the source and subsequent target text. The translator-reader-enscriber is also conscious of her audience, the readers of the target text, who again will be producers of meaning. Both of these determine the production of the translation. As Jirí Levý suggests, translation is a “realization of a work in a new language,” and like the author, the reader is historically determined. “It is the historical determination of the translator’s conception that establishes the link between the translation and the translator’s cultural milieu.”¹⁴

While discussing the shift in emphasis of meaning from source text to the translation, the target text, André Lefevère defines certain translations (and critical interpretations) as *refractions* — texts produced on the basis of another text, with the intention of adapting them to a certain ideology or a certain poetics (89). He suggests that “theoretical reflection on translation should, therefore, move away from old questions of fidelity and freedom” towards explicating the ideological and poetological constraints under which translations are produced, and describing the strategies devised by translators to deal with those constraints (98).

Equivalence, fidelity, freedom and the like will then be seen as functions of a strategy adopted under certain constraints, not as absolute requirements that should or should not be imposed or respected. (98)

If Lefevère is correct that translators “make mistakes only on the linguistic level” and “The rest is strategy” (99), and that the foreign writer is introduced via a number of misunderstandings and misrepresentations, which are, “for the most part, a function of the relationship of need, superiority, relative equality between literatures at a given moment in time” (99), where does this place English-Canadian translators of Quebec literature? Indeed, what is the function of a translator in a bilingual country such as Canada? Is he or she in the situation of diglossia, where the translator may see himself or herself as “absolved from all responsibility to the [so-called] inferior culture of the SL text” and contributing to the growth of a form of “colonial imperialism” (Bassnett-McGuire 4)?

BY EXAMINING the three different modes of either the non-translation or mis-translation of English in the French source text, we may be able

to see these dilemmas in perspective. We can then return to the question of translation as assimilation, to the reasons why good translators commit these acts of non- or mis-translation. Note that many translators simply do not indicate that certain words were in English in the source text (non-translation): omission and absence have as strong ideological consequences as alterations, additions, and other forms of textual interference.

i. In many Quebec texts, the use of English is political. The author, through language — joul, English colloquialisms or expressions — is demonstrating the colonized, diglossic situation of Quebec, linguistically highlighting her degradation or simply the hard realities of the cultural context. The particular choice of words in English is also highly significant. Let us look at some examples of the political use of English.

i. Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-soeurs*, a 1960's play about neighbour women and stamp books, is the first play written entirely in joul. In one scene, Lisette de Courval, a housewife with pretensions, rages:

A Paris, toute le monde perle bien, c'est du vrai français partout. . . . C'est pas comme icitte. . . . J'les méprise toutes! Je ne remettrai jamais les pieds ici! Léopold avait raison, c'monde-là, c'est du monde *cheap*. . . . (Leméac, 1972, p. 59)

The English version reads:

In Paris, you know, everyone speaks so beautifully and there they talk *real* French. . . . Not like here. . . . I despise everyone of them. I'll never set foot in this place again! Léopold was right about these people. These people are *cheap*. (*Les Belles-soeurs*, Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1974, trans. John Van Burek and Bill Glassco)

"Cheap" expresses the condition of these women and of Quebec through an imported term that is itself signified and signifier, a sign of the condition, of diglossia.¹⁵

ii. One solution is to italicize the English expressions in the target text so that the reader is aware of the context of the source text and acknowledges that he or she is reading a metatext. Penny Williams, the translator of Jacques Godbout's 1965 novel of the Quiet Revolution, *Knife on the Table*, with a revolutionary hero and his Westmount English girl-friend, has a translator's note to this effect. The novel, given its revolutionary context, is permeated with English expressions, bits of dialogue, and songs illustrating English domination of Quebec. References to wealth and money are usually referred to in English.

— Non, tu penses! Because my father left a few million dollars behind him, ces millions tu voudrais qu'elle les distribue aux petits orphelins? (*Le Couteau sur la table*, Paris: Seuil, 1965, p. 13)

"No, you idiot! *Because my father left a few million dollars behind him*, you want my mother to distribute it all to little orphans? (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968, p. 2)

iii. More problematic are parodic texts such as Jacques Ferron's *Contes d'un pays incertain*, translated by Betty Bednarski as *Selected Tales of Jacques Ferron* (Toronto: Anansi, 1984). Bednarski also includes helpful notes to explain colloquialisms or historical facts. But a story like "The Dead Cow in the Canyon" ("La Vache morte du canyon"), which is set in Le Farouest, is filled with anglicisms, parodying the linguistic and cultural subordination of the Québécois, especially as he ventures far from his home province. For example, *Le Tchiffe* becomes the Chief; *Biouti Rose* (the prostitute), Beauty Rose; *le clergimane*, the clergyman; *la touristroume*, the tourist room; *le Farouest* becomes the farwest.¹⁶ In this way, much of the parody at the semantic level is lost in the English version.

iv. Jacques Renaud's *Le Cassé* (1964) was one of the first texts to be written in joul — others had used joul in dialogue but not as primary narrative discourse. David Homel, in his *Broke City* (Montreal: Guernica, 1984), which is an effective, skilful transposition, had the choice which Ray Ellenwood posed in the introduction: to create an equivalent street dialect in English or to continually remind the reader of the original text's source in joul. Homel chose equivalence.¹⁷ In his choice as a translator, Homel has decided to emphasize the function of the target text and its accessibility to the English reader. His text becomes a refraction, catering to the street scene of English North America. This does, however, pose a problem in relation to the source text and its function which has consequently shifted and shrunk, since for the characters who live on the street,

Joul isn't a style, it's a way of thinking, a way of existing . . . the language of both revolution and submission, of anger and impotence. (Renaud, "Afterword" 95)

Note that the following examples of joul and anglicisms are given not in the dialogue, which is more common, but in the narrative:

La jeune femme a stoppé la volk's au coin de Bernard et Parc. Elle a retiré sa sacoche d'entre les deux sièges avant. Elle en a sorti un crayon et un carnet. Elle a griffonné quelque chose (23) . . . Philomène s'est trouvée une djobbe comme empaqueteuse dans une manufacture de cigares. Elle met
cinq gros cigares dans une boîte,
cinq gros cigares dans une boîte,
cinq gros cigares dans une boîte,
coffee break . . . dix minutes,
cinq gros cigares dans une boîte. (25) . . . Il s'est agi, tout au plus, d'alcool,

d'excitants, de gouffebâles (ça jase, ça jase) (26) (Montréal: Parti Pris, 1964, 1968).

The English text reads:

The woman stopped the Veedub at the corner a [sic?] Bernard and Park. She got her bag from in between the two front seats. She got a pencil and paper and scribbled something down (28) . . . Philomena got herself a job packing cigars in a factory. She put

five fat cigars in a box,
five fat cigars in a box,
five fat cigars in a box,
coffee break, ten minutes,
five fat cigars in a box (32) . . . But all isn't lost: on the menu was alcohol and uppers (talk, talk, talk). (32)

v. Carried to an extreme this kind of refracted text leads to the following comment by Brandon Conron in the introduction to Gabrielle Roy's *Street of Riches* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1967):

Yet one of the achievements of this book is that most English-Canadian readers will scarcely be conscious that it deals primarily with French Canada (xi).¹⁸

vi. An even more extreme situation occurs in Ray Chamberlain's translation of Jean-Yves Collette's *La Mort d'André Breton*, where a passage in English in the original French is translated into another version of English with changes in words, punctuation, word order.

Very serious, yes. / We wish to publish your. / A success? / At least 500,000. / Yes, serious. / Well done yes. / To drop in on us. / Your country is small. / Very happy. / People are not interested enough in literature . . . / Is it not a pity? (Montréal: le biocreux, 1980, p. 29)

The English version reads:

Quite serious, yes. / We'd like to publish your. / A success? / At least 500,000. / Serious? Yes! / Well done, yes. / Drop in on us. / Your country is small. / Very happy. / People don't show enough interest in literature . . . / Pity, isn't it? (*The Death of André Breton*, Montreal: Guernica, 1984, p. 21)

This is a transformation from inter- to intralingual translation.¹⁹

2. A second mode, this time of mistranslating English, also has cultural consequences. What and how certain texts are translated, what is omitted, what is altered, and what is foregrounded can give us a biased and modified impression of Quebec culture. Quebec becomes not what it is, but what we wish it to be.

i. D. G. Jones gives an example of a poem by Pierre Nepveu called "Pepsi" ("Text and Context: Some Reflections on Translation with Examples from Quebec Poetry") with the reiteration of "pop" throughout. The *meaning* Jones

points out depends on the relation of French to English (the invasion of the English is obvious), the relation of the poem and its French to previous poems by Anne Hébert, Saint-Denys Garneau, Alain Grandbois, Emile Nelligan, and the relation of certain words or images to those in previous Quebec poems and the language of Quebec (2). Jones then continues, to say that translating this poem into English will change its meaning — the obvious intrusion of the English into the French will disappear. The *pepsi*, *pop*, *pop-si*, and *pop-corn* will serve primarily to reinforce an accepted part of the code, not to subvert it. Therefore one is inevitably creating and not just translating meaning (9). Jones joins Blodgett and theorists like Lefevère, Lévy, and Derrida in stressing the necessity of difference over equivalence and similarity in which lurks the spectre of assimilation.

ii. Another example, different in effect, is Linda Gaboriau's translation of Jovette Marchessault's *The Saga of the Wet Hens*. The French-language play closes with an invocation to a multitude of foremothers:

Gertrude Stein, Madeleine de Verchères, Natalie Barney, Georges [sic] Sand, Marguerite de Navarre, Sabine, Isadora Duncan, Violette Leduc. (*La Saga des poules mouillées*, Montréal: Editions de la pleine lune, 1981, pp. 177-78)

The English version gives:

Gertrude Stein, Madeline de Verchères, Emma Goldman, Natalie Barney, Georges [sic] Sand, Anne Boleyn, Isadora Duncan, Violette Leduc, Susannah Moody [sic]. (*Saga of the Wet Hens*, Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1985, p. 134)

The alteration here may be subtle — the addition of Emma Goldman, Anne Boleyn, Susannah Moody [sic], the omission of Marguerite de Navarre, but Marchessault has listed the foremothers important to her and her characters, and the alteration changes this emphasis, creating cultural difference.

iii. Although my final example in this mode is not one of mistranslating English, it again indicates how translations can shape the false transmission of translated authors. To a large extent, English-Canadian readers form their impressions of Quebec literature and culture through what is translated. (For just such a general schema see Jeanette Urbas, *From Thirty Acres to Modern Times: The Story of French-Canadian Literature*, Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1976, which describes a literary evolution based solely on translated novels.)

Ray Ellenwood, in "Some Notes on the Politics of Translation," gives the example of John Glassco's highly influential anthology, *Poetry of French Canada in Translation*, which includes very few poems from the Quiet Revolution of the 1960's. This is not entirely Glassco's fault, since the anthology was prepared some years before it was actually published (1970), but the English reader relying mainly on Glassco's text would know very little about the semantic and syntactic

experiments of the Parti Pris poets, the *formalistes*, or even earlier *automatistes* such as Claude Gauvreau.

3. Finally, the mis- or non-translation of English has another consequence, less momentous than the previous two, but nevertheless significant in terms of the French author's narrative strategies. Occasionally, English words and phrases are used as thematic markers in the French source text. For example, in Marie-Claire Blais's *Visions d'Anna ou le vertige* (*Anna's World*, translated by Sheila Fischman), "drifter" and "drift away" are purposefully iterative to indicate that the characters are adrift. Secondly, these words, along with "sexy," "gang," and "forbidden" mark the influx of American culture and commercialism, and are used in reference to Anna's father, formerly an American draft-dodger, now a bourgeois suburban father. Similarly, in Anne Hébert's *Les Fous de bassan*, translated by Sheila Fischman as *In the Shadow of the Wind*, Stephens Brown, in his letters to Old Mic, his American friend, tosses in English phrases to show Stephens's difference from the community of Griffin Creek (though, of course, the novel is about English protestant Loyalists) and to emphasize his years of exile in the States. This use of English is a semantic marker to distinguish Stephens's voice from the others.

WHAT THEN IS THE SIGNIFICANCE of this non- or mis-translation of English by so many skilled translators? I think there are two ways of answering this question. First, in several cases, translators like David Homel, Sheila Fischman, and Betty Bednarski are thinking of their readers. Their focus and desire is directed towards creating a readable pleasurable text for the English reader. Given their understanding of the Quebec milieu and authors, they are skilfully able to transpose the source text on a semantic and syntactic level into the target text. Their orientation (over the last few years) is primarily towards the production of meaning at the target text, though they themselves have "interpreted" the original text within its wide cultural context. Finding certain aspects (e.g., *joual*) culturally untranslatable, they have deferred to the target text and produced meaning for their readers. Furthermore, it is not always the translator, but sometimes the editor — the literary institution — who privileges the referential system of the target text. Unfortunately, one of the consequences of this kind of readability is the often subtle diglossia that results. The Quebec text becomes assimilated into English-Canadian literature.

The other way of answering the question is to pose an alternative in which the target text, instead of assimilating, absorbing the original Quebec text, effecting a form of closure as the English text firmly closes its jaws upon the French original, tries to and does create an open target text, open to differences, open to varieties

of meanings, open to both the original cultural referential system and the one in the process of being created. In order to effect this accomplishment, there seems to be no reason not to use textual devices such as italics, parentheses, translator's notes, additions, conscious alterations, and explanatory phrases. (See also Bassnett-McGuire, pp. 56-57.)

I will conclude with an example where the use of an addition, or a "conscious alteration," is effective. In his translation of Jacques Ferron's *Papa Boss*, Ray Ellenwood, through italics and the altered phrase, "even though angels always speak English," indicates that "How do you do?" and "very well, thank you" were in English in the source text. Here is the relevant passage:

... un ange ... qui ne leur demandera pas d'argent, qui se contentera de leur serrer la main: "How do you do?" Un ange gentil, pas intimidant malgré son anglais, à qui il s'agira de répondre tout simplement: "Very well, thank you." (Montréal: Parti Pris, 1966, p. 20)

The English version reads:

... but still an angel, ... who will only want to shake hands: 'How do you do?' A gentle angel, not intimidating, even though angels always speak English, and you will reply simply, 'Very well, thank you.' (*Quince Jam*, Toronto: Coach House, 1977, p. 20)

It is possible, therefore, to create translations sensitive both to the source text and culture, and to the new reader.²⁰

NOTES

¹ *One for the Road*, trans. David Lobdell (Ottawa: Oberon, 1982).

² Note the recent controversy over Premier Bourassa's handling of Bill 101 — his concessions to bilingual signs, and English schooling.

³ See William Francis Mackey, "Langue, dialecte et diglossie littéraire," *Diglossie et littérature*, édité par Henri Giordan et Alain Ricard (Bordeaux-Talence: Maisons des Sciences de l'homme, 1976), pp. 19-50.

Depuis quelques siècles, les Québécois avaient vécu une partie de cette réalité [une réalité bien nord-américaine] en anglais, et certains aspects n'avaient aucun équivalent exact en français — certains aspects du travail, de la vie urbaine, de la vie politique et des sports (p. 47). . . . L'écrivain québécois n'est pas borné aux thèmes d'exploitation économique: il a aussi tenté de décrire la confrontation politique entre francophone et anglophone, et le manque total de compréhension. On a également tenté de représenter de telles situations en intercallant des phrases anglaises dans le dialogue. . . . C'est ainsi que toute une génération de jeunes écrivains québécois ont inclus, sans toujours fournir de traduction, des mots et des phrases en anglais dans leur romans et dans leur pièces de théâtre. . . il semble que plus son public se sent dans la nécessité d'utiliser l'anglais, plus le romancier québécois, reflétant cette situation, aura tendance à intercaler des expressions anglaises dans son texte. . . [il veut] représenter avec fidélité une situation telle qu'il avait perçue, en restant toujours conscient de l'utilisation qu'il fait de l'anglais pour créer son effet littéraire (pp. 48-49).

- ⁴ In *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Buskin (London: Fontana, 1981), p. 20.
- ⁵ While Shek uses diglossia to refer to the English-French language situation, diglossia also describes the relation between international French and joul. See Pierre Chantefort, *Diglossie au Québec: Limites et Tendances* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1970).
- ⁶ "La canadianisation de la littérature québécoise: le cas Aquin," *Liberté*, 159 (juin 1984), 50-59.
- ⁷ "How do you say 'Gabrielle Roy,'" p. 24.
- ⁸ D. G. Jones, "Text and Context: Some Reflections on Translation with Examples from Quebec Poetry," unpublished paper, *Traduire la littérature du Québec/Translating Quebec Literature*, March 9, 1984, Concordia University; Ray Ellenwood, "Some Notes on the Politics of Translation," *Atkinson Review of Canadian Studies*, 2:1 (Fall/Winter 1984), 25-28; David Homel, *Transmission*, 4:2 (November 1985), 5.
- ⁹ Joseph E. Graham, "Introduction," *Difference in Translation* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), p. 20.
- ¹⁰ André Lefevère, "That structure in the dialect of men interpreted," *Comparative Criticism*, ed. E. S. Shaffer, 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), 88.
- ¹¹ Barbara Johnson, "Taking Fidelity Philosophically," *Difference in Translation*, p. 145.
- ¹² *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (London: Oxford, 1975), p. 47.
- ¹³ Susan Bassnett-McGuire, *Translation Studies* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 22. However, she mentions only the first two referential systems.
- ¹⁴ "The Translation of Verbal Art," in *Semiotics of Art*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Irwin R. Titunik (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1976), p. 222.
- ¹⁵ For comments on the problem of English in the source text and the translation of Tremblay's plays see Renate Usmiani, *Michel Tremblay* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1982), p. 27.
- ¹⁶ I understand from the translator, Betty Bednarski, that the editor was also involved in the final decision concerning the translation of these terms. This then raises interesting questions about an editor's role in enforcing assimilation. Editors may favour the target text's reception and its referential system in that they are pre-occupied with marketing and audience rather than with the source text and culture. Therefore, the literary institution (i.e., publishing house) is also a significant factor in this kind of assimilation; not only the individual translator is responsible.
- ¹⁷ An earlier version by Gérard Robitaille, *Flat, Broke and Beat* (Montréal: Editions du Bélier, 1964), is more literal but also fails to make the reader aware of the origins in joul.
- ¹⁸ Another example of this occurs in the change in title of the C. G. D. Roberts's translation of *Les anciens canadiens* from *Canadians of Old* (1890) to *Cameron of Lochiel* (1905), which takes the novel completely out of the Quebec and French realm and transforms it into a Scottish- or English-Canadian novel (I am grateful to Sherry Simon for drawing my attention to this.)
- ¹⁹ For similar problems in the non-translation of English, see Marie-Claire Blais, *St. Lawrence Blues*, trans. by Ralph Manheim; Pierre Turgeon, *Sweet Poison/Coming Soon*, trans. by David Lobdell; Marco Micone, *Voiceless People*, trans. by Maurizia

Binda. In Gratien Gélinas's *Hier Les Enfants dansaient* (Leméac, 1968), in dictating his speech at the end of the play, Pierre Gravel closes symbolically in English: "By now, you all know that my own house is divided . . ." (p. 120), and then switches to French; this is not indicated in the English version, *Yesterday the Children were Dancing* (1967), trans. by Mavor Moore.

- ²⁰ See also Anne Hébert's *Kamouraska*. Elisabeth is accused and tried in English, "L'acte d'accusation est écrit en anglais," and it is made clear that English is the language of privilege and power, from which Elisabeth is excluded. This is indicated in the 1973 translation by Norman Shapiro through the use of italics. I am grateful to Ben-Zion Shek for drawing my attention to this, and to the problems with the Gratien Gélinas translation (see footnote 19). In *Wild to Mild* (Saint-Lambert: Les Editions Héritage, 1980), his translation of Réjean Ducharme's *L'hiver de force* (1973), Robert Guy Scully has a note on the title page, "Asterisks denote words or expressions which are in English in the original text." This is significant because this text about a couple representing dispossessed, aimless contemporary Quebec society, is littered with English expressions related to drugs, swearing, jargon, material goods and products — *leatherette*, *cellophane*, *shopping centre*, *fuck*, "*don't be so heavy*," etc. For a good discussion of this problem, see Henry Schogt, "*Pas lonely pantoute?*" *Solitude rompue*, eds. Cécile Cloutier-Wojciechowska et Réjean Robidoux (Ottawa: Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1986), pp. 340-50.

COMEDY OF NOSTALGIA

Alexandre L. Amprimoz

She
why do you still turn to *mater europa*

He
the empty union
is the empty set
and when we intersect
we remain what we always were

She
but this fever gives you no time
to return to the present

He
between the scent of cool carnations
and the mind of sleepy waiters
between cathedrals and cafés
the soul within was not absolute
absence

WINTER WHEAT

Brian Pratt

like a farmer knows
i know what weather means to the bus business
cross-winds push my kite off freeways
poor visibility and increased stopping distances in rain
and snow and ice and lack of road salt and tension
i like to think of being like a farmer
not the hired hand i am
talking winter wheat at dusk
with a neighbour from down the road
at the community well
after yet another dry day
or ponder the horizon
a system not coming
or if it comes it'll be hail
an entire day looping a field smaller
storm clouds doing what they will in spite of my wishes
the action of weather being good
even if its outcome is bad
it's the possibility of good coming from the horizon
the work of farming not looking like work from my horizon
but i realize with time also invested in thought
the farmer realizes my business
isn't as it looks either



THE WRITER AS TRANSLATOR

A Personal View

Joyce Marshall

I ONCE READ THAT ALL WRITERS should in the course of their careers write at least one book for children and translate at least one book from another language. (I believe the exact words were “owed it to the profession” — a daunting phrase.) I haven’t yet written my book for children (though I have one or two excellent ideas and have been waiting for years for something — myself? — to set me going) but I have translated seven books, as well as a number of shorter pieces, from French, the only other language I know. I’m not at all sure that this was in any sense a gift to the profession of letters — I don’t think in such terms and, anyway, someone else would have translated the books — but it was certainly a gift of tremendous value to me as a writer, a writer in English.

Of the seven books only three were works of fiction — *The Road Past Altamont*, *Windflower*, and *Enchanted Summer* (to give them their English titles), all by the late Gabrielle Roy — and as I am myself a writer of fiction, I propose to deal specifically with these. Though I learned something about the languages from my translation of the three non-fiction books, and though my work on *Word From New France: The Selected Letters of Marie de l’Incarnation* plunged me into the heart of an alien seventeenth-century society and a personality unlike my own in every respect (a huge and exciting leap of the imagination), I shall leave these more or less to one side.

My translation of the three Gabrielle Roy books, which concluded with close, extremely demanding sessions during which she and I went over my translations word by word and sentence by sentence, not once but several times, gave me the inestimable privilege of friendship with one of our greatest writers (and finest and most elusive human beings). We were already acquainted, in fact vaguely friendly when I undertook the work but I would never have known her so well if I had not seen her at work and, by working with her, learned much about the methods and imaginative texture of an extraordinarily disciplined and original mind. As I have described these revision-sessions more than once, in other places, emphasizing to some extent their amusing aspects, I shall not repeat these descriptions here, just say that they were great fun and, because we were both exceedingly stubborn people, often exasperating as well and that in my frequent need to defend

myself, often turning my mind inside out to do so (for though of the two of us she was the unquestioned authority on her own meaning and intention, I was just as unquestionably the authority on English syntax and idiom), I learned things about the English language I might not have learned in any other way, learned what it could do and couldn't do and above all learned to value it more than I had ever done before. I've often thought that every translator, especially every translator who was just beginning to learn the craft, should have had to work at least once with Gabrielle Roy — particularly if that translator hoped or was trying to be a writer. It was a stimulating, if at times excruciating, process but having been through it three times, I was glad finally to decide not to go through it again. I learned much from these sessions and what I learned I know. I am grateful for this and for the friendship that survived all differences of opinion and added so much to my life.

But I am getting ahead of myself. I propose to write in general as well as particular terms about the writer (in this case myself) as translator: what are (or might be) the disadvantages, the advantages, and the ultimate gains.

I BECAME A TRANSLATOR by accident. I had done some writing and it was known that I'd grown up in Montreal and thus knew French, so when some time in the late 1950's Robert Weaver wanted a story by Gabrielle Roy translated for broadcast over the CBC he asked whether I'd give it a try. I said I would and learned whatever I've learned about the craft of translating by doing. I'd never met anyone who'd done even a single translation — in fact, there were few such people in this country at that time. I'd never (nor have I yet) taken a course in translating. (I don't think that in those days there were any such courses.) I'd never read a single book — or for that matter an article — on the subject. After I decided in the late 1970's not to translate any more books, having grown weary of scraping my mind raw over thoughts that weren't mine, I encountered a few books and sometimes read them even now, thinking rather wistfully how useful they'd have been when I was trying to teach myself to be a translator.

At the time, however, I undertook the job of translating one of our most important and, for some reason that I'd never quite managed to put my finger on, one of our most intractably difficult writers, without knowledge, theories, or skill. And soon after I'd completed that first story, Harry Binsse, who'd translated Gabrielle Roy's most recent books, was no longer available for freelance work and I was asked to translate *La Route d'Altamont*, of which the story I'd already translated was a tiny part. I happened to be bored with my own writing at that time; I felt that I knew what I would say before I said it since I'd been saying the same things, or at least the same sorts of things, for years. So I agreed to translate the book.

For me it was a gruelling and desperately difficult undertaking. I simply set down the English equivalent, as nearly as I could discover it, of every word in pretty much the order in which they occurred in the French, then tried to turn the resulting curious sentences into English. At this point it was the similarities rather than the differences between the languages that troubled me. It might have been easier to work with a language that didn't have subjects, objects, prepositions, conjunctions, etc. (if such languages exist), at any rate from a language that didn't make even wild, clumsy sentences when translated more or less word after word. As a matter of fact, I never got much beyond this first stage of translating fairly literally then fighting the results into English. If there are tricks I never discovered them or problems with easy solutions I never found them, and when I did find a solution to a problem, any relief I might feel was quickly wiped out by the looming of some new equally formidable problem. I learned a great deal by this fighting; what effect it had upon the outcome I cannot say. As I'm discussing this matter from the point of view of a would-be translator who was already a writer, the fact that I did know, at least essentially, how an English sentence went was an advantage. But even so I found, and continued to find whenever I was translating, that I had to spend some time every day reading English — not the newspapers but the most immaculate English I could find. Otherwise I simply forgot, or was at least in danger of forgetting, how an English sentence was put together and why it was put together in that way. I also had to examine very carefully, not only every word of the French but every word of my English rendition, deciding not only what it meant but also what it weighed and how it affected other words and phrases in the sentence. (This last was important. English words do condition, even tinge, one another as French words do not do to the same extent.) Another useful discipline was that I was forced to follow Gabrielle Roy's thoughts and intentions in every way. I'd tended in my own writing (as I imagine most writers tend) to try to get an effect in one way and, if this failed, strike it out and try some other way. As a translator I had to get Gabrielle Roy's effect in the way she had chosen to obtain it. This was complicated by the fact that much as I admired her writing, and continued to admire it, I did not always like, or perhaps it would be more exact to say I didn't always find congenial, the way she obtained an effect — by which of course I mean her emotional, dramatic, or structural effect. But I was bound to use her way.

AND NOW WE COME to what might have been the disadvantages (or at least difficulties) of the writer (myself) as translator. People often asked me, and in fact continue to ask me, "Weren't you tempted to convert the French into an equivalent of your own English style?" The answer to that is No —

not only was I not tempted to do this, I would have found it impossible. (I have a style presumably although I'd be at a loss to try to describe it; it seems to be a sort of rhythm that comes, in some way I can neither control nor analyze, from my head to my fingers.) I suppose if there were a writer whose thoughts and imaginative processes were identical, or almost identical, to my own, I might slip into this rhythm without realizing that I was doing it. But when, as with Gabrielle Roy, not only the thoughts themselves but the structure of the thoughts, the use or withholding of detail, in fact the entire attitude, were idiosyncratic and unique, these thoughts, coloured as they were by the mind that inspired them, could not fit themselves into my particular way of forming sentences but had to find their own arrangement of words, vocabulary, and stress. I never found this in itself much of a problem. As a writer of fiction, I was accustomed to writing dialogue, in other words to recording the speech of people who expressed themselves in characteristic ways. Translation is simply an extended exercise in dialogue-writing. I didn't describe it to myself as such at first, I simply did it, or at least tried to do it, reminding myself when necessary that this was someone else speaking, not I myself. And an entire novel, or linked series of stories, was a more extensive piece of dialogue than any I'd tackled before, and the fact that it came from a mind that was very much subtler than any I could possibly invent was not only a tremendous challenge to me as a writer but a marvellous holiday from myself.

I've been asked, by the way, whether the intensity and prolongation of the work — the solitary struggling and the final discussion-sessions with Gabrielle Roy of which I've already spoken — tempted me or even caused me unknown to myself to try to write like Gabrielle Roy, structure events as she structured them, attempt to copy her style. I don't believe so. Our minds were too different, as going right down into the bones of her writing would have shown me even if I hadn't been aware of it before. The experience made me not only more disciplined as a writer but, by taking me right away from myself, more conscious of how I wanted to write, what I wanted my style and approach to be. In other words it taught me to accept my own individuality, even to know, dimly at least, what this individuality involved.

So much for the benefits and disadvantages. Now for the discoveries. I suppose the chief of these, and the one that sums up all the others, was the realization that my thinking, my attitude, in fact everything that influences my way of expressing myself, as well as my choice of what I want to express, is completely bound up with the English language — and with this realization came my awareness that I was glad that this was so. It is easy for anyone who was taught to speak French, as I was by a native speaker of the language, to acquire an inferiority complex about English. I certainly did and I even have a record of the way it started, in a diary I kept when I was twelve. Into the usual record of childhood doings, ornamented with the usual high-flown and egotistic sentiments, comes the announcement that "today Mademoiselle ——— told us that no one could write good prose

in English because English words can mean more than one thing.” “Damn her and her French!” I added, apparently already determined to prove her wrong. Though I never referred to the incident again, the memory must have rankled. In fact I know it did. Certainly Mademoiselle ———’s pronouncement was not the last such comment I heard. French-speakers are taught not only to value but to extol their own language as English-speakers are not and I always had a sneaking fear that English could never achieve the *clarté* French was said to possess and to possess by its very nature. The trouble was that I loved French and kept up my reading of the language through all the years when my life in Toronto gave me very few occasions to speak it, loved it not only for its *clarté* but for the marvellous lightness of its sentence structure, the neat adroit phrasing and connections between phrases that often made me, as a lover of language, want to cry aloud with delight. Can English ever do this, I sometimes wondered.

Perhaps not that. Or not precisely that. But what it can do, it does to a considerable extent because English words, in Mademoiselle ———’s immortal phrase, “can mean more than one thing,” are influenced by other words, spread, are never static. And we have so many — the Latin words so formal and heavy often, or at least abstract, the Saxon words so much quicker, so evocative, so much closer to the heart. (We’ve never after all these centuries quite accepted these Latin intruders, I often think.) After years of working with French, getting right down into the sinews of the language while doing no original writing of my own, staring at words whose meanings, though perhaps not subject to change, were often so wide that they swallowed up a good half dozen of our small bright English words (and needed a variety of set phrases — *pour ainsi dire*, *malgré tout*, etc. — to tie them down), looking at conclusions when I wanted to see process — for French is to a considerable extent a language of nouns, English a language of verbs — and discovering that a sentence of great *clarté* in French wasn’t at all clear in English (and this often because it didn’t tell me the things I wanted to know), I began to feel less apologetic about English. I have even praised its merits to French-speakers on occasion, to their great surprise. Perhaps “merits” isn’t the right word. Perhaps no language can be said to possess merits as such. Perhaps all I mean is that English suits me as a medium of expression, multiple meanings and all, and that I’ll cheerfully damn, as I did with such lack of knowledge when I was twelve, anyone who suggests that it can’t produce “good prose.”



MANDRAKES

Bruce Taylor

Toadflax, because it is yellow, cures jaundice.
Pokeweed is poisonous when fresh.
Virginia Snakeroot cures snake bites, the name
makes that obvious. It is also called Pelican Flower.

Each plant has an alias.
Dropwort

is Goatsbeard.
Hog Apple and Raccoon Berry are wild
Lemons.

Buckbean is Bogmyrtle.
Hellebore is Tickleweed.

The lovely Evening Primrose,
powerfully 'mucilaginous',

is Scurvish to some,
to others Scabish.

In the New Life all plants
will be replaced by their names
and attributes —

But in our day,
in this world,
they are all mandrakes.
We cover our ears so as not
to be struck dead by their screams.



THE TRUE QUEBEC AS REVEALED TO ENGLISH CANADA

Translated Novels, 1864-1950

Sherry Simon

WE OF ENGLISH SPEECH turn naturally to French-Canadian literature for knowledge of the French-Canadian people."¹ Thus Charles G. D. Roberts, translator of *Les anciens canadiens*, defines literary translation in Canada as a vehicle for knowledge. But what kind of knowledge is it which English Canada expects from Quebec literature? According to Roberts it lies in the articulation of a "natural" link between the realms of the literary and the political, between the aesthetic object and the society it is supposed to represent. This confident assumption, based on what we would consider a naïve theory of representationalism in literature, has nevertheless become a persistent theme in the presentation of Quebec novels in English. Translators' prefaces, one after the other, establish the translation's doubly authentic nature as literature and as a revelation of socio-political reality.² Mobilized in the interest of the national cause, literary translations are charged with the task of making an alien reality less opaque, of offering the key to an otherwise dark society.

The conception of translation reflected in this tradition seems to contradict the traditional premise which equates translation much more readily with *deformation* and *betrayal* than with *knowledge*. In fact, though translated literary texts have been the object of study since at least the mid-nineteenth century, the epistemological status of translations has never been fixed. In what ways do translations — as translations — produce specific knowledge?

In proposing to render both the literary and the ethnographic truth of the novels they translate, Canadian translators seem to be proposing an explicit epistemological frame of reference for their work. Their translations, addressed to a specifically Canadian public, are grounded in a concern for authenticity. But how will this authenticity be materialized? It is a truism of translation analysis that translations inevitably either choose to conform with the writing standards and traditions of the receiving culture (in which case they will be "ethnocentric" and "hyper-

textual" in A. Berman's terms) or to declare themselves a product of an alien reality (and may choose what Berman calls "la traduction de la lettre").³

Obligated to choose between allegiance to the standards of literature or subservience to the demands of the ethnographic documentary, what is it that Canadian translators choose to define as knowledge? How do they convey to their public the truth about Quebec? An examination of Quebec novels translated between 1864 and 1950 allows us to determine how English-Canadian translations structure perceptions of literary reality by negotiating between seemingly contradictory constraints.

Although they are produced and consumed under the same aesthetic and market constraints which affect the productions of the receiving culture, translations are generally treated as individual efforts produced in isolation from these norms. In fact translated literature is part of the literary models and expectations. If translations often reflect the strongest literary models, they can of course work in an opposite direction by redirecting literary trends. (This was the case of the French translations of Hemingway, for instance.⁴) There are many other possible models of interaction, however. Galland's translation of the *Milles et une nuits* creates the possibility for the French prose fiction which will follow, while proposing a model for a written form of the Arabic tales;⁵ the stylistic accomplishment of the *King James Bible* was derived through a series of revisions which profited from a host of influences.

The corpus of translations of Quebec novels is notable neither for its great volume (eighteen novels before 1960 according to Stratford⁶) nor for the impact which it has had upon English-Canadian literature. In fact comparatists have amply and ruefully proved the contrary: English- and French-Canadian literature in Canada have pursued radically parallel paths, until recently in relative ignorance one of the other.⁷ Though these translated novels have rarely if ever been considered to be part of a tradition (even the translators seem largely unaware of the efforts of their predecessors), the translations published between 1864 and 1950 offer a number of common traits which make their consideration as a corpus pertinent and revealing.⁸ These traits include (1) the type of novel which is translated; (2) the self-conscious insertion of the translation into a socio-political context (in the preface); and (3) the literary importance which is given the classics of French-Canadian literature (translations and prefaces by prominent men of letters).

The translated novels which constitute the corpus then are: *Les anciens canadiens* (trans. 1864, 1905, 1927); *Récits laurentiens* by Frère Marie-Victorin (1919; trans. 1925); *Chez Nous* by Adjutor Rivard (1914; trans. 1924); *Maria Chapdelaine* (1916; trans. 1921 twice); *Les demi-civilisés* by Jean Charles Harvey (1934; trans. 1938); *Menaud, maître-draveur* (1937; trans. 1947); *Trente arpents* (1938; trans. 1940); *Nipsya*, Georges Bugnet (1924; trans. 1929); *A l'oeuvre et à l'épreuve*, Laure Conan (1891; trans. 1909 U.S.A.); *Le survenant*

(1945; trans. 1950), and *Marie-Didace* (1947; trans. 1950). We will not consider the remaining published translations of the time — five novels by Maurice Constantin-Weyer translated and published in New York, Toronto, London; *Grand Louis l'innocent* by Marie Lefranc (1925; trans. 1928 U.S.A.); *A la hache*, Adolphe Nantel (1932; trans. 1937); *Le Centurion* by Adolphe-B Routhier (1909; trans. 1910 U.S.A.) — because they are either unavailable (published exclusively in the U.S.A.), or totally marginal to the literary production of the period.

The translators, as I have noted, explicitly founded their activity on two assumptions: that they were translating faithful *representations* of Quebec society which were at the same time *literary* works. Both elements of this balance present some difficulties. The first audiences of these novels would have hardly agreed with the translators' assertions that they were "faithful representations" of Quebec and its people. De Gaspé's vision of acquiescence to the British victory, Savard's version of the folly of Menaud, Harvey's critique of the Quebec bourgeoisie were surely not immediately accepted collectively as authentic representations of French-Canadian reality. *Maria Chapdelaine* is perhaps the most controversial case. Blake's preface to the original 1921 edition mentions nothing of the issue, but the subsequent 1938 preface by Hugh Eayrs and the 1948 preface by Blake (posthumously; Blake died in 1924) discuss the general view that the novel is not a "complete picture" of French-Canadian reality. Blake's reservations, however, are almost exclusively ethnological. Except for the brief mention of "haunting melancholy," which might have been touched with "a lighter hand," he reviews the aspects of the work which are inaccurate: the transcription of the vernacular, the description of customs, the naming of vegetation.

We could suppose, therefore, that what English-Canadian translators were most interested in revealing was the documentary nature of the works, their revelations of customs and character. They would have been in some ways justified in this impulse by the weak concept of "literature" which held in the Quebec novel in general. The Quebec novel emerged out of a long tradition of didactic fiction; prefaces to many Quebec novels of the nineteenth century include not entirely ritual disclaimers in which the "author" declares himself unworthy of being called a real author. This is the case in *Les anciens canadiens*. De Gaspé begins by insisting that "j'ai nullement l'intention de composer un ouvrage *secundum artem*, encore moins de me poser en auteur classique." Roberts argues in his first preface (1890) that this disclaimer is not to be taken seriously and that "From the literary point of view" the work is "the best historical romance so far produced in French Canada." But the problem seems to persist as Roberts claims in his second preface (1905) that the choice of a new title for the work *Cameron of Lochiel* (at the suggestion of his publisher) is justified on the grounds that this title will better promote the book's claim to being a work of fiction rather than a volume of memoirs and folklore. Is this explanation simply a ploy to try to justify a clearly misleading

title? He concludes by reiterating, however, that what drew him to the book were precisely the “riches of Canadian tradition, folklore and perished customs” that it contains.

Roberts’s preoccupation with the question of the “true nature” of de Gaspé’s work reveals the hybrid nature of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Quebec novel and the socio-literary intention which underlies it. Its ambiguity is directly tied to the question of authorship. The fact that two of the important novels of the period under consideration (*Les demi-civilisés* and *Menaud, maître-draveur*) were subject to important revisions by their own authors seems to be a further confirmation of the difficult relationship between authors and their work. This question has a direct impact on translation. How is the translator to react to a text whose authority is radically put into question by its own author? John O’Connor notes in his preface to John Glassco’s retranslation of *Les demi-civilisés* that many of the changes that Lukin Barette made in his much-derided translation *Sackcloth for banner* were in fact the same ones that Harvey would later make to the original. It becomes apparent that the confident equation between translation and knowledge which was at the heart of Canadian translating enterprise rests on somewhat dubious assumptions. Both “literature” and “representation” turn out to be problematic notions. To understand what knowledge means to translators within this very specific historical, political, and literary context, we must look at the strategies adopted by the translations themselves.

HISTORICALLY, LITTLE ATTENTION has been given to the theory and analysis of translation of novels. With its origins in the Renaissance and its concern with classical culture, translation theory has dealt almost exclusively with texts carrying a strong sense of authoritative authorship — especially poetry and sacred texts. While translation theorists since du Bellay have recognized the importance of *elocutio* in poetry, for example, the signifying structures of the novel, as they relate to translation, have remained largely unexamined.

The polylingualism of the novel, as defined by Bakhtin, means that any approach to translation must involve various registers and strategies.⁹ These different levels of textual material can be particularly important in revealing the constraints of translation. In their thorough and illuminating study of the successive French translations of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, José Lambert and Katrin Van Bragt show how the clear presence of two very different “textual models” (the poems inserted into the prose work) indicates translation strategies. The translations, they found, were commanded by literary norms quite independent of the novel itself.¹⁰ The fact that the French eighteenth-century novel had no tradition of the mixture of genres which the German and English novel had already adopted created special diffi-

culties for the translators. The hesitations and uncertainties of translation result from the inexistence in a specific tradition of the particular "sub-genre" to be translated.¹¹

In the case of the translation of Québécois novels, the question of dialect constitutes the overwhelming point of tension. It would be incorrect, however, to say that the difficulty of translation resides in the absence of similar textual traditions in French (-Canadian) and English (-Canadian) literature. In fact, *Les anciens canadiens* is explicitly modelled on Sir Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor* and the use of dialect in these novels has parallel functions. When de Gaspé's book is "re-translated" back to English, however, the specific functions of regional and idiolectal dialect can no longer be retained. What differs, then, in the two textual traditions is not the presence or absence of dialect but its specific historical, social, and literary functions. In the following analysis of English-Canadian translations of Quebec novels, the question of dialect becomes the focus through which translation strategy is examined. Because dialect is defined at the same time by social and by literary norms, its translation will define in an especially appropriate way what it is that English Canada wants to know about French Canada and its literature.

THERE ARE A NUMBER of factors which make G. D. Roberts's translation of *Les anciens canadiens* a particularly important text. First, it's a retranslation in 1890 following a first version by Georgiana Pennée in 1864. Retranslations carry an extra weight of significance¹² — both because they inevitably progress through historical stages, and because they offer the opportunity for stylistic revision which often gives them the status of literary works (the obvious example is the King James's Version of the Bible, but the successive translations of Rabelais by Urquhart, Motteux, and Ozell also show a progression towards stylistic unity and refinement). Retranslations also testify to the ongoing and, therefore, increasing historical importance attributed to the original work. This importance is shown in Roberts's case by the work having been issued several times, each time with important prefatory material, and its eventually being integrated into the New Canadian Library in 1964. This edition even indicates on the cover page that Roberts, and not de Gaspé, is the author. For the author's name to be forgotten in favour of the translator's is a rare occurrence indeed. Roberts's translation was chosen as the definitive translation over two rival versions — the Pennée version, and the Marquis version (another revision of Pennée's text published in 1929 by the popular history writer T. G. Marquis). What kind of a version does Roberts give us?

Roberts's translation could be categorized as a classic "hypertextual" translation; it is also to a great degree "ethnocentric." The hypertextuality (that is, Roberts's striving everywhere for aesthetic effect, and his concern for sentence rhythm and euphony) seems to be the result of a process of "rewriting" of the Pennée translation; the ethnocentricity is revealed in the use of the 1905 title *Cameron of Lochiel* as well as in the systematic transposition of the French songs and poems into an Anglo-Saxon literary register and form. Roberts eliminates the abundant appended material following de Gaspé's novel; he acknowledges this cut in his first preface, referring the interested reader to the whereabouts of the material. In addition, names are anglicized (François becomes Francis) and idiomatic expressions are often drawn from the banter of Victorian England, especially when Jules and Archy exchange the jokes and taunts of British schoolboys: "Oh, why don't you let me help you out of the scrape?" "The devil you say"; "Tut, if you talk of those ha'pennies, there's an end to the business" or "My dear fellow." Roberts's concern, however, for keeping some of the local colour of the original leads him to incongruities such as speaking of borrowing 50 francs in one paragraph and mentioning ha'pennies in the next.

Aubert de Gaspé uses dialect only in the speech of one character, the servant José. Roberts chooses to ignore this use of dialect entirely, transforming the source of this character's humour from comic malapropisms and quaint expression "doutance adons orogane, guvalle, esquellette, rhinoféroce," simply to obsessive obsequiousness. This elimination of dialect markers is a surprising decision on Roberts's part if we consider the literary models from which both the original and the translation derive. De Gaspé refers explicitly in his novel to Sir Walter Scott's character Caleb Balderstone in *The Bride of Lammermoor* as a model for José. There are in fact great similarities between Scott's novel and de Gaspé's, which suggest that Scott's novel was a model for de Gaspé. These similarities include the narrator's presence in the preface, a marked resemblance in the plot structure, and, most important, the use of footnotes and internal translation in the form of parenthetical explanations for difficult, local terms. We know also that de Gaspé translated several of Scott's novels, although the texts have never been found.

The importance of dialect in Sir Walter Scott is both literal and historical. In his preface to *The Bride of Lammermoor* the author-narrator explains how important dialogue is for character: "The ancient philosopher, said I in reply, was wont to say 'Speak that I may know thee'; and how is it possible for an author to introduce his personae dramatis to his readers in a more interesting and effectual manner than by the dialogue in which each is represented as supporting his own appropriate character?"

The use of dialect in *Les anciens canadiens* can therefore be considered as the expression of a literary imperative as much as of a social one. The use of dialect

signals the Romantic infatuation with language as the reflection of the soul of the people (and points to the political significance which this language will acquire in the modern Quebec novel), and dialect is also clearly still part of the comic tradition present in literature as far back as Molière and Shakespeare. Considering the multiple connotations of the use of marked dialect in de Gaspé's novel, the literary acceptability of dialect, and the massive influence that Scott exercised over nineteenth-century writers of historical fiction, it might have been "logical" — if logic operates in such matters — for Roberts to have looked to Scott and his successors for ideas as to how French-Canadians might be shown as speaking a characteristic dialect (French-Canadian) in English. How would Scott, or any of his successors, have made French-Canadians speak in English? It is interesting to note that none of the writers of historical fiction who used French Canada as a setting (William Kirby in *The Golden Dog*, Gilbert Parker or Mrs. Leprohon) seems to have used a particular kind of language to indicate the specific expressions and intonations of French Canadians. In his own fiction, Roberts himself used marked language (rural dialect, for English-speaking characters) but clearly hesitated to introduce such forms in his translations.

One major exception to the absence of the representation of French-Canadian speech in English is the poetry of William Henry Drummond. It was first published a few years *after* Roberts's translation, and its representation of French-Canadian speech is not an equivalent of their language but an imitation of the accents and cadences of the French-Canadian as he or she spoke in "broken" English. These poems were wildly popular in English Canada, and endorsed by Louis Fréchette himself.

Of the three possibilities theoretically before the translator as he confronted marked dialect in French (using an equivalent dialect, using some sort of fabricated one, or using none at all), Roberts chose the last solution. His choice paralleled the model adopted by the contemporary historical novel. The marked dialect of French-Canadian speech would not be reproduced. What seems important here is that there was nothing inevitable about Roberts's choice of solution. This becomes apparent in the 1929 resuscitation of the original Georgiana Pennée version by Thomas Marquis. Marquis's 1929 version, entitled *Seigneur d'Haberville* (this is the third title given to the book) and carrying no translator's name on the cover pages, shows some interesting contrasts with Roberts's version and resulting in a text which is certainly the "literary" inferior of Roberts's. Why then would a writer of popular history have chosen to rehabilitate a version which could clearly not compete with Roberts on literary grounds and whose variations might well be dismissed as defects? We find the answer to this question in the indications that Marquis is less interested in the literary aspects of the novel than in its value as a historical document.

The Marquis version is hardly a scholarly attempt to recover the pristine totality of the original. There are numerous cuts in the narrative (not acknowledged by the editor) eliminating discursive passages, some footnotes, and most of the appendix. But the fact that Marquis added footnotes which de Gaspé had not included indicates that Marquis was particularly concerned with demonstrating the value of the work as a historical document. (This concern is also shown in Marquis's preface, which warns the reader not to take the portrait of the diabolical General Murray seriously.) Marquis's translation of José's dialogue (which he retains from the Pennée version) retains the characteristic diglossia of the French by using internal translation: "a-dons" (occasional extra glasses), "rhinosferos" (rhinoceros), "feux-follets" (will-o'-the-wisps). José's comic mispronunciations are noted. This explicitness of the text is characteristic of the literalness of the whole: "Ma foi" becomes "my faith" and not "Lord." Marquis's version also contains bits of dialogue like "But why on earth did you not have recourse to me?" or "Your family sends you many messages." Clearly, Marquis is seeking above all to present *Les anciens canadiens* as a historical document. Roberts's novel on the other hand is a romance which seeks acceptance as a work of literature.

A comparison of these two versions of *Les anciens canadiens* provides us with a paradigm of novel translation in the Canadian context. We have two models of textual generation which result in a hypertextual translation (the highly written and reworked text) and in a translation which allows the foreign signifier to pierce the surface of the text. That the former, with its clear measure of "extra rewriting work," was chosen as the standard translation is evidence of the premium placed on aesthetic standards. The translation has been accredited on the grounds of its acceptability within the literary canons of the receiving culture.

MARIA CHAPDELAINE WAS GIVEN two translations, both in 1921.¹³ W. H. Blake's translation, which has become the standard version, is, even more than Roberts's *Canadians of Old*, intensely hypertextual. One passage from the work, a passage of dialogue by Samuel Chapdelaine, will reveal the mechanisms at work in this work as compared to that of Andrew Macphail:¹⁴

Alors je prenais ma hache et je me'en allais dans le bois, et je fessais si fort sur les bouleaux que je faisais sauter des morceaux gros comme le poignet, en me disant que c'était une femme dépareillée que j'avais là, et que si le bon Dieu me gardait ma santé lui ferais une belle terre. . . .

Then I took my ax, and I went into the woods and I struck so hard on the birches that I made chips fly the size of my fist, whilst I said to myself, that it was a matchless woman I had there, and if the good God should guard my health I would make a fine farm for her.

Well, I caught up my ax and was off to the woods; and I laid into the birches so lustily that chips flew as thick as your wrist, all the time saying to myself that the wife I had was like no other, and that if the good God only kept me in health I would make her the best farm in the countryside.

A comparison of the key terms in the three passages show how Blake continually uses a process of lexical and syntactical *intensification* to obtain a highly poetic effect:

prenais: took/caught up
 m'en allais: went/was off
 fessais: struck/laid into
 si fort: so hard/so lustily
 le poignet: my fist/your wrist
 belle terre: fine farm/the best farm in the countryside
 dépareillée: matchless/like no other

While Macphail remains quite literal, Blake always seeks the most precise and descriptive term, adding strength to what was simply suggested in the original. "Toute cette blancheur froide" becomes "The chill and universal white"; "une succession de descentes et de montées guere plus profondes que le profil d'une houle de mer haute" becomes "a succession of ups and downs scarcely more considerable than the slopes of an ocean swell, from trough to crest, from crest to trough"; "sur le sol canadien" becomes "under the Canadian skies."

Despite the very sharp differences in the two translations, however, both versions are remarkably similar in their approach to dialect. Macphail writes expressions like: "It is beautiful, the mass"; "not worse, not worse" (for "pas pire, pas pire"); "This is luck meeting you — your place being far up the river and I so seldom coming here"; and "Your daughter, that is different, she has changed." Blake produced such phrases as: "Well Mr. Larouche, do things go pretty well across the water?"; "since then I have been nearly all the time in the woods"; "Our well must needs dry up"; "Beyond question it will rain again"; and "All the summer I am to be working."

The ultimate effect of this literal approach to dialect differs in each case, however, because the passages in dialect are given different contexts. In Blake's version the hypertextuality of the narrative passages gives to the literal dialogue a literary acceptability which does not exist in a completely literal version like Macphail's. We understand from this example, then, that the value of the translation of dialect will vary according to the literary context in which it is placed. Blake's translation is very satisfactory, blending the elegance of a highly reworked prose with the very obvious "strangeness" of dialect. Blake has found a way of divorcing the hypertextual from the ethnocentric, of denying the mutual exclusivity of literary and ethnographic desires.

LIKE *Les anciens canadiens* and *Maria Chapdelaine*, *Menaud, maître-draveur* was translated by an English-Canadian writer, the successful and prolific Alan Sullivan. Though his translation is marred by gross errors owing quite obviously to his lack of comprehension of the French, Sullivan's version of *Menaud, maître-draveur* follows a strategy similar to Blake's. (Sullivan notes in his preface that it is the "poetic imagery" of the work which interests him above all.) Sullivan modifies the terse and dramatic qualities of the original by combining paragraphs, lengthening sentences, and everywhere softening the harshness of Savard's text. There is little dialogue and almost no dialect in the novel. Savard tends to remain in a poetic register and Sullivan uses "thou" for "tu" to accentuate the romantic and timeless nature of the work.

The first novel to use dialect systematically in French and to receive a dialectic equivalent in English is *Thirty Acres*. The very title of the novel indicates the translators' anglicizing bent (arpents and acres are not equivalent measures, as is emphasized in the preface). The dialogue is given a vaguely rural, often Western twang: "There wasn't nothing but stones"; "We work a sight too hard for what it gets us"; "So you're aiming to do some sugaring"; and "We was just about buried alive." The translations of *Marie-Didace* and *Le survenant* by Germaine Guèvremont under the title *The Outlander* are given a similar treatment and are even more clearly culturally transformed. Place-names and titles are anglicized and the dialect is unspecifically rural. In all these cases the narrative is given a close translation.

The preceding analysis has suggested four possible ways of translating French-Canadian dialect into English:

1. Roberts: dialogue is *ignored* (just as Defauconpret ignored dialect in his French translations of Sir Walter Scott); the writing is hypertextual.
2. Marquis: dialect is rendered *lexically* within a text which does not carry marks of literary reworking.
3. Blake: dialect is rendered *syntactically*, but integrated into a hypertextual narrative.
4. Walters: dialect is given a dialectic *equivalent*, geographically unsituated. The narrative is given a close rendering.

There are, of course, other possibilities. Translatability is not an essentially technical question, but rather a historical one.¹⁵ Each individual work imposes constraints which result from the way dialect has been represented. Dialect is very much a literary modelling of spoken language, a representation which can have its source as much in literary tradition as in the street. The study of the translation of vernacular turns out to be a multi-tiered process: it includes the study of the

historical significance of the representation of popular language, the availability of existing models for translation, and the socio-political context of translation.

The variety of responses in the treatment of literary dialect makes it difficult to speak of a unified tradition of Canadian translation. There is no consensus during the period under consideration or even now as to the representation of French-Canadian speech in English. The work of G. D. Roberts, W. H. Blake, and Alan Sullivan suggests, however, an interest in translations on the part of the established literary community which seems to be less strong today.¹⁶ This primarily literary interest existed alongside the more ethnographically oriented approach represented by such writers as Andrew Macphail and T. G. Marquis.

The knowledge which English Canada expected and received from translations of French-Canadian literature is fragmented and various. Though explicitly motivated by the needs of national reconciliation, translations offer different versions of that "other society" and its people. Affirmations of essential identity (most clearly typified by Roberts's translation of *Les anciens canadiens*) coexist with declarations of fundamental difference (the examples of both W. H. Blake and T. G. Marquis).

This ambivalence in English-Canadian versions of French Canada throws an interesting light on the history of intra-Canadian literary relations. It indicates that Canadian English-language translations could be acceptable even if they did not conform to exclusively literary standards. Less normative in their approach to textuality than translations in the French tradition, English-Canadian translations were to a certain extent open to the intrusions of a culture at once close and very distant. In the essential indeterminacy of their attitude towards French Canada, English-Canadian translations are an accurate reflection of English Canada's difficulty in conceiving of the Other. Translation is the very materialization of this difficulty and a privileged terrain for its investigation.

NOTES

¹ Charles G. D. Roberts, "Introduction," *Canadians of Old* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974). Other works and their translations referred to explicitly in this paper: Ph-Joseph Aubert de Gaspé, *Les anciens canadiens* (Montréal: Bibliothèque Canadienne française/Fidès, n.d.), trans. *Seigneur d'Haberville: A Romance of the Fall of New France*, ed. T. G. Marquis (Toronto: Musson, 1929); Louis Hémon, *Maria Chapdelaine* (Montréal, Fidès, 1953), trans. W. H. Blake (Toronto: Macmillan, 1923), trans. Andrew Macphail (Montreal: Chapman, 1921); Félix Antoine Savard, *Ménard, maître-draveur* (Montréal: Fidès, 1937), trans. Alan Sullivan, *Boss of the River* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1947); Louis Ringuet, *Trente arpents* (Montréal: Fidès, 1938), trans. Felix and Dorothea Walter, *Thirty Acres* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1940).

² For G. D. Roberts, *Les anciens canadiens* is "a faithful depiction of life and sentiment among the early French Canadians" with "a strong side-light upon the motives and aspirations of the race" (1894). Blake says of *Chez Nous* that "it lays bare for us the generous and kindly French-Canadian heart" (1924). Ferres says of Marie-Victorin's tales that they offer a "more intimate knowledge of the literature and

mental attitude of our French-speaking fellow citizens: leading to a more fully cordial entente" (1922); the Walters call *Thirty Acres* the "most authentic account of rural French Canada" since *Maria Chapdelaine*, and promise even greater authenticity because its author is no foreign Frenchman but a "genuine French-Canadian who has not a drop of any but French blood in his veins" (1940). Alan Sullivan claims that *Menaud* "may be taken as expressing the resilient, fanciful and spontaneous spirit of most of our French Canadian patriots" (1947). B. K. Sandwell's introduction to *Sackcloth for Banner* underlines the acuity of Harvey's critique of Quebec society (1938). Almost all of these prefaces include some formulation of the wish that the work will advance the cause of national unity. Though translators' prefaces (and the politico national context which they provide) are much rarer now than they seem to have been before 1950, some contemporary prefaces offer interesting variations on the repeated theme. Philip Stratford and Michael Thomas (*Voices of Quebec*) offer a much more cautious and tentative appeal post-1976; and Suzanne de Lotbinière-Harwood offers a rock version in *Neons in the Night*, her translation of Lucien Francoeur.

- ³ Antoine Berman, "L'auberge du lointain" in *Les Tours de Babel*, ed. Granel Toulouse (Editions Trans-Europ Repress, 1985).
- ⁴ Maurice Blanchot, "Traduit de," *La Part du feu* (Gallimard, 1965).
- ⁵ Raymond Schwab, *L'Auteur des Milles et une nuits: Vie d'Antoine Galland* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1964).
- ⁶ Philip Stratford, *Bibliography of Canadian books in Translation* (Ottawa: HRCC/CCRH, 1977).
- ⁷ Stratford, "Canada's two literatures: a search for emblems," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, no. 6 (Spring 1975).
- ⁸ Almost all of the important novels published in Quebec over the period we are considering (from the first translation by Georgiana Pennée of *Les anciens canadiens* by Philippe Aubert de Gaspé, to the translations of Germaine Guèvremont's *Le survenant* and *Marie Didace* in 1950) were given contemporaneous translations. There are a few exceptions: *La Scouine* by Albert Laberge (1918; trans. 1976) and *Marie Calumet* (1904; trans. 1978) were both considered highly controversial in the Quebec of their time; *Un homme et son péché* (1933; trans. 1978); *Angeline de Montbrun* by Laure Conan (1884; trans. 1975); and *Jean Rivard, le défricheur*, by Antoine Gérin-Lajoie (1874; trans. 1977). These novels were translated as part of a systematic programme of retrieval during the 1970's.
- ⁹ Mikhaïl Bakhtine, *Esthétique et théorie du roman* (Gallimard, 1978).
- ¹⁰ José Lambert et Katrin Van Bragt, *The Vicar of Wakefield en langue française: Traditions et ruptures dans la littérature traduite*. Preprint Nr. 3 (Louvain: Dept. de Literatuurewetenschap, Université de Louvain), pp. 24, 32.
- ¹¹ Lambert and Van Bragt, p. 60.
- ¹² In addition to *Les anciens canadiens* and *Maria Chapdelaine*, at least two other Quebec novels have received more than one translation: *Menaud, maître-draveur* has been translated three times (one translation is unpublished); *Les demi-civilisés* has been translated twice.
- ¹³ The mystery of this simultaneous apparition is explained by the fact that Andrew Macphail and W. H. Blake, both well-known men of letters, were to have collaborated on the translation. After disagreeing on stylistic matters, each went ahead with his own translation. This bit of biographical information is especially interesting because it seems to indicate that the differences between the two versions were a

result of a conscious choice on Blake's part to produce a "poetic" text and on Macphail's to be as literal as possible. Presumably aware of the rivalry between the versions, the publishers made a special effort with the books. Macphail's is accompanied by illustrations by Suzor-Côté; Blake's is accompanied by an unusual publisher's note: "We account it a high privilege to sponsor this very able translation by W. H. Blake."

¹⁴ See note 1. Hémon, p. 183; Macphail, p. 199; Blake, 242.

¹⁵ Henri Meschonnic, *Pour la poétique II* (Gallimard, 1973).

¹⁶ An important exception to this statement: the extraordinary interest in translation on the part of feminist writers in both French and English Canada.

MUTE (ANOTHER POEM OF ANGER AND FRUSTRATION)

Brian Pratt

there is an appearance of innocence in deafness
the kids from Jericho Hill School
for the Deaf travel in packs of two or more
like most kids learn
their handicap not evident at the farebox
only at the back of a near empty echo chamber bus
does the inchoate sound that is laughter
cause me to check the rear-view mirror
seeing their hands work slang
take advantage of maladies like most humourists
tapping each other to tell another one
maybe pushing their knowledge of or luck with friends
dropping a firecracker as they leave
one they can feel if not hear
they've learned to run as its result
the vibration shaking me from asshole to cerebellum
so mad i can't hear my saner self
i want to quietly educate at least one kid
face to face
guards of inexperience fumbling up
to the dissonance of a single fist

VAN SCHENDEL IN TRANSLATION

*Translation by Ben-Zion Shek, with an
Afterword by Michel van Schendel*

INTRODUCTION

MICHEL VAN SCHENDEL is one of Quebec's leading poets, but he is little known in English Canada, and this fact was one of the spurs that led to the preparation of this sampling of his poems, appearing here for the first time in the language of the other solitude. When he won the Governor General's Award in 1980 for his collection *De l'oeil et de l'écoute* (Of the eye and of the ear), many were shocked to learn that he had been refused Canadian citizenship for almost thirty years because of radical political activity in his native France, where he was born of Belgian parents in 1929. The publicity surrounding this paradoxical revelation resulted in a quick turnabout by the federal government.

Michel van Schendel's first (short) poetry collection was *Poèmes de l'Amérique étrangère* (Poems of a Strange America), 1958. This was followed by *Variations sur la pierre* (Variations on Stone), 1964, *Veiller ne plus veiller; suite pour une grève: poème daté, 17 septembre 1976–30 avril 1977* (To stay awake or not stay awake; suite for a strike...), 1978; *De l'oeil et de l'écoute*, 1980; *Autres, autrement* (Different, differently¹), 1983, and *Extrême/livre des voyages* (Extreme/travel book), 1987. In addition to his poetic production, Michel van Schendel has written for radio and television, has been a journalist for several of Montreal's major dailies, and has edited the now defunct magazine, *Socialisme québécois*. His own literary production was paralleled from the beginning by critical activity, and he was one of the founders of the review, *Liberté*, as well as being involved for a time in the management of the seminal publishing house, l'Hexagone, which has produced all but one of his poetry collections. For several years, Michel van Schendel has been a professor of literature at the Université du Québec à Montréal, and is currently preparing several books on literary theory.

The leading journal of Quebec letters, *voix et images*, had a feature issue on him (no. 32, Winter 1986) which contains a penetrating interview, three critical studies on his poetic and other writings, and a selected bibliography.

The selections of van Schendel's poems presented here in translation are all taken from *Autres, autrement* (Montréal: Hexagone, 1983). The notes I have appended to my translations are there merely by way of example, for they could have been multiplied several-fold, the job of rendering his poems into English being complex, and the poems themselves being rich not only in their lyricism, but also in their reflexivity and social comment.

BEN-Z. SHEK

1.

The sensual: a knit of forms.

This knit when the intimate hits the public eye.

The sensual: a drop of water, a rhythm, a flamboyant tree,
a lovely leaf repeated, the trajectory of a finger learn-
ing how to count. The sensual is a calculation. And also
a profusion. Therefore economical. And an act of solidarity.

I am learning to count. A timeless age settles in. Thus it
becomes immediate yet different. Thus it becomes the here
and now. And it follows from this that it startles.
You may call it bizarre, odd. Open to the drapes of nudity,
the caress soars through the sky of squares. The sensual is
that knit of forms of the humdrum.

Montreal, 8 September 1979 — Toronto, 16 September 1979

2. *We shall go all the way to the star beamed by the city*

Velvet of the wooden ceiling tender skin is a perceptive eye
Today two pretty ones betwixt and between two stages
A memory of woodland strawberries and twigs
A smell never before reaching the eyes which soften them with salt
A walk on the sand close to the most expected
A tremble of snow on the lower roofs
The wind turns their domes white²
We shall go all the way to the star beamed by the city

Montreal, 9 December 1977

3. *Sketch*

Cloud-rack or mare's tail
through the window-pane
The stomach yields while distilling forgetfulness
"Provincial Bank" one reads through the blue hoarfrost
Between lawn and latch helter-skelter a hound a head of hair opening
out of the flowers a coat beneath the wave

All is blue like an almond a woman stretches a stamen
Passover is more beautiful than a cradled child

Ligré, 24 July 1979

4. *Frail*

Sylvie by the lamps
By the pitter-patter of plankton³
The crack is the ornament of remains
Even the synagogue is gone
The Templars have set down their work-bench of nails
They have razed the plane and the tree
White whiskey equalizes all

Vienna, 5 July 1979

5. *Brief*

The cinder in the port
Is softened by its navel
Under the sandstone curtains
The sails are astonished
By a shiver of seagulls

Paris, 1 August 1979

6. *Imagines Possessing*

That arm stretched over the other shoulder like a pat possession⁴
He withdraws it at dessert time
He counts his pennies

A desire to harvest
A little bird
A most tenuous twig
Which breaks
Like a beating wing the oar splits the wave

She didn't twitch an eyelash

Montreal, 18 June 1979

7. *Support*

From a hotel room I meditate on time
Waiting for the money which haunts me
A pedestrian walks caterpillar-like.
I have no greater concern
Than to extend by an eyelash
The stretch of his steps

Paris, 13 June 1978

8. *About a sum and a remainder*

First Draft

In the middle the upturned but double wing
Decalcomania of tender arrivals
A blue gluttonous gal eats a dragonfly loaf
The table is white before me before her
I attract a glance on the grass's edge
One knee bends above the other
The blue cloth is a hiding place for that which has no time
and yet will last not last
In geometries

I owe money phone calls letters calendars
Delay the thorn on the spinning wheel I am improvident
I examine a leaf attached to the wing

Montreal, 8 May 1979 — Ligré, 24 July 1979

Second Draft

In the middle the upturned but double wing
Decalcomania of tender arrivals
The table is white before me before her
I attract a glance on the grass's edge
One knee bends above the other
The cloth of light is the acquaintance of a hiding place
And of a fleeting beak

I owe money phone calls letters calendars
I don't know how to separate them
I examine a leaf attached to the wing

Montreal, 23 September 1979

9. *A Request to my trade-union comrades*

What goes by doesn't go by it's mortar
The death-blow the voice carried away beneath the caissons
Unanimity is unreal,
Not unity.

A long road long real long
In the tender taking of pulse and freed fingers
In the patient body of fatigue
Facing but within the crowd
The loud-mouths demand a roll-call.
This knots the nest,
The little ones choke.

Montreal, 30 May 1979

10.

The proverbial is an obelisk: it is naked, syncopated, straight, very tidy.

It apparently proposes a simple truth, reductively, evidently universal. The proverbial is that which repeats endlessly, in short sentences, the signs therein engraved, prosodic, thus changing, ever new.

For the immobile originality of the proverb, inscribed in its recurring gesture, depends on who utters it, who puts it to use in ever changing situations. The proverb thus offered to all, one can harness it to innovative ends, not necessarily dangerous but troubling, partial ones. Turning inside out is what's at stake.

Proverbial, axiomatic, maieutic: teaching's involved, where the discovery of new meanings is ever reached by slow repetition. Proverbial, like that of a saying that can be deciphered at a touch or sounded by a hurdy-gurdy: what's involved is a *diferencia*, a *distanca* but also a *diskant*, a *romance*, perhaps a *roman*, always a *vers*, a *ballade*, a *danse*.⁵ Proverbial: the one who works at the dactyl of the pyramids, the stone of the staircase, the material ordering of orchards, who says what he can't say otherwise, his fingers being worn; the one says what comforts him through provisional perennity, that supple saying figuring eternity. Eternity is short for him, but infinite for the flock of petitioners, of those who duplicate demands by way of a maxim. Infinite, thus countless, for a saying is ready for all immediate

and ephemeral uses which its transformation resuscitates and preserves, and one can just as easily utter a saying to reinforce a unique tradition as proffer it for an opposite use.⁶

The proverbial goes in a circle, for it concerns the stable, the identical, the law, dolmens, the dead, the ornament of order. Yet, because of this, it can be shaped, for “it’s by going in circles that one advances,”⁷ and the rhythmic rule which punctuates the filling of time turns upon itself against structural subservience. All that’s needed is a few slight, almost tender, shifts.

The proverbial is sexual. It involves unreason.

Montreal, 10-20 October 1979

11.

The heterogeneous is a laugh, a lack of order. The heterogeneous is the non-hierarchical. It denies god, his splendour, his armies, his dazzling lights, his law. It loops, it laughs. The heterogeneous is a nothing-at-all.

A laugh: a beech-grove jostled by the wind is not a tree-top mockery of birds, nor simply a rustling of branches; if the wind rises to a squall, the beech-grove may come down on our heads.

A laugh. You are with friends. And in the air, beneath the sprigs, thanks to the smoke, there is a teasing, a warm pleasure, you feel good, you will go home that evening. Yet you observe yourself. In the air, surveillance — and there are Chinese lanterns, a luminous demarcation of territory. But a laugh makes a mockery of brilliance, and all surveillance. I didn’t ask you who you are. Don’t ask me who I am; you do not do so.

Yet, it’s there, that request. But we erase, via utopia, every gradation, every ordered difference. Let’s be precise — I am — we don’t erase it but rather counter it. Rats, the rat system, is familiar to us and we refuse it. Such is our resolve. We are well versed in this system. We know that for now it will not stop functioning. Yet we believe, through irony or tenderness, that a thrust of that resolve, of that fever — since the rat system is sick — once it reaches a critical threshold, can unleash a concentrated movement that will destroy hierarchies and free the rats. Such a thrust is exhausting, we are war-weary. We die often. The survivors are the fighters of memory. They sketch signs, negotiate knowledge.

The heterogeneous is a principle of writing. It cannot be hierarchized. Yet it is ordered. But only to be perturbed. It is made of atomizable, atomized particles. It arranges them. It's a speck of dust, a paper-maker's bench, a ream being glazed, before the cut and after the roller. It's a work-bench, a workout, an impossible pull-up, on the bar between the floor and nothingness. There's a lack of order and yet a program. Thus, a kind of order.

The heterogeneous is a beach stubbed by pebbles. It's a rhythm. Rhythm is shaped in the wood or stone alone, or in the poem. A contrast of vowels. An anonymous imprint of a name. A tambourine.

River, oh river!
Fire, oh fire!
Memory, oh flesh!
And there, all the residual, all the abhorred.

There is no other notch. I am not revealing the incoercible for you. The blind man, unaware of his blindness, does not know that it's there, uncoercible. The hand envelops a vertebra of night. Countless suns.

All the abhorred, since it's there without apparent continuity. The heterogeneous is completely discontinuous, yet whole. Each notion is reported. It forms a poem. The poem has a line or two. It exists only to the extent that it clashes with other equally precarious notations [here the comma and the period mark a moment of hesitation]. The whole is polyphonic and it creates a cliff between resounding and receiving. The crop of all these cries is desolation. Nothing can, nothing ought to console the poem-of-notations.

All the abhorred. For the abhorred receives. He is the outsider. He can't help but hear. His ears are fettered.

All the abhorred, all the heterogeneous. The heterogeneous one is he who comes from every direction and politely steps aside for some other walker. The heterogeneous is a politeness and a silence. I walk. He who walks carries, in his gait, a forest. A beating of beaks. He who walks becomes the step, the burning one, the dying one, the newborn, the knowing one. He wins to the walker's wiles the varied footsteps which could bar the entry to the escarpments.

Thus I compose. Thus I advance. Thus I read.

Montreal, 20 October–4 November 1979

12. *Poem-drawing*

Under vaults of lime the pencil's spray
 Rounds the ends of a smile.
 You handle it with precarious attention
 And a few flowers.

Paris, 10 June 1978 — Montreal, 4 November 1979

13. *Written on rue Danton near fertile eyes
 or Homage to a book*

The shadow the blind stain a way of dissolving the wing
 Also the roof which is absent beyond
 To see what no longer remains and mobilize there
 At a common height
 Without a three-cornered hat cross or beak helpless
 But a burning
 Or the audible sieve-like circumstances the still enamoured bone

Paris, 12 August 1979

14. *Discreet*

Silence and ochre an ellipsis
 A stone tossed at the skull the well
 A simply elided word which spurs on
 I have seen that land beneath the impatiens
 Ardently lives the recumbent effigy
 With a certain cellar frugality
 The garden stretches to the brightness of the heights

Montreal, 14 August–4 September 1979

15. *Another Ellipsis*

I shall plan to write a book on windflowers. And nothing else. I'm not familiar with them. Haven't seen their shape or perhaps not attached a name to them. I don't know if that conveys a smell to the living who might be concerned. Windflower is a blind man's name, or perhaps an ellipsis. I can do nothing but write in its name.

Montreal, 14 August 1979

16. *Three words three points*

1. Altar-piece of a grace, they call it cerebral.
 These dunces know nothing,
 They make bubbles bulls popes piles of paper,⁸
 They don't play marbles.

Cerebral they call this disturbing poetry;
So it must be poetry.
Their cerebrum defecates.
They've got the wrong figure.

I do not forget the minarets coal-cellars workshops,
The oil-flame and the shade of eyelids on the fear of the sun.
This calls for invention, always.

Montreal, beginning of May 1979

2. Poetry is not a sorcerer's art, although that too
Coming from furthest time, most fragile, with its
glow remaining in the ashes, all the
more vibrant in their ardour for being
not yet totally extinguished;
Poetry is not a sorcerer's art, but one of experience, and
that is totally rocky, shining in the pathways where
I tread,
Of experience, then, when you walk the streets behind a
blue turban worn for style or because it's out of fashion,
and you sit down on the steps of a noisy cafe which
is shaded below
And there's music, and there's more.
Someone writes on a paper canvas
In bold-face or light but regular letters.

Montreal, beginning of May 1979

3. I write on silence or the voice the name against the flesh of
what is spoken by the streets
It hurts like a violently blue sky,
Some bread-box angel eating from a trough a purchased
pleasure.
I rush to the redoubts.
I grope for the sounds, for the other ear.
Some not too old women stood at the doorsteps;
They recounted the day's tale, beneath blowing bedsheets;
Their mouths were not basted with submission.

Montreal, 14 May-4 November 1979

17. *A pinch of ink is just too much*

The edition flees like a moon and the conversations are lost
In a paper hankie etched with a camaieu

June it will be he said before hanging up
 And then fall and winter and then spring
 It will come out next fall said he again
 So you have time to write crochet reweave
 Two three books of dawn and night
 Poetry says this poet doesn't sell
 Poetry is for the night
 So there you are with all that soiled paper
 And you turned it into something sad
 Like a box-tree for boughs or wood for autumn coal
 And less sad grave birds
 Friends' voices ashes in an ashtray papers in the wind of
 store windows
 And you wrote about the stranger who speaks
 Beside you, you a scribe wrote that stranger
 The vague icon with twisted tracks traversing the trains without
 a tiara
 And this counts as much as a fly's wing
 Caught by the eye beneath the blue window in fine weather
 All this grillwork of blue rage you are done undone you fly off
 through paper lined for indignation
 They had you, you know it, as they say in the iron and cotton
 workshops
 Cacophony telephone case he made the sole mistake of
 not saying
 What of not saying it
 That that one with the hair-shirt
 There's nothing else he can do.
 He's only a poet after all
 And he has objections
 Which he can't reveal
 Therefore you tarry you take off
 By the birches streets derisions
 You stain with your hand the bark of stations
 A pinch of ink is just too much
 To mark the pupil
 Of strangers who approach the blind window

Montreal, 2 May 1979

18. *Written with a new pen*

The finish is that pleasure of the white page broadly open
 where one discovers the pebbles amidst the splashes of sand
 It's the good the blue the sensible thing the finicky

A pain pierces the ear's epitaph just behind the bone
Between the two boxes of brain and jaws
The long roads will soon open up
But the page signs point to wisdom
You will find courage grass and water bubbles
Near the eglantines

Montreal, 2 May 1979

19. *On the line*

Time is lined with grey on the book cover
Small piles of stone obscure the eye
You didn't understand a thing I said
Or perhaps I understood nothing of the tenderness of teasing
I loved you from a paradise where we needed road-side roses
The lighted lamp wounds dry flowers
Near the keyboard of the writing desk at the edges of the rain
The books are slow in coming but the mountain
Assures me behind me with dahlias and birds for a fever
All this is said on the stopless line
In the manner of hapless encounters under umbrellas upturned by
a gust
I loved you we loved each other we know our grammar
An entire people passed beneath the Persian blinds parsed by fear
We left behind our friends' fear like a torn undertop
They thought the weather was turning fine perhaps they caught a
chill
In their backs and palms very far from their gaze

Montreal, 3 September 1978, 23 February 1979, 5 November 1979

20. *A (nearly) unretouched portrait*

Her cheeks speak appetite
She looks you straight in the eye
She trod and trod the pathways
She has been through worse
She extends eyelashes which wander towards mountain plants

She is prudent she has seen mounds moons
She walks horns first into the underbrush
Towards the tenacious tinges of autumn
She donned her modest old billy-goat frock
She came radiant

She walked and walked among the daisies
 She stamped the earth with many a dismembered almond
 The windows opened to trade-winds
 She put her finger to her lips
 A bird's wing caressed her

Montreal, 15 November 1978, 13 January 1979, 5 November 1979

21. *Conversation*

She said: How can one stand this a whole year long, between
 moon and tiger, cloud and cat?

How

The atmosphere of fire, the starry cinder 'neath the eyebrow
 The tranquil tub, a quarrel, a care too quickly curbed by too much
 talk

The stop, the pen piercing the skin, the prolonged stop, stopping
 Work, the narrow span

To stand all this when she comes from far, how when

There is, out there, like morass of a moat⁹

A roof's slate, a pumice stone for the sole, the polite, the loveable
 and the calendar

The work-bench for the warp, a yellow drawing on the wall, a
 half-closed eye in bed, the night for waking sleep, the distended,
 the gilding, the scarlet, the splintered

Even so indented by the index which the closed ear lends to
 the salamander of the hearth. It is six in the morning,

Aren't you asleep? You won't be able to stand him. Between moon
 and tiger

you repeat,

The lights of the mining towns have no room, or perhaps
 emilian¹⁰

Distant in the streets all lights out, the apsidial chapel or
 the distancing of the sun, I mean the obsidian

Along the roads without lairs without larches

Which simply form a network for mayweed and menace¹¹ or,
 say, something smooth

Achieved by an oh so slow index at the tenderest skein of the skin
 But how

Those missing towns of the supersonic bang, commercial cold air,
 the tall blue chimneys between the bareness of buildings, the
 teeth of wolf-friends very jagged with ambitions and misfortune,
 dust or the hollow echo of sounds of excavations, the lapse of
 lips?

I used to rise at ten, and you, thoughtful, tied the slightest
step to silence.

22. *The tea-rose unties the tongue*

I'll not forget those ardent eyes which entered the station at
the top of the stairs,
near a shoulder, digested dust, a star,
a smell.

A white flower brings the vase and the bee,
lips form flesh,
there's nothing more to add.

I can't forget the crossing, the thrice-felt heart-throb, the tea
rose,

The ravines gutted by drops of water bouncing from the bridges
of slate — you said it in Toronto amidst the rose-bushes we
sought —,

the vase, we hadn't one so we drew
a red cat alongside a sun perched over pollen.

Montreal, 20 November 1978, 22 June 1979

23.

The musical flows from silence.

The musical flows from an ellipsis.

The musical flows from a colour.

The musical is continuo and syncopation. Within that opposition,
it accompanies the humdrum. It seduces it, it fulfils it.

Continuo: a repeating of rhythmic parts, deployed syncopically in
two, four, five tempi. Thus and yet a syncopation, wherein is woven
the melody which calculates and traps the continuous. The melody is
the form of the ephemeral, the narrative cell of the banal. But with-
out the prosodic continuity of narrative argument, no text is possible.

It's a question of weaving. Perhaps of woven. Surely a shiver.
There's the measured pause, like a freed form, a hesitation before
the obscure in order to sound its signal.

The shiver sets off ancient techniques, the augmented, the con-
tracted, the canon, the ricercar. One must seek. Which means nothing
unless something has already been found. Something out of which the
impass arises. This ellipsis proceeds by linkages, by the roadblock and
release of linkages.

The musical is an offering. For nothing can be offset unless it is first offered. Homage to the name. Homage to the motif. Motif of a fête. Perhaps of a repose.

Montreal, 10 November 1979

24.

She'd love the branch of slate
At the crumbliest rancour of rain at sunrays' repose
Then she smiles she suddenly has time
The deep-sea pleat when the hour's release is nigh

One can say it with an offering or a contradiction
The release of the nullified hour for the pleasure of
a fishnet weary of water
When the diverse and the deep-sea overlap in the large
lips lento

Montreal, 20-25 June 1979

NOTES

- ¹ My original translation for the collection's title was "Other, otherwise." This and other problems which arose during the process of translation were discussed with the author in several face-to-face meetings, as well as telephone conversations.
- ² The original line read: "Le vent leur fait le dôme blanc." I had originally proposed "The wind whitens their domes," but the poet wanted me to maintain the stress on "blanc."
- ³ The original was "Aux planctons de pluie." In order to keep the alliteration in [p], I chose "pitter-patter of plankton," with its suggestion of, but not explicit reference to, rain.
- ⁴ The poet used "propriété lisse." Again, as in many of the texts, I looked for an alliterative coupling which was not in the original. I had first put "purring possession," but switched to "pat" to render "lisse," and keep its irony.
- ⁵ I decided to retain the underlined terms (the first three of which were of foreign origin, and all of which were in Roman characters in the original French, to offset the italics of the rest), since their meaning would still remain clear.
- ⁶ This fragment gave me much difficulty, as did, in general, the philosophico-aesthetic texts on the sensual, the musical, and the heterogeneous (nos. 1, 11, 23).
- ⁷ Bertolt Brecht, from *Meti, Livre des retournements* (Paris: L'Arche, n.p., n.d.), free translation.
- ⁸ This verse read: "Ils font des bulles des papes des paperasses." The word "bulles" has two meanings in French: bubbles and bulls, meaning formal papal documents with seals attached. It was impossible to find a single-word English equivalent. I thus dropped the idea of "bubbles," and kept "bulls" with its stream-of-consciousness link to "popes." But the poet suggested rendering his "bulles" by two words:

bubbles, bulls. And this most useful suggestion was accepted. The free-association of “des papes des paperasses,” with its identical initial syllable, was another knotty problem: “popes piles of paper” is, I think, a close substitute.

⁹ The original reads: “Il y a là, là-bas, comme un dormant de douve.” “Dormant” is a polysemic word for which I found no equally complex English equivalent. I had to be content with keeping one of its meanings through the word “morass,” which I chose in order to keep the alliteration with “moat.” I had at first used “mire of a moat,” but decided to turn to the final version in order to preserve the double syllable of “dormant.”

¹⁰ In French, the line read: “Les lumières des coronas n’ont pas de place, ou peut-être l’émilienne.” The poet indicated to me that the last word could have been evoked by a girl’s name, or, as I thought, by the region in northern Italy, Emilia-Romagna, here in adjectival form. The following verse began with “Lointaine,” which could refer to the enigmatic “émilienne” or the “l’absidiole” which comes later in the second verse. The poet told me, too, that this poem reproduces the process of its own composition, as the poet gropes for the right word. I decided to leave the word “emilian” with lower case “e,” but am far from sure that the meaning is clear. (Is the original any clearer?)

¹¹ The original reads: “Qui forment simplement un lacis pour la ronce et le risque, ou alors quelque chose de lisse.” It was hard to maintain the alliteration in [l], [s], and [r]. My first attempt gave “Which simply form a network for bramble and brag or, say, something smooth.” I then tried “dog fennel and danger” for “la ronce et le risque,” finally choosing the present version, with its repetitions of [s] and [m] sounds.

TRADUIRE L’AUTRE, PRESQUE LE MÊME

Réflexions d’un auteur à propos d’une traduction

Michel van Schendel

AUTRE: que puis-je dire d’une traduction quand elle est adéquate sinon qu’elle produit un *texte* autre, à la fois fidèle et différent? Je connais la langue d’arrivée, en l’occurrence l’anglais. Je ne connais pas dans mon propre texte la possibilité d’un autre qui, écrit en une autre langue, puisse en devenir l’émanation, presque la transcription. Si, au moment d’écrire, je connaissais ce possible, je n’écrirais pas. En même temps, écrivant aussi pour les tiers, pour leur

appartenance à d'autres cultures qui me sollicitent, j'apprends à épeler la différence d'écriture dans la langue d'arrivée, et j'aurais presque envie d'écrire en anglais, en italien, en espagnol, en tant d'autres langues. Tel est le paradoxe que suscite une traduction intelligente. Je rends hommage au texte de Ben-Zion Shek.

Pour les avoir pratiquées jadis, j'appréhende les embûches de la traduction de poésie. Deux partis sont offerts, un troisième est possible. Le premier invite à suivre le sens, ou plutôt la référence lexicale, pour autant que les divers moments du poème y soient réductibles. Il s'agit, en effet, d'une réduction. Le tissu échappe. Le deuxième parti est de tricoter en laine ce qui est tissé de lin, ou l'inverse. De construire dans la langue d'arrivée des allitérations, des assonances, et des métriques et scansion censément analogues à celles — de la langue de départ? non, du poème que la traducteur tient en modèle. La traduction y arrive, si arriver est jamais possible dans le texte, mais en brouillant le sens qui, à son tour, échappe. Un poème, si c'en est un, est la construction d'un sens inouï dans une forme inédite, la production d'une forme-sens actuelle mais inépuisable qui réinvente la langue dont le poète est tenu de garder l'usage et le savoir minutieux. Le traducteur intelligent opte donc pour un troisième parti, le plus périlleux. Il pratique un droit singulier: le droit multiple du sens, de l'ordre des mots du texte d'origine, de sa scansion réinventée, de sa sensualité phonique. L'hésitation est nécessaire, aussi la reprise. Elles sont la marque d'une sensibilité avertie. De même, le conciliabule fréquent entre le traducteur et l'auteur initial, gens d'entendement s'ils ont cette modestie de la passion. Ce sont les signes d'une transculturalité mutuelle, et d'une longue mémoire historique inscrite jusque dans les os ineffaçables.

Que l'on comprenne ceci, car ceci me concerne. Un poème organise la polysémie, on le sait, la rend audible et lisible dès lors qu'il exige la difficulté de l'amitié. Je rends actuelle la mémoire, celle de l'ombre inentendue dans l'histoire du présent, dans toute l'histoire accueillie. Ce n'est pas une prétention, c'est le sens de mon métier de poète. L'amitié est transversale, elle s'adresse aussi à des inconnus isolés sur quelque Place des Trois-Cultures. Le poème engrange et distribue cette mémoire qui n'est jamais assez intelligente, — ou sensible, c'est tout un, — il compose une extrême tension de sens, d'habitudes et de vocalités entre les mots, en pourvoit chacun d'eux aux endroits stratégiques du passage vers d'autres plages textuelles, arides ou douces, mémorielles, actives. Le mot peut alors, sans complément d'objet ou autre indice, concrétiser des constellations de silences. Celles-ci viennent de l'histoire, et l'on n'a pas à parler pour ce qu'elle ne dit pas, pour ce que ses agents ne disent pas bien qu'ils la réclament. L'inconscient est fluide mais cultivé, il accueille dans son parcours l'histoire écourtée des autres, de la mienne aussi.

De là, de cette polysémie diffusée et pourtant de cet écourtement vient une redoutable difficulté pour l'interprète, même s'il est transculturel. Comment traduire? Premier, deuxième ou troisième parti? Troisième. Après et avec hésitations et conciliabules. Et par décision. Ainsi, dans "*Croit posséder*" (décrit en *Imagines*

Possessing), le mot “engrangement.” Comment le traduire? Voici le texte d’origine, dont la traduction est présentée plus haut :

*Ce bras étendu sur l'autre épaule comme une propriété lisse
Il le retire à l'heure du dessert
Il compte les sous*

*Un désir d'engrangement
Un petit oiseau
Une branche très ténue
Qui casse
D'une aile battue la rame fend l'eau
Elle n'a pas bougé d'un cil*

Dans une première version, Ben-Zion Shek avait traduit “Un désir d’engrangement” par “*A desire to store grain.*” Mais il ne s’agissait pas de cela, du grain à engranger. C’était inutilement référentiel et réducteur. L’engrangement ne concernait pas la grange, peut-être pas elle seule. Pris entre le premier et le deuxième parti (*A desire to store grain / A little bird*, où “Un désir d’engrangement” n’appelle pas en complément syntaxique “Un petit oiseau” qui, placé au vers suivant en même position, fait partie du même paradigme imaginaire, si je parviens à me lire après coup), M. Shek a opté pour une formulation intransitive et généralisante, “*to harvest*,” qui dit le sens et protège le tissu.

Troisième parti de traduction, donc. Un autre exemple vient. Dans “*Trois mots trois points*” (*Three words three points*), dans la troisième séquence du poème : “*Quelque ange de huche mangeant à l’auge un bonheur acheté.*” Cela est radicalement intraduisible, cela est épouvantable; cela néanmoins participe encore du français. L’ange qui vient prétendument du ciel, l’auge attribuée au cochon et la huche normativement destinée au pain, comment les concilier phonétiquement et les contraster dans une langue d’arrivée? Conciliation et contraste ont fait l’objet d’une invention : “*Some bread-box angel eating from a trough a purchased pleasure.*” La forme-sens y est, plénière — bien qu’elle adhère à une tout autre beauté culturelle où j’aurais tort de chercher la mienne. Sans doute, le très référentiel “*bread-box*” ne peut être l’équivalent du sensitif “*huche.*” Mais ce n’est pas la faute à Shek, c’est la faute au référentialisme culturel de l’anglais. Cet élément lui-même, déplaisant à mon oreille française, est intégré dans une séquence qui établit, en anglais, selon un autre système, une sensibilité et une intelligence. Ces qualités ne sont plus seulement référentielles. Elles sont symétriques au texte du poème.

MICHEL VAN SCHENDEL

A SUNNY DAY

Cornelia C. Hornosty

at Koblenz a small church
with two towers, roofs like helmets;
thinking in terms of good shots,
I said stand in front, I'll snap it

suddenly a skirmish —
insulted and crushed,
his blond hair curled tightly
his blue eyes blazed:
one tower was bombed, unmended
the other whole, unhurt
while he felt wounded and german
and I stayed american, unscathed

at Koblenz we fought
hurling words and feelings
sharing love and a legacy
as children of the War:
Don't take the photo
But I want to remember
and show others what happened
Please, my love, too much of that
let's look away, try to forget,
how could you want it —
can't you see my breaking heart
just there by the ragged tower

so we have no pictures —
our love survived the harsh daylight,
our memories better than cameras
stronger than sun on celluloid



SQUARING THE CIRCLE

The Problem of Translation in “The Temptations of Big Bear”

Deborah Bowen

“Sometimes when I meditate and look,” Big Bear said in Blackfoot, “the sun no longer looks round. It’s starting to look as if it had four corners.”¹

TWENTIETH-CENTURY LINGUISTIC and literary theory has been much concerned to demonstrate the relation between language and vision: we see what we have words to shape. The assumption of absolute relationship between signifier and signified has been profoundly challenged, and as a result there has arisen a new understanding of the political significance of language. If we define ourselves and our environment from within the language of our ideology, then words have power to make and to unmake us at an unsettlingly deep level. It is with the languages of contrasting ideologies that Rudy Wiebe is centrally concerned in *The Temptations of Big Bear*.

Wiebe has written a poignant account of his search for Big Bear’s “sacred bundle,” which he finally tracked down in a New York museum.² He describes the bear’s paw at the core of the bundle, and then he says:

The Cree believe that a person’s soul comes to him at birth and resides along the back of the neck, and so wearing this [bundle] Big Bear felt the weight of the Hand against his soul: he was in the assured, perfect relationship with the Great Bear Spirit.

The soul lives in the base of the neck: on September 13, 1876, Big Bear refuses the treaty by asking the Governor “to save me from what I most dread — hanging; it is not given to us to have the rope about our necks.” And Morris interprets that to mean Big Bear is a criminal, and afraid of literal hanging! A logical enough thought, I guess, for a white man to whom language is always only proposition, and never parable. (*A Voice in the Land* 148)

Language as proposition, language as parable: these two concepts are fundamentally opposed to one another in *The Temptations of Big Bear*, and, though it would

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be an oversimplification of the book to polarize white language and Indian language absolutely, nevertheless there is a core of truth in such a polarization, in that the white man is characterized as the man who writes reports where the Indian is characterized as the man who tells heroic tales. In a stimulating recent paper, Sherrill E. Grace applies the distinctions made by Jakobson, Todorov, and Kristeva to the language of *Big Bear* and concludes that the Whiteskins' language is predominantly that of horizontal, metonymic narrative, where the Indians' language is predominantly that of vertically referential, metaphorical narrative.³ She contrasts the whites' syntactically logical discourse of rationality with the Indians' poetic discourse which disrupts the logic of syntax, and she argues that Wiebe is using such disruption to undermine the constraining dominance of white identity which is dependent upon its particular relationship to language for its very existence. The disparity between the outcome of the historical narrative — the subordination of the Indian to the white man — and the outcome of the poetic narrative — the joyous union of Big Bear with the earth — forces the reader to reassess the basis of his own identity, and to question the assumptions of a language whose victory seems to touch only the rational aspect of man while signally failing to understand his heart.

The role of the translator in this novel is, then, a key role. Like the reader, the translator must listen carefully to two voices, two discourses, and try to interpret them. The difficulty of the task centres upon the fact that these two discourses can scarcely exist in terms of one another. Even to the white man who has some knowledge of Cree, the Indian voice may sound like a wordless chant. This is how Kitty MacLean describes the experience of acting as translator between Big Bear and her father:

Big Bear's voice seemed to be coming from high up, as if it might be only wind turning the leaves on Frenchman Butte so gently that there was no sound whatever of them touching, only the hush of air brushing my ears, reading down to me what already hung there in the air as happened and what with Big Bear's vision had now inevitably touched the earth. I could feel that, like light spiralling back and forth through my hollow head but I could not . . . where did those Cree words come from, I had never heard . . . were they words, they were, sounds . . . as if the high oration had melted into chant, or dirge . . . the old man stood with a wide black hole in the middle of his face and the sound coming out of there.

"What's he saying?" Papa's elbow prodded my knee. "What's that? Kitty!"

But there was only that sound turning in my head. Translate what? And words emerging, spinning over me after a time too, though my mouth could say nothing. (287-88)

The voice is like wind, reading down; like light, spiralling back and forth: for the white man, this is a new relationship between sound and meaning, which he cannot bring from its spinning into a linear progression of cause-and-effect rationality.

On the other hand, to the Indian, the white man's voice may sound like a snore. Here is Big Bear's response to the reading of the charges against him at his trial:

A short, very dry little man was reading loudly from a paper; he read on and on, his thin lips barely moving in one long snore running together in Big Bear's head; if he could have felt wind fondle him and his legs been folded under, not dangling over such a cut edge of chair, he might have fallen asleep to that wavering mosquito. Then Peter had to try again to put words to what he had done wrong, why they kept him in jail over two months though they allowed Horsechild to share his black hole and let him walk once in the sun every day and he listened to the few words which said as much of that long snore as the language of the People could formulate; and as Peter Houri finished Big Bear laughed out loud. (356)

The snore makes Big Bear laugh; it seems to epitomize the flimsiness of the charges against him, the one-dimensional nature of this place where wind and sun are rationed and of this language which uses so many words to create what does not exist. The "black hole" of the white jail is allied to such dry, wavering speech in comparison with the oratory and chant that come from the "black hole" of Big Bear's own mouth.

When the white men do not understand the significance of Big Bear's image of the rope, it is because they are thinking metonymically — that is, they associate "rope" only with the larger concept linked to it in kind. Big Bear is using "rope" metaphorically, to refer to the larger concept of suppression and subordination which is linked to "rope" imagistically. But it is also true that Big Bear's understanding cannot fully grasp the structures of a propositional language: Peter's attempt to translate "crown and dignity" leads Big Bear into a long and confused meditation on the question of the queen's hat and why he might try to throw sticks at it (387). And as Big Bear comes to see that he is not understanding something of great importance to the white man, it is as though "he ha[s] suddenly changed by half a degree all the sign language" (387). This ultimate incomprehension, symbolized by untranslatability, is Big Bear's downfall, as Kitty signals to the reader by her response:

It was impossible. He had always understood every — her thoughts stopped with a terrible lurch that shook the very bench they sat on. . . . It was the abrupt, momentary endless silence of the court, silence complete, with everyone, oddly, sitting there black and white and not so much as breathing. . . . Kitty was staring at Big Bear too. Suddenly devastated. In this silence, now, his great voice, he must now — understand at last she could not understand him — a woman's hat with feathers, what fea — not in the least. The last red edge of the sun slashed across his closed, monolithic, face. (387-88)

There is a silence in which the black-and-white distinctions that have been predetermined by the dominant system are felt presences, unconquerable on their own territory. It is not that Big Bear lacks intuitions — far from it: he is throughout

the book presented as the man of sensibility and spiritual understanding. But he is at a loss before those specifically rational constructs of a white society for which he has no comparable entities in his own language; the concepts of "crown" and "dignity" are untranslatable because the whole notion of statecraft for the Indian is based on premises of vision and prowess recognized within the community, rather than on the premise of ascribed authority exercised from outside the community. In this white world even the circle of the sun becomes Big Bear's enemy and slashes his face with its last red edge.

The basic problem, then, is that the holistic world of the Indian will not translate into the linear terms of the white man, nor can the white man's propositional images be translated into the Indian's organic ones. When the Magistrate asks Big Bear whether he recollects the nature of the charge brought against him, Big Bear speaks thus to Peter Hour, the translator with the "good quiet face, folded brown together like land in a long autumn":

"My friend, I have seen this Whitehair and I remember him," and he told him at length, gently; Peter's head tilted a little, his right hand on his heart the way he always stood, struggling to fight clear some meaning between them. Big Bear concluded, "I understand what he wants to tell me, and you understand, but we haven't been given words or signs for it, so just let him say his white things." Hour stared gloomily at him, and translated finally:

Prisoner: "No, I don't recollect it, nor did I understand what was the charge laid against me. I do not understand that." (355)

"I understand but I have no words" is translated "I do not understand": the irony of the translator's task could not be more graphically presented. At other places in the book, it is the white man who is in a vulnerable position, and the Indians' world-view that dominates. Here is the description of Governor Morris's meeting with Sweetgrass and the Indian bands at the signing of Treaty Six:

The Governor did not like his position; having marched up the slope to the flagpole at the head of his party, the band tootling quite impressively at last into the vast air — all that repetition of only three tunes — he now faced straight into the lowering sun. By some oddity he had never before been on a council flat at this time of day; the Indians circled before him seemed not so much human as innumerable mounds the earth had thrust up since morning; there was a strange yellow and blackness about the still, brilliant air, a kind of crystal lack of shading that made alert thinking seem silly. As if there were only inevitabilities into which all, irresistibly, moved. He shook his head; the outlined smile on the old face before him smudged, wavered, and he widened his own smile, gesturing in apology with his head at the sun; shifting to his left. Sweetgrass understood. With half a step the Governor had cut off the sun against the chief's raven headdress; he must concentrate. He must. (17)

The discomfort of the Governor on the Indians' home territory is indicated by the difference in Morris's and Sweetgrass's attitudes to the sun: Wiebe suggests that the Indian is at home with, at one with, the sun, able even to regulate it (it is the

chief's headdress that cuts off the sun for Morris), where Morris is reduced to irritability, wavering and uncertainty. Two kinds of clarity are contrasted: the clarity of "alert thinking" and the clarity of "the still, brilliant air." The crystalline light somehow renders propositional thought not merely inadequate, but "silly." Now it is the Governor's turn to "fight clear" some substance to his words, but the kind of concentration to which he is accustomed is alien to this environment which prefers the certainties of the earth to the subtleties of rational structure.

"WORDS ARE NOT JUST SOUND," says Big Bear to Kitty MacLean (314). Communication requires a communion of minds; it requires, in effect, a spiritual element, where the wholeness of one person can be received in a known context by the wholeness of another. Kitty MacLean plays a central role in *The Temptations of Big Bear* precisely because she is able to communicate with Big Bear at a level of spiritual awareness. In a very beautiful scene, she receives a new sense of her own identity from Big Bear exactly because she can translate more than "just words":

"I want to be more like you. A Person," she added after a moment because he did not say anything looking over the water that a wind ruffled slightly, suddenly a wedge widening. . . .

He seemed to be studying the lake, the muscles of his naked arm beside her like smooth tinted rocks. He smelled of smoke and sweat, sharply sweet; she felt her legs, arms, outer and inner parts of her whole body loosening as if they were clothes being unhooked. He was speaking then, saying a thing she heard his voice say several days later as if he were speaking aloud to her, then: "Blackbirds live by water and leave diving to the ducks." But here, where this water barely frothed against these rocks and sand she could not have said she heard it. All he said to her was,

"The Sun will warm you."

So she took off her clothing. . . . the sun bulged over her stark in the livid sky and heat began weaving loops of warmth about her. She felt herself becoming again, the farthest tips of her moving out towards fire until she knew herself too complete to comprehend, too enormous, each unknown part of her vastness she could not yet quite feel but which would certainly surround the whole earth bending back under her. And there was the heat, it rounded her head and he was passing over in his dance between the long green rushes, the curves of his massive chest ablaze above her, chant reaming the hollows of her head up through the sand that held her body and gradually arching her distended and enormous as if she were poised by planets rocking, singing her suspended while Sun devoured her warmer and warmer until she was suffused. Herself; completely; open and radiant. Held in his chant, rocked in his radiance.

"Words are not just sound," the old man said. "Now I will tell you the story of Bitter Spirit." And he did.

She never remembered a word of it. . . . (313-14)

Kitty's entrance into full personhood is described as an experience of union with the universe ("... as if she were poised by planets rocking . . .") whose secrets Big Bear already knows: the sun's warmth and light become the curves of his blazing chest, his radiance. The part played by words in this episode is extremely significant. When Kitty speaks to Big Bear, he is silent; when he does speak, his remark seems highly tangential and she hears it only several days later. Then, "The Sun will warm you": "so," writes Wiebe, "she took off her clothing." Though to the rational mind this response must seem a-logical, its naturalness is reinforced throughout the passage by the emphasis on the primacy of feeling and chant over thinking and word. Finally Big Bear tells Kitty a story, of which she remembers nothing but to which she listens intently. For the significant interaction in this meeting has nothing to do with the referential function of language and everything to do with its phatic and poetic modes in the service of intuition and communion. Sherrill Grace suggests that Kitty functions in *The Temptations of Big Bear* as a reader-surrogate, who is essentially the translator of two languages, two modes of discourse, and who therefore represents the possibility of freedom from the constraints of ideological language that the text offers to the reader who will consciously take this median role. In the description of her "becoming," we may see that degree of awareness and sensitivity to another mode of existence which the white reader too is called to exercise in absorbing the story of the Indian as Wiebe presents it.

"The sun bulged," "loops," "curves," "arching," "rocking" — the passage just quoted is filled with notions of roundness, suggestive of the curve of earth and sun. Once earlier in the novel Wiebe uses the image of "rocking": it occurs in his description of Big Bear's last buffalo hunt:

He was the curl of a giant wave breaking down upon and racing up the good beach of earth. . . . Dust, bellows, shrieks, rifle explosions, grunts were gone, only himself and the bay stallion rocking suspended as earth turned gently, silently under them in the sweet warmth of buffalo curling away on either side . . . and then there was only the cow, . . . as she ran true the great curve of earth, as he drifted to her shoulder and his arrow for an instant pointed her like the giant constellation of the wolf road points the sky at night and instantaneously it grew in her, the feathers grew in the coarse streaming hair of her shoulders tight against her thin wiry summer curls and her rhythm rippled momentarily. . . . In the circle of sun and sky and earth and death he stood complete. (128-29)

It is characteristic of the mode of discourse used by Wiebe when describing the Indians that words conveying roundedness move the sentences in a rhythmic and syntactically disruptive way. One full sentence within the buffalo-hunt passage takes more than seventeen lines of text, the clauses joined only loosely by present participles or conjunctions such as "and" and "then," or merely juxtaposed with no conjunctive markers. The cow buffalo "ran true the great curve": she did not merely run along it, but became one with it — the unusual use of a transitive form

of the verb “run” makes this the necessary interpretation. The verbs throughout this passage are powerful and often unexpected: Big Bear and the horse “rocking,” the buffalo “curling,” the arrow which “pointed her” — again this use of a transitive verb where one would expect an intransitive. The stress is on the unity between universe and man and beast; so strong is the bond that the buffalo hunt can be described not as something frantic, energetic and destructive, but rather as something gentle and natural. “Suspended,” “silently,” “drifted,” “grew” — these are not terms one would expect to associate with a hunt. In fact the felling of the buffalo is likened to the light of a constellation in the night sky, and the arrow within her seems to blossom. The strikingly non-violent way in which Wiebe describes a violent event emphasizes again the rightness of the act within the cycle and circle of the natural order: “In the circle of sun and sky and earth and death he stood complete.”

The contrast between circle and square, roundness and linearity, gentleness and angularity, is perhaps most acutely drawn in the passage which describes Big Bear’s view of his country after he is released from jail. His vision comes to him slowly and brings great pain:

The land lay its endless circle around him in distant bluish levels tilting and curving slightly against and over each other; he looked everywhere under the bright sky but there was no sun to be found. . . . He saw then that straight lines had squared up the land at right angles, broad lines of stark bleached bones had been spread straight, pressed and flattened into the earth for him to ride over, and sliced into hills as if that broad thong of bone could knuckle them down, those immovable hills. As far as he could see, wherever he looked the world was slit open with unending lines, squares, rectangles, of bone and between the strange trees gleamed straight lines of, he comprehended it suddenly, white buildings. Square inedible mushrooms burst up under poplars overnight; but square. . . . He was seeing; the apprehension which the settler-clustered land of Manitoba and Winnipeg’s square walls and gutted streets had begun drove like nails into the sockets of himself and his place was gone, he knew Earth and Sun which had been his gifts to accept and love and leave to others were gone, all gone. (408-09)

In this passage lines and squares are portrayed as fundamentally unnatural and destructive — “the world was slit open.” Where the killing of a buffalo became almost an act of love, the building of a city becomes an act of violence. Where the arrow in the buffalo seems to flower into life, the streets of the city are like nails in Big Bear’s skull. The transfer of the expected epithets forces the reader to reconsider the ground of his own understanding, his own cultural mores which give him his sense of right and wrong and define him as himself. Where circles are characterized as expansive, life-giving, at one with earth and sun, lines are characterized as flattening, slicing, restrictive, and destructive: by denying the true nature of the land, they prevent it from being itself. Linearity in *The Temptations of Big Bear* is expressed in the fences, military parades, and legal documents of the white man,

and supremely in the railway, the "iron road" which divides the Indian from the buffalo and which represents the ruthless and unnatural hand of white "progress" through the land and the book. When Big Bear imagines that he is beginning to see the sun with four corners, he is defining imagistically that unnaturalness which the white man's ideology brings to Indian territory. For the white man's language changes the geography of the land, quite literally: his mode of thought and of expression leads the white man to handle the land in a way that is diametrically opposed to the Indian way of communion and oneness, and as a result the landscape becomes unrecognizable.

But Wiebe ends with the end of Big Bear and a reassertion of the pattern of the circle. On the Sand Hills Big Bear feels "a warm weight against his soul," the great sacred bear-paw, and "Such happiness broke up in him then he had to turn the complete circle to see everything once more in the beautiful world that had once been given him" (415). As he lies down in the cold sand and snow, his last sight is of "the red shoulder of Sun at the rim of Earth." Finally every suggestion of linearity is removed from him as sand and snow sift "over the crevices of his lips and eyes, between the folds of his face and hair and hands, legs; gradually round[ed] him over" — as he came from the earth, so he returns to it. Because his life has involved an understanding of the circularity of the natural order, his death is peaceful. For the white man, separated from the circle of the earth, death is much more definitively the end of a line, and therefore much more to be feared.

IT IS SIGNIFICANT FOR THE READER, the translator of these discourses of circle and square, that Wiebe finally privileges the circular over the linear. For the linear is essential to the storyteller, to the tale told, if the listener is to have any real understanding of the progression of event. But by privileging the circle, Wiebe makes particular play with the mode of the novel form. A novel is never merely a linear narrative; its nature as a completed entity with a final page creates it as an essentially cyclic event, where the reader inevitably reads each succeeding moment in the light of all that has gone before, and may at any moment refer back to an earlier page for confirmation of an emergent notion. In a sense any work of art partakes of this completedness and therefore of this self-referentiality; it is the very fact of completedness which gives to the artwork its satisfying aura of the "simulacrum of eternity," the world in miniature which is within man's grasp and where, like God, he can see the end from the beginning. Of course within this framework of the complete form, the novelist may emphasize one mode of discourse over another. If he chooses to emphasize the linear, realistic mode, his novel will tend towards the adventure-story. If he chooses to emphasize the cyclic, symbolist mode, his novel will incline towards the allusive density of poetry. Wiebe

makes this second choice, for reasons essentially identifiable with the purposes of his book.

By placing his novel firmly on the parabolic rather than the propositional side of the balance, Wiebe encourages the reader to particular care with "translation," and to an awareness of his own deeper message: that the humanity of man is best expressed not through conflict with the natural order but through harmony with its rhythms and cycles, and that man's allegiance to sequential time is inadequate unless it is harnessed to an appreciation of the cyclical times and seasons of the earth. Within the created sphere of his novel, Wiebe privileges a consciousness of the many-layered and turning circle of the earth, and of a people whose language is in tune with the turning. Since language is power, then the power of the artist who recreates a lost sensibility has an authority far beyond that of mere narrative. By expressing the conflict of the white man's square with the Indians' circle, Wiebe has given the reader the possibility of recognizing the shackles of his own linguistic consciousness, and thereby being afforded some degree of liberty from them. Big Bear had to die to rediscover freedom; perhaps the reader need only understand the lesson of the rolling Sand Hills.

NOTES

- ¹ Rudy Wiebe, *The Temptations of Big Bear* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1984), p. 93. All further references to this book will be indicated by page numbers in the text.
- ² Wiebe, "Bear Spirit in a Strange Land," in W. J. Keith, ed., *A Voice in the Land: Essays By and About Rudy Wiebe* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1981), pp. 143-49.
- ³ Sherrill Grace, "Structuring Violence: 'The Ethics of Linguistics' in *The Temptations of Big Bear*," *Canadian Literature*, 104 (Spring 1985), 7-22. I am indebted to this article for the theoretical underpinnings of my own paper.

THIS IS THE DAY

Susan Musgrave

I have nothing under my skirt
but a whole lot of lessons I never learned
properly. The man labouring on the road
senses that, and waves a fingerless hand
hoping for a quick throw over the lunch hour.

Your life isn't your own any more
 when a man like that can bruise his eyes on
 emptiness, and leave you wanting.
 In a huff I move from the stoop

into the house where my friends have laid
 a feast around my body. It's been dying
 for days and they've dusted it
 — "she would have wanted it that way" —
 with cake flour to make it look ghostly.

I don't want it, who would want anything like it?
 I fume around the place for awhile
 but there is no outlet now, there never was.
 It seems a shame to have loved a man so long
 who was the wrong man

but suddenly there comes a day when I can move
 through a room without you. And this
 is the day.

THE FICTION OF POEMS

Alexandre L. Amprimoz

In the village I stayed away from love and other crumbs of clouds.
 But so many scared little rabbits were running around that I lost my
 narrative to desire.

In the village there was a draft. The chocolate dwarf was held.
 Responsible. Hanged. It was the devil and the central government
 that made them do it. They said while biting into mud cakes.

And the well was dry. They dug out the dwarf and hanged him a
 second time. It was a matter of principles they told me.

MORE THAN AN ECHO

Notes on the Craft of Translation

George Woodcock

TRANSLATION IS A DIFFICULT and not always well-regarded craft. The Italians, with their linguistic pride, have a harsh saying, *traduttori traditori*, “translators are traitors,” and even George Borrow, who rendered works from a good many languages into English, remarked that “Translation is at best an echo.”

Yet there have been superb translations, which strikingly conveyed the spirit of the originals. Sometimes, indeed, translators have been credited with producing versions that are *better* than the originals, as used to be said of Edward Fitzgerald’s version of the *Rubaiyat*, which Persian scholars have always regarded as a rather minor and inferior work.

The fact is, of course, that Fitzgerald’s success, such as it was, came from his boldness in moving to the far verges of translation, and producing what was essentially a mid-Victorian poem, abandoning the form and preserving the hedonistic sentiment as he turned Omar’s discontinuous aphoristic quatrains into a unified and continuous sequence, which presented an ironically philosophic view of life that caught the public imagination when the traditional consolations of religions were being eroded by the findings of modern science and the materialistic arguments based on them. Fitzgerald’s *Rubaiyat*, in fact, was paraphrase rather than translation, as his earlier renderings of Calderon had been.

Fitzgerald’s bold treatment of his originals is probably connected with his imperfect knowledge of Persian and Spanish. Having got the philosophic hang of the *Rubaiyat*, he used his talents as an English versifier to present what he felt was the spirit rather than the letter of the works. And in doing this he seized rather roughly on one of the essential limitations of translation: that it can never be faithful in the sense of rendering in another language the actual verbal texture of the original. In that sense a translation is indeed, as Borrow contended, no more than an echo. It is the spirit and intent, and the structural form, that can be carried over, and the skin of words is shed like a snake’s and replaced by that of a translator’s own language, so that works written in French or Italian or German must ideally *seem* in translation to have been originally written in English. I am not suggesting that there should be any abdication of the responsibility to render the actual text as faithfully — which does not mean as literally — as possible, for verbal texture and basic form are necessarily interdependent; there is in fact an

intricate adjustment here, the very heart of the mechanism, to find English words that will convey the spirit of a work and clothe its structure as adequately as the original words had done, a process that, given the various ways languages work, may necessitate notable departures from the literal.

I suppose such departures occur at their most extreme in poetry. My own first translations, from the French and fifty years ago, were of sonnets by Pierre de Ronsard, and here the problems were double: to find a slightly archaic English that would be *parallel* to the original sixteenth-century French, and somehow to prevent the stiffer English rhyme patterns from destroying the fluency of the French rhymes. For anyone who might wish to see how I succeeded, an example appears in my *Collected Poems* (1983). It is inevitably awkward, because of the attempt to reconstruct the poem in detail, down to the metre and the rhymes, and in later years I have tended in rendering poems into English to get as literal a prose version as I could and then to start over again, using what I now have for a new poem in a form that seems to me to offer a convincing verbal echo. Sometimes, like other modern poets, I have moved into an area of inevitable paraphrase, putting into English something from a language in which I am not fluent. In the early 1960's there was almost a movement among Canadian poets who offered versions of poems in Hungarian, Bulgarian, and other tongues without ever having learnt to speak or even read them; Earle Birney and John Robert Colombo were among those working with primary translators who knew the language and turning their literal renderings into English-Canadian verse. Somewhat later, in the early 1980's, I also produced "translations" from languages I knew slightly or not at all, using prose translations of the *Tao-te-Ching* or of Greek archaic poems which I turned into English verse that I felt had enough contemporary relevance to bridge the centuries and the continents. An example was one of Anacreon's late poems, when he had lived his hedonistic life to the end and turned to an ironic lament whose implications I felt deeply since I had come to the age when my own thoughts crossed with his; in rendering this late untypical Anacreon into the language a modern man might use I was speaking for myself and any aging contemporary as well.

I'm grey about the ears
and going thin on top.
What grace I had in youth
is rotting like my teeth.
I had sweet life before me.
Now it has passed me by.

Of course I lament it,
fearing what comes after.
It's a long way down to Hades
and the journey is dreadful.
And for him who has once gone down
there is never a climbing back.

Most translators in fact, if they are not merely mechanical interpreters and have some feeling for the work they are undertaking, speak for themselves as well as for the writers they are translating. In this sense translation is a craft similar to biography; it involves a moving forward into identification with the subject — person or work as the case may be — and at the same time a counter-movement of withdrawal into the objectivity needed to achieve a separate creation.

THERE ARE SOME LITERATURES that especially offer themselves to successful translation — in the sense of the translation itself becoming a valid and evocative work — more easily than others, and this has nothing to do with the ease of literal interpretation. The differences between Chinese (and Japanese for that matter) and any European language are so profound that a literal translation has very little meaning. But Chinese poetry has the saving grace of its great visuality; it is a poetry of evocative images, and images — more easily than phrases — overleap the verbal frontiers of language. Thus, though Arthur Waley undoubtedly knew Chinese and Japanese well, his translations were no better, as poems in English evoking the Chinese imagination, than those of Ezra Pound and Kenneth Rexroth, who knew Chinese hardly at all, yet had good collaborators and were imagists enough to trap and use the visual content and the exile's sadness of Chinese poetry.

Another literature lending itself astonishingly well to translation has been Russian. I think there are two reasons for this. The best of the Russian novelists, rather like the best of the Canadians, have always had that sense of the look and feel of the land which comes from living in large countries; I once compared Margaret Laurence and Tolstoy in this respect, and I do not think I was wrong. But Russian literature, because it has always been the principal means of expressing dissidence obliquely in a land where free thought had always been inhibited by tyrants and censors, has inclined towards the expression of broadly tendentious ideas or generous sentiments, both of which stop just short of rebellion but which have nothing of the sharp specificity of the ideas to which French novelists often give expression in their moralist *réécits*. Since comparatively few English-speaking readers know enough Russian to make linguistic judgments, translators have been more at liberty to stray from the literal in rendering writers like Turgenev and Tolstoy, like Dostoevsky and Chekhov, and to rely for their appeal on the evocation of the landscape or the projection of provocative thoughts, and so we have had a succession of what are sometimes rather unilateral but often tremendously evocative translations. I still shudder with as much delight as any story in English can give me when I read the Hepburn translation of Turgenev stories like "The Singers" and "Bezhin Meadow," with their absolute truth of tone, or the Garnett rendering of Dos-

toevsky's *House of the Dead*. Yet often when I read scholarly books on Russian writers I find their authors — perhaps with justified precision — drastically revising the old translations that have opened the Russian imagination to generations of Anglo-Saxon readers. All the same, these new scholarly versions are not so appealing as the old more amateur ones, and this brings one back to the conclusion that the secret of good translation is to keep the bones of structure and the flesh of content, but ruthlessly to change the verbal structure until the work is, as it were, skinned afresh.

Skinned it may have to be more often than once. A work written in the writer's own language is there for good or ill; only he can change it without violating its integrity. But any translation is *ipso facto* a violation or, more accurately, an impersonation. We offer a double of the original, in a new and modish dress, speaking a different language; but always the original is there in its own language, and different generations of translators, seeing it anew, feel the challenge, if it is a work of lasting consequence, to translate it according to the literary and linguistic conventions of their day. Originals are permanent; translations are always transitory. Take the *Odyssey*. Chapman rendered it into sound blank verse, the idiom of his Jacobean day, in 1616; little more than a century later, Pope turned it into Augustan heroic couplets. Then came along the mid-Victorians Lang and Butcher with their prose translation, which was marred by the same kind of archaisms as falsified Tennyson's and William Morris's excursions into romanticized pasts. Richmond Lattimore constructed something deceptively reminiscent of Homer's own hexametric verse in his 1962 translation, but that seemed even more archaist, for prose has been the appropriate form for adventurously romantic narrative ever since Malory, and I always found myself more comfortable — reading and teaching — with E. V. Rieu's 1946 prose translation of the *Odyssey* than I have with any verse translation into English, with the possible exception of Chapman. It kept the structure, the imagery, the mythology and such intellectual concepts as the Greeks had evolved by Homer's day, and rendered them into an epic equivalent of the prose fiction in which inevitably such a tale as the *Odyssey* would appropriately have been written since verse began to go out of fashion as an English narrative medium in the seventeenth century; it had already gone out of fashion in Greece when Herodotus and Thucydides began to write their histories of wars later than that of Troy.

UP TO NOW I HAVE BEEN GENERALIZING as much from the reader's as from the translator's viewpoint, and it is time I returned to my own experience in the craft, for I did not indulge only in awkwardly strict translations of French verse and happily free ones of Anacreon and Lao Tzu. In recent decades translators have taken a pride in their occupation, have formed themselves into

professional associations, and in our country can even qualify for a special Canada Council prize. But in England during the 1940's, except for a few virtuoso figures like Cecil Day Lewis with his version of the *Aeneid*, translation was usually a means by which down-at-heel writers could supplement their incomes. Translators in those days were the upper crust of that New Grub Street half-world of literary mechanics which also included copy-editors, publishers' readers, indexers, and those sad people who called themselves researchers and before the advent of Xerox would sit day after day, year after year, copying by longhand under the great dome of the British Museum Library.

Once, when I was broke, I was offered such a Grub Street task of translating a novel called *Anny* by Marc Bernard, a French writer who had some kind of reputation in the years after World War II. I recruited my friend Marie Louise Berneri, who had lived most of her childhood and youth in France, as collaborator, and we gave ourselves the *nom-de-plume* of M. L. George. We did so because, though *Anny* had won the Prix Interallié in 1934 and Bernard later won the Goncourt for his *Pariels à des Enfants*, we found the novel so shamelessly mawkish that we did not want our real names attached to it. Still, we earned a hundred pounds we badly needed, and had some amusement, sitting day after day at the height of a splendid summer in an outdoor café in Hyde Park, as we laughed over the outrageous sentimentalities and tried to put them into a form that would not sound too ridiculous in English — which, contrary to general opinion, is a language less adapted to the expression of false feeling than French. But *Anny* was a sow's ear no magic could transform, and our last laugh was a sardonic one, when a reviewer remarked that the book was so poor that it might have taken a beating in translation; we realized that there was no way — even in the most skilful rendering — of turning a bad book in one language into a good book in another. It was a salutary lesson.

And though I did not at this point give up translating for money, I did abandon working on authors for whom I did not feel the respect that made faithful translation a challenge to be met with diligence and with one's stylistic antennae at the alert. Usually, in later years, translation tended to fit in with my current interests, and this I am sure helped a great deal, since I approached it with the right kind of predispositions and often with a good deal of background knowledge.

In the 1960's, when I was writing a great deal of radio drama, I put *Le Malade Imaginaire* and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* into English for Gerald Newman of CBC Radio, and also did for him a free blank verse version of Racine's *Phèdre*, which Andreas Schroeder later published as a special issue of his magazine, *Contemporary Literature in Translation*; I still think it was my best piece of translation.

My writings on anarchism and particularly my anthology, *The Anarchist Reader*, led me to put into English many of the writings of Bakunin and the French anarchists, and my biography of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon also involved a good deal

of translation, since so little of Proudhon had appeared to this time in English. Undoubtedly I was helped in one case by the fact that my mind was steeped in anarchist teachings, and in the other case by the fact that in relation to Proudhon I had fallen into the typical biographer's condition of identification with the person whose life I was writing; I came for awhile to think like him, to feel like him, even to mimic his minor illnesses, and in these circumstances faith in translation came almost naturally.

IN MORE RECENT YEARS my interest in the métis led me to use sources in French while I was writing my *Gabriel Dumont*, and here again my inclination to identify with Gabriel helped me greatly; I knew through shared feeling what Dumont meant in the narratives he dictated after the 1885 rebellion, and I translated them quickly and easily. The success of *Gabriel Dumont*, which itself was eventually translated into French, led to my being invited to undertake the vast task of rendering into English Marcel Giraud's seminal work, *Le métis canadien*. This was no shallow novel to be translated in a few weeks; it did not even compare with the relatively brief anarchist essays I had put into English in the past. It was a vast scholarly book, filled with unfamiliar knowledge, and 1,300 pages long. I thought it over very seriously before I agreed. I knew that I could not possibly sit down, put aside all my other work, and translate it in — say — a concentrated year and a half. But I had always found I worked best when I did two or three literary tasks in tandem, so I suggested I take three years over the job, doing a page or so a day and continuing with my other writings at the same time. It worked out very well. My own writing benefited from my having another, constant task to which I could turn when my originaive energy was flagging. And my translation benefited because I was in the flow of my own writing and the stylistic tone of my version of Giraud was sustained in the same continuum as that of my other prose.

There were difficulties, of course. Fortunately Giraud, writing in the early 1940's, did not use the repulsive jargon in which ethnologists now mostly write, and in any case he was as much a historian as an ethnologist, and his book had a broad narrative sweep and was full of vivid descriptive detail. But he was prolix in his writing, tended to repeat himself, and wrote long, involuted, almost Germanic sentences that trapped one in labyrinths of thought from which the exit was not always easily visible. In addition, there was a strong flavour of social Darwinism about the book; Giraud was close to the nineteenth-century ethnologists who tended to see primitive peoples as less "evolved" than the civilized people with whom they came into contact.

What should I do about this? I decided to make no direct approach to Giraud, who is still alive, though I did not object to my publisher sending him a couple of chapters of my version to get the flavour, which he liked. I believed that my dealings as a translator were with the book, not with the author; if I were translating Balzac I would not even be able to consult him. Since there were no points in the work that were too obscure for me to solve through my own research, I decided to make no direct contact with Giraud until the work was complete; when I did get in touch with him he found only one fault in 1,300 pages.

As for the defects, it was obvious that the book had not been very rigorously edited at the time of publication, when a good deal of fat might have been trimmed. But once it had been printed, and the author himself had not proposed a condensation, it seemed to me that it had acquired a kind of permanence and must be translated as it stood, faithfully, but not necessarily literally. For example, I disentangled many of the elaborate sentences, often substituting three or four short ones for a long one, and in this way aerating the book, at the same time as I did my best to tone it up stylistically. As for Giraud's outdated views, I decided these must be reproduced as he wrote them, and my introduction would have to express my disagreement. While I was working I did talk to other translators, and I remember one Bulgarian scholar who vigorously objected to my toning up the style; all its textual faults should be carried over into the translation to make it "faithful." I did not accept his view. I believed I had to make a work that would stand as a piece of good English prose, and I think I succeeded. Certainly in the end Marcel Giraud believed I had done so. And this meant it was a translation that had met the double test. It seemed faithful to the man who had written it in French and who was fortunately bilingual; it stood its ground in English. When one's work meets these two criteria, translation becomes one of the most satisfying of the literary functions.

Yet in translation, as in other fields, even success breeds its dissatisfactions, and ambition still challenges one. One lives, as in one's other work, with the sense that the best achievements are ever ahead, that one is still, in comparative terms, an apprentice. And always, as for a mountaineer, there are ventures full of ardour to be dreamed of and — who knows? — completed. My own Everest is a new translation of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Partly I am led by my admiration for Proust, whom I regard as the greatest of modern novelists, partly by the fact that I feel the present English version (with its hideously misfitting title) was never eminently faithful (I am not talking of literalness), and partly by the same kind of urge that led Pope and all the others to retranslate Homer: the feeling that not merely our language and our cultural ambience but also our sensibilities have changed since the 1920's when Scott Moncrieff rendered most of the work into English. There has been a radical shift in feeling and tolerance so that readers

of English are now more able to accept Proust as he was, in all his complexity, in ways impossible sixty years ago, and it is time they were given a version fitting these changed circumstances and more accordant with the author's intent. Shall I succeed? Shall I even live long enough to come to the end? Perhaps not, but the prospect of the journey is irresistibly appealing.

RESOLVE TO BE ALWAYS BEGINNING — TO BE A BEGINNER: RILKE

Rienzi Crusz

Turn away from the cracked face of the mountain.
For once, try the waters.

Swim, tingle your skin like fire,
or die, falling and thrashing with bubbles in your mouth.

There'll only be a clasping of hands
(life with death), a soul breaking out of ribs.

All in a flash
you'll learn the language

of new beginnings,
the good earth,

Cherubim and seraphim,
the nether darkness.

What kills for certain
(even before you reach the river)

Is the no-no head, the jaundiced skin
that never knows

those other beginnings,
how an old configuration can end.

MOVING

Bruce Iserman

We have no money until next week's pay —
there are three chicken wings with soy sauce tonight.
The people downstairs will no doubt have bigger portions.
They are between twenty-five and fifty in age,
indeterminate as plastic-wrapped cheese.
We don't want to know them. Particularly.

There will be no beer until the weekend
when guests may arrive and buy some. Hopefully.

Outside, a bulldozer snorts in the dirt,
wallowing a mire out for the rolled grass.
Gasoline feeds on our new apartment. Deafeningly.

We tell each other that we are on vacation;
we don't belong in such temporary poverty. Not really.

The countryside around this town
is lucrative for breeders, growers, even industry.
The land is often humped and squeezed
into contours more interesting than wealth.
But it's also laid square, like the town,
which may be leveled on foot in one half hour. Barely.

We sip the sweet sludge from our tea cups;
I imagine a balcony of majestic, delectable mountains.

Empty. Empty.



LES TRANSPORTS DE LA MÉTAPHORE

Christine Klein-Lataud

LA MÉTAPHORE PRÉSENTE UN intérêt particulier pour ceux qui réfléchissent aux problèmes de la traduction. Le phénomène de métaphorisation est en effet apparenté à celui de la traduction, comme le manifeste l'étymologie. Le mot grec *μεταφέρειν* qui signifiait faire passer, faire traverser, repris par le latin *verbum transferre*, désignait toute opération de transfert de sens, qu'elle s'effectue à l'intérieur d'une langue ou d'une langue à l'autre. Le *verbum translatum* (*translatum* est le participe passé de *transferre*), c'était le mot employé par métaphore, mais *verbum transferre in latinam linguam* signifiait traduire un mot en latin.

Traduire une métaphore, c'est donc prendre en charge un double transfert et se faire passeur d'un sens doublement éloigné — entreprise périlleuse, lors de laquelle, pour filer la métaphore, les risques de naufrage sont multipliés.

Pour cerner le problème de traduction de la métaphore, il est bon de rappeler sa définition. Selon Aristote, elle consiste à "donner à une chose le nom d'une autre." Cette définition vague s'applique à d'autres figures, et est de surcroît battue en brèche par certains sémioticiens comme Liselotte Gumpel dont le livre récent *Metaphor reexamined* est sous-titré *A Non-Aristotelian Perspective*. Mais mieux vaut ne pas s'engager dans un débat qui occupe inlassablement rhétoriciens, linguistes, philosophes, sémanticiens, critiques littéraires etc.; on aura une idée des dimensions de la question en se référant à la bibliographie de L. Gumpel qui regroupe quelque trois cents titres! Une définition traditionnelle suffira à notre propos, comme celle d'Henri Morier dans son *Dictionnaire de poétique et de rhétorique*: la métaphore est une comparaison ellipitique "confrontant deux objets ou réalités plus ou moins apparentées, en omettant le signe explicite de la comparaison." Cette comparaison peut se présenter sous diverses formes syntaxiques: apposition du type *cette neige: hermine enfuie* (Philippe Jaccottet), génitif du type *le banyan de la pluie* (Saint-John Perse) ou *les balcons du ciel* (Baudelaire), verbe du type *Le cœur me piaffe d'impatience* (Jules Laforgue), attribution du type *le révolver à cheveux blancs* (Tzara). Cette diversité sémantique est sans pertinence au niveau de la traduction. Si les modalités changent, le phénomène sémantique est identique: rapprochement de deux objets ayant des sèmes communs.

Toutes les langues connaissent le procédé métaphorique. Mais à cette universalité s'oppose la diversité de son utilisation par chaque langue. Comme le résume bien une formule de Dagut, "languages are anisomorphic metaphorically, just as they are phonologically and syntactically" (Dagut 1976).

Le premier niveau auquel les langues diffèrent est celui des "métaphores obligées," où la métaphore pallie l'absence du mot propre. C'est ce qu'en rhétorique on appelle catachrèse. Ainsi, le français parle des pieds d'une chaise, l'anglais des *legs of a chair* sans y voir la moindre image (encore faudrait-il nuancer: les Victorien^s voilaient les *jambes* de leur piano!). Mais lorsque nous apprenons une langue étrangère, les catachrèses nous éblouissent, telles celles par lesquelles le pidgin néo-mélanésien désigne les cheveux et la barbe: "herbe qui pousse sur la tête" et "herbe qui pousse sur le visage." Le danger qui guette le traducteur est de vouloir restituer à ces catachrèses dans la langue d'arrivée le valeur d'image qu'elles n'ont plus dans la langue de départ. Vouloir garder le sens étymologique des mots, c'est faire de la "mirandolite" ou de la "traductionnite." Ce danger n'est pas une simple hypothèse d'école, comme l'atteste l'exemple suivant emprunté à la traduction de la Bible. L'hébreu, pour désigner la langue, utilise trois mots signifiant au sens propre langue, lèvre et bouche. Pour ne pas perdre la valeur étymologique du mot hébreu *safa*, Chouraqui le traduit ainsi dans l'épisode de la tour de Babel: "Confondons là leurs lèvres," ce qui est tout simplement incompréhensible à qui ne connaît pas la traduction classique: "Brouillons ici leur langue" (cité par Meschonnic 1985). Ces métaphores sont du domaine de la compétence et le traducteur a pour les traduire les mêmes libertés et les mêmes contraintes que pour n'importe quel mot du lexique.

Il faut rapprocher de ces métaphores lexicales devenues invisibles les grandes métaphores qui sous-tendent chaque langue. Comme l'ont montré George Lakoff et Mark Johnson, "Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Et c'est notre langue qui exprime et impose ces "métaphores qui nous font vivre." Un des exemples qu'ils citent à l'appui de leur propos est une métaphore omniprésente en anglais: *TIME IS MONEY*. Elle est sous-jacente dans des expressions comme:

You're WASTING your time.
How do you SPEND your time these days?
I've INVESTED a lot of time in her.
He's living on BORROWED time.

Les expressions françaises couramment employées seraient :

Vous perdez votre temps.
À quoi vous occupez-vous ces temps-ci?

Je lui ai consacré beaucoup de temps.

Ses jours sont comptés.

On voit que la métaphore centrale des expressions anglaises n'est pas conservée en français. "Il vit sur du temps emprunté" serait incompréhensible. Quant à la traduction: "J'ai investi beaucoup de temps dans cette relation," elle fait ressortir la valeur métaphorique *INVESTED* qui, comme dans le cas des catachrèses, n'est plus ressentie par l'anglophone. Elle est donc littéralement exacte et fonctionnellement erronée.

UNE SECONDE CATÉGORIE DE MÉTAPHORES va nous permettre d'approfondir ce point. Il s'agit des métaphores figées, des clichés, expressions toutes faites.

Entre langues voisines, certaines métaphores se retrouvent sous une forme identique.

To wash one's hands of it. / S'en laver les mains.

Mais certaines sont propres à la langue de départ. Que fait alors le traducteur? Très souvent, il cherche dans la langue d'arrivée une métaphore différente mais de sens équivalent. Il applique ainsi le principe d'"équivalence dynamique." Énoncé par Nida, ce principe consiste à produire sur le récepteur du message traduit un effet identique à celui que le message de départ avait sur le récepteur initial. Il a pour corollaire le principe de transparence: on ne doit pas s'apercevoir qu'il s'agit d'un texte traduit.

C'est cette approche communicative qui est prévalente aujourd'hui au Canada. Or elle est battue en brèche par une autre école qui y voit de l'ethnocentrisme, le refus de s'ouvrir à l'étranger. Ainsi, il faudrait conserver l'image du proverbe allemand: "L'air du matin a de l'or dans la bouche" et non en donner l'équivalent français: "Le monde appartient à ceux qui se lèvent tôt." Et selon le même principe, Gide a eu raison de rendre la phrase de Conrad: "He did not care a tinker's curse" par "Il s'en fichait comme du juron d'un étameur" au lieu d'avoir recours à l'équivalent français: "Il s'en fichait comme d'une guigne" (cité par A. Berman 1985). Antoine Berman va jusqu'à écrire dans *La traduction et la lettre — ou l'auberge du lointain*: "Jouer de l'équivalence est attenter à la parlance de l'œuvre" (id.).

Il restreint son propos au domaine de la traduction littéraire, mais même si l'on s'en tient aux textes littéraires, la traduction littérale des métaphores conventionnelles est un principe contestable. Le lecteur goûte la saveur des images de la langue

source, mais est induit en erreur sur leur originalité. Si l'on ne tient pas compte de la fonction de la métaphore dans le texte, sa traduction littérale peut constituer un contresens. Prenons l'exemple d'une nouvelle de Margaret Atwood. Une jeune fille définit ainsi un de ses soupirants: "He said things like 'That's the way the cookie crumbles.'" Le rôle de cette métaphore est au second degré: sa valeur est indicelle, c'est-à-dire qu'elle ne tient pas au contenu de l'énoncé mais à ce que sa forme révèle sur l'énonciateur. Une traduction littérale serait donc doublement inadéquate. Tout d'abord, la phrase ne signifierait rien en français. Ensuite, si l'on traduisait: "Il employait des expressions du style: 'C'est comme ça que s'émiette le biscuit,'" on aurait l'image d'un aimable excentrique et non d'un raseur qui s'exprime par clichés. En l'occurrence, en l'absence d'une métaphore conventionnelle de sens équivalent, le traducteur peut utiliser n'importe quel cliché, puisque là réside l'information réelle de la phrase.

Un problème particulier posé par les métaphores figées ou conventionnelles est celui de leur réactivation.

Le changement de gouvernement en France a fait l'objet d'un article dans *Newsweek* intitulé "Strange Bedfellows." Traduire que Chirac et Mitterrand sont d'étranges compagnons de lit serait amusant mais gauchirait terriblement la pensée du journaliste qui veut simplement signaler l'étrangeté de l'association sans allusion à de quelconques fêtes galantes. *Bedfellow* est une métaphore lexicalisée, qui a perdu sa valeur d'image et est traduite par "association" dans le dictionnaire. Mais un article du *Sunday Star* reprenait très récemment le même sujet et se terminait ainsi: "They may share the same bed but their dreams are much different." (Si leur lit les rapproche, leurs rêves les séparent.) Comme quoi il ne faut pas se fier à la métaphore qui semble morte: elle ne fait que dormir. . . .

LA TROISIÈME CATÉGORIE DE MÉTAPHORES est celle des métaphores originales. Elles sont, bien sûr, au cœur de la création littéraire. La psychocritique y voit la manifestation de l'être le plus profond du créateur, comme le révèle le titre du livre de Charles Mauryon *Des métaphores obsédantes au mythe personnel*, et Proust en fait l'essence de son art poétique. Selon lui, la mission de l'écrivain est, on le sait, de retrouver le temps perdu, et c'est à la métaphore qu'il appartient d'accomplir cette opération magique. "La vérité ne commencera qu'au moment où l'écrivain prendra deux objets différents, posera leur rapport . . . et les enfermera dans les anneaux nécessaires d'un beau style; . . . quand, en rapprochant une qualité commune à deux sensations, il dégagera leur essence commune en les réunissant l'une et l'autre pour les soustraire aux contingences du temps, dans une métaphore" (*À la recherche du temps perdu*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. la Pléiade, t. 3, p. 889).

La traduction de la métaphore placée ainsi au cœur de l'œuvre associe celui qui en est chargé au mystère de la création littéraire, et pose des problèmes beaucoup trop complexes pour être abordés dans le cadre de cette étude. C'est pourquoi nos exemples de métaphores originales seront empruntés à des textes informatifs.

Afin de recueillir un corpus suffisant pour permettre les comparaisons, j'ai choisi dans de grands hebdomadaires et dans une revue pédagogique des articles riches en métaphores, et les ai soumis à des traducteurs professionnels (cinq anglophones, cinq francophones) en leur demandant de justifier leur choix traductionnel. Pour plus de commodité, j'ai rassemblé leurs traductions dans les tableaux ci-dessous. Les solutions consistent soit à garder la même métaphore, soit à donner une métaphore équivalente, soit à dégager le sens en paraphrasant et en sacrifiant la métaphore, soit à escamoter purement et simplement la métaphore.

Étant donné que, pour un même texte, l'éventail des solutions adoptées et les motivations qui président à leur choix sont les mêmes pour le traitement des métaphores conventionnelles et pour celui des métaphores nouvelles, ces deux catégories sont regroupées dans le même tableau.

Il est impossible de commenter tous les exemples, mais mon analyse s'appuie sur l'ensemble des choix traductionnels et sur les commentaires de leurs auteurs.

Les choix étaient étiquetés A (même métaphore), B (métaphore équivalente), C (sens dégagé, pas de métaphore), D (suppression pure et simple de la métaphore). Quelquefois, la solution adoptée combine deux possibilités (A + C, B + C).

Il est frappant de constater la rareté de la solution A. On pouvait s'y attendre pour les métaphores conventionnelles, qui diffèrent très souvent d'une langue à l'autre. Mais les exemples 2 et 3 montrent que même lorsque la métaphore est incontestablement originale, elle n'est pas pour autant traduite littéralement. Ainsi la métaphore de la robe de mariée a été dans l'ensemble rendue par une métaphore affaiblie (*worse for the wear, shopworn, etc.*), et une fois rendue par une métaphore plus audacieuse et plus drôle (surtraduction réussie). La solution B est majoritaire, suivie de C. D existe, mais à titre exceptionnel.

À QUELS CRITÈRES LE TRADUCTEUR fait-il appel pour opérer son choix? Tout d'abord, il évalue la *fonction* de la métaphore dans le texte: est-elle informative, argumentative, ludique? Dans les textes étudiés ici, la métaphore vise souvent à attirer l'attention, à déridier en dépit de l'austérité générale du sujet et à illustrer la virtuosité stylistique des auteurs. On pense au commentaire de Barthes sur les métaphores omniprésentes dans l'écriture artistico-réaliste des écrivains communistes, qui seraient seulement "une marque littéraire qui situe un langage, tout comme une étiquette renseigne sur les prix" (*Le degré zéro de l'écriture*).

- Code: A Même métaphore
 B Métaphore équivalente
 C Sens dégagé sans métaphore
 D Suppression pure et simple

C. A. Wilkins, "National Syllabuses and the Concept of a Minimum Adequate Grammar," *The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching*, ed. Brunfit and Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) :

1.

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| Language teachers would be rightly sceptical of abandoning the partly negotiable currency of the grammatical approach / for the crock of gold at the end of the functional rainbow. | Lâcher la proie tangible de l'approche grammaticale / pour le miroir aux alouettes du fonctionnalisme. | Abandonner l'approche grammaticale, avec ses défauts et ses qualités / pour le Saint-Graal fonctionnel revient à lâcher la proie pour l'ombre: c'est une perspective devant laquelle les enseignants de langue auraient raison de se montrer sceptiques. | Les professeurs de langue feraient bien de ne pas lâcher la proie de l'approche grammaticale / pour l'ombre de l'approche fonctionnelle. | L'abandon de la méthode grammaticale, relativement sûre, / au profit de la méthode fonctionnelle, véritable miroir aux alouettes, laisserait sceptiques, à juste titre, les professeurs de langue. | Les professeurs de langue auraient raison d'être sceptiques si on leur demandait d'abandonner la méthode grammaticale, valeur partiellement négociable, / au profit du mirage qu'est la méthode fonctionnelle. |
| | - B - B | | - D - B | - C - B | - A - B |
| | | - C - B + B | | | |

Jacques Julliard, "La droite introuvable," *Le Nouvel-Observateur* (11-17 avril 1986) :

2.

| | | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|
| Et, dans tout cela, le libéralisme si fringant dans l'opposition ressemble aujourd'hui à une robe de mariée qui aurait voyagé trois semaines dans un fourgon à bestiaux. | Looks worse for the wear. - B avec affaiblissement - alternate solution: D | The opposition's bright and shiny liberalism is looking a bit shopworn today. B avec affaiblissement | And the liberalism so dear to the hearts of the opposition before the election seems to have vanished into the thin air of the corridors of power. B | Liberalism, so brilliant in opposition, now seems rather faded. B avec affaiblissement | Liberalism looks like a young bride the morning after. B avec soulignement |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|

3.

| | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Assurément, la "droite" est une expression qui habille trop large. | The Right is a bit too much of a catch-all expression. B avec affaiblissement | The "Right" covers a very large spectrum indeed. B avec affaiblissement | To lump all the groups in the opposition together under a term like "the right" is really masking a whole range of positions. D | The "Right" covers a lot of territory. B avec affaiblissement | The "Right" is a catch-all expression. B avec affaiblissement |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|

4.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|------------------------------------|--|---|
| ... Chirac applique avec beaucoup de détermination la tactique du dernier Horace contre les trois Curiaces [sic] inégalement blessés. | Chirac faces, like Horace on the bridge, his opponents with great determination. - A + C | This makes one think of the story ... well-known in France. - A + commentary | Chirac first used Giscard ... D | As Chirac has proven to be a master of the old adage "Divide and conquer" ... C | Since Chirac is determined to use the tactic of Caesar: Divide and conquer ... C |
|---|---|---|------------------------------------|--|---|

- Code: A Même métaphore
 B Métaphore équivalente
 C Sens dégagé sans métaphore
 D Suppression pure et simple

David A. Stockman, "The Triumph of Politics," *Newsweek* (28 April 1986), pp. 50-51:

5.

I now realized it was going to be a white-knuckle operation all the way.

Je me rendais compte que nous nous engagions dans une épreuve de force au "finish."

A

Je me rendis compte alors que pas un instant, tant que l'affaire durerait, je ne pourrais baisser ma garde.

B

Je me rendis compte alors que la tension serait à son comble.

C

Je me suis alors rendu compte que je devrais mener une opération de choc.

B

J'ai compris alors qu'il s'agissait d'une opération qui exigerait de nous le maximum d'efforts sur toute la ligne.

C

6.

So when our "allies" on the Hill started to descend on me demanding concessions, / I resolved not to give in to them one dime's worth.

Aussi lorsque nos alliés se sont mis à me tomber dessus du haut de la Colline en exigeant des concessions, / je résolu de ne pas céder un pouce de terrain.

- A
 - B

C'est pourquoi, lorsque nos soi-disant "alliés" du Congrès commencèrent à fondre sur moi en brandissant leurs exigences de concessions, / je résolu de ne pas leur céder le moindre bouton de culotte.

- A
 - B avec soulignement

C'est pourquoi lorsque nos "alliés" du Capitole se jetèrent sur moi en me demandant des concessions, / je résolu de rester ferme sur mes positions.

- A
 - B

Quand nos "alliés" les sénateurs m'ont assailli pour me faire faire des concessions, / j'ai décidé de rester d'airain.

- A
 - B

Par conséquent, lorsque nos "alliés" se sont mis à fondre sur moi pour demander des concessions, / j'ai décidé de ne rien leur donner, pas même un sou.

- A
 - A

7.

Enacting the Reagan Administration's economic program meant rubber-stamp approval, nothing less.

Tout revenait à approuver les yeux fermés.

B

Approuver sans discuter: c'était, ni plus ni moins, ce à quoi devait se borner le Congrès.

C

L'application du programme économique de l'administration Reagan exigeait ni plus ni moins l'approbation aveugle du Sénat.

C

L'application du programme économique de l'administration Reagan exigeait l'approbation inconditionnelle du Sénat.

C

La mise à exécution du programme économique du gouvernement Reagan n'exigeait rien de moins qu'une approbation totale, sans discussion.

C

8.

The world's so-called greatest deliberative body would have to be reduced to the status of a ministerial arm.

L'Assemblée délibérante présumée la plus grande du monde serait réduite au simple rôle de pion sur l'échiquier politique.

B

Il allait falloir réduire la plus grande assemblée consultative du monde au rôle de simple appendice ministériel.

B avec affaiblissement

L'assemblée délibérante présumée la plus grande du monde serait réduite à une assemblée de béni-oui-oui.

C

Le corps législatif réputé le plus grand du monde serait réduit au rôle de bras ministériel.

A

L'assemblée délibérante considérée comme la plus prestigieuse du monde devait être réduite au rang d'un simple prolongement du cabinet ministériel.

B avec affaiblissement

La traduction dépend également du jugement *esthétique* du traducteur. Quand la métaphore est perçue comme ornementale, il l'escamote volontiers s'il l'estime ratée. C'est le cas de la métaphore 2, gommée parce qu'elle a été jugée inutile et ridicule. Dans l'exemple 1 où l'on a une double métaphore, les traducteurs ont dans l'ensemble jugé préférable de rétablir une cohérence en supprimant la première métaphore. Mais un traducteur a préféré au contraire mélanger lui aussi deux métaphores très différentes parce qu'il trouvait l'effet réussi.

Le traducteur choisit également, bien sûr, en fonction de l'idée qu'il a de son *public*. Interviennent ici toutes les différences socio-culturelles perçues entre le public du texte-source et celui du texte-cible. Le recours à la solution c est justifié par un traducteur anglophone en vertu du moindre goût que les Anglais auraient pour la métaphore. Ce sont parfois les connaissances encyclopédiques du public qui sont en jeu. La métaphore 4, par exemple, est supprimée par la majorité des traducteurs parce qu'ils estiment l'allusion aux Horace et aux Curiace incompréhensible pour le public canadien actuel. Elle est conservée assortie d'une glose par un autre ("l'histoire, bien connue en France . . ."). Inversement, parce qu'il s'adresse à des professeurs, un traducteur s'autorise un changement de registre en remplaçant la métaphore (1) du "crock of gold" par celle beaucoup plus recherchée du Saint-Graal, qui serait trop ésotérique pour un public général. Nos textes étant pragmatiques, les traducteurs se préoccupent essentiellement de faire passer l'information, en la clarifiant si nécessaire.

D'autre part, conscients de l'appauvrissement provoqué par la suppression ou l'affaiblissement d'une métaphore, les traducteurs cherchent souvent à compenser soit par un autre procédé stylistique, soit par le soulignement de la métaphore suivante. Les besoins de cette étude m'ont amenée à fragmenter le texte, mais la perspective en est faussée: pour tous les traducteurs, le choix traductionnel d'une métaphore s'opère et se justifie en fonction de l'ensemble du texte.

Enfin, les conditions matérielles de traduction jouent un grand rôle: chercher une "bonne" métaphore prend du temps, et s'il en manque, le traducteur doit souvent se résigner à la solution c (dégager le sens).

En conclusion, on peut dire que la traduction des métaphores est particulièrement intéressante parce qu'elle est sans cesse à réinventer. Elles représentent en effet une manifestation privilégiée de la liberté langagière, et permettent de jouer à déjouer les règles ordinaires de la sélection lexicale. Impossibles à emprisonner dans un dictionnaire, elles constituent par là même un obstacle formidable à la traduction automatique. Parce qu'elles font constamment appel à la créativité du traducteur, elles forment un des plus sûrs remparts contre la déshumanisation de la traduction. Par le défi permanent qu'elles lancent au traducteur, elles incitent à remplacer le vieil adage *TRADUTTORE TRADITORE* par celui que propose Michelle Trân Văn Khãi: *TRADUTTORE TROVATORE*. Vive donc les métaphores!

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TRANSLATION & PARODY

Quebec Theatre in the Making

Annie Brisset

A LITTLE 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-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 *québécoisité*. 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

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

Ducharme

CHIMENE: 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 inmanquable. 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-cœur. C'est mauditemment compliqué, mon affaire. Si je tue pas le père de ma blonde, je perds ma blonde. C'est inmanquable. 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 mauditemment 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! . . . Qé pas possibbe! Moué, ça mfait mourir des discussions dmême! . . . Qé 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'embarquer dans nos maisons pis enfarmer toué filles en âge de smarier dans leu chambbes! . . . Pis après ça, le plus drôle, qé 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 nôtse 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 nôtse 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 . . . çé 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 ltamps de ldire y était rendu au pied de la pente dousse comme y disent à Québec . . . un ben belle ville ça . . . çé mailheueux qu'y aient eu l'idée dla construire sus une falaise pis dfaire des rues si étroettes . . . 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 splaignait 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), *pente* (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 translatable 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 irréalisable" (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; Kryszewski 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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WALLS OF SOUND

John Steffler

Crickets can't stand it in Newfoundland,
so you need a good house there to keep
the silence out, the buzz of "folly! folly!"
your ears make in an empty space.

Here on the grand banks of southern
Ontario, schools of birds plunge in the blue
air and crickets build walls of sound, more
full of curly depths than William Morris wallpaper,
than the paintings of Henri Rousseau.

You can sit naked here in any
windowless old shack and ply your trade quite happily,
whatever it might be. You've got
support. So many other creatures choose to live here too
and love it.
Just listen to them carry on.

But in Newfoundland, the houseless man is
naked all the way to the stars, to the troll-noggined sea,
scowling over the rock in its folktale enmity.

Build your walls thick there and
stay indoors, filling the lighted air
with the music of men.



LE POÈTE EST UN TRADUCTEUR

Robert Melançon

à Philip Stratford, avec reconnaissance et amitié.

P
OURQUOI TRADUIT-ON DES POÈMES? La poésie en traduction intéresse très peu de lecteurs et, pour ainsi dire, aucun éditeur. Pis, elle est suspecte, plus traître, craint-on, que toute autre traduction. Et il faut des efforts sans fin, un temps fou et une chance plus folle encore pour trouver l'équivalent approximatif d'un vers. Les raisons de s'abstenir ne manquent donc pas si Robert Frost a eu raison d'écrire: "poetry is what vanishes in translation." Pourtant on traduit des poèmes, on en traduit beaucoup, on en adapte, on en transpose, et plusieurs grands poètes d'aujourd'hui ont fait de la traduction une composante de leur oeuvre: Robert Lowell, Philippe Jaccottet, Jacques Brault, D. G. Jones — la liste serait sans fin. Si la traduction de la poésie exerce une telle séduction sur les poètes, il faut qu'elle réponde à toutes les objections par de puissantes raisons. Quitte à risquer ce qui semblera un paradoxe, je dirai que celui qui écrit des poèmes est amené à en traduire précisément pour cette raison qu'il en écrit.

Traduire, c'est s'approprier le texte d'un autre, le faire en quelque manière sien. Il y a dans la traduction une démarche analogue à celle du peintre qui copie le tableau d'un maître, du musicien qui transcrit une oeuvre pour un autre instrument. On cherche ainsi à s'assimiler de nouvelles ressources, à accroître son registre, à quitter ses formes et ses thèmes habituels en s'astreignant à reproduire ceux d'un autre. Ainsi s'explique, je crois, que tant de poètes modernes se soient faits traducteurs. C'est en traduisant qu'un poète se mesure aujourd'hui à des contraintes analogues à celles qu'imposaient naguère une versification stricte. Un poète devient maintenant traducteur pour les mêmes raisons qu'il entreprenait autrefois de composer une couronne de sonnets ou une ode pindarique, par besoin d'éprouver des résistances. Elles sont salutaires en ce qu'elles lui rappellent, tenté qu'il est aujourd'hui par l'illusion orgueilleuse que tout est possible et que son moindre grognement devient oracle, les limites de son art, la nécessité de maîtriser son métier, la modestie du labeur artisanal. Et elles sont sans doute plus considérables dans la traduction que dans l'ancienne prosodie, laquelle n'imposait après tout que des formes alors que traduire un poème consiste à tenter de le refaire intégralement,

jusqu'en ses moindres détails, avec le matériau d'une autre langue. En traduisant, on rencontre vite ses limites, et rudement. On découvre aussi des ressources inconnues dans sa propre langue, dont on s'enrichit. C'est la première raison pour laquelle on traduit des poèmes.

On en traduit aussi pour les lire. Si j'entreprends de traduire un poème qui me touche, je l'ai évidemment lu, et plus d'une fois. J'ai même pu l'apprendre par coeur sans l'avoir cherché, simplement à force de le relire et de le redire: "*Sempre caro mi fu quest'ermo colle . . .*," je n'ai pas à chercher longtemps pour retrouver les premiers vers de *l'Infinito* de Leopardi. Mais en m'essayant à le traduire avec exactitude, je découvre lentement tout ce qui m'avait échappé, je réduis tout ce non-lu qui se mêlait à ma lecture, qui l'aveuglait. La traduction arrache cet aveu qu'on lit mal, trop vite, que la lecture la plus attentive reste comme rongée d'ombre. Traduire un poème, c'est refuser cette distraction à laquelle on se résigne le plus souvent, c'est s'imposer la tâche d'une lecture totale, qui atteindra tout le sens, presque tout le sens, bien sûr, mais aussi la couleur des mots, les rythmes, les équilibres les plus subtils, les traces les plus fugaces, les allusions, les échos, tout le tissu incroyablement serré d'un poème. *Lone Bather* peut sembler simple et parfaitement limpide à qui se contente de le lire ou de le dire; il faut tenter de le traduire en français pour feuilleter toute son épaisseur. Il peut arriver en plein travail, quand on s'affaire à manipuler des dictionnaires, qu'on entrevoie un instant, j'oserais dire presque comme dans une vision inspirée, toute la figure d'un poème. Cela exalte et donne le vertige. Cela décourage aussi le traducteur qui réalise du coup tout ce à quoi il devra renoncer, tout ce qu'il ne pourra jamais rendre. Mais il sait alors qu'il a lu le poème qu'il a sous les yeux, qu'il l'a vraiment lu, intégralement; c'est une expérience bouleversante, et beaucoup plus rare qu'on ne veut l'avouer.

Enfin, on traduit un poème pour lui trouver de nouveaux lecteurs. Le plaisir esthétique, analogue en cela au plaisir amoureux, devient plus vif s'il est partagé. Ce poème que j'aime, je veux que d'autres l'aiment à leur tour, et tout mon effort pour le traduire devient une longue manoeuvre de séduction. Pour former le projet de le traduire, il faut que j'aie la conviction ou, plus exactement, que je fasse le pari qu'il est possible de le transposer dans une autre langue et de le rendre ainsi plus lisible, plus semblable à lui-même. A bien y réfléchir, la traduction d'un poème ne cherche pas tant un équivalent fidèle qu'une interprétation. J'entends ici interprétation au sens qu'on lui donne couramment en musique, où l'on admet qu'une grande oeuvre en appelle plusieurs, toutes justes quoiqu'il arrive qu'elles diffèrent sensiblement. Je dirais des traductions d'un poème qu'elles le jouent, comme Schnabel, Horowitz, Kempf, Gould, Brendel, Serkin jouent une sonate pour piano de Beethoven. Un mélomane ne se privera pas d'écouter diverses interprétations de la même oeuvre, exclusives les unes des autres à certains égards mais qui toutes (à un certain niveau: il y en a de fausses ou d'incompétentes) lui permettent

d'approcher un peu mieux sa vérité. Il suivra même la partition s'il sait lire la musique, pour accroître ses perceptions. Pour une raison analogue, il faut publier les traductions de poésie en édition bilingue. Le face à face avec l'original répond à une nécessité bien autre que celle d'un contrôle: pas plus qu'un amateur ne suit la partition pour vérifier si Alfred Brendel joue toutes les notes, je ne me reporte pas un texte d'Eliot pour savoir si Pierre Leyris le traduit bien mais parce que son admirable interprétation fait sonner *Ash Wednesday* avec une vigueur, un brio, une profondeur qui me rendent, dans son texte originel, ce poème présent comme jamais auparavant. Il se pourrait bien que les traductions de poèmes s'adressent idéalement à celui qui maîtrise la langue d'origine et qui, d'une certaine façon, pourrait fort bien s'en passer. Si elles n'apportent rien à ce lecteur qui connaît déjà l'original, elles apporteront moins que rien à celui qui n'y a pas accès. Traduire un poème, c'est peut-être pratiquer la seule forme de critique qu'il appelle.

P
OUR CES RAISONS, depuis une dizaine d'années, je me suis lancé dans cette entreprise un peu folle de traduire des poèmes. Longtemps je ne me suis pas soucié de communiquer ce travail à qui que ce soit. En lisant Robert Lowell, Leopardi, Jaufré Rudel, Properce, A. M. Klein, David Solway, je me surprenais à esquisser une version française, sans toujours m'astreindre à la coucher par écrit. J'ai assez vite découvert tout le profit que je pouvais tirer de sa mise au net et, chaque fois que je le peux, je m'y efforce. Le plus souvent je me contente de glisser le résultat de ces efforts, ma "traduction," dans l'ouvrage en guise de signet.

Depuis quelques années, parallèlement à ces esquisses à mon usage, à ces exercices, j'ai entrepris des travaux plus soutenus, destinés à la publication. On ne va pas très loin quand on écrit si on ne se soumet pas au jugement des autres (l'exception d'Emily Dickinson n'infirme pas la règle), c'est pourquoi il faut publier. Traduire des poèmes ne diffère pas fondamentalement de l'étrange acte d'en écrire et doit répondre aux mêmes exigences. Si donc je voulais que mes traductions deviennent autre chose qu'un jeu sans conséquence, il fallait m'imposer un travail de quelque envergure, le mener à terme et le publier. L'occasion m'en a été donnée par VLB éditeur, qui m'a proposé de traduire les *Collected Poems* d'Earle Birney. Il a fallu renoncer à tout traduire. D'abord pour des raisons pratiques: il s'agissait de présenter Birney à un public de langue française pour qui il reste pratiquement inconnu, et la masse des *Collected Poems* risquait de décourager lors d'un premier contact. Puis je ne me sentais pas d'affinités pour toute l'œuvre si variée de Birney, et je ne crois pas qu'on puisse bien traduire un poème pour lequel on ne se sent pas d'affinités. Enfin, je ne suis pas parvenu, après des années de travail, à rendre de façon tolérable certains poèmes auxquels je tenais. Par contre, j'ai dû m'acharner

à en traduire d'autres qu'il était indispensable d'inclure quelle que soit la difficulté de les traduire, par exemple le long poème narratif *David*, parce qu'on n'imagine pas d'en amputer l'oeuvre de Birney. En outre, j'ai décidé d'ajouter à ce choix qui risquait de dérouter un lecteur de langue française, les commentaires de Birney sur sa propre poésie dans *The Cow jumped over the Moon*, ce qui m'a forcé à inclure quelques poèmes, particulièrement ardues à rendre en français, auxquels il est fait allusion dans cet essai. C'était donc un travail sensiblement différent de celui que j'évoquais tantôt : traduire pour soi un poème par lequel on a été vivement séduit est une toute autre chose que d'essayer de donner une image juste d'une oeuvre aussi complexe, aussi variée que celle de Birney. Je ne sais ce que vaut cette traduction qui n'a pas encore trouvé son public (le manuscrit, accepté pour publication il y a près de deux ans, dort toujours chez un éditeur qui se traîne les pieds), mais je sais qu'elle m'a énormément appris. Je ne renoncerais pas à mes exercices privés de traduction, mais j'ai appris que la perspective de se soumettre au jugement des lecteurs est un puissant aiguillon et je compte bien en donner d'autres grands projets comme ce Birney si je parviens à y intéresser un éditeur. La poésie canadienne anglaise reste pour ainsi dire *terra incognita* pour les lecteurs québécois, dont elle est pourtant étrangement proche à certains égards malgré des différences appréciables, et j'aimerais bien me mesurer à quelques oeuvres qui me sollicitent vivement, notamment celles d'A. M. Klein, W. W. E. Ross, Louis Dudek, David Solway.

Actuellement, en collaboration avec ma femme, Charlotte (qui, pour sa part, poursuit une traduction de la poésie d'Emily Dickinson), j'achève, ou plutôt nous achevons de traduire le roman d'A. M. Klein, *The Second Scroll*, qui comporte dans ses "gloses" une série d'admirables poèmes. La difficulté particulière de cette oeuvre tient à son espace intertextuel, à un réseau très dense d'allusions bibliques et talmudiques, à tout un travail de l'anglais par l'hébreu, le latin, le yiddish et même le français, qui conduit Klein à des traits de virtuosité stylistique éblouissants mais jamais gratuits. La tradition littéraire anglaise s'y trouve passablement bousculée, métissée, réorganisée. Nous devons rendre tout cela en français, dans un français aussi déroutant que l'anglais de Klein, et je crois bien qu'il fallait nous mettre à deux pour le tenter.

P
OUR FINIR, j'aimerais évoquer brièvement une expérience de traduction qui m'a fait passer de l'autre côté, je veux dire celle de mes propres poèmes par Philip Stratford. Après la publication de *Peinture aveugle*, je me suis mis à découvrir dans ce recueil, que je ne m'étais pourtant pas précipité pour publier, toute une série d'insuffisances, d'approximations, de facilités. On publie précisément pour cette raison, me semble-t-il, qu'on n'est plus capable d'avancer;

il faut alors se soumettre à l'épreuve de la lecture. La publication est pour ainsi dire un appel lancé par l'écrivain à des inconnus qui forment cette chose mystérieuse qu'on appelle un public. Ils restent peu nombreux pour un poète, mais ce sont des inconnus, les premiers venus (c'est essentiel), et ils sont bel et bien le public, c'est-à-dire des gens qui ont choisi sans contrainte de lire. Leur réaction parvient confusément à l'auteur : par quelques comptes rendus dans les journaux et les revues (les critiques professionnels se font dicter leurs réactions par le public dans une mesure bien plus grande qu'ils ne le croient), par quelques lettres d'amis et d'inconnus (d'autant plus précieuses qu'elles contiennent autre chose que de fades compliments), par des conversations, par des silences, par une vague rumeur difficile à décrire. Donc, quelques mois après sa publication, je me suis mis à annoter un exemplaire de *Peinture aveugle* sans autre idée que d'arranger pour moi ce qui n'y allait pas. Je ne sais si j'avais alors formé clairement le projet de le récrire. En tout cas, lorsque Philip Stratford a commencé à le traduire, ses insuffisances se sont mises à me crever les yeux. Une première version était pratiquement achevée quand je me suis décidé à tout refaire. Cette traduction me révélait tant de choses qu'elle me permettait enfin de mener à terme cette révision que je savais nécessaire depuis longtemps. Le traducteur est le lecteur idéal, celui qui lit vraiment tout le texte et qui peut ainsi le révéler intégralement à son auteur. Quelques semaines plus tard, j'ai apporté à Philip Stratford le manuscrit de la nouvelle version que sa traduction venait pour ainsi dire de me dicter — le traducteur peut devenir ce que Platon appelait un "démon" qui souffle ses vers au poète. C'était littéralement un autre recueil. Sans broncher, il s'est remis à la tâche et a tout refait à son tour. D'autres corrections sont intervenues, qu'il a accueillies avec une patience sans fin, et c'est trop modestement qu'il a écrit dans la préface à sa traduction : "*while we worked over these poems, they continued to change on both sides of the centre crease.*" Je dirai en une seule phrase ce que je lui dois : il m'a révélé ce que j'avais fait, ce qui restait à faire, et il m'a permis de réduire l'écart entre les textes auxquels j'avais fini par me résigner et les poèmes que j'avais rêvés.

L'expérience de la traduction, à la fois à titre de traducteur d'autres poètes et à titre d'auteur traduit, a profondément transformé ma poésie. On dit souvent, et on a raison de le dire, qu'un traducteur de poésie doit se faire poète. Mais un poète n'est jamais lui-même qu'un traducteur, qui cherche difficilement des mots pour transposer le moins mal possible ce qui, peut-être, échappe aux mots.



FAMILY PLOT

Susan Musgrave

My father has been gone
a long year. We're at the grave
planting flowers that won't last
the season. My daughter, aged three,
says if we keep digging far enough
and move all the earth
he might come up again before summer.

I watch as she picks up a handful of dirt —
for her this is an ordinary experience.
Come on I'll show you she says
when I stop, kneeling there
over a small hole in the grass
not wanting to go deeper than
we already have,
afraid to drive the shovel home.

GREEN GIVING

John Steffler

This green shower caught in the arms
of the wind, green memory of rain
after the rain has passed: young

elm leaves fountaining down slight
boughs, green fingerprints, as many
as notes sprayed out of the grand
piano at Debussy's hands, gracing

my window. armfuls cast from above.
green giving, the motion that colts
make with their necks and manes at
the sight of fields: sparrows plunge

in, deft brown strokes of the feathered
brush, finding the shadows that wait
for them, like cool suits of clothes.

VIOLETS IN A CRUCIBLE

The Translating, Editing, and Reviewing of Canadian Books

John J. O'Connor

NOT EVERYONE AGREES that it is possible, or desirable, to translate literary texts. Shelley, for instance, in his inspired defence of the unique grace of the poetic imagination, eloquently disputes the view that such vision can be successfully conveyed in another language:

the language of poets has ever affected a certain uniform and harmonious recurrence of sound, without which it were not poetry, and which is scarcely less indispensable to the communication of its action, than the words themselves, without reference to that particular order. Hence the vanity of translation; it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet.¹

No doubt Shelley would sympathize with the often-expressed modern view that translation is also an act of treason — *traduttore, traditore*. For Shelley, then, any attempt at “transfusion” would quickly become little more than a failed exercise in bloodletting.

A more contemporary text, Brian Friel’s *Translations*, develops the idea of translation as treason. By dramatizing the grave losses and tragic consequences that accompany the British soldiers’ translation of Irish place names in the 1830’s, he reminds us to what extent the vitality of a nation’s culture is rooted in its language. A few of the play’s characters clearly see this linguistic manoeuvre as a treasonous sell-out of their traditions and themselves. The unnamings of their familiar ancestral world is for them a kind of ironic expulsion from Eden, more suggestive of apocalypse than genesis. Ironically, too, here the “source” culture is shown to be the “target” of takeover, of appropriation and assimilation. The weapons of this war are words, the strategy translation.

Although these acts of translation carry superficial overtones of transformation and transition, they also convey the subtler and more sinister implication of transgression. In the play the principal translator-transgressor is Owen, a “go-between” and intermediary who describes himself as a man “employed as a part-time, under-

paid, civilian interpreter. My job is to translate the quaint, archaic tongue you people persist in speaking into the King's good English."²² Having lost faith in his native language and culture, he now collaborates actively with the British soldiers to subvert his ancestral inheritance. In consort with Owen, some characters attempt to demonstrate the limits of unilingual lives and argue that a second language offers the exciting prospect of deliverance into a wider world. But the play itself sounds a darker note, showing the potential danger in the acquisition of English if it means the loss of their native tongue and thus a continued existence as unilingual beings. Of course, the ultimate and all-encompassing irony of *Translations* is demonstrated, throughout the play, in the presentation of nearly all Gaelic speeches in English for the benefit of modern, unilingual audiences.

It is both interesting and illuminating to reflect on the views of Shelley and Friel in the context of contemporary Canadian practices in the field of translation. Most modern readers, in Canada as elsewhere, lack the linguistic skills of the poet and the playwright. As a rule, our reading of foreign literature in translation is likely to be a matter of necessity rather than choice. However, given the extraordinary diversity in the quality of translations published in Canada, we must never forget that our reading of them is always, in some sense, an act of blind faith — faith in the translator, the editor, and often the reviewer on whom we depend to alert us to problems in the “transfusion” process. This dependence is still more acute, and the faith itself absolute, for unilingual Canadian readers who wish to be knowledgeable about literary concerns and achievements beyond their own native language.

WHAT FOLLOWS IS a variety of observations on my experience in the area of literary translation. Like many anglophone Canadians, I first encountered French-Canadian literature — *The Tin Flute*, as it happens — in translation in high school, where I happily accepted Hannah Josephson's version of what Gabrielle Roy had to say. Since that time, I have gradually built up a knowledge of French grammar and vocabulary through courses in the Modern Language and Literature program at the University of Toronto and the Master's program in Comparative Canadian Literature at the Université de Sherbrooke. There, in 1970-1971, I was taught to be far more skeptical about the accuracy and reliability of Canadian translations. Since that time I have been able to observe firsthand and participate in translation activity in Canada in the following ways: evaluating manuscripts dealing with translation for the Aid to Scholarly Publications Programme of the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and samples of translation for which a grant is sought from the Canada Council Translation Grants Programme; editing the third edition of the translation *Bibliography* originally published by the Humanities Research Council of Canada; working as both

member and chairman of CFH's Translation Committee and the Canada Council's Translation Jury; writing individual reviews of translations for *Canadian Literature*; editing and introducing John Glassco's translation of Jean-Charles Harvey's *Les Demi-civilisés* as *Fear's Folly* in the Carleton Library Series; and finally, compiling the first six annual reviews of Canadian translations for the "Letters in Canada" issue of the *University of Toronto Quarterly*. (The last of these tasks always seemed to me a "write of spring" that was at once both exhaustive and exhausting in its demands on academic time and energy at the very point in the university year when both were rapidly dwindling.) In the following comments, I want to concentrate on observations arising from these varied experiences, with particular attention to the roles played by translator, editor, and reviewer in the production of translations in Canada.

In the evaluation of texts for publication I support existing procedures for judging the merits of scholarly studies, and agree that a sample of a proposed translation must be assessed to determine its quality *when the translator's work is unknown*. However, it seems to me ridiculous to spend all-too-limited arts-council funds to determine the merits of a translation proposed by a translator whose past work has been of consistently excellent quality — for example, Philip Stratford, D. G. Jones, Ray Ellenwood, Sheila Fischman, or Larry Shouldice, among others. Such approval procedures cause annoying delays for a publisher who wishes to offer contemporary texts to a larger readership while they still retain their currency. An evaluation system providing rapid approval of the proposals made by demonstrably first-rate translators would undoubtedly encourage others to strive for a higher standard. I have long felt, too, that our best translators deserve a higher rate of remuneration for their labour, which might prove to be a still more effective incentive to those still seeking to master the exacting art of translation. By contrast, I cannot countenance the recurrent funding of individuals and publishing houses who consistently present to Canadian readers work that is carelessly done and decidedly substandard and ought to be embarrassing to any self-respecting editor. In these cases sound funding policy demands that financial support be withheld until such translators clearly demonstrate a change of art.

My duties as editor of the third edition of the translation *Bibliography* resemble the task of evaluating manuscripts in the sense that the work is also demanding and tiring, often quite tedious but undeniably a necessary preliminary labour for academic research. I am now totally convinced that a true bibliographer is a very peculiar animal indeed, and regularly doubt that I belong to the species. The reality of such a project soon becomes apparent in the constant need to have an alert mind and an unwavering eye for detail. For these reasons I am particularly fortunate to be able to build upon the work of Philip Stratford in the second edition. My own challenges in compiling recent entries no doubt conform to habitual difficulties faced by all bibliographers: lamenting the lack of convenient

access to comprehensive information about current Canadian translations in reliable bibliographies; pursuing books announced but never published; tracking down copies to supplement details provided in other publications or to resolve the contradictions between conflicting references; restraining my annoyance at translators and publishers who ignore requests for information or who provide very cryptic responses to questions they alone can answer. On the other hand, many individuals have been remarkably generous in helping me in this way — among others, editors at Anansi and Guernica, Irène Aubrey at the National Library, and the staff of the *Index translationum* project at UNESCO headquarters in Paris. Such assistance is the more welcome and encouraging for its rarity, and undeniably expedites the completion of large projects.

While bibliographical endeavours are often a solitary activity, membership on translation committees and juries permits contact with a wider fellowship. My work with the Translation Committee of CFH coincided with a brief tenure on the Board of Directors as the result of a mistaken reading of the Constitution. A return to the status of standing-committee chairman increased my feeling of marginalization. It was also frustrating to have so few funds to work with and to see most of them required to defray travel and meal expenses for a small but geographically scattered membership. Some very capable and knowledgeable individuals declined invitations to serve on the committee. Very early in our deliberations we were compelled to acknowledge the many obstacles to improving the system for the evaluation and funding of translations in Canada, and saw how little action was taken in response to the circulation of a list of central Canadian texts not yet translated. Throughout the time of my involvement with this committee, the CFH staff were very supportive and helpful, always willing to provide whatever assistance they could to expedite our work. I concede that my feelings of frustration with this committee may well be an admission of personal inadequacy, and not a sign of institutional breakdown; but a growing sense of futility soon made it impossible for me to accept the offer of an additional term as chairman. I simply could not ignore a growing conviction that the committee's budget would give far better value if assigned instead to the publication of a few more excellent translations.

On the other hand, my experience as a member for three years of the Canada Council Translation Jury was an entirely different matter. My fellow jurors gave excellent value for their modest stipend, and officials at the Council were always very helpful and accommodating to us. At the end of the three years, I left this jury with some regret. On the basis of my own tenure there, I can assure all Canadian translators that their works are given very careful scrutiny indeed. The Council's initiative in establishing two generous awards for Canadian translations demonstrates its responsible leadership in the promotion of an activity so vital to the intellectual life of a bilingual country.

The three years I spent on this jury coincided with the last three years in which I wrote the long annual review of Canadian translations for the "Letters in Canada" issue. In a very real sense the work of a juror is a task of close reading, of *re-viewing* what has been seen by the translator and observed by the editor looking at the views and vision of the original author. By way of some observations on the work of Canadian translators and editors, I would like to turn now to several reflections on my experience as a reviewer of their collaborative efforts.

IN HIS PREFACE TO *Poems of French Canada* (1977), F. R. Scott notes that a translation may be said to resemble the original text upon which it is based because neither is ever finished. His comment echoes views expressed earlier, in *Dialogue sur la traduction à propos du "Tombeau des rois"*, in which he argues that "the original poem is itself a translation into a chosen language of that inner stirring of emotion and thought which started the poet on the act of creation." Furthermore, he adds, "In one sense even the reading of a poem is a form of translation."³ Nevertheless, whatever the number of "translation" steps between the conception of the source and the reading of the target text, none of the "go-betweens" must make Owen's mistake of losing sight of the meaning and value of the original and believing that such a loss is entirely unavoidable. Thus, in his introductory remarks to the Hébert-Scott dialogue, Frye takes issue with Frost's (and by extension with Shelley's) view that it is the poetry itself that is lost in the translation. Rather, states Frye, "a translation, when thorough enough, may be a critical elucidation of its original as well as a translation."⁴ Here Frye implicitly defines the ideal effect of all translations: to lead the reader back to the original. For this reason, first-rate translators are always careful to provide full bibliographical information about the source text and ensure that the edition upon which their translation is based is authoritative. Regrettably, however, there have been cases in Canada in which translators have selected expurgated editions of works of interest to us primarily because of the "scandalous" nature of the original work — e.g., *Marie Calumet* (Harvest House). Other translators (Lukin Barette in *Sackcloth for Banner*, for instance) so radically bowdlerize the original as to give an entirely new meaning to the concept of "free translation." And who can forget the infamous example of Hannah Josephson's *The Tin Flute*, so justly condemned for its manifest failings as a reliable and idiomatic English equivalent of Roy's novel? Moreover, very few readers of her translation know that it appeared at the very moment that Roy published a major revision of *Bonheur d'occasion* (the second edition, published in 1947). As a result, the Josephson translation was not only gravely flawed and inadequate; it was also instantly obsolete. Obviously there is much to be done, and redone; but unfortunately, as we know, retranslation is not, in and

of itself, a guarantee of reliability. In the end, it all comes down to the question of how respectful the translator has been of the original voice and vision.

In addition to this respect, a translator must not only possess a wide knowledge of the vocabulary, grammar, and cultural context of the original, but also be tenacious and consistent. So often I have seen works in which the translator has been slow to find his stride in the first half of the work, or has allowed his attention to detail to flag as the translation draws to a close, with a consequent decline in quality. On the other hand, there are translators who adhere scrupulously to the original word-order as though convinced that only such an approach will ensure that every detail is transposed. But since versions that are too literal are usually clumsy and unidiomatic, the translator thereby inappropriately casts the annoying shadow of the original language like a pall over the translation. With cavalier disregard for the exacting responsibilities of the craft, other translators offer free-wheeling "tradaptations" (Michel Garneau's term), gratuitously adding and deleting details in a way that falsifies the substance and spirit of the original and makes "carefree" synonymous with "careless." Such intervention in the text may not be treason, but it is a kind of theft, as Andrew Marvell reminds us: "He is translation's thief that addeth more, / As much as he that taketh from the store / Of the first author."⁵ When these "thieves" move with such stealth through the source text, so inattentive to its subtleties and peculiarities, the inevitable consequence is a pared-down style, a blurring of the nuances conveyed by context, and a loss in tone and shading. We have only to consider the problem of capturing satisfactorily the particular style of V.-L. Beaulieu or Blais, Aquin or Maillet to realize how central these concerns are to the question of excellence in translation.

Added to these difficulties are a number of recurrent problems that confront the reader of a careless translation — for example, the distortions caused by overlooking negatives or bypassing parts of the source text when they are enclosed within a repeated word or phrase. We should not minimize the great and constant challenges faced by all translators: how best to deal with colloquialisms, puns, titles, cursing, the *vous/tu* distinction in French, and the use of the target language in the source text, among others. Our best translators, it seems to me, have never forgotten that they are more archer than fletcher, and that a defective aim will inevitably result in a target missed. They remember that their role is creative to a certain point but always in a secondary or subservient capacity. This I take to be Scott's central point about the complexity of the translator's work: "He writes, as it were, to order, yet must create while obeying the order. He is unfree and yet free at the same time."⁶ It is not surprising, then, that some of our best translators, Scott among them, have also been writers, respectfully attuned to the inspirations of others and ever mindful of the encoded meanings in *their* words. Thus, a skilled translation will always be something more than a work of Coleridgean fancy, something less than a product of imagination, though always striving to achieve that quality. Indeed, the

relationship between the original and the translated text may be seen as akin to the connection Coleridge describes between the primary and secondary imagination, since the nature of the latter is essentially that of every excellent translation: "It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*."⁷

Between the author of the original and the reader of the translation, however, the translator does not stand alone, for the editor/publisher is an important collaborator in the enterprise. It is difficult to say where to draw the line of responsibility between these two intermediary figures. Who, for instance, can be held to account for the following blunders in translation: *rumeurs*/wounds, *tristesse*/madness, *menace*/treat, *plage*/page, *moralement*/orally, *lune*/noon, *comment*/now, *canons*/cannons, *nouveau*/now? If we are familiar with the original language, we can recognize the typographical errors here and identify the approximations by considering what the translations *should* be — sounds, sadness, threat, etc. Close, perhaps, but certainly no cigar for either translator or editor here. Regrettably this kind of inexactness is all too commonplace in Canadian translations, and must prompt headshaking confusion in their readers. What, too, can we say when *tough* is transformed into "touch," *funambule* into "sleepwalker," and *consternation* into "concentration"? Clearly, in the midst of such carelessness, the translator and editor are the sleepwalkers, their concentration lost, out of touch with the text, and the consternation will be the reader's.

In a similar way, those who know the source language well can double as detectives and therefore discern the missing link in the following pairs: *palais*/broom, *pommes de terre*/apples, *ravoir*/to see again, *oreiller*/ear, *compagne*/natural world, *épouvantail*/fan, *fournis*/plants, *pleurs*/fears, *mot*/world, *salivation*/salvation, *sortit*/smiled, *Qui*/yes, *mensonges*/dreams, *plainte funèbre*/dark plant, rooks/*rochers*. But what are readers without a firm grounding in the original language to think when, by a muddled metamorphosis, a palace unaccountably turns into a broom (*balai*), a scarecrow into a fan (*évantail*), lies into dreams (*songes*), etc.? Oversights by even the most diligent and careful translator are inevitable, which makes the editor's role in the preparation of a translation a central one. Yet many editors would appear to have a very scanty knowledge of the source language and must therefore accept on faith whatever the translator offers, despite its often quite limited degree of credibility. Consider, for example, this comment by a Canadian translator: "No one reads French in Toronto publishing and they're so mystified, they'll take anyone's word for it. My last literary translations were never read in-house; they were part of a package deal."⁸ Obviously these remarks are an exaggeration and thus subject to qualification; but they contain an important element of truth. It cannot be denied that standards must rise considerably at many publishing houses, and editors skilled in handling texts in two languages must be

engaged if the translations they offer are to be respected and trusted. It is not at all unreasonable to expect that good dictionaries will be used repeatedly throughout the project to ensure textual accuracy and contextual precision. Otherwise, it is certain that we will continue to see *sensibilité* (sensitivity) translated as “sensibility,” *déception* (disappointment) as “deception,” *luxure* (lust) as “luxury,” and *chair* (flesh) as “chair” — which, in the last case, means that *empâté dans une chair jaunâtre et flasque* was once translated into English as “ensconced in a big yellow armchair”! Such a comedy of errors provides amusement for bilingual readers, it is true; but in such cases it is the translator and editor who are the “false friends” of both the author and the reader.

Moreover, editorial negligence in the vetting of Canadian translations is not confined to single words and phrases. Obviously, a knowledge of the meanings of individual words alone is insufficient to detect the subtle complexities of idiom, which a first-rate editor simply must have if the following mistranslations are to be avoided: *J’t’en veux pas* as “I don’t want you”; *Je te voyais venir* as “I saw you coming”; “go out on a monumental toot” as *m’en aller en poussant d’épouvantables hurlements*; and “He’s been fucking up for the last few years” as *il était en amour depuis deux ans*. The editor must share the responsibility with the translator to eliminate such gaffes and *faux pas*, and demonstrate a deeper concern for both the well-made book and the well-done translation. Nevertheless, although it is now sixteen years since the Translation Grants Programme was established by the Canada Council and at least a decade since reviewers began calling for such editorial expertise,⁹ many (most?) Canadian translations are still not receiving an adequate editorial scrutiny prior to publication. Until they do, readers will remain confused and perplexed by what they encounter in the text. Ironically, in the light of Frye’s comment about the ideal effect of excellent work, it is often a *bad* translation that drives them back to the original.

GOOD OR BAD, every translation should certainly send its reviewer back to the source text. As yet another intermediary figure between author and reader, the reviewer, too, has an exacting responsibility, particularly in view of the laxity with which many editors perform their duties. Because unilingual readers must put their complete trust in the translator, the reviewer’s *caveats* are essential and his responsibility substantial. For these reasons a comprehensive scrutiny of the translation is mandatory if the review is to be of any service to readers. This obligation notwithstanding, until quite recently Canadian readers very rarely found any reviews that were a close reading and critical examination of the translation. Even at the present time, most reviews of translations are little more than a very cursory and superficial evaluation of the actual quality of the translation

itself. It is not at all unusual to find only one or two vague sentences on the quality of the translation, which suggests an unwillingness or inability on the reviewer's part to consult the original text in a more than cursory and superficial fashion. A passing acquaintance with the original text, or none at all (some reviewers, apparently unashamedly, go so far as to admit this), can only be seen as a complete abnegation of responsibility. To my mind, a complete juxtaposition of the original and the translation is the *sine qua non* of the reviewer's task. Only a close scrutiny of both in a concurrent reading allows the reviewer to be authoritative and comprehensive in his assessment of the translation's reliability. Only in this way can he detect the careless omission of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and whole pages as well as the gratuitous additions of which so many translators are so fond. True, a detailed examination of this kind is quite tedious and exhausting, but why review the *translation* at all if not in this way? Furthermore, the reviewer must be very familiar with both the source language and its cultural context, not only to determine how correctly the voice of the original is echoed in the translation, but also to identify the original text's subtle allusions — for example, to a poem by Nelligan or a song by Leclerc. Ideally, these encoded cultural references would be recognized and identified by the translator himself, or by an astute editor. When they fail to do so, these tasks necessarily revert to the vigilant reviewer. With few exceptions, he or she is likely to be a native speaker of the target language. It was this conviction that led me, reluctantly, to abandon the English-to-French section of the annual "Letters in Canada" reviews, though I continue to believe that such translations also stand in need of detailed scrutiny.

Another challenge in the world of Canadian translation is that of impartiality. If the world of Canadian literature is small, that of Canadian literary translation is smaller still, and a few years' labour in the field soon gives the worker an acute awareness of the fences that surround it.¹⁰ After a half-dozen years writing the annual "Letters in Canada" reviews, I realized that I had talked to or met or sat on committees with a large number of the translators whose work I was asked to evaluate in manuscript or in published form on a regular basis. More problematic still was the requirement to evaluate the work of former teachers, or colleagues, or friends. We all know that an offer to review such texts is often refused when a glance at the book reveals that a positive response cannot honestly be made. At times mutual friends have reported to me the anger of old acquaintances at an unflattering review. In one extreme case I was informed by an editor that a certain publisher's anger and frustration at my sharp criticisms of his books were so great that he refused to send future publications for review *and*, furthermore, fully intended to punch me in the face if he ever got the chance. (I am happy to report that I have, to date, avoided this unpromising encounter.) All this may be quite normal in the daily round of a book reviewer's professional life, but it is also quite disconcerting, and indicative, as Layton might say, that such a publisher's devotion

to literature is not perfect. But I must also add that I have on occasion received letters from both translators and publishers expressing gratitude that their work was being taken seriously and closely scrutinized.

NO ONE COULD READ and review translations for over a decade in Canada without reaching some general conclusions on both the current state of this difficult art and its future needs and prospects. Throughout this period the journal *ellipse* has continued to provide a forum for both the translation of Canadian poetry and a critical inquiry into the very nature of the activity of translation itself,¹¹ a discussion that has been supplemented by the many fine insights offered by participants in the University of Ottawa translation symposium — in particular the outstanding contribution by Philip Stratford.¹² In *ellipse* we find the ideal of bilingual translation, which immediately achieves the primary objective of leading readers to the original text. While such a format is not economically feasible for all literary texts, the requirements for a good translation of poetry do apply to other forms as well. In all cases, a first-rate translation is not a précis or a paraphrase. It must never be subjected to the “treason” or “theft” of a translator for whom it serves merely as a pretext for freewheeling amplifications, approximations, and gratuitous interventions. In every case an excellent translation is both reliable in content and graceful in style, neither too loose nor too literal in its interpretations. Ideally, it is an authentic counterpart of the source text, providing the reader with one work in two languages, not with two fully independent works. While their appearance can never be identical, the twinning of texts must at least be fraternal, with very strong family resemblances. When the ensuing translation seems flawed, the reviewer must at times acknowledge that its limitations are those of the target language itself, that there will always be, as Scott suggests to Hébert, an “*élément intraduisible*”¹³ in the original.

At the present time the major needs for translation in Canada are fourfold: increased funding to arts organizations to permit the translation of central cultural documents in both official languages (a quite reasonable, but as yet unrealized, policy for a bilingual country); an unwavering commitment by publishing houses large and small to increasing very substantially the number of translations produced in Canada; speedier publication of translated versions, to give unilingual readers a sense of what is current in the other language; and, finally, translations of much higher quality and lower price. It must be very distressing to hardworking translators to see how often, and how quickly, their work is remaindered, only to sit unsold even at much-reduced prices. Because translations that are neither bought nor read make a mockery of the bureaucracy instituted to promote them, it is time to adopt as a standard policy the publication of some translations in paperback

only, if that is what is required to achieve solvency in the business. Too often, it seems to me, translators/editors/publishers have lost sight of the primary objective — to produce first-rate translations that will be *read*. What, finally, is the point of translating or retranslating a text for sale in an expensive slipcased edition if the quality of the work itself is as low as the price is high? Ironically, in such instances the cost of the book appears to be a useful if unwitting discouragement to the reading of an inferior translation. But good or bad, if the translation cannot be sold at an affordable price, increasing numbers of translators will be forced to close their dictionaries and turn their minds to other pursuits.

In conclusion, we might recall Shelley's indictment of the "vain" endeavour of translation in terms of a crucible that conceals the colour and odour of violets. We must acknowledge that, in the contents/container relationship of original text and translated version, there are many such "crucibles" among Canadian translations. It is all the more disturbing to encounter such indifference to the necessity of excellent translations in an officially bilingual country like ours, because the whole is always diminished by any downgrading of its parts. In a respectful exchange of visions, no cultural appropriation need be feared. Brian Friel's *Translations* offers us a translator's ideal response by contrasting the "traitor-translator" Owen to Yolland, the young British soldier humbly struggling to "decode" the Irish language in an honest search for "perfect equation" and "perfect congruence": "I can only say that I feel — I feel very foolish to — to — to be working here and not to speak your language."¹⁴ Perhaps something like this kind of foolish feeling is the catalyst required to bring English- and French-speaking Canadians into a closer congruence. In literature a comparable paralleling of languages and cultures is made possible by the translator's central position and role — call it mediator, midwife, archer, bridge-builder, lens, threshold. Through a careful echoing of the original voice he makes us believe, as Friel does in *Translations*, that we are hearing not an echo but the voice itself, speaking directly to us. When this happens, the "crucible" of the translation no longer impedes our sense of direct contact with the colour and odour of the "violets," and the efforts of the translator cannot be described as "vain." When this happens, too, the tragic bloodletting of Friel's play is avoided and, with a minimum loss of vitality, the translation preserves the lifeblood of the original vision in this process Shelley so insightfully likens to a transfusion.

NOTES

¹ "A Defence of Poetry," in Carl R. Woodring, ed., *Prose of the Romantic Period* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), p. 492.

² *Translations* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), p. 29.

³ "Third Version — Note explicative par Frank Scott," in Anne Hébert et Frank Scott, *Dialogue sur la traduction à propos du "Tombeau des rois"* (Montréal: HMH, 1970), pp. 94, 95.

- ⁴ "Foreword," *Dialogue sur la traduction*, pp. 13-14.
- ⁵ "To His Worthy Friend Doctor Witty upon His Translation of the 'Popular Errors,'" in Elizabeth Story Donno, ed., *Andrew Marvell: The Complete Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 62.
- ⁶ Undated letter to Anne Hébert, quoted in *Dialogue sur la traduction*, p. 56.
- ⁷ "Biographia Literaria: or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions," in Donald A. Stauffer, ed., *Selected Poetry and Prose of Coleridge* (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 263.
- ⁸ Quoted in Ray Ellenwood, "Some Actualities of Canadian Literary Translation," in Camille R. La Bossière, ed., *Translation in Canadian Literature: Symposium 1982* (Ottawa: Univ. of Ottawa Press, 1983), p. 69.
- ⁹ See, for example, Christina Roberts-Van Oordt, untitled review, *Queen's Quarterly*, 82, no. 2 (Summer 1975), 294-95, and I. M. Owen, "Bridge of Tongues," *Books in Canada*, 5, no. 12 (December 1976), 5-6.
- ¹⁰ For a witty and revealing discussion of this question see Larry Shouldice, "On the Politics of Literary Translation in Canada," in La Bossière, ed., *Translation in Canadian Literature*, pp. 73-82.
- ¹¹ See especially *ellipse*, 21 (1977), *ellipse*, 29/30 (1982), and *ellipse*, 36 (1986).
- ¹² "The Anatomy of a Translation: *Pélagie-la-Charrette*," in La Bossière, ed., *Translation in Canadian Literature*, pp. 121-30.
- ¹³ *Dialogue sur la traduction*, p. 54.
- ¹⁴ *Translations*, pp. 45, 32.

IN FOUR ACRES

Robert Beum

The skipping stone sunfish flash morning stays —
too long for time to know, and the kildeer
skimming the ripples cry nothing it hears:

summer stands still, the elders will be held
spangled with finches, musky draws will wave
ochre and gold where one boy stops the hours.

books in review

QUEBECHOES

ANNE HÉBERT, *Héloïse*, trans. Sheila Fischman. Stoddart, \$12.95.

MARIE-CLAIRE BLAIS, *Deaf to the City*, trans. Carol Dunlop. Lester & Orpen Dennys, \$13.95.

ROBERT LALONDE, *Sweet Madness*, trans. David Homel. Stoddart, \$13.95.

DENYSE BOUCHER, *The Fairies Are Thirsty*, trans. Alan Brown. Talonbooks, \$5.95.

WHILE IT IS possible to gain a general sense of the merits of a translation by a random sampling, a comprehensive assessment requires a line-by-line comparison of the French and English texts.

Each of the four texts has been subjected to this kind of close reading. The order in which they are listed above is, in general, the order of their merit as translations: Sheila Fischman's is characteristically first-rate and Carol Dunlop's is often excellent, whereas the English texts provided by David Homel and Alan Brown can only be recommended if accompanied by a very substantial *caveat lector*.

Fischman's *Héloïse*, a translation of the 1980 Hébert novel of the same name (reviewed in *Canadian Literature*, 91), is named for the *femme fatale* and vampire who serves the satanic Bottereau. It is her sinister mission to drag Christine's fiancé/husband Bernard into the underworld of the dead beneath the streets of Paris. The grim fatalism of the novel is enhanced by Hébert's inspired choice of settings: Père Lachaise cemetery, sterile *fin de siècle* apartments, the shadowy tunnels of the Paris *métro*, and the staircases linking the worlds "dessus" and "dessous." These terms are highlighted in the novel's epigraph, taken from "En guise de fête" in

Hébert's *Le Tombeau des rois*, and echoed by similar images elsewhere in the novel. The reader eventually comprehends the true nature of Héloïse and her absolute enslavement to the power of Bottereau, who obliges her to claim Bernard's life if she wishes to continue her own. The novel concludes on a note of brooding fatality with the death of the young couple, irrevocably drawn into the city's underworld in an unqualified triumph of death over life, evil over innocence. To convey her vision Hébert has chosen a simple, evocative, sensuous prose style; and its texture and rhythms are very sensitively captured in Fischman's English version. Her rendering of *Héloïse*, like her earlier translations of Hébert and many other Quebec writers, provides a clear and undiminished echo of the author's voice. Throughout, Fischman's prose is fluid, idiomatic, and precise — absolutely flawless for pages at a time. Some of the original paragraphing is altered for clarity, and on occasion the translator has wisely amplified some of the cryptic geographical references in the French text. Finally, Fischman acknowledges Donald Winkler's (very able) assistance in translating the songs in *Héloïse*.

The shortcomings of this translation, while not extensive, do undercut somewhat its general excellence and reliability. It would, for example, seem advisable to identify for anglophone readers the source of the novel's epigraph, especially if we remember the corresponding death imagery in Hébert's poetry. In the text itself, Fischman omits a few descriptive phrases and some adjectives and adverbs from the original, although none of these alters Hébert's meaning in any significant way. Of greater concern is the omission of a half-dozen full sentences and fragments (pp. 23, 47, 51, 73, 96, and 101), including the two sentences that follow Christine's "What did you do all day, Bernard?" (51). Moreover, the translation is

at times a bit too literal, overlooking a more precise English idiom: *frontière* (border/boundary) is given as "frontier," *chaudrons* (pots) as "cauldrons," *crie* (shout) as "crying," and *carrefours* (intersections) as "crossroads." A similar inexactness can be seen when the doctor's reference to Bernard's apparent suicide attempt is translated as "murder" (85); and a subtle nuance in Hébert's text is lost when Fischman offers "Bernard manages to walk a little way with Héloïse" (66) as a translation of *Bernard obtient d'Héloïse de marcher un peu avec elle*. Finally, there is one clear example of mistranslation in the text: the meaning of *une silhouette féminine qui glisse le long de la grille, depuis le haut jusqu'en bas* is reversed in "a female figure ascending the fence" (63). Still, none of these errors and omissions is very grave; Fischman's work in *Héloïse* can only enhance her reputation as a very attentive and reliable medium for the transmission of Quebec's literary voices to anglophone audiences.

Similar lines of communication have been established by Carol Dunlop in *Deaf to the City*, her English version of Blais's award-winning 1979 novel *Le Sourd dans la ville*. Like Hébert, Blais offers us a bleak and depressing vision of urban life — in this case, a portrait of despair, illness, violence, and suicide as they affect a variety of characters at Hôtel des Voyageurs, a name suggestive of their uprooted and drifting existence. *Le Sourd dans la ville* adopts a very complex, convoluted syntax to convey the characters' psychological malaise and introspective ruminations. Its style weaves an intricate fabric of action and reflection, deeply internalized. Although overlong sentences and the absence of paragraphing pose major challenges for the translator, they are, on the whole, more than adequately met by Dunlop. The translator is consistently attuned to the complex nuances of the French text and admirably tenacious in unravelling its

Gordian-knotted prose. The merits of her work are therefore considerable: very little gratuitous addition (a recurrent and unfortunate problem in the work of many other translators); a correction of Blais's unidiomatic English; an attempt to reflect the *vous/tu* distinction in forms of address in the original; assiduous attention to descriptive detail; and the correction of a major typesetting error in the original (138). On the whole, Dunlop regularly provides her audience with a reliable echo of Blais's voice.

Nevertheless, while the translator's intentions are often commendable, the results are not always satisfactory. Dunlop addresses the problem of how to indicate the presence of English in the original text by informing us that such phrases are presented in italics; but not all the English in the original has, after all, been italicized, and some of the italicized material in the translation did not appear in English in the original French text. As a result of these and similar confusions, the reader who trusts the editorial headnote on italics will very often be misled. At times Dunlop overlooks adverbs and clauses, and a few sentences are omitted. The translator also vacillates on occasion between readings that are either too literal or too loose. Phrasing such as "there was a brusque torment" (216) adheres too rigidly to the original French and thus falls short of the mark as good idiomatic English, while the occasional tendency to offer free approximations means that a more precise rendering of the text is overlooked. Thus, *nombreuses* (numerous) is given as "a few," *Plusieurs* (several) as "Some," *pelle* (shovel) as "hoe," and *peut-être* (possibly) as "probably." Such inattention to Blais's nuances can be misleading when, for example, the collective anxiety explicit in Mike's question to Florence, *pourquoi ne nous aidez-vous pas*, is translated as "why don't you help her?" (180), or when *aveuglément, fidèlement* is reduced

to "instinctively" (40). There are also instances of misinterpretation in *Deaf to the City*, exemplified in the following: *solo-nelle* (solemn) becomes "personal," *douzième* (twelfth) is given as "seventh," and *de loin* (from far away) is translated as "nearby." In conclusion, however, it must be acknowledged that *Le Sourde dans la ville* is certainly among the most difficult of Quebec texts to translate, and very few translators in Canada could surpass the calibre of Dunlop's often excellent work here.

Another award-winning novel, Robert Lalonde's *La Belle Epouvante* (reviewed in *Canadian Literature*, 95), has been translated into English by David Homel under the title *Sweet Madness*. In journal format the novel relates the obsessive musings of its unnamed thirty-year-old narrator on his preoccupation with "Elle." With an excessive self-indulgence that is quite irritating, the unsympathetic narrator sets out to dissect the intricate emotions of sexual love and to offer an anatomy of its attendant ecstasy. As a whole the novel lacks dramatic tension and an engaging narrative line, and consequently falls into a banality so stultifying that even the narrator repeatedly recognizes it. The weary reader cannot but concur when this narrator laments, "J'aurais même aimé savoir écrire. . . . J'aurais aimé savoir me taire aussi." Certainly in reading *La Belle Epouvante* we lament the author's lack of both skill and silence in a way that is never the case as we struggle to grasp the intricate meanings of *Héloïse* and *Le Sourde dans la ville*. Now readers of *Sweet Madness* will also regret that the task of providing an English version of Lalonde's novel did not fall into the hands of a translator as skilled as Sheila Fischman or Carol Dunlop. It is reasonable, in my opinion, to expect that a translation be no worse than the parent text, and it is possible to hope that it might be better. (A case in point, as the translator himself

so correctly asserted, is *Fear's Folly*, John Glassco's English version of Jean-Charles Harvey's *Les Demi-civilisés*.) There are, it is true, some merits to the Homel translation of Lalonde: the translator identifies the source of the epigraph from Rilke; Homel corrects Lalonde's mistaken use of English in the French version and indicates the presence of dialect in the original. There are many instances where Homel finds appropriate diction, equivalent cadences, and corresponding cultural references (e.g., the hymn on p. 59), and he often provides a clear echo of the voice of Lalonde's narrator. Homel's potential reliability as a listener attentive to the nuances of Lalonde's voice is evident when we encounter work that is flawless for several consecutive pages (e.g., pp. 127-32). These are not negligible merits in Homel's dealing with so monotonous and unfocused a text. Lalonde's novel is undeniably intractable in many respects, so Homel's task is daunting.

However, the challenge eventually overwhelms him. The weaknesses of *Sweet Madness* are numerous, from minor oversights to major errors. The typographical and spelling mistakes may perhaps be blamed on editorial laxity, but responsibility for other weaknesses remains with the translator. Occasionally Homel adds details and sentences that have no basis in the text, but he also omits descriptive adjectives, adverbs, phrases, and clauses, as well as approximately two dozen full sentences, including an important statement about the narrator's "folie" (26) and several sentences charging the reader with hypocrisy (133). When "on" is omitted in "You put back [on] your yoke in no time" (34), the original meaning is sharply altered. In another case an omitted sentence results in confusion when a subsequent reference is no longer intelligible (87). A related shortcoming in the translation is its reductive response to the complexities of the original. Two exam-

ples can stand for many: *A la campagne, se mettre au blanc, comme diraient les Français, s'ils avaient une petite idée de ce qu'est notre hiver* becomes simply "To snow country" (29), and *les endroits où murmure l'eau et où coule le lait de la sagesse et de la sensualité* is inappropriately reduced to "innocent places" (83). Furthermore, Homel's prose is too often inexact and unidiomatic, foregoing even the limited authenticity demanded by the writing in *La Belle Epouvante*. We easily detect the shadow of the original French behind the following words and phrases: "peltry," "in function of," "Claustration," "infatigable," and "I live out a presage." Compounding these weaknesses are the clumsiness and imprecision of "she-duck," "obligingness," "broken-field repartee," "getting my knickers in a twist," and "Is it against the law to imagine treasures [*le meilleur*] instead of thieves [*le pire*]?"

Although the preceding are distracting and unfortunate errors in the translation, other areas of weakness in *Sweet Madness* are much more serious: mistranslation and the mishandling of songs and allusions. Misinterpretation can be seen very clearly in Homel's handling of the title. Though elusive, the title *La Belle Epouvante* unmistakably focuses on the concepts of beauty and fear, and variations on these terms echo throughout the novel. However, in none of the places where Lalonde uses these terms to provide a gloss on his title (e.g., pp. 19, 95, 116) does Homel use "sweet madness" to signal this connection. In addition, imprecision is repeatedly in evidence when we find *grenouilles* (frogs) translated as "cat-tails" (*quenouilles*), *gris* (gray) as "bronze," *convention* as "conversation," and *sentir* (smell) as "sense." Inexplicably, Homel alters "Etc." to *Und so weider* and *la première* to "last" (42), at this point also failing to reflect the masculine/feminine distinction of the original. In the same way the translator ignores a number of

puns and misunderstands the straightforward meanings of the French text; thus, *le soleil d'aujourd'hui? Il ferait fondre des glaciers de problèmes* is given as "the sunny present? We could make whole glaciersful of problems melt" (56-57), whereas the French words clearly comment on the heat of the day itself and mean that "today's sun could melt . . ."

Furthermore, Homel fails to acknowledge the allusion to Nelligan (91) and is less successful than Dunlop in alerting the reader to the use of English in the original. Some lines from "A la claire fontaine" (21) are dropped, and some of the details, as well as the rhyme and rhythm, are omitted from Leclerc's song (29), though Fischman's solution to the translation of songs in *Héloïse* indicates that such translation challenges can be successfully met. Two lines from "As Time Goes By" are simply overlooked (137). On the other hand, to his credit Homel corrects all the errors except one in Lalonde's use of a Carole King song, and offers endnotes to identify the songs by Baez, King, and Billie Holiday.

Here again, however, good intentions do not lead to a reliable translation and text. In transcribing the lyrics of two songs by Holiday, Homel fails to detect a major error in Lalonde's comprehension and transcription (the French text gives the third line below as "My heart wants more"). Furthermore, the translator introduces an error of his own (*lives* becomes *lies*), and incorrectly identifies the second Holiday excerpt (137), which is in fact taken from "Deep Song" and should read as follows:

Where can I be headed for?
The blues crawl in my door
To lick my heart once more.
Love lives in a lonely land
Where there's no helping hand
To understand.

For all these reasons, the assertion of "diligent efforts" notwithstanding, the reader

must remain very skeptical about the collaborative endeavours of author, publisher, and translator in the writing of *La Belle Epouvante* and *Sweet Madness*. Whatever the limitations of the former, and they are indeed substantial, the latter remains inadequate as a trustworthy English echo of its many voices. Homel can do, and has done, better work than this.

The same can be said of Alan Brown with reference to his achievement as translator of Boucher's *Les Fées ont soif*. This is the play that aroused so much controversy in the summer of 1978 when it was refused an arts grant to support the original production by Théâtre du Nouveau Monde. Boucher's aggressive approach to her subject indicts "Toute une culture d'hommes célibataires" and their "fantasmes de virginité." As a highly stylized account of women's socialization and exploitation in a world ruled by men, Boucher examines the search by women for new self-defined roles through the discovery of a maternal language and an understanding of their female ancestors. The three characters of the play are representative of archetypes/stereotypes determined to break out of prescriptive moulds: Madeleine, an alcoholic prostitute; a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary; and Marie, a despondent housewife and mother who occupies a vague kind of middle ground between whore and virgin. Largely through monologue and songs, *Fées* conveys the women's insular experience; and Boucher's innovative staging demonstrates their gradual movement from confinement across neutral ground to their own free place. At the end of the play the audience is challenged to "imagine" a new order of experience and to picture for themselves, in Boucher's own words, "la femme réelle . . . la réalité des femmes."

To "image" forth Boucher's vision of both the old and the new order, to echo the distinctive voices and verbal constructs of her play, Brown first had to decide

which version of *Les Fées ont soif* would be used as his source text. The verso of the title-page in *The Fairies Are Thirsty* acknowledges "1979" as the copyright date of the original. By the time *Fairies* appeared, Boucher had published four French "editions" of her play, including the second edition at the beginning of 1979, a greatly revised third edition later that same year, and a facsimile reprint of this version as the "4^e édition" in 1981. With a few major variations (especially two major borrowings from the second edition) Brown's text appears to be based on this third/fourth edition. His choice is easily discernible if the stage directions of the translation are compared to those in the second and fourth editions of the original, but it must be pointed out that *The Fairies Are Thirsty* is not an exact translation of *any* of these editions. This is not to say that the English version is without merit, however. At times it is reliable, providing corresponding colloquialisms in a fluid English vernacular. There are instances where Brown finds good equivalents for the very demanding puns used by Boucher (*p'tit chiâtre* becomes "sick-guyatrist," for instance). He wisely offers English equivalents for most of the French names given by Madeleine and Marie (16-17), though the translation of *Jeanne-D'Arc* as "Jo Anne" misses a resonant echo in the original (and what are we to make of the metamorphosis of *Abélard* into "the Six Million Dollar Man" while *Casanova* remains unaltered?).

At the outset Brown translates Boucher's untitled prefatory note, but excludes the prefaces by Jean-Louis Roux and Jean-Luc Bastien, an unfortunate omission when we consider how much useful information these directors provide about the meaning and impact of the original production (see especially the fifty pages of photocopies from Montreal newspapers included in the second edition). On occasion we find in *Fairies* the

gratuitous addition of descriptive detail as well as full sentences. The anglophone reader must also realize that many of the stage directions are entirely Brown's own: he turns individual speeches into choral song (17, 30-31), and adds other staging details (46, 54) without basis in *Fées*. Still more problematic is the addition of two long speeches by Madeleine (20-21, 49) lifted from different contexts in the second edition. It seems to me reasonable to expect that Brown acknowledge, in a "Translator's Note," so major a conflation of two distinct texts.

Far graver are the difficulties posed by the many contractions of Boucher's text in Brown's reworking of it. As well as the oversights regarding descriptive details, we find the exclusion of many full sentences, of which the most serious are the omission of four lines from the statue's last major speech (66-67) and a four-sentence stage direction after the "Song to Father Christmas" (37). There are, furthermore, a number of flaws in Brown's translation of several other songs in the play, for he has not solved this problem as wisely as Fischman does in *Héloïse*: "Song of the Odyssey" (16) drops an entire stanza, including its significant references to lovers, mothers, and waves; the lyrics in Marie's song (20) are radically altered with the consequent loss of important references to *barbarie*, *Spiritum sanctum eliminum*, husbands, fathers, and cats — all ideas and images echoed elsewhere in the play; the translation of "Madeleine's Song" (23) fails to reproduce its colloquial character; and the position of the Chorus in the "Song of Let's Suppose" (30) is unnecessarily altered.

Of related interest are the problems posed by Boucher's allusions to well-known songs. Although Brown persistently alters cultural references to give the text an anglophone flavour, he inexplicably retains the French lyrics in Marie's singing of a Félix Leclerc song and mistakenly

reports its title (21). Madeleine's "Take my hand I'm a stranger in paradise" (64) is italicized in the English version, but Brown, unlike Dunlop, provides no indication that italics are meant to signal the use of English in the original. However, there is no consistency in Brown's approach to this matter, for Madeleine's earlier singing of "Blue Moon" is translated as "Plaisir d'amour." Clearly, the whole matter of Boucher's use of English needs to be considered very carefully; in none of the above instances is Brown's *ad hoc* response satisfactory.

Finally, there are the problems caused by mistranslation. They include imprecision and lost nuance in individual words — *cuisse*s (thighs) translated as "legs," *oublié* (forgotten) as "rejected," *fée* regularly translated as "star-fairy" though Boucher uses this terminology only once — as well as more serious misinterpretations of words, phrases, and sentences. Thus, *baseball* is illogically translated as "hockey" (42), and *toi* in the statue's final speeches is variously rendered as "you," "myself," and "ourselves" (66-67). Because one of the syllabified nouns (46-47) is overlooked, the remaining terms are incorrectly assigned, and confusion and inaccuracy are the inevitable result. Similar carelessness is apparent in many other places in the text. By the omission of the negative in "It has words for what I'm seeking" (46) Brown directly contradicts the meaning of *Elle ne nomme rien de ce que je cherche*. The complexity of Madeleine's description of herself as a whore *Qui voudrait bien se faire appeler maman / D'un bon mari* (Who'd really like to be called "Mom" / By a good husband) is quite lost when the lines are translated as "I'd like to hear myself called 'mother' / And have a kind husband." Perhaps a bleary-eyed typesetter is responsible for the Freudian slip in omitting "up" when "women prostitutes are to blow the system" (64) is offered as the English version

of *les femmes prostituées vont tout faire sauter*; but it seems only fair to censure both translator and editor for their own drowsiness when we read "*Half-walking*" (48) as the translation of *Pleine de sommeil* (Full of sleep; Half-awake). Other typographical and stylistic errors in the text of *The Fairies Are Thirsty* clearly demonstrate the need for much closer editorial supervision and authorial proof-reading. Such carelessness, while inexcusable at this point in the literary life of our country, is by no means a rare occurrence in the translation of Canadian books. Too often, the prevailing editorial attitude (it could not be a "policy") regarding translations in Canada appears to be a simple-minded belief in the reader's blissful ignorance or good-humoured forbearance, and a conviction (to adapt an old, and discredited, view of marriage) that a bad translation is better than no translation at all. Alan Brown cannot believe this to be true, but his work in *The Fairies Are Thirsty* in no way suggests his lack of faith in such a creed.

In summary, it is clear that while Fischman and Dunlop have been assiduous in their attentiveness to the demands of the source texts, Homel and Brown have not. Anglophone audiences can unreservedly attend to the carefully enunciated English performances in *Héloïse* and *Deaf to the City*, confident that they are hearing reliable echoes of the voices of Hébert and Blais; but reservations as well as hearing aids are recommended for both *Sweet Madness* and *The Fairies Are Thirsty* if the same audiences hope to hear an unmuffled English echo of what Lalonde and Boucher have articulated in French.

JOHN J. O'CONNOR



EX-CENTRIC

MICHAEL ONDAATJE, *In the Skin of a Lion: A Novel*. McClelland & Stewart, \$22.50.

IT IS INTERESTING that the form which postmodernism has taken in Canadian fiction has been that of simultaneously taking seriously and challenging the conventions of realism, arguably our dominant novelistic tradition. One of the most common modes of this paradoxical postmodern use and abuse of conventions is what I have called "historiographic meta-fiction" — works which are self-consciously grounded in social and political history. *In the Skin of the Lion* is a good example of this kind of fiction and, like *Beautiful Losers* and many others before it, it is also a poet's novel, with carefully structured image patterns (here, based on earth, air, fire, and especially water) and narrative motifs (damaged arms and painted bodies, among them). It mixes the historical and the fictional, and offers to the reader a now characteristic Ondaatje blend of the surreal and the terribly real that leaves certain scenes lingering in the reader's memory long after finishing the novel: insect-like lights (sheaves of cattails alight) in the dark, held by Finnish loggers skating on a frozen river; a nun blown by the wind off the Bloor Street viaduct; an allegorical dramatic production in the illicit darkness of Toronto's R. C. Harris Waterfiltration Plant; tannery dyers with their white heads and coloured bodies; the thief, Caravaggio, ironically painted blue to match the prison roof from which he then escapes; the tour of smells in the Garden of the Blind. The power of these scenes resides at once in the imagination of both novelist and reader and in the clear connection of the novelistically imagined with the historically known — here ranging from the material history of the Toronto cityscape to the ethnic history of the Macedonian com-

munity that Lillian Petroff has been unearthing for us.

It does not take us long to realize that, despite the historical setting and personages, we are in the realm of overt metafiction. An opening disclaimer announces: "This is a work of fiction and certain liberties have at times been taken with some dates and locales." And, we might add, certain fates have been imagined where the historical record has remained silent: the end of famous Canadian missing person, Ambrose Small, for instance. The second of two epigraphs of the novel also points us to the metafictional orientation of this text: "Never again will a single story be told as though it were the only one." This is from John Berger, one of the most committed historiographic metafictionists writing today, one whose own fiction contains the same mix of history, class commentary, political analysis, subverted realist narrative, and metafictional self-reflexivity as does *In the Skin of a Lion*. As in the fiction of E. L. Doctorow, class is an important issue in this novel; so too is race and ethnic difference, as it also is in the work of Maxine Hong Kingston.

I mention these two other novelists because Ondaatje is one of the few North American writers who address the issue of our immigrant, working-class history, a history silenced by official versions of public events. As both historiographers like Dominick LaCapra and novelists like Rudy Wiebe have recently been arguing, the version of the past that survives is the history told by the written documents and photographs that name and picture those deemed central. We know today the names of the rich (Ambrose Small) and the politically powerful (R. C. Harris, city commissioner), but we do not know the names of the peripheral, of the women of the rich (Small's mistress), or of the anonymous workers (who built the structures ordered by Harris). These are among the outsiders, the "ex-centrics,"

that are made the paradoxical (and very postmodern) centre of the novel. The protagonist, Patrick Lewis, may belong to the centre in terms of race and language, but he is working class and from the country. He also, of course, works hard to alienate *himself*, in order to protect himself from contact and from having to act. The novel is the story of his insertion into community and responsible action. As an ex-centric, Patrick comes to find a place among the others who populate the east end of Toronto early in the century: the nameless immigrants who make possible the dreams and visions of the powerful (the Bloor St. Viaduct, the Harris waterworks). Forced to cope with both danger and anonymity, these immigrant workers exist but remain unrecorded, denied their part in the historical process. Lacking the language of power, they cannot even symbolically name themselves and thus construct their own identity.

This is a novel about identity as defined from a position of ex-centricity and marginalization. It is also a story of love and politics, and both are related to language and the power to name. Alice Gull (who has ironically named herself after a parrot) is an actress, a woman of many faces but no past. But it is Alice's love that breaks through Patrick's protective shell of silence, behind which he watches, reflects, but does not act. Her absent past, however, provokes him into a kind of activity, a seeking for historical evidence of her identity. What he learns is not only relevant to Alice:

His own life was no longer a single story but part of a mural, which was a falling together of accomplices. Patrick saw a wondrous night web — all of these fragments of a human order, something ungoverned by the family he was born into or the headlines of the day. . . . [T]he detritus and chaos of the age was realigned.

And that realignment is this novel, the narrative that we too, as readers, have been piecing together.

Patrick goes from his alien position as an observer to a new role as actor: "Each person had their moment when they assumed the skins of wild animals, when they took responsibility for the story" and Alice's death is that moment for him. His skin is the lion's skin of the novel's first epigraph ("The joyful will stoop with sorrow, and when you have gone from the earth, I will let my hair grow long for your sake, I will wander through the wilderness in the skin of a lion"). He ceases to be "nothing but a prism" that refracts the life of others. That Alice's death coincides with his learning of the past of Canada, of the union battles of workers silenced by history, is not unrelated to his radicalization.

Patrick's entry into the world of action is destructive, yet necessary. He pays for his crime in prison and upon his release, in 1938, commits his final political act: the attempted destruction of Harris's waterworks. Here the theme of power that has been building up in the novel comes to its climax. Harris faces the threatening intruder with "How dare you try to come in here!" — to which Patrick replies: "I'm not trying this, I've done it." He confronts Harris with his (and his class's) forgetting of the workers who made their civic visions possible. When Harris says he fought tooth and nail for the waterworks' luxury, Patrick responds with: "*You* fought. *You* fought. Think about those who built the intake tunnels. Do you know how many of us died in there?" The reply is damning: "There was no record kept." In an attempt to save his life and his plant, Harris lectures Patrick on power: "You don't like power, you don't respect it, you don't want it to exist but you move around it all the time." That there is considerable truth to this accusation is ironically conditioned by the fact that Patrick is at that moment carrying a blasting-box in his hands.

This discussion links the notion of imagination and creation to power. Harris tells of dreams he has had, dreams that turn out to be of plans of places which could have existed in Toronto, but had been rejected: "These *were* all real places. They could have existed." The rich and powerful city commissioner, in fact, has been given the vision that is a *mise-en-abyme* of the entire novel's mixing of history and fiction in the context of class politics:

You must realize you are like these places, Patrick. You're as much of the fabric as the alderman and the millionaires. But you're among the dwarfs of enterprise that never get accepted or acknowledged. Mongrel company. You're a lost heir. So you stay in the woods. You reject power. And this is how the bland fools — the politicians and press and mayors and their advisers — become the spokesmen for the age.

The responsibility for historical silencing lies not only with the rich and powerful, then. This is part of Alice's legacy to Patrick, as is clear when he chooses this moment to accept responsibility for her death in a bombing accident he might have prevented.

Harris comes to understand why he was chosen for Patrick's final assault: "he was one of the few in power who had something tangible around him. But those with real power had nothing to show for themselves. They had paper." But so too does the novelist. This is the power to change how we read fiction and history, to alter our awareness of the way we think we can draw lines between the imaginary and the real. The silenced ex-centrics on the margins of history — be they women, workers, immigrants (or writers?) — must take the responsibility and accept the power to change the perspective of the centre. This is the power given voice in *In the Skin of the Lion*.

This is a novel about ex-centricity and its power through naming, through language. As the work of Michel Foucault

has shown, power is an ambivalent force, neither totally negative nor totally positive: it can build as it can destroy; it can be used to combat injustice as easily as to induce complacency. Literalized as dynamite in Ondaatje's novel, power allows the conquering of nature in the so-called name of civilization and yet also brings about the destruction of human life. Yet, the creative power of the novelist, the power to name the unnamed of history, may offer a somewhat less compromised model for yet another kind of blasting power, the power of postmodern fiction.

LINDA HUTCHEON

STORIES INTO ART

LILLY BARNES, *A Hero Travels Light*. Oberon, \$12.95.

EDITH FOWKE, *Tales Told In Canada*. Doubleday, \$19.95; pb. \$12.95.

MICHEL M. J. SHORE, *The Tempest (Essays and Short Stories)*. Editions Naaman, \$5.95.

THE BASIC LURE of *story* — as enlargement of self and insight into existence — underlies the effort behind each of these volumes. Edith Fowke's compendium of oral tales (told or translated in English) illustrates the ubiquitous impulse to narrate, as well as the wide variety of material gathered, and the complexity of categorizing it — let alone analyzing it, which Fowke suggests is the next step.

In Lilly Barnes's sequence of autobiographical stories the narrator, now living in Canada, adroitly struggles throughout with the need to forget the difficult anomalies of her conflicting Israeli-German backgrounds. The adroitness enables her, simultaneously, to examine and dissipate the effects of her experiences by transcribing them into the layered ambivalencies that make up the art of narrative prose.

Michel M. J. Shore in *The Tempest (Essays and Short Stories)* is, one can only

suspect, lured by the same search for significance, because he presents "impressionistic portraits . . . of individuals and of societies . . . set in various epochs and locations" — mostly in Europe. Although some passages convey feeling, the author's focus often is too didactically upon that end-significance, and the basic material that engenders his vision — perhaps a conflicting mixture as in Barnes — is seldom made available to the reader.

Barnes, in her reluctant dredging up of the past, takes risks with her readers, as she does presumably with her own memories. Her narrator by turns resists and explores the evocations of childhood; the reader has to have some involvement with both tendencies or else wax impatient with a storyteller stifled by self-debate. It is testimony to the honesty of the narrator's mixed emotions and the honesty of the writer's examination that the often will-o'-the-wisp restructuring of chronology works so well. Only in a couple places in the last story, "Secrets," does the narrator's shifting self-examination and jumping time periods become, for me, a little too deliberately detached from the account at hand — an account that centres, significantly, upon another person with mixed heritage, Alex, who brings back to his enlightened life in Canada the knowledge that he had a Nazi father. In the other more dominantly autobiographical stories, the narrator's honesty of perception keeps the time shifts linked more closely to the pulse of Barnes's "two identities engaged in lethal subterranean battle" — a battle, that is, between the implications of her life in Nazi Germany and on a kibbutz in Israel.

Fowke's collection of fifty tales is a cross-fertilization of the varying kinds told, from 1898 to 1985, within varying ethnic groups in Canada. The kinds range from myths, animal tales, supernatural tales, romantic tales, jokes, anecdotes, formula tales, legends, and personal ex-

perience narratives (a couple borrowed from Barry Broadfoot). The ethnic sources include: Indian, Inuit, English, Scottish, Irish, French, German, Ukrainian, Doukhobor, Polish, Italian, Jewish, Greek, Swedish, Icelandic, West Indian, "and some whose ancestry is mixed." An appendix cites sources and references for each tale and assigns each tale a type category (according to Aarne and Thompson's *The Types of Folktale*) and a motif classification (according to Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*). In addition, a ten-page bibliography cites useful reference material plus "most items of traditional Canadian folktales published in English with the exception of native collections."

In her Introduction, Fowke, one of Canada's pioneering folklorists, takes stock of what has been done in the field of Canadian folktales and suggests that "we can expect more description, discussion and analysis of the tales, the way they are told, and what the storyteller thinks of them." Her book is a guide, and possibly a goad, to that end, even though she professes that encouraging enjoyment of the tales themselves, the creation of a reading experience similar to old storytelling sessions in village homes, is her chief aim.

To discover what oral tales meant to our forebears and what they mean to us now may well require the kind of wrestling with the ambivalence one encounters in most art, the kind that is essential, I think, for the success of what both Lilly Barnes and Michel Shore set out to do, with diverse results, in their attempts to transliterate into art their own memories of past experience.

GERALD NOONAN



PLUS OU MOINS

L'Ouest en nouvelles. Collective Les éditions des plaines, \$8.95.

MAURICE CONSTANTIN-WEYER, *Avec plus ou moins de rire.* Les éditions des plaines, \$8.95.

L'IDEE DE PROPOSER un recueil de nouvelles d'auteurs qui ont en commun d'habiter les mêmes espaces géographiques, en l'occurrence l'Ouest canadien, serait une première selon l'éditeur. On retrouvera donc, dans *L'Ouest en nouvelles*, des textes très variés signés par Hubert Balcaen, Jannick Belleau, Inge Israël, Jean Lafontant, Annie Marquis, Geneviève Montcombroux, Marguerite-A. Primeau, Annette Saint-Pierre et Gilles Valais. La même diversité apparaît également au niveau des thèmes et surtout des formes. Ainsi, le recueil donne à lire tout autant des textes de structure simple et classique que d'autres recourant aux procédés propres au fantastique ou jouant sur une alternance de voix narratives. La tonalité de cet opuscule, c'est-à-dire cette variété des modes et des formes, est tout à son avantage.

On ne peut dire, toutefois, que les nouvelles soient d'un intérêt égal, bien au contraire. Certains textes sont plutôt faciles, et leur fin trop prévisible. Il est certes exigeant, dans un court récit, d'amener le texte à un niveau de haute densité; à cet égard, le plus intéressant de tous, le plus long d'ailleurs, est celui de Marguerite-A. Primeau, "La Maison d'autrefois," qui raconte l'histoire d'un vieillard qui veut retourner dans son village d'antan. Marguerite-A. Primeau narre avec justesse l'effet du temps qui embellit trop souvent le passé. Si plusieurs des nouvelles du recueil se contentent de raconter, celle de Marguerite-A. Primeau évoque, fait réfléchir et engendre une certaine rêverie.

L'Ouest en nouvelles? Ni l'un ni l'autre en fait. Car de l'Ouest il sera bien peu question ici; quant aux mot "nouvelles"

il recouvre, dans une acception plutôt large, plusieurs textes courts qui s'apparentent beaucoup plus à des contes qu'à des nouvelles proprement dites.

A la vérité, un dégustateur de nouvelles (ou de contes?) sera plutôt intéressé par ce recueil de Maurice Constantin-Weyer, *Avec plus ou moins de rire*. L'on sait que Constantin-Weyer a passé onze ans de sa vie au Canada, entre 1904 et 1914. On retrouvera ici, comme le note Liliane Rodriguez dans sa préface, "plusieurs de ses nouvelles canadiennes publiées dans divers journaux ou, pour certaines, intégrées à des recueils depuis longtemps épuisés," encore que certains récits se passent aux Etats-Unis et en Alaska.

Une chose frappe tout au long de ces textes: Maurice Constantin-Weyer sait raconter et il utilise tous les procédés disponibles à cet effet. La technique la plus employée dans le cadre de la communication du conte est la création d'une situation narrative mettant en scène un conteur comme personnage. Dans "L'Homme qui se croyait prophète," "La Route de l'Orégon" et "Le naufrage," par exemple, la narration est prise en charge par un personnage qui s'adresse directement à des auditeurs dont il veut capter l'attention. Billy-sans-Oreilles est tout à fait représentatif de ce type de narrateur: "Il y a une chose mystérieuse. C'est que, parfois, sous une influence impondérable, l'homme le plus taciturne éprouve le besoin de se raconter." Et c'est à la faveur de cette impulsion que Billy-sans-Oreilles va narrer son histoire extraordinaire impliquant un Mormon, Betsy et un enlèvement.

Les contes de Constantin-Weyer créent ainsi une sorte de métadiscours fort opportun pour créer une situation de communication directe: on n'y camoufle jamais que ce que l'on raconte, ce sont des histoires, pour le meilleur ou pour le pire. Dans "Les Oeufs au lard," histoire extraordinaire à propos d'un ours plutôt gour-

mand, le narrateur multiplie les interventions du genre "Vous voulez connaître l'histoire?" "Vous voulez la suite?" etc. Nous sommes toujours dans une situation d'écoute tendue extrêmement bien organisée.

Le titre du recueil, *Avec plus ou moins de rire*, est lui-même fort évocateur du caractère relatif avec lequel l'univers de ces contes doit être abordé. Ce domaine du "plus ou moins..." transparaît dès l'ouverture avec cette histoire loufoque d'Amorak chez qui un zèle intempestif d'évangélisation amène les pires excès, faute d'avoir tenu compte du contexte où il se trouvait: "Tout cela prouve, conclut le narrateur, que la morale, si l'on y réfléchit, est comme je vous le disais, une simple affaire de temps et de lieux." D'ailleurs, avec Constantin-Weyer, on ne sait jamais si le conte est vérité ou mensonge: le vantard Erikson, dans "Le Naufragé," sert l'histoire du Titanic à sa façon à un auditeur qui n'y a rien vu. En revanche, dans "La Légende de Hiawatha," un Ojibway n'hésite pas à affirmer que "la légende, la tradition, la poésie sont les seules forces qui nous protègent du mal."

En définitive, c'est bien ce qui intéresse chez Constantin-Weyer: les récits sont bien narrés, établissant une communication directe avec le narrataire. Mais surtout, il font sérieux sans se prendre au sérieux, ainsi que l'affirme Moïse Ouellette dans "Les fiancées de Jean-Baptiste," résumant en quelque sorte l'art de Constantin-Weyer:

"Comment j'ai marié ma femme et comment que Jean-Baptiste a marié personne en toute, dit Moïse Ouellette, c'est toute une sacrée histoire. Mais, si tu veux la savoir, verse-moi à boire..." Moïse Ouellette... était terriblement bavard, un peu inventeur. Il "fléchait," c'est le mot employé pour dire qu'on exagère. Mais ses anecdotes n'étaient que rarement vraies, elles étaient souvent amusantes.

PIERRE HEBERT

FIRST BYTE

FRANK DAVEY & FRED WAH (Database managers), *Swiftcurrent*. Access through Datapac.

IF YOU SUFFER from cursor anxiety, you probably won't read this review. It's about an electronic magazine that lives inside a computer: the world's first on-line literary journal. But *Swiftcurrent* deserves attention, not only for the mere fact of its existence — to say nothing of its literary merit — but also for issues it raises about computer involvement in the production and distribution of texts, and indirectly about computer technology and culture in general.

I am not about to complain about glitches in the system. Nothing is more certain in computer technology than the fact that the first time someone tries something, it probably won't work. And if it does work, it won't work well. But improvements to the system will likely come at a rapid rate. Moreover, the choice of name — bringing A. J. M. Smith's "Swift Current" ("arrows of direction / spears of speed") into the computer age — atones for many shortcomings.

In order to read *Swiftcurrent*, all you need is a personal computer, and access to a dial-up port, or to Datapac. Once you have "logged in" (that is, established the necessary connection), you select a category from a "menu" of such things as announcements, commentary, fiction, poetry, and reviews. You then specify an author from a menu of those who have submitted to this category, and, finally, choose from a list of that author's contributions. This branching and sub-branching — the technical terms are directories, subdirectories, and files — is quite typical, and is a function of the way data are usually stored in a computer.

Swiftcurrent aims to be Canada's first "national" literary journal since the late lamented *Tamarack Review*. To a com-

mendable extent it succeeds. Where other literary magazines in this country cater to relatively narrow audiences (defined mainly by region or politics or poetics), *Swiftcurrent* largely circumvents categorization. But if forced to generalize, I would call the contributions "postmodern" (though Brian Fawcett is pushing for something he calls "neo-modernism"). While the terms "radical" or "avant garde" would be misapplied, so would "traditional" or "establishment." Instead of Atwood, Findley, Munro, Gallant, or Davies one finds the work of Mandel, Bowering, McFadden, Jirgens, and Yates. In fact, most of the contributors are male; over half are from Ontario, a third from B.C., and all save one of the rest are from the prairies. If *Swiftcurrent* is a technological experiment, any valid conclusions about it must examine the role played in such biases by factors related to that technology.

Furthermore, such factors obviously limit readership: as editor Frank Davey realized from the beginning, to restrict the already limited market for literary journals to those individuals who also have access to and familiarity with computers clearly eliminates any possibility of commercial levels of circulation. However, "circulation" (things moving around) is a less than apt image: as much as anything else *Swiftcurrent* has become a network of writers, a forum for them to read and comment on each other's work.

This tendency of some pieces to be "in-process" — some contributors have left multiple drafts of the same work on the system, inviting comments — can make the journal seem somewhat rough, and unpolished. Reinforcing this tendency is the editorial structure of *Swiftcurrent*, which, unlike that of most journals, is "non-hierarchical." That is, each contributor is effectively an editor, free to load into the database (and later delete) anything deemed worthy of attention. And at

last count, the contributors numbered fifty-nine. Hence it is hardly surprising that the journal has grown to over one megabyte in size (about 200,000 words), though it varies continually in size and constitution. And the vertigo induced by such flux is merely compounded by the tremendous unevenness of the contributions, which range from glittering insight to jejune self-indulgence: the reviewer hesitates . . .

The commentary category, which is also the largest (> 400 Kb) exhibits the greatest unevenness, ranging from profound to petulant, from inspired to scabrous. Most notable are editor Davey's measured analysis and Donna Bennett's disquisitions on language and women. With hundreds of poems from over fifty contributors, the eclecticism of the poetry category understandably produces plenty of both gems and clunkers. Michael Yates's images, however, have their customary sharpness, and Bowering and Mandel are touching and poignant, as each writes of his remembered father. Submissions to the fiction category, on the other hand, are of a remarkably consistent high standard; Karl Jirgens and Andreas Schroeder in particular shine. The only other section with more than a few kilobytes devoted to it is reviews, and reviews of reviews (leading perhaps to reviews of reviews of reviews, and so on) can only be regarded as extremes of parasitism and ephemera.

If print is, in McLuhan's sense, a "cool" medium, and television "hot," then *Swift-current* is somewhere around lukewarm: the issues and questions it raises as a medium will likely outlast its purely literary value. What effects will computer technology have on culture in general, and literary culture in particular? Obviously, the potential is there for profound changes in communication, and access to and distribution of texts — issues Davey addresses explicitly. Lurking behind them,

however, are other questions, subtler and more elusive, whose significance is nebulous at present, but possibly far-reaching. How (if at all) does a computer affect our apprehension of the world? our conceptualization of what we perceive and think? our use of language?

First, there can be a lack of perspective, a lack of periphery or context caused by the narrowness of the computer's focus: you cannot have more than about half a page on your screen at any given time. Because of this, and because a computer's files are all stored separately from one another and must be retrieved one at a time, a book is easier to browse through, and a bookshelf vastly easier. Computers are generally very efficient when you know exactly what you're looking for, but not so good when you're not quite sure — when you just want to look around. A computer can locate a word or string of words with impressive speed; it is not likely to fare so well when it's a logical connection you're after.

Following this line of thought further, one sees that the organizing principle in most computer storage systems is *differentiation*. Directories are divided into subdirectories which are themselves divided until one reaches the individual files; to reach the file, one must often specify the full path necessary to reach it, and then in order to access another, retrace one's steps back to the last common directory or subdirectory. This rigidly structured system is necessary, of course, or managing the database would be chaotic. But there is a hint of danger in it, a danger which concerns the way humans represent things to themselves. The individual's structured representation of reality for all intents and purposes *is* that individual's reality; the means by which that representation is structured seems inherent in reality, rather than a function of mind. From dealing with computers, we might begin to adopt, begin subconsciously to emulate the way

they structure data; we might begin to believe that our structuring of ideas is an inherent characteristic of those ideas — or of the world. Differentiation has always been a useful tool; in the lack of a balancing sense of integration, of synthesis, however, lies the threat of chronic intellectual balkanization.

A similar concern underlies computer science's "digital versus analog" distinction when it is applied to language. Simply put, the difference is that between an on/off light switch (digital), and a dimmer (analog). On/off is the absolutely fundamental principle of computers. And one need only consult a computer manual to see the effect that this has had on language. After a few hours of reading a manual or programming, one actually begins to think differently, largely adopting the rudimentary but functional syntax of programming languages, and quite losing the fine shades of distinction, the subtleties of elegant and flowing periods. Language is symbolic, representational, metaphoric: it works according to the analog principle, and is anything but digital.

These observations should not be construed, however, as thundering about a fundamental antipathy between computers and language or computers and humans, but merely pointing to a small cloud on the horizon. To be sure, by the time one's fingers strike keys on a keyboard, the translation into digital mode is essentially complete. And I am not proposing that the quill be the only means for transcribing (interesting word, that) language: although I am writing this long-hand right now, I will be dependent on a word processor to produce the final draft. Computers have already had a considerable impact on culture; in the future their effects will become more pervasive. But such technology requires close examination, sensitivity to its implications, and hard thought about its possible consequences.

DAVID INGHAM

DISGUISES

DACIA MARAINI, *Devour Me Too*, trans. Genni Donati Gunn. Guernica, \$12.95.

RHEA TREGEBOV, *No One We Know*. Aya Press, \$8.00.

JAN CONN, *The Fabulous Disguise of Ourselves*. Signal Editions/Véhicule, \$8.95.

THE TITLE OF Jan Conn's second collection of poetry, *The Fabulous Disguise of Ourselves*, captures the spirit of much contemporary women's poetry. It is a poetry of fable, parody, linguistic playfulness — and of disguise. Indeed, if early women writers found disguise a distasteful necessity, these contemporary poets are exploring disguise as a subversive act — an act of joyful fabulation.

One way Canadian women writers can reach out to a larger, thriving community is through translation of feminist poets from other nations. This is the aim of B.C. writer Genni Donati Gunn's translation of Italian poet Dacia Maraini's 1978 collection *Mangiarsi pure*. Donati Gunn renders the title *Devour Me Too*, yet in this translation she loses two important elements. The full translation (which Donati Gunn does use for the title poem) is "Go Ahead Devour Me Too." But by abbreviating the title, she loses the sense of a taunting, defiant female voice — one which refuses to be silenced, "eaten." This brings up another fine point. The verb which Maraini chooses is *mangiare*, "to eat" — not "to devour," which is another term altogether. In the context of the collection, it is important to keep the more visceral, less literary term "eat" (in spite of — or perhaps because of — its sexual connotations in English), for sex becomes, in Maraini's work, an act of domestic consumption.

Reading Maraini alongside two young Canadian women sheds light on what might be called the "intercontinental drift" between North American and European feminist theory. Maraini has been

strongly influenced by continental theory, especially by French theorist Hélène Cixous's emphasis on "writing the body." Many of her poems are celebrations of the female cycle and female solidarity. Yet at times theory does more than inform the poetry; it tends to programme it in a starkly mechanistic way:

we have severed the heads
of our loving husbands who had set about
sacrificing us as docile women
in the bed of social duty

As a recounting of what the male order has done to women throughout history, this isn't bad. But as poetic "fabulation" it falls flat.

For Canadian women poets, in spite of their less theoretical bent, the same questions arise: how to write political poetry without sounding like a textbook or a placard. Rhea Tregebov, in her second collection, *No One We Know*, discovers some creative solutions. Her poem "Vienna, November 1983" takes us from a well-dressed woman sitting in a café to the distant yet ever-present past which inhabits her mind: the concentration camp at Mauthausen. "The fire under control," a poem written about Chernobyl, juxtaposes the domestic world of a woman and an aggressive society in a far subtler way than the Maraini passage I have quoted: a Ukrainian market woman holds a radiation-poisoned radish, "a bomb in the warm palm of her hand." Tregebov does indeed "write the female body"; she is always conscious of that body both as an object of penetration by the male, by the environment, and as an active power which may exclude and select:

But you can make love
The world can enter
without wounding you;
it can come in

"Can" here denotes not only ability but permissibility. In spite of its occasional

subtlety, though, Tregebov's poems often suffer the effects of cliché or of lame endings. "We're predators" is a perfect example — a poem, like many of Maraini's, about consuming. Tregebov's witty lines, "Bones are to last: after the / subtraction of death they are to be the remainder," would make a memorable ending, but she ends, instead, with cliché: "we carry around with us something / that's not immortal but at least endures."

Jan Conn's *The Fabulous Disguise of Ourselves* suffers only fleetingly from this verbal exhaustion, in lines like: "Forbidden pleasure is addictive." But such moments are rare in this work of energy and spirit. Many of the poems in this collection were inspired by Conn's biological field work in Central America. The jungle becomes, as it has for Patrick Lane, a world which challenges every assumption a human can hold: "Wish you were here. / Glad I'm alone. / All the contradictions are true." Soon, we realize, the speaker's jungle is the site of psychological field work; as she addresses her father in the first poem: "I decide to become an archaeologist, / to go where you've been / while the scent is still fresh." In this jungle, though, the female not only stalks, but is stalked; in the title poem, the speaker finds herself in a "men's bar" whose red rug is the colour of "raw sex." In another poem she dreams that a female archaeologist has just dug up a woman's body, half of the head severed, but no blood. Sexual desire becomes ferocious, like a leopard, as Conn says in her poem for Mary di Michele. In short, what male and female cannot achieve is what the natural world achieves so easily: mutuality without language and the power it implies. "They are what we've lost / or never had," writes Conn. In *The Fabulous Disguise of Ourselves*, Jan Conn conducts us on an unsettling journey — the journey of human creatures alien to the natural world, the journey of woman away from and, para-

doxically, towards the Other, the father, male authority, and the journey of a young poet in language. Journeys which are this dangerously familiar are worth taking.

LORRAINE YORK

VOICES OUTSIDE

HELEN POTREBENKO, *Sometimes They Sang*. Press Gang, \$6.95.

EMILY NASRALLAH, *Flight Against Time*. Ragweed, \$14.95.

Sometimes They Sang is a curious title for Helen Potrebenco's dark comedy about a woman who loses her job and her apartment in Vancouver during the late 1970's. It implies a cast of characters engaging in group activity, but in fact the book tells the story of a solitary who remains outside any movement she tries to join. The narrative begins with a light, ironic tone: "In her 36th year, Odessa Greenway decided it was time to have a baby"; but soon turns didactic: "Starting in the late 50's, the Greenway family scattered, as did most farm families." The lecturing voice that places Odessa on a demographic trend drowns out the earlier voice that makes humour out of her search for a man to make her pregnant.

Odessa is no singer. Instead, she is a sewer of serviceable clothes on her home sewing machine, a true descendant of her indestructible Ukrainian mother. Although she is appalled by her mother's combination of brute strength and female passivity, she identifies with her Ukrainian, rather than her English, ancestors, and she feels proud of their accomplishments opening the Canadian West. Belonging to the generation that left the land, Odessa finds herself poor, unemployed, and unmarried, a failure in her mother's eyes. Rejecting her mother's materialism, she searches for guiding principles in university textbooks, and joins

movements that aim to change society. Invariably, disillusionment follows. Since Odessa takes up and discards many doctrines, it is no surprise when she begins to lose faith in books — even books written by women and sold in the Women's Bookstore where she works as a volunteer. At its midpoint, *Sometimes They Sang* confronts its own validity in an ill-conceived explanatory note from the author, drawing attention away from Odessa and on to a text that looks, under intensive scrutiny, rather thin and full of gaps. Is Potrebenco attempting to use style to suggest Odessa's dispossession — authorial self-questioning echoing the uncertain voice of an outsider struggling to escape from outmoded economic, political, and social structures? This hypothesis might explain why the narrative issues in brief snatches that keep dwindling into silence, but not why Odessa's longing to have a child is dealt with in such perfunctory fashion at the end.

Flight Against Time was written by Lebanese novelist Emily Nasrallah and translated by Issa J. Boullata. Like *Sometimes They Sang*, it is composed in short, discrete segments, but *Flight Against Time* is the more coherent work, unified through the motif of a journey and a strong, lyrical, narrative voice. Seventy-year-old Radwan Abu Yusef is the protagonist, an Arab from the tiny Lebanese village of Jurat Al-Sindyan on the slope of Mount Hermon. Radwan continually invokes the many names of the Deity in a spontaneous litany of praise. "May God give you long life and increase your blessing," he tells a clerk in the Canadian Consulate at Beirut, and "Praise to the Creator!" he exclaims as he admires the stewardess on his first airplane flight.

This Lebanese grandfather, whose children now live in Charlottetown, is a perceptive observer of their way of life. Orphaned during World War I, Radwan has little formal schooling, but his long life as

millers, farmers, hunters, and fishermen has developed his powers of reflection. Proud of his children's success in Canada, and impressed by the sheer size of everything, he is not overwhelmed. Long ago, he has acquired the confidence that comes from knowing where he belongs: "In his village, man lived within the circle of his little world in dignity — honoured and protected." Radwan retains that dignity even when far from home.

Although Radwan's point of view dominates, his impressions are modified by those of his wife Raya. To this loving mother and grandmother, being with her family again is enough. Whereas Radwan asks his son why the grandchildren have not been taught to speak Arabic, she urges him to refrain from criticism. Her way is to adapt to the situation by taking the three-year-old in her lap and playing finger games with him. But for both grandparents, the joy of family reunion is tempered by the realization: "The children of this country belong to this country." In Charlottetown, the grandparents finally realize that their descendants will remain permanent exiles from their homeland. Nevertheless, Radwan and Raya still hold honoured places in their Canadian family, as shown by the ceremonies at their arrival. Two of the most poignant moments occur when Nabeel begs his mother to place the unleavened dough on the lintel above the threshold of his home, and when Radwan dances the age-old Lebanese *dabka*, linking the present to the past and the new country to the old.

Only at the end does Radwan's eloquent voice falter as he suddenly makes up his mind to go back to Lebanon alone. What happens to him there may be true historically, but structurally, it goes against the grain. So does the brief epilogue that needlessly wrings a final tear.

CHRISTINE SOMERVILLE

FRONT LINES

HÉDI BOURAOUI, *Echosmos*. Mosaic, \$10.00.

RIENZI CRUSZ, *A Time for Loving*. Tsar Publications, \$6.95.

C. H. GERVAIS, *Letters from the Equator*. Penumbra, \$7.95.

ONE OF THESE recent collections is accompanied by such extravagant claims that it is difficult to approach the poetry without some predetermined attitude. Rienzi Crusz's *A Time for Loving* is introduced by an essay wherein it is claimed that misogyny is a specifically western and Christian construction which Crusz has transcended, and that this Canadian ethnic writer is unique in straddling two very exclusive worlds and cultures.

It is, therefore, somewhat of a relief to begin with C. H. Gervais's *Letters from the Equator*. This slim volume — epistolary prose-poems, a poetic journal of a monastic retreat, imagistic "snapshots" of life in Latin America, and a continuing meditation on the rituals of daily life with a young family in Canada — is also refreshing for the most part. Gervais's work is most notable for the accuracy with which he notates his perceptions. In the journal, "Postcards from Gethsemani, Kentucky," Gervais frequently abandons serious, intellectual commentary. Here, in this retreat, the poet admits that the outside world of politics and conflict is fading. As a direct result, the writing begins to direct the eye and mind:

I crunch up crackers
spread them on a ledge
wait

all but one jay
& no other takers
until I fall asleep

When I wake
the ledge is aswarm
with a crowd of wings
against the gray day it is
a gasoline rainbow spilled on
my doorstep

Other poems read curiously like apprentice-work as Gervais stretches the writing to carry news from various contemporary front-lines: Nicaragua, Jerusalem, and the suburban bungalows of southern Ontario. A constant, and sometimes beguiling, humility pervades even the more profound offerings.

In one of the later pieces, "Second letter to D," Gervais reveals his source and inspiration, explaining much that happens in the collection:

Reading Ginsberg aloud . . . Later, stocking feet
we from snow. Reciting old fifties poems . . .
It's great to hear
them again, you said. Sunny afternoons
16 years ago when I read
aloud to you . . . Now you're off at the store
& I address them to
two-year-old Stéphane as he rushes about the
living room with
a hockey stick . . . The great Sunflower Sutra
. . . His golden head
bobbing among furniture & books, chanting
along . . . The
Kaddish poems . . . & Stéphane flashes a
smile from the other
room . . . eating words alive, devouring
rhythms . . . The purest
product of the future emerging in each
stride . . . Later, he lies on
his back & I change his diaper, read him
The Fall of America, the
extravaganza of the protest years . . . Dylan,
Peter Paul & Mary or
what you called the soft prayers of the air
waves . . .

Gervais has obviously weighed the risk of banality in these and other domestic texts. *Letters from the Equator* is ambitious: Gervais is rewriting a generation's seminal works such as Ginsberg's journalistic poems of international travel. He also attempts to domesticate that radicalism for a more contemporary, more settled, and definitely more bourgeois Canadian reading and writing public.

Therein lies the major difficulty with the collection. Gervais writes to and about various saints and more contemporary artists such as Apollinaire, Proust, Cocteau,

and Ginsberg — but the homoerotic, alternative lives of these latter three alone confront Gervais's revisionary inclusion of them as new domestic saints. Is there not a linguistic, social, textual, and indeed moral dilemma in such a consciously artful, and carefully constructed lifestyle? Who will tell us what Ginsberg, Proust, and Cocteau really signify, if their gayness is denied when their art is invoked? Who is going to tell the radically named Stéphane — and readers to come, for that matter, if Gervais's literary history succeeds — that these variously deviant voices are not the proper and just accompaniment to the rituals of bringing up baby in contemporary Canada? Gervais's portraits of late twentieth-century Canadian parental life unfortunately suggest that such heterogeneity has at last been overwhelmed and subdued by educated and happy families everywhere.

The travel poems in *Letters from the Equator* betray similar inconsistencies. Managua and Sandino are sadly depleted because contemporary, and perhaps even because they are Marxist, symbols here of a world now "discordant, chaotic, reckless." Too often the insight that the same cultural reference points which Gervais inscribes are causes of the very squalor which offends him is foresworn for more conventional assertions. Poverty and underdevelopment are seen as concomitants of revolution, not causes. Various icons of former stability — such as European high culture, the machismo of Hemingway's insight and rhetoric, Mozart, Oxford, and belles lettres — are invoked for an almost clichéd contrast with current affairs, again mainly in underdeveloped places. One begins to wish that Gervais had read Walter Benjamin's axiom, "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."

Crus's *A Time for Loving* suffers from similar shopworn conclusions. At times, this poet sounds like a world-weary travel-

ler loyal to the same metropolitan culture that naming Naipaul conjures. Sri Lanka is now subject to a colonial's dangerous nostalgia, as Crusz juxtaposes North American luxury with Sri Lankan underdevelopment, which is nonetheless privileged as more spiritually wholesome. The result is sometimes mawkish — like Betjeman parodying Longfellow, perhaps, but without the redeeming self-reflexivity:

Five-star hotels now gleam
in the Sri Lankan sun, tourists
dip their bottoms
in the everlasting blue
of your circling sea, wrap
their pink skins in cotton and silks,
the loud embrace of batik;
and your craft boutiques burst
at their seams with elephant and ivory,
the filigree effusions
of your artistic people . . .

O my beloved country,
your paradise story goes on
with dark antonyms to match,
but take a bow, an encore,
and an encore for the warm brilliance
of your new sun.
I pray
for the slum corners of your kingdom,
your soul.

Elsewhere, and somewhat illogically, great classic temples in Sri Lanka — surely the product of massive conscription and social oppression? — are contrasted with the daily fare in Canada of televised soap operas. His idiom is as old-world and anachronistic as is Naipaul's, too: where else in contemporary writing do we encounter "girls," "little brown boys," and a description of people of several different races lounging on a beach like "a Caesar's salad / dressed in thick Florida sun"?

Crusz does reveal, however — like Gervais — the finely tuned perceptions of a suppressed imagist. Poems such as "How Does One Reach the Sweet Kernel?" read, sound, and look like the kind of poem a Sri Lankan raised on Creeley might produce in an unguarded moment:

For the kind of love
that hangs exotic and hard

like a bunch of king coconuts
on the palm of our dreams,
we need to tear the pink fibres
on our crowbar nerves,
machete the shell
of stubborn eyes
and burst into the kernel
of the heart.

There are big problems with Crusz's poetry: the assertions are untested and too often pietistic, the claims are much too grand and thus naïve, and the writing is too frequently unconsciously bathetic.

Hédi Bouraoui's *Echosmos*, in sharp contrast, is controlled, thoughtful, and precise. The paperback edition is quite magnificent, with French and English versions of the poems on facing pages, and black-and-white reproductions of drawings, lithographs, and paintings from the various places about which Bouraoui writes. The poems here are densely intertextual and rigorously intellectual, recalling entire poetic traditions and schools in carefully constructed phrases and imagery. Lines matter here, and grow in the mind long after the book is closed.

All three of these books attest to the eagerness with which the Canadian book-trade is eager to find and publish new international writers: to exploit, perhaps, the mosaic our politicians and educators proclaim. Only the last, *Echosmos*, delivers on that promise, though. Bouraoui's writing often challenges preconceived ideas about what poetry might be or do; and it always repays careful attention to nuance and technical implication.

CRAIG TAPPING

HYBRID FICTION

DOROTHY WINGROVE, *Run, Madrina, Run!*
Sono Nis, \$9.95.

THIS NOVEL PROMISES on its back cover to be "an action-packed adventure story" and "a good read," while its front cover is dominated by photographs of scenes of

political unrest in Central America. This suggests an unusual combination of aims on the part of the author, or at least on the part of the publisher responsible for the design of the book. On the one hand the goal seems to be to entertain readers "of all ages" with a story full of "fast-paced adventure, romance, travel and humour"; on the other hand, those photographs of barbed wire fences, armed soldiers, and refugee camps suggest an examination of a particularly brutal contemporary political situation more than the romance and humour of a good summer read. And the work does turn out to be something of a hybrid, a picaresque novel whose various parts suggest influences ranging from *Lassie* and *Rin Tin Tin* adventure stories, through serious civil rights fiction and political commentary on Central America, to *Harlequin* romances.

This all results predictably in an uneven novel, which sometimes reflects too greatly Dorothy Wingrove's background as an ambulance driver and German Shepherd breeder in World War II and a travel writer in more recent years. An inordinate amount of attention is thus centred on the fate of the orphaned German Shepherd dog which the heroine, Madrina, picks off the side of an Oregon road at the beginning of her journey from British Columbia to San Salvador in search of her Salvadorian foster child, and too much time is spent on the trivial problems of travel. The reader interested in the unfolding of the plot becomes tired of being side-tracked with discussions of the superlative nobility of the dog, whose profile is otherwise well drawn, or the relative merits of particular sleeping spots or restaurants.

Behind these irritating details is, however, a story which in certain episodes springs to life and brings together elements of social commentary and adventure in a convincing and engrossing manner. This side of the novel first becomes evident in a flashback story involving the

couple whose names Madrina finds on the collar of the dog. This segment, which is really a short story only tangentially attached to the main story, suddenly thrusts the unsuspecting reader into the civil rights conflict in the American south, and ties together various loose-hanging threads in the fabric of the main novel in an ingenious and satisfying way. And it is particularly evident in the central episode of the novel involving the successful attempt to trace and find the foster child in San Salvador. The author's tendency to portray the world in terms of black and white characters finds a more fertile landscape in war-torn El Salvador than it does in San Diego or British Columbia, and the adventurous story she places in this framework is well-constructed, exciting, and believable. Perhaps it does not include a penetrating analysis of the underlying reasons for social and political unrest in Central America, but nevertheless the reader is confronted with enough elements from various sides of the conflict during the search for the child to understand clearly the author's viewpoint on the situation. In these episodes, the author demonstrates a talent for producing exciting fiction about threatened individuals in the midst of social conflict, and the reader wishes the editor had advised her to concentrate more thoroughly on this area of her plot, avoiding the excess which the conclusion of the story cannot bear.

Unfortunately this tendency to exaggerate and melodramatize wins over emphatically in the story of the escape from El Salvador. Here, after the faithful super-dog has been shot to death while saving Madrina and her foster child by killing the dastardly policeman who otherwise would have shot them (they bury the dog but not the policeman), after Madrina has been knifed in the back by an unknown assailant and lies mortally wounded on a drifting dinghy with her bloodied fingers trailing in a sea thrashing

with ravenous sharks, one wonders where the controlling hand has gone. And when she is then picked up by a passing yachtsman, who happens to be a handsome doctor on his way to Tahiti just waiting to fall in love with a late middle-aged, unhappily married Canadian woman and start a new life raising sheep in New Zealand, we suspect that the editor has gone to Harlequin books for a course in plot conclusions. It is unfortunate that this final section of the story gets drowned in sentimentality, for it draws attention away from some of the solid fiction writing which precedes it.

PETER STENBERG

CULTURE & CRITICISM

MARIO J. VALDÉS, *Phenomenological Hermeneutics and the Study of Literature*. Univ. of Toronto Press, \$25.00.

GILES GUNN, *The Culture of Criticism and the Criticism of Culture*. Oxford Univ. Press, \$37.50.

IN HIS STUDY Mario Valdés, professor of Spanish at the University of Toronto, explains and defends his own critical assumptions. He claims to be treading the line between absolutism and deconstructive licence. By the end of the book, which features two demonstrations of his approach on texts by Paz and Borges, the reader understands that Valdés's theory arises from the specific context of Hispanic studies, which is "inextricably entwined with history." This context, along with his insistence on the community of scholars, are seen as antidotes to "some corners of academic North America" where "trivialization has taken over critic's [*sic*] minds."

Valdés's *engagé* attitude to literature is evident in his rejection of absolute meanings; he claims these "render the literary text aesthetically sterile and worthless" — but doesn't quite say why. He is heavily on the side of historically conscious texts be-

cause (he again assumes) we all share "the deeply rooted need to enhance continuity." What of the modern and post-modern call to radical disruption, to "make it new"? These quotations are from the first part of Valdés's book, where he is at his most dogmatic and awkward; here he claims, for example, that "verbal communication is part of reality" and that "existence is one of dynamic process." He is uneasy with semiotics, one rushed passage ending with his solitary quotation from Kristeva; and he summarizes Barthes's purpose as "providing an important stage for an enriched environment of the collective experience of reading texts." He persists in using such expressions as "reality" and the "real world," which preempt the complex theories of being-in-the-world which he is attempting to summarize.

However, Valdés transcends "the muddled middle of heated debate" when he gets on to the history of literary theory. It is a well-trodden path, but here the tradition of Vico, Unamuno, Croce, Gadamer, and Ricoeur is well rehearsed. It is pleasant to read a critic who insists on the historicity of both his own endeavour (Valdés refers to contact with Ricoeur and Iser at Toronto in the early 1970's) and of the text. Despite his ingenuous insistence that "the text was written by someone, about something, for someone to read," Valdés skilfully surveys the main features of Derridean deconstruction. His images of force-fields and energy generators are particularly "illuminating."

Still, there are points where his analysis is heavy-handed and assumes the very concepts which are called into question. He asserts, for example, that the form of a work of literature "is a closed totality," and (more damagingly) that the only thing possible after a deconstructive reading is "silence and the invitation to do it again." His argument that deconstruction is ahistorical and hermetically sealed

within its own negations precludes both the deeply self-conscious historicity of the best deconstructive criticism, and the more recent debate (initiated by Derrida himself) about the wider context of the humanities and the power structures which are served by the critical/humanist enterprise. Valdés prefers to relocate the act of criticism as a celebration within an academic community which he implicitly admires. His Gadamer-like notion of "putting into play" one's heuristic fiction in reading, of asserting one's refiguration of the world, seems homely enough until one subjects it to the usual challenges. How have we escaped the chaos of subjectivity, a myriad of equally unprivileged refigurations? Valdés rejects the problem of what makes the "common" reader (a problem which dogs phenomenological criticism) by baldly asserting that he is concerned not with "the individual experience of reading but only with the essence of such an experience." He also rejects with anger Richard Rorty's subtly rhetorical exhortation "to keep the conversation going" — there is little room for the true polysemy of irony in Valdés's literary community.

It is typical of the highs and lows of this book that such statements should be immediately followed by a useful, simple set of questions which constitute the author's own critical practice: "How does the text operate? What does the text speak about? What does the text say to me? How have I read the text?" In the end the fascination with this book is the same as that provoked by T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent": the rebel heart warring with the compromising mind. Criticism as the celebration of "the creative difference" or "the creative mind" also offers itself for the "edification" of the critic and that problematic "community of commentary."

Giles Gunn's wide-ranging discussion of the relationship between culture, literary

criticism, philosophy, and religion, particularly in the contemporary American context, shares with Valdés's a valorisation of discussion as opposed to debate. Gunn avoids being bogged down in the question of the ontological status of the text, and looks at the ways a variety of critics — Rorty, Bakhtin, William James, Burke, Geertz — have valued literature precisely for its multiplicity. Although the separate chapters sometimes read like extended book reviews of commentators *on* the critics (particularly Lentricchia), Gunn elegantly elucidates many current ways of thinking, and does much to reinstate the American pragmatists as a significant line in cultural criticism. Indeed, Gunn confesses in his preface that his own "hermeneutics and heuristics . . . grow out of, and attempt to extend, the legacy of American pragmatism." He is especially good on the deliberately antic style of Kenneth Burke — a rather surprising turn, since much of his analysis of culture accords with a fortuitous misprint which has him discussing not the "word" but the "work" *culture*.

Gunn is weakest near the beginning. As with Valdés, deconstruction brings out the best and worst in him. He claims that Derrida turns culture into a "self-serving construct" (is there anything wrong with that?) and that deconstruction leaves the cultural critic with little to do. He displays his own ignorance of literature when he talks about deconstruction's fellow travellers "from Barth to Barthelme" (one letter out of twenty-six?). But at the same time he must be credited with distinguishing Derrida's larger view from the narrow-minded practice of many of his followers. One of the many strengths of this survey is Gunn's detachment. He opens by noting the "elegiac mood in all of this," since philosophy and criticism have become marginalized in a world of multinational corporate capitalism. But by the end he has convinced the reader that his kind of

cultural criticism does matter. He welcomes the intermingling of "disciplines," the application of Durkheim and Weber to literary texts. His ability to invite several literary approaches is proof of his own pragmatism. In an excellent final chapter on the relationship between literature and religion in our age, Gunn identifies their common aim of maintaining and celebrating (as Valdés might say) the "otherness" of other ways of thinking, or of the text itself.

I'm not sure that, as a teacher, I would like to enter a classroom with either Valdés or Gunn for rationale. Somehow neither the scholarly tradition nor the validation of world views can be ostensible reasons for study, no matter how large they may loom in the hidden agenda. A less holistic approach, one which encourages a serious play and a delight in beauty (both concepts which enter only fitfully into these analyses), is perhaps a better response to literature in our age.

DAVID DOWLING

SOMETHING EXTRA

KIT HOOD & LINDA SCHUYLER, with Eve Jennings, *Casey Draws the Line and Other Stories*. James Lorimer & Co., \$12.95.

MONICA HUGHES, *Log Jam*. Irwin, \$10.95.

CLAUDE JASMIN, *The Dragon and other Laurentian Tales*, trans. Patricia Sillers. Oxford Univ. Press, \$9.95.

BETTY WATERTON, *Starring Quincy Rumpel*. Groundwood, \$5.95.

THESE FOUR BOOKS have little in common. A certain earnestness that is perhaps typically Canadian speaks from them all, even from whimsy of Betty Waterton's Quincy Rumpel book. Yet more powerful, at least in idea if not in execution, is a theme each shares: the theme of enclosure, imprisonment. In these books, with more or less clarity and force, the shades

of the prison house have descended, and characters either search for the sun, for a place to stretch, or they struggle for recognition and purpose in a rapidly alienating world. Of the four books, two — *Starring Quincy Rumpel* and *Casey Draws the Line* — are slight; the other two are more thoughtful and challenging.

The three stories in *Casey Draws the Line* have their origin in episodes of the TV series, "The Kids of Degrassi Street." The translation from film to book is not a happy one. The written stories have little stylistic energy, and the characters have little personality. Each story has a design upon its reader, the first to point a moral concerning co-operation and property rights, the second to illustrate the importance of self-confidence, and the third to warn children against smoking. These stories of children messing about in clubhouse and backyard lack emotion and consequently miss the opportunity to develop their themes of enclosure: peer pressure, cultural and racial tension, superstition and hero worship. Despite the location, the Degrassi Street neighbourhood, readers do not get the sense of place that they get in, say, Paul Yee's *Teach Me to Fly, Skyfighter!* (1983), a book of stories somewhat similar to *Casey Draws the Line*.

A sense of place is less important to *Starring Quincy Rumpel*, the sequel to Betty Waterton's *Quincy Rumpel* (1984). Here the emphasis is on situational comedy something akin to Joan Aiken's Mortimer and Arabel stories. The plot, such as it is, involves Quincy's plan to advertise her father's rebounders (small trampolines) on TV, but the book moves from one silly crisis to another: losing a pet dog, finding Aunt Twistle's luggage at the airport, entering a costume contest at Halloween, or catching the attention of the soccer coach. There is no lack of energy in this eccentric family. Perhaps the nicest scene occurs early in the book when Mrs.

Rumpel finds herself, still dressed in housecoat and nightgown, alone in the living room with the newly arrived rebounders. She hitches up her bathrobe and steps on to a rebounder, begins bouncing up and down until her nightgown and bathrobe are "swirling about her legs," higher and higher until shouts from her children in the kitchen bring her down with a sigh. Humorously and even movingly, Waterton captures Mrs. Rumpel's desire for abandon. This is a family who gleefully resists the pressures of urban uniformity, the enclosure of suburbia.

Claude Jasmin's *The Dragon and other Laurentian Tales* is a series of short, simply written tales set in the village of St. Adele. These stories of marvellous incidents, talking animals, and descending winter have a bittersweet quality more piquant than but nevertheless related to folk tale. Although set in the Laurentian hills of Quebec and although spare in characters (other than Jasmin there are no adults in the book, at least none that affect the action), the enclosing sweep of suburbia is felt. The bear and the moose move north. Jasmin and his child friends keep secret their talks and adventures with the animals since few would believe them. Caught between the adult's world where wonders have indeed ceased and the child's world where they never cease, Jasmin and his friends see and feel the sadness of necessary separation between man and animal. As the moose says (or writes, since this moose produces slips of birch bark with writing on them from his mouth), his natural habitat is the wild, not cities, whereas Veronique's natural habitat is the village. The forest, he says, "is no place for people." The big white cat from the hotel and the two dogs, big Choupi and little Fritte, reappear from story to story, never talk, and silently remind the reader what happens to animals who live among people all the time. This theme of human entrapment and animal

freedom is apparent in the very structure of the book. As the reader moves from story to story, she moves from season to season, from spring with its bursting promises of hope, to summer in its fullness, to fall, and finally to winter's frozen wonderland.

Wonderland is truly frozen in the book's final story, "The Dogs and the Skating Rink." We have come to winter and the dogs "feel like prisoners." The magnificent pink, mauve, violet, and glossy grey-green dragon of the first story has shrunk to two small dragons with shiny scales. These are inaccessible beneath the ice; "we were out of luck," Jasmin writes. The encounter with imaginative life diminishes; survival for talking toads, dragons, moose, bears, and wolves is not possible in a place where adults consider stories of their existence "tall tales." Their existence must remain a secret, a secret shared by Jasmin, his child friends, and the splendid creatures they meet. The sadness in this book derives from the necessity of secrecy. The folk tale's appeal to a community of old and young has diminished to a wink between the teller and the child.

That these are latter-day folk tales is clear from their matter-of-fact style, probably a result of their oral beginnings as stories told by Jasmin to his nephews and nieces. The residue of oral telling is available even in this English translation, as the following passage indicates:

Rowing back to the beach, I suddenly felt something — a long something — underneath my boat. It made a steady scraping sound. Now I don't think of myself as a coward, but all the same . . . I began to row faster and, to be honest, I didn't want to see anything popping out of the waves.

The qualification of "something" to "a long something" is typical of the storyteller's elaboration during oral telling. The colloquial beginning of "Now I don't consider" catches the oral voice, as does the same sentence, "but all the same . . .,"

where a roll of the eyes or some such gesture completes the sense. Also the "to be honest" interjection establishes the oral teller's intimacy with his audience. Indeed, intimacy is what these stories are all about, the intimacy of author and reader who share the secret of marvellous happenings around Round Lake. This same intimacy is apparent in the black and white illustrations by Jasmin. These are primitive and witty, echoing in line and shading such illustrators as William Steig and Quentin Blake.

The books I have mentioned are for pre-teens, but Monica Hughes's *Log Jam* is a book for adolescents. Here Hughes returns to a contemporary setting to deal with the problems adolescents encounter in growing up — divorce and remarriage of parents, cultural identity, the pull of urban and rural values, and what it means to be free in a world that threatens and squeezes human opportunity — themes and settings she has dealt with in such books as *The Ghost Dance Caper* (1978), *The Hunter in the Dark* (1982), and *My Name is Paula Popowich!* (1983). *Log Jam* has both the virtues and the weaknesses of these earlier books, but it also has a more sophisticated structure and a willingness to enter the consciousness of adults as well as adolescents.

Hughes's weakness is a familiar one to reader's of novels for young adults: heavy-handedness. Lenora's stepfather, Harry, appears too insufferably straight, too organized and informative and unsympathetic. His cool explanation as to why lumber companies ought to "exploit" the forests more aggressively and his calculating use of his wife strike us as too unpleasant for us to accept Lenora's change of attitude to him at the end. Hazel, Lenora's mother, is also presented in the extreme: nervous and weak. In theme as in character, Hughes is quick to give the reader more than enough help. The book modulates nicely with images of prison,

entrapment, and immoveability. Perhaps Hughes thinks her young reader incapable of understanding these images, for at the end she has Lenora say just what the book has been trying to show: "*Maybe all of us are alone most of the time. Each one in his or her own prison.*" Emotions can be jammed up, like the log in the river that stopped Lenora's canoe, and until something sets that log free there will be no connection with others, no passage to understanding of others.

The strengths of *Log Jam* are fine writing, a willingness to show toughness of vision, and a structural complexity that will challenge young readers. The fine writing is especially evident in the sections of the book that deal with Isaac, the Indian boy who has escaped from a prison camp. His feel for the wilderness and his attachment to the old ways and legends of his people allow Hughes to show her ability at poetic writing that captures the spirit of the wild and primitive. At the same time, Hughes does not grow sentimental over this lost boy in the woods. His fierce desire for freedom leaves him gaunt and desperate so that when he meets Lenora his frantic, near crazed, attempt to keep her from signalling her rescuers is believable and frightening. Hughes also manages the bringing of these two together deftly, interweaving chapters devoted to Isaac with chapters devoted to Lenora and her family until the two come together in chapter 9, on the third day of the adventure. For both Isaac and Lenora, their meeting completes a rite of passage that leads to acceptance and understanding.

All four books deal with luck and secrecy, the need to move carefully but boldly in a world set with traps for the progress into adulthood. Hughes's book, because it is for older children, has a complexity the others lack. Jasmin's folk tales skirt the sentimental. Waterton's comedy will entertain, but not provoke thought.

The Degrassi Street volume attempts to provoke thought, but will succeed only in engaging the young reader who does not want the challenge of strangeness, of something she must imagine beyond her limited experience. The secret of fine writing for the young, as for all readers, is to ask for something extra. Hughes and Jasmin wish to do this, the other two do not.

RODERICK MCGILLIS

INTEGRALITY

ROBERT ALLEN, *One Night At The Indigo Hotel*. Cormorant Books, n.p.

JOHN REIBETANZ, *Ashbourn*. Montreal: Signal Editions/Véhicule, \$9.95.

DARKO R. SUVIN, *The Long March: Notes on the Way 1981-1984*. Hounslow, \$8.95.

WHAT IS PARTICULARLY important about these three books is the apparent directness and honesty of statement, the strength — and flexibility — of form (and form is always the servant of ideas for these writers), and the constant attempt to seek and to speak the truth, even if the truth as seen by the poets involves ambivalence, insecurity, or even potential discomfort for some readers. All three books comment on, and at times attempt to explain, the notion of aspiration and striving, the necessity (and honour) of struggle, the age-old (but not always old-age) theme of the brevity of time and beauty, and all three offer, along the way, vivid imagery which frequently has its roots, like so much of this country's art, in the pastoral. And the pastoral serves not only as a mine for metaphor and simile but, typically, at certain points, as a vehicle for escape from an urban world that has the capacity to impair and to corrupt.

Allen's poems speak of individual sensitivities with simplicity, economy, and clarity — splendid classical ideals whose virtue is displayed more in their achieve-

ment than by windy rhetoric about them. Focusing, for the most part, on central Canadian and eastern American scenes, the poet, in evocative pictures, invites a consideration of scenes both urban and rural, as in "Montreal at Night, September 12, 1986" ("Reared plinths of light, almost swaying, dancing") and in "Equinox" ("Wind bawls out late winter cantatas / like the most piteous country song" and "Geese bestride a near-full moon"). "New York City, from Prince Edward Island by Train" is a vivid, masterful handling of the journey poem, and the book's own title piece, "One Night at the Indigo Hotel," offers touching nostalgia in prose form but avoids the mawkish and the banal. And while there are sombre moments — "Franco" is another example — there are touches of wry humour as in the comic pastoral "The Last Episode of Wild Kingdom: Snaring Marlon Perkins."

Reibetanz's *Ashbourn* is, in its geographical focus, much more concentrated than Allen's book, and it has a clear theme — the nature and lives of the people in a small village in Suffolk. Each poem centres on a particular character or scene — "Will Travis, Blacksmith," "Bob Copping, Veteran," or "Stones from Ashbourn Churchyard." Again, many of the images are drawn from nature: this set of poems comprises an extended pastoral cycle. The approach to the characters — to the village scene — is as compassionate as it is detailed and revealing; in one sense this is country and county history, told through compelling narrative, and in another, human nature writ large. As in Allen's volume, courage, strength, and dignity are not only presented as admirable but as requisite for survival. The back cover announces that this is Reibetanz's first book — if the statement is a defence, it is unnecessary, for the pieces are marked with the touch of a sure hand which ought to give us more books: *Ashbourn* needs no apologies.

Suvin's *The Long March* needs no apologies either. While it owes an acknowledged debt to classical Chinese culture (to Chinese literature, in particular), its statements and observations come to grips challengingly with the modern world. Suvin, like the other two writers, is a skilful fashioner of visions and vistas, a lyricist of dexterity and deftness whose touch commands the ear and the heart. He is concerned about the state of the world (note, for instance, "Genosucide" and "'The Decay of a Ruling Class Spreads Stench Everywhere' (In Wu's Style)"), about the nature of beauty or reality (consider "Ein Traum das Leben (A Dream This Life)"), and about the attainment of honour in age (as in "Old and New Wisdom"). Suvin emphasizes the "integr(al)ity," to use his term, of assumed polarities, and that is worth more than a passing thought in what seems, more frequently, to be an age of expediency and compartmentalized morality. Suvin offers us some genuinely memorable moments in pieces which demand to be reread at the same time as they impel us to read on. As he writes in "Some Esthetics on a Summer Morning": "the poetry is in the inexhaustible / above underneath between words."

BRYAN N. S. GOOCH

FATHER BASTARD

GEORGE MCWHIRTER, *Cage*. Oberon, \$19.95.

THOUGH NO STRANGER to prose fiction, George McWhirter is known first for his poetry. Inevitably his novel *Cage* is seen first as the fiction of a poet. *Cage* plunges us, as poetry does, into exposition as immediate as it is foreign: "Ben T. Carragher has thought about little else for years. Bird-cages, Don John of Austria and a teenage girl, Angelina." Who fails to concentrate is lost. The reader's atten-

tion is demanded also by McWhirter's heavy reliance upon precise imagery rather than action to advance the plot, and by a compressed syntax. "If only he had a foot of land for every horse's he had put between his knees!" Most of his sentences are simple; complex structures are presented in their elliptical forms, lacking relative pronouns; and compound structures are usually broken into sentence fragments to keep the prose direct and colloquial.

One good reason for this style is its feeling of closeness to the fundamentals of human existence. We are in rural Mexico, where the sophistications of twentieth-century industrialization are absent or else false. Another good reason is that McWhirter's style, by calling attention to itself, prepares us for a major theme of *Cage*, language. Carragher, a Jesuit priest, gains the trust of native women not when he speaks a language they understand, Spanish (the language of their country's conquerors), but a language they do not, English (the tongue of those who conquered the Spanish in other parts of the globe). He is privy to the confidences of a wealthy American because they converse in their first language. "This was something he knew well, between people who have been buried away in a foreign language, that immediate intimacy that the ease of a common tongue unlooses." The celibate Carragher even transfers to language much of his need for sexual life — "erotic vulgarity; the words connected, copulated still" — and insists upon his national distinctiveness in the choice of words:

"In Canada, at the reserve where I was."
 "Reservation?"
 "Reserve."

The Irish-Canadian priest in a third-world country asserts his right to a national diction during conversation with a wealthy American. A third reason for Mc-

Whirter's simple style, we may notice, is that it encourages speculation regarding symbolism, parables, and allegory.

But the language theme has a more distinct focus in the role of the writer. Irish-Canadian Roman Catholic McWhirter — locked up in a room in Mexico, writing on sabbatical from his B.C. teaching job? — has his priest incarcerated in a church in Oaxaca. There he writes his history of Don John of Austria, like him the bastard of a wealthy and powerful father, like him faced with the choice of spiritual purity or worldly fortune. Priest becomes writer, and soon recognizes the need for a writer to become his main character, "slipping into seeing everything as Don John saw it. In order to dramatize his history he too had to feel neglected, passed-over, ignored." A parable of the writer, insufficiently recognized by society? If so, doubly trapped by the fact that society is his only material: despite its unrewarding nature, society is the context for everything he may attempt to say.

That realization justifies McWhirter's choice of the father as Carragher's main obsession. His preoccupation with Don John is founded upon the mutual condition of bastardy; bastardy is a concept which emphasizes the pre-eminence of the father; the priest is a father to his flock, yet celibate; there is much talk of impotency, and waiting women. Carragher's reputation is based less on his economic impact (he establishes a cage-making industry in the town) than on his fathering a child without benefit of sexual intercourse. Although women dominate men in this Oaxacan town, the myth of fatherhood dominates all, an ultimate cage to contain and define existence. The Father who tried to uncage the people economically by teaching them to make cages is at home here, where his personal obsession is established myth. Ironically, the people who have accepted and de-

fended him will inevitably want him to become part of that myth:

They need him to go for everything to fit into place. That is how they want the gringo — like the old god, Quetzalcoatl: gone, leaving them wonders — pulque, mescal, cribs and cages. Cadillacs.

RON MILES

PASSION

SUZANNE JACOB, *La Passion Selon Galatée*. Editions du Seuil, \$12.95.

ALICE PARIZEAU, *L'amour de Jeanne*. Pierre Tisseyre, n.p.

La Passion Selon Galatée est remarquable pour le manque de véritable passion dans la vie de Gala, l'héroïne du texte, qui est décrite par son amant Babey, "une pauvre rentière," comme ça: "Tu es insensible, tu es égocentrique, tu es d'un narcissisme morbide, tu es froide, tu n'as aucune tendresse, aucune amitié, tu es une allumeuse de première, et dure. . . . Il a fallu cette incroyable aventure pour que je te vois telle que tu es." Voilà le reflet de la condition humaine contemporaine. On doit suivre attentivement les incroyables aventures de Gala pour découvrir cette indifférence, cette recherche interminable pour un autre objet d'admiration.

Dans une interversion ironique du mythe de Pygmalion et Galatée, c'est Gala qui doit donner une signification et animer ceux qui adorent être adorés, d'autant que tous ses amis l'accusent d'une incapacité de vivre et d'avoir "une langue que tu es seule à connaître et à comprendre." Elle répond qu'elle est "dépourvue d'une langue adéquate" pour s'exprimer. Ce qui se reflète entièrement dans ce roman de Suzanne Jacob. Ainsi dans sa quête, l'héroïne nous expose les détails des vies intimes — de Sylvie Nord, l'ancien amante socialiste de Gala, engagée en bataille avec Baldwin pour avoir les droits de garder cette statue d'ivoire, "une petite

bourgeoise blanche de peur qui a tout à perdre,” du prêtre qui était son premier amant, et de sa soeur Titi, une neurotique qui vit en banlieu de Toronto — d’une manière qui ressemble aux conversations d’esprit de philosophie, d’érotisme, et de gastronomie, en vogue dans les films de Godard, de Woody Allen, ou comme dans celles évoquées dans *Le déclin de l’empire américain*, *The Big Chill*, et *The Four Seasons*. Ce n’est pas par accident que Gala adresse toutes ses prières et ses lettres à Godard (affectueusement connu comme “God”) car l’histoire ressemble au déroulement d’un de ses films, avec le vol spontané des voleurs de banque, une chasse, et une retraite dans une boîte enchantée où Gala cultive le jardin d’un *pusher* et de sa copine jusqu’au point où “L’Araignée” qui l’a suivi dans ses rêves la trouve là. “Puis ça passe exactement dans les films qui sont dans la vie.”

Les automatismes de la vie moderne, où tout le monde meurt d’ennui, sont bien captées ici, et tout l’action a lieu dans les voitures, les trains, les taxis, les autobus, les appartements à la mode, ou les chambres d’hôtel. Gala est représentée par “un cube, impénétrable, lisse, parfait . . . emprisonné dans la tête.” Toutes les images reproduisent cette emprisonnement — les gemaux Siamois, la pomme qui se transforme en biche, l’ivoire, les *clips* de films — elles sont évocatrices, mais ne se rejoignent jamais avec cohérence. Le point de mire efface la distinction entre le réel et l’imaginaire quand Gala est obsédée par “les états d’âme et pour la morbidité.” Si c’est vrai que “l’amour est plus fort que tout,” selon Babey, ce qui est impossible pour Gala c’est d’être touchée constamment, de trouver l’élément sauvage dans la vie, de connaître la relation entre la chance et l’ordre, et de décider du rôle de Pigue, sa père, (Pygmalion) dans sa vie (“j’ai tendance à me prendre pour Dieu le Père”). Les divagations deviennent de plus en plus abstraites et philosophiques;

finalement Gala, comme Alice dans “Wonderland,” a son échange le plus profond en était dévisagée par son reflet dans la vitre de l’autobus “de voir si je suis entière” ou s’il y a vraiment plusieurs Gala. Enfin, elle fait appel à son créateur pour réunir tous ses personnages, et elle peut poursuivre sa carrière de chanteuse. Mais on sent que ses chansons ne seront jamais joyeuses et l’on est hanté comme Gala elle-même par le bruit que fait l’eau qui coule dans la baignoire pendant toute la narration, en se demandant continuellement s’il viendra qu’a s’arrêter.

L’amour de Jeanne, le dernier roman d’Alice Parizeau, met en vedette une autre héroïne qui dit “je ne suis pas capable d’aimer.” Mais ici on n’attend pas l’arrivée d’Aphrodite pour lui insuffler la vie au cœur, non plus après l’autorité du Père car l’important c’est d’être réunie avec la mère. Alice Parizeau revient à Varsovie de *Les lilas fleurissent à Varsovie* pour la mise en scène de sa saga polonaise qu’elle a commencée il y a vingt ans. Auparavant, elle l’a toujours présenté du point de vue omniscient. Alors que dans ce cas-ci, par l’intermédiaire de Zosia, la jeune fille qui garde ses secrets dans un journal où elle interprète les événements de l’insurrection de Varsovie, l’auteur a recours à une technique narrative subjective. Cela permet moins de maladresse et ajoute au sentiment d’intimité et d’intensité de l’histoire, ce qui autrement aurait enclin Alice Parizeau à la répétition des sujets exploités dans ses romans précédents.

Ce qui distingue également cet essai des autres c’est l’accent mis sur le monde des femmes, leurs secrets, leurs mystères, leurs trahisons. Sous prétexte de décrire la vie de Zosia, l’objectif de sa quête n’est autre que la recherche de *L’amour de Jeanne*, sa mère, et l’histoire couvre la durée de leurs deux existences, ainsi que celle de Mme. Dorota, qui est forcée par les circonstances de la guerre de partager leur

petit appartement, et qui devient le mentor de Zosia. D'où les expériences dans sa vie acquièrent les trois aspects archétypés de la femme: la vierge, la mère, et la vieille bique, représentés par ces trois générations de femmes. Au début méfiante et critique de sa mère, qui a pris un amant Karol ("cet homme que je hais avec toutes mes forces") tout de suite après l'arrestation et la disparition de son père, Zosia apprend éventuellement à lui pardonner, elle qui en réalité n'avait d'autre désir que de protéger sa fille contre le fait que son père soit mort. En même temps, sa mère soupçonne que Zosia gagne de l'argent au marché noir ne pose pas de questions lorsque Zosia lui achète un parfum dispendieux pour son cadeau de Noël. Il y a beaucoup de pathétique lorsque Zosia essaie de protéger sa mère, que est "naïve" et "d'une sensibilité à fleur de peau," en même temps qu'en projetant soi-même le paradoxe de la fragilité et la puissance.

C'est le temps des découvertes, des culpabilités, des trahisons. Comme beaucoup de jeunes gens, Zosia accepte d'être disponible pour tous. La parallèle entre sa première expérience sexuelle et l'incident de la "surdose" de médicaments par Mme. Dorota lorsque Zosia en a la garde, représente l'expression de sa perte d'innocence. Comme soldat elle apprend bien les relations entre l'amour, la mort, et la sexualité: "En quelques secondes, j'avais cessé d'être enfant." S'il y a un film que ce roman évoque, c'est *Hiroshima, mon amour*, où on voit que "il y a donc un lieu entre la mort et l'amour absolu." Les émotions d'adolescence sont captivés d'une manière poignante, et les paradoxes de la vie sont présentés d'une façon simple et directe. Un exemple typique de la puissance d'Alice Parizeau se manifeste dans la scène où Mme. Dorota doit enlever les poux de la tête des deux rescapés du ghetto, fait à la fois dégoûtant et émouvant.

Zosia à la longue doit reconnaître les trois femmes au sein elle-même. Par contraste, l'homme, dont le rôle est minimisée dans le texte, n'est pas permis de déranger les liens entre femmes — ni Karol, qui entreprends de remplacer le manque de liens entre Zosia et sa mère, ni Tomek, qui décrit Zosia comme une putain, ni son dernier amant Daniel, qui dit que son "désir de retrouver maman n'était ni normal ni légitime." En confrontant la mort de sa mère et celle de Mme. Dorota, Zosia rends le cycle féminin complet car elle y découvre la passion pour vivre. En revenant en Pologne, elle trouve le patriotisme absent en France. Elle déclare que "à Paris, ne pas aimer, c'est un peu comme être infirme," mais il y a parler de la passion et la vivre! Divisée comme Gala après une maladie, Zosia apprend de Mme. Dorota "que la malédiction du monde c'est l'incapacité des uns à aider les autres." Son courage, sa puissance, de pair avec la connaissance de soi, créent dans sa vie une véritable sens de la passion, ce qui contraste grandement d'avec *La Passion Selon Galatée*, où Gala choisi de ne pas acheminer la passion jusqu'à son expression.

ELISABETH POTVIN

SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

CAROL MATAS, *Zanu*. Fifth House, \$3.95.

ERIC WILSON, *The Unmasking of K'san*. Collins, \$13.95.

NEITHER OF THESE easily read, unpretentious novels for young adults is going to be a classic of Canadian children's literature, but both have qualities which set them off from standard works of their genres. Although stylistically undistinguished, and specifically intended to lure the reluctant reader from the TV set with a series of dizzyingly paced adventures recounted in a simple vocabulary, both books do manage to arouse the reader's

interest in more than just what happens next. As well as the thrills and chills, they have a real concern for social issues, issues within a Canadian context, and without any easy solutions.

Zanu, an anti-Utopian fantasy, uses the device of time travel for a didactic purpose; like the prototype of its genre, H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, *Zanu* gives an admonitory vision of the future, in which present threats have become realities. In Winnipeg in 2085, synthetic comforts temporarily cushion city-dwellers from awareness of the devastation outside, created by acid rain, other forms of pollution, and the "greenhouse effect." The eponymous *Zanu*, a giant corporation which has taken over the world, enforces the spending of money and consumption of goods as the chief duty of all citizens. Children must leave school at the age of 10, to join the work force as producers and consumers; they have money, cars, and fashionable clothes, but not the opportunity to continue to be school children, and no contact with what we now think of as nature.

Matas borrows largely and rather too casually from stock science-fiction gadgets, while her characters seem to be merely colour-coded — distinguishable by the descriptions of their hair and clothing rather than by any genuine individuality. What makes her vision unusual within North American writing for young adults, however, is its child's-eye vision of a world wholly given over to consumerism, and its direct ascription of social evils to the corporate and individual greed of our own society. Matas leaves implicit a realization of how far we have already moved towards the compulsive and compulsory shopping mania of this future world, but her scene in the Winnipeg mall of 2085 is both prophetic and eerily familiar. More overtly, the novel stresses personal choice and responsibility as the means of preventing such a future. Unlike most

popular fiction for teenagers, Matas's book challenges some very basic North American social values, and shows what damage our own comfort-seeking can do. It's a pity that such important subject matter is not embodied in a more carefully conceived and better-written story.

The most recent in a popular series of mystery/thrillers by Eric Wilson, *The Unmasking of K'san* is a better novel than *Zanu* and less didactic in its treatment of social issues. The plot concerns the theft of a valuable old Raven mask after it has been borrowed by a young dancer in the K'san ceremonies. To clear her own name and to recover the heirloom, she and her friend Graham search for the mask, letting their suspicions fall on a variety of colourful characters within the community. There are indeed so many hair-raising adventures and suspicious characters that Wilson cannot get the full effect from any of them before we are rushed on to the next. A teacher of remedial reading, Wilson aims his books at the reluctant junior high student, and uses colloquial dialogue, vivid settings (cliff edges, rushing rivers, and dangerous bridges abound), and a hectic sequence of adventures which leaves the characters little time for reflection. Those characters are, however, often interesting individuals: Graham is not a slick boy-wonder of the Hardy type, but is created with a humour and sympathy which allow us to care about him as well as about his solution of the mystery. Unlike the Hardy Boys' usual opponents, Wilson's thieves are given very mixed and believable motives, and are capable of genuinely kind gestures towards the young protagonists. Only in touching on Graham's grief for his dead mother does Wilson seem to overdo it a little; the treatment is too light and perfunctory for the experience.

Wilson, who has a geographically schematic approach to his fiction (*Vancouver Nightmare*, *Terror in Winnipeg*, *Vam-*

pires of Ottawa, etc.), sets this story in the northwestern B.C. village of K'san, which has become a showplace for the native culture of the area. He suggests some of the complexity of native reaction to tourism here, where the wealth of traditional crafts and the public performances of dances and ceremonies have made the native heritage the object of non-native interest and also cupidity. For example, he shows how a carver who wishes to explore new forms is frustrated to find that only very traditional work is commercially profitable. Although, as his titles suggest, Wilson always likes to daub his mystery stories with lots of local colour, the colour in this novel is not just superficial; as well as providing the geography of the chase scenes, K'san supplies the mystery itself, as the means and motives of the robbery and the reactions of key characters are a part of the lives and concerns of the local people, and could not easily be shifted to another setting. Wilson lightly but effectively gives his readers some sense of the problems of a society which is receiving international recognition for its past achievements but not for its present ones. *The Unmasking of K'san* should not be overestimated; like *Zanu*, it retains the common weaknesses of its genre, such as an overly hectic plot and sometimes perfunctory characterization. Nonetheless, it is heartening to find popular fiction for adolescents in which not only adventure or the personal achievements and emotional struggles of the protagonist, but serious social issues, are at the centre of the story.

GWYNETH EVANS



ALLURE

LORNE DANIEL, *Falling Together*. Thistledown, \$8.95.

W. B. ROBERTSON, *Standing On Our Own Two Feet*. Coteau, \$7.00.

EUGENE MCNAMARA, *The Moving Light*. Wolsak & Wynn, n.p.

CHILDREN PLAY A pivotal role in Lorne Daniel's *Falling Together*, not only in the individual pieces but in the way the whole book is put together. It is arranged in two sections, and children impart to each its particular momentum. The book begins with a birth, and it takes awhile for the first section to unfold fully into its characteristic tone of vulnerability and caution. The poet sees his children, initially extensions of himself, growing away from him into an independent relationship with the world:

*I know Kate adds
I know numbers never end
Numbers never end until you die*

The poet's attempts to control the growing apart of various fragments of his life are thwarted, and the life itself becomes an elemental force which he observes as an outsider:

mud coagulates around the heart
in the lungs
breath a labour
heaving the heavy goop
up, clay sucking in my foot
crawling up my leg
a streaked spring kitten
i want to beat
against my window, break
inside/out
till i cut colour into the sky

The ambiguity and poignancy of this situation is nowhere more clearly drawn than when Daniel writes about the house he built. As a repository of domestic experience this artifact too takes on its own forms of awareness, an independence beyond the lives of the builders/residents:

I could almost forget
 the wood
 the money
 the cold wet hours
 the blood blisters
 could forgive the memory if
 that spot on the floor
 by the door
 didn't squeak
 if you were here
 when I stepped on it tonight

The second section begins with the hurt withdrawal of the first but gradually establishes an opposite momentum as the poet cautiously re-advances into emotional contact with others. Here again children play a special part, this time establishing a positive, active mood:

In the middle of the night when the moon
 washes walls
 in clean waking white he goes to their rooms
 holds his breath
 listening for theirs
 blinks — and again —
 finds them, partially emergent from covers,
 as from cocoons
 and bends, as if for the first time, to touch
 skin luminous and new

This second section is structurally weaker; it is hard to understand, for instance, the inclusion of "After Dropping Out of Dance" when the central character has no obvious connection with the narrator, and her sad withdrawal belongs in the first section.

Daniel uses long, loose, impressionistic sentences. This style suits his concern with the ambiguity of action and the attempt to chart the sources of emotion. It is also just right for the abstracted nostalgia of many of the poems, especially in the first section. Archaic usages do turn up, but only rarely, and without being too disruptive. Daniel has a particular skill in evoking memory, coupled with the intelligence and control to explore broad themes on an intimate level.

William Robertson's *Standing On Our Own Two Feet* is arranged in three sections, unified by a movement similar — or parallel — to that charted by Daniel. Robertson is also preoccupied by the remembrance of things past, but here the development of that theme is more comprehensive, embracing an entire life cycle, or at least a part that could stand for the whole. The physical quality of the images establishes the direction, moving from liquid softness to palpable hardness. This underscores the movement from childhood and the memory of childhood, through the central section with its painful growth into awareness, to the final section which might abstractly stand for death but really serves as a place of quiet reflection where the conscious, active mind flows back into its experiences, and where there is a greater focus on the hard edges of landscape:

We have gone in farther than
 ever before
 and John can take us still farther
 two more portages
 over much of the shield that butts
 up through the forest
 to lakes our illusions
 would have us believe
 are hardly touched
 and then I no longer dangle
 my hand over the edge
 of the canoe

Robertson uses shorter sentences than Daniel. At the same time some of the poems explode into jumbled, impressionistic endings. This can be an effective way to produce almost-subconscious echoes in the reader's mind, but I get the feeling that Robertson sometimes uses it to mask a problem with closure, as in "Poem for Dr. A.," where the final image does not really tie anything together, as if it came from another poem, or as if Robertson were not sure what he meant to say. Robertson is a good writer — at his best — and he and the reader would have benefited from a more careful job of editing.

Eugene McNamara's *The Moving Light* is taut and finely controlled, the poet relaxed and aware of his voice and the persona it carries. On the back cover an excerpt from a review by Wayne Telfs of McNamara's *Call it a Day* says "His works intentionally disregard the ordered . . . structures of the conscious mind" in favour of unconscious reality as evoked by strong images. Most of the work does indeed seem to focus on external detail to the point where the reader sometimes is not sure if McNamara is anywhere in the immediate vicinity. Yet by the presence of a single poem like "breakfast Special," which is weak because it seems to lack a controlling presence, the reader realizes that McNamara has been subtly in control everywhere else.

The poet's comprehensive assurance provides a broad context within which each poem is a detailed expression with a definite beginning and end. This enables more definite closure than we find in Robertson or Daniel yet allows for calculated and rhetorically effective departures from conventional syntax, as in "Running Rivers of my Youth," the final piece:

Always i go back to that first
river of no name when i had
no name standing on cut gully
bank the large stones half wet
half white bone in dry light
knowing them sacred knowing
the rivers rill furrowing the
high certain field sacred
before i knew a name for my
self knowing my self whole

McNamara's acute feeling for the importance of detail enables him to render faithfully not only the details themselves but also the ways we perceive and relate to the external world. The following lines show him at his best:

In a farmers kitchen someone
whistles to a dog who pants
for action a screen door slams
and game birds rise to moonlight
over the uneasy fields

While McNamara is not as overtly concerned with the evocation of memory as Daniel or Robertson, his love of image creates strong nostalgic echoes in the reader. I am not putting the others down — their aims are different — but McNamara's skill and strongly individual tone impress, alone or in comparison.

A more direct comparison can be drawn in terms of the personal experience of which McNamara writes. He, like the other two, has lived through a marriage, though he no longer (apparently) lives with his children. Many of the poems deal with loneliness, or at least 'alone-ness.' The poet describes himself at home with other lives going on outside, or imagining himself elsewhere:

And the late ships under the bridge
salute each other deep and echoing
god! when i hear them i get weak
thinking of far off ports going
away so i lie still waiting to be
taken

Throughout *The Moving Light* there is this lucid tension between the poet's spot of solitude and all the other places and lives he might reach and can at least imagine. The voyage, the forsaking of here for there, becomes an anticipated ritual of cleansing in which the untidy old is washed away by the absolute cleanness of the unknown. McNamara's triumph lies in his ability to convey the allure of the strange and unknown through precise images, which in turn allow the reader to be projected, sometimes with alarming strength, into the poet's deepest longings.

ANDREW BROOKS



DREAMS & ICONS

FRANCIS SPARSHOTT, *Storms and Screens*.
Childe Thursday, \$6.50.

W. D. VALGARDSON, *The Carpenter of Dreams*.
Skaldhús Press, n.p.

"IT MUST BE borne in mind," Sartre once said, having no doubt suffered a recent unfavourable review, "that most critics are men who have not had much luck and who, just about the time they were growing desperate, found a quiet little job as cemetery watchmen." Speaking as a cemetery watchman, I note that one of the poems in *The Carpenter of Dreams* is "November at Ross Bay Cemetery":

Slow lines of spume along the breakwater
Shake the sailors in their old boats.
Anchored by unfeeling hearts, the dead
Shift and jerk once more as if with dreams.
My coat

Stands taut as a dark sail. Beneath me
The thick stone hums to itself, vibrates
Until I am riding the vast ocean,
I and five thousand silent shipmates.

Within the textual field set up by *The Carpenter of Dreams* this poem is notable not least because it brings into succinct configuration hearts, dreams, and silence/silent — three of this collection's most obviously constitutive signs. It is important also because it situates us, liminal, between sea and land. Part of one's negotiation with this text is to imagine coast. The sense of being on this sort of threshold, of being coastal, is unassertively pervasive, like spindrift. Some good things are landward, like mountains (though some of these are coastal too), but then so also are abandoned or dangerous houses, Joe Clark in Moscow, empty factories, diminishing aspirations, a native Indian stalking through a crazed nightmare of urbanities, or a lost lover whose separation is construed, the context suggests, as sixteen hundred miles inland. The sea, though, comes to signify the heroic, adventurous,

royal, sacral; the ceremonious, even heraldic:

Send fifteen ferries to speed my love
To me. Let their white wakes churn the seas
As if great beasts were carrying a sacrifice
To this green island . . .

It also signifies the mourning of desire for what is recoverable only as or in elegy. All of which significations are at play, for example, in "Sealand"; or at the liminal place and moment, between land and ocean, as in "At Sidney Spit with Friends," "Interlude," or "After a Quarrel" where the tones of angry grief modulate to precarious content. Threshold contentments, however, are provisional. Readers are reminded, even as they generate such a working semiosis of sea/coast/land, that it is unstable. Shorelines bring their equivocations if not outright undecidabilities, as in "The End of Fall Fishing: 1953": "On the dock, the light-house blinks / A desperate message to the sky." A whale's death by beaching ("Whale of Frenzy") or a rowing trip dangerously interrupted by a squall ("Egg Island") both in their way ambiguate relations between sea and land, that is to say, coastal relations; both rework the maimed coast-dweller's oceanic dream of epic grandeur, simplicity, and venture. And the very title "Sealand" tells a lot: liminal possibilities and/or ambiguities equally have disappeared. Threshold has been oxymoronically eliminated; sea and land have been collapsed into a banal sign of exploitation, the name of an unplace where sea kings perform in/for the human circus.

As all this emphasis on sea/coast/land suggests, *The Carpenter of Dreams* is very much an outdoors text. Except for the title poem (a rather curious special case) there isn't too much in the way of indoors. There is a good deal of escaping "from the certainty of doors," doors that do not function, as our erstwhile semiotic beachcombing might predict, as thresholds be-

tween inside and outside. It seems rather to go thus: houses a-building or inhabited by lovers are carpentered of dreams — dream homes; houses that are abandoned or sites of lonely, solitary housekeeping are also dreams of a sort. The former are to one kind of dream (aspiration, anticipation, desire) as the latter are to another (dream-as-loss, desire disappointed, how things actually turned out). It is an elegaic letter-poem that opens *The Carpenter of Dreams*. It is addressed to the writer's already separated, soon to be ex-wife who, it seems likely, is also the addressee of "The Visit." Whether or not we are tempted to narrativize this further, one line from "The Visit," the innocuous, often banal phrase "We went indoors" resonates with both senses of dream home, inflecting a pleasure and a loss, recording a brief reunion in past tense elegaic. Again, whether or not it invites us to make a marriage-gone-wrong story of it, the text certainly has as one of its projects the reassembly and stabilization of a subject painfully decentred by loss. This is (one place) where the title poem, "The Carpenter of Dreams," comes in. For me it is the least persuasive poem in the collection: there are few literary enterprises less convincing than warmed-over Frost; but the poem is important in its context because the carpenter whose speech is being reported functions as an exemplary sign and instance of a unitary petty bourgeois subject in a state of good repair. He is represented representing himself as an "independent sort," a folksy artisan who, in respect of the workings of ideology, is interpolated as a version of the freestanding individual so dear to our middle-class liberal humanisms. Perhaps not entirely freestanding. He is able briefly to glimpse that his independence and integrity are socially constructed, functions of the ability of some few other subjects to pay for his custom carpentry. There is no marking which I can detect in the poem to

suggest that the speaker has anything but approving admiration for his carpenter. But there is an interesting contradiction which gets played out here, for nowhere else in the text does the speaker come anywhere close to his admired carpenter's stable self-satisfactions. Indeed the speaker's major figure for psychic reassembly, restabilization, and coping with loss is resurrection — not a notably autonomous operation. There is some sense of process as one produces the text and almost unavoidably supplies a minimal story. The text's last piece is modestly festive; entitled "Happiness," it seeks to represent one of those relatively unselfconscious moments, unhaunted by dreams, sore hearts, and silence.

Chance in the form of review editor's choice placed *The Carpenter of Dreams* in relation to *Storms and Screens* and this reviewer in relation to them both. By way of animating these relations I note, first, that *Storms and Screens* offers a much more complex discourse than *The Carpenter of Dreams*. In Bakhtinian terms the composition of the former is dialogic in tendency; the latter, monological. In *The Carpenter of Dreams* poems of personal address and informal colloquy, whether descriptive or narrative, contemplative or assertive, costive or expansive, only rarely fit in the livery of specific genres. There are one or two letters (the first one very important) and, perhaps, a couple of journals or diary entries. With a single exception *The Carpenter of Dreams* keeps to one dialect, so to say, within the conventionally canonic "speech genre" of poetry; it rarely enters into intertextual parley with precursor texts, and a reader can consume it in readerly fashion from a single, unruffled subject position. The simple (i.e., single) dialect goes with the construction and representation of a would-be freestanding individual speaker; they are functions of each other. (The exception is "He Does

Not Sing" which, as to form and rhetoric, seems to come from nowhere — strongly atypical in rhythm, tone, rhetorical stance, and sounding like some Brechtian ballad for Père Ubu; at the level of theme, though, it is quite clear where this character is coming from: he is an eruption of our friendly neighbourhood autonomous subject's dark doppelganger, busy being himself alone.) In *Storms and Screens*, by contrast, the verse is motley — often self-consciously and playfully so; it utters in various speech genre dialects of poetry and goes in numerous generic liveries. One detects accents from the discourses of metaphysics, theology, science (all these three together in "The Step at the World's End"), of Critical Theory, of literary theory and literary conversation (both of these, for example, in "For a Lost Poet"), and literary-biographical history ("Celan"). One flows along in a carnival of genres: classical ode, nursery rhyme, both letter and diary in "From a Letter from a Diary," ballad, gossip, pastoral, fairy tale, and several self-reflexive, metapoetic pieces such as "Wartime School," "Exhalations of a Dying Metaphor," or "On the Margin."

An aside: one of these metapoems serves as epigraph to the collection; it is a brief piece called "Blank" that raises the only real problem I have with *Storms and Screens*:

The paper stares up at me now
as it stared at Shakespeare.
Margin to margin the pens
with the same fitful scratching
scrawl. Words are the same and dark
ladies and lads are the same.
The poems are different.

No, the words are not the same. Or rather, many of them are the same but also different. They've undergone semantic migrations or linguistic slides since Shakespeare's day; their contexts and pretexts are so different as to enforce not only new differences among them but also differ-

ences within themselves. As Michel Pêcheu says in *Language, Semantics, and Ideology*, words change their meanings according to the positions held by those who use them. But just as the rest of *The Carpenter of Dreams* tends to deconstruct "The Carpenter of Dreams," so here the practice in the rest of *Storms and Screens* is better than the theory of "Blank."

To enlarge briefly on the discursive complexity of *Storms and Screens*: there is a fine range and subtlety to its declensions of intertextuality, such as allusion, parody, citation, commentary; and there is that modification, sometimes transformation of readers' relations to precursor texts, that opening up of new positions for reading subjects, without which allusion and citation are not in themselves significantly intertextual. In "Celan," for example, the closing phrase "seeing life steadily / seeing it through" induces in the reader's response to the precursor text of Matthew Arnold a sea-change, rubbing open his ideology of wholeness. Seeing life through is very different from seeing it whole. Or to take an example which can well speak for itself — except for me to remark that Penelope is speaking:

till at dinner one day
surprise surprise
that isn't a beggar no it's the old man
himself in person with his bows and arrows
and the last dog dies
and the very first thing he does
he kills the domestic staff
onetwothreefourfivesix justlikethat
the cook and the laundrymaid
and the parlourmaid and the chambermaid
and the two maids who did the work
he hangs them
hello darling I'm home.

Both poems I've just referred to come from "Icons," which is for me the most interesting of the text's four main sections. A good number of these icons are proper names that function as 'cultural icons,' that is, items which powerfully encode various doxas, values, congregations of

opinion. In Barthes's terms they are elements of the cultural code and here in "Icons" they are decoded and recoded, often very effectively. It also seems to me, if I may take Peirce so in vain, that these icons are also iconic signs, signs that resemble what they signify. As everyone knows, both fulcrums and specific gravity look like Archimedes; and a Blakeian inspection of the soul of any diary will discover the lineaments of Pepsy.

Two more points by way of conclusion. One is that *Storms and Screens* is produced by a self-conscious wordsmith ("I am the word user") who is well aware that words, language, produces him. Part of this awareness comes through in love of words, not only for their protean capacity to signify but also for their sounds, their very materiality. The speaker(s) of the text sample(s) the lexicon like tasters at a wine fair. 'Spool' has hardly more affectionate attention lavished upon it by Beckett's Hamm than "The Word Fog." And the Epilogue, "Portrait of a Confused Artist," reminds me of Julia Kristeva's notion of semiotic, a fecund site of as it were linguistically primal, presymbolic sounds and irresistible rhythms. Here the words of the speaker, who signs himself Francis Sparshott, are no more able than any other words to recover the innocence and terror of the fully presymbolic; but a lot of them come near to sounding asymbolic, while the speaker is tumbled in a spin of destabilized phonemes that, charged with sound and rhythm, take to the streets of syntax to make carnival mock of semantics. My second point by way of conclusion, and a last point of comparative contrast to *The Carpenter of Dreams*, is that the work of *Storms and Screens* speaks out of a range of various discursive formations which are aligned loosely and non-hierarchically by a polyvalent general title and in several subtitled clusters. Who is speaking and from what position is a mat-

ter that is neither uniform nor taken for granted. The speaking subject is aware of itself as a continuous but provisional, plural construction; in consequence the reader, too, is offered more than one subject position and installed as a series of possible selves. This has to do with the already mentioned varieties of speech genres in this text, with the loving user of words being produced in words, and with a gregarious, fluent intertextuality. It also has very much to do with the capacity to imagine otherness — to imagine speaking and being spoken differently, from elsewhere.

IAN SOWTON

ON MUNRO

JUDITH MILLER, ed., *The Art of Alice Munro: Saying the Unsayable*. Univ. of Waterloo, n.p.

LIKE ANY COLLECTION, this one is uneven in quality. The subtitle, however, indicates a major theme among the individual writers, and the editor divides their interests into four overlapping groups: "artistry," "psychological perceptiveness," the presentation of "double worlds," and "a high place in the company of other writers" — including the metaphysical poets, Joyce, Keats, writers from the American South, and Canadian writers of metafiction. Missing from the introduction, however, is the date of the Waterloo conference (actually in March 1982); for academic purposes, such information is always useful. The majority of the articles focus on *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) and the stories in *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* (1974); several deal with *Who Do You Think You Are?* (1978). The stories in *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982) were not yet collected, and those in *The Progress of Love* (1986) not yet published.

In the first article Joseph Gold places Munro "in a tradition of literature . . . to formulate with great exactness and precision the relationship between feeling and language." Many of the stories concern expression (or non-expression) of feelings — but if the characters sometimes fail or refuse to express their feelings, Munro triumphantly succeeds. Munro can reverse the marginalization of women by a subtle use of language, as in the sexual experiences of Del and Rose. (Gold makes a lengthy analysis of the erotic *double entendres* in the train scene with the "minister.") Such "a fine consciousness and a respectfully exacting use of language are themselves humanizing." Gold's essay, the only one to fall into all four of the editor's categories, makes a suitable position paper to open the collection.

Harold Horwood's "Interview with Alice Munro" gives a fitting conclusion to the book, as Munro tells how she began to write in childhood, distinguishes between novel-writing and daydreaming, and reveals the distance between her own perceptions and those of academic critics. She is not consciously aware of symbolism, only of making the story "happen," and of the difficulty in "getting it right." She intends no message by a story. Although this seems to negate all the ideas about the stories, in another way it fulfils that subtitle, for what the stories say is in various respects "unsayable" — and yet it is said. Alice Munro does not say it with the conscious mind, because when said that way it loses strength (even the best academic writing captures only part of the creation which it discusses). The last word in the book goes to Alice Munro; she says "Yes." Having found that "life on the west coast wasn't real in the same way," she has returned to southern Ontario, where we hope that she will long continue to say the unsayable by getting her stories right.

Between Gold and Horwood, eight others try to capture fragments of what Alice Munro does indeed say, or to describe some of the methods by which she says it. In "'Heirs of the Living Body': Alice Munro and the Question of a Female Aesthetic," Barbara Godard examines the problems of the woman writer, in a world where the words and the genres are all defined by men, and reduce women to the margin. The tradition of the foremothers is oral, often ironic and ambiguous. Del Jordan tries to solve these problems by following both male and female parents and roles — by incorporation rather than by opposition. Several of the writers comment, in various ways, on the interplay between the fictional character as woman writer, and the woman writing. On another line, W. R. Martin considers "'Hanging Pictures Together': *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You*." Martin finds that the order of the stories adds further richness to meaning; for example, "Material" amplifies "Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You," and indicates Et as artist "making do" with Char's husband Arthur in a way that would be too obvious if "Material" were the first story. Other stories are often in pairs, showing two varieties of the same thing. Perhaps Alice Munro avoids the conventional novel to keep the hidden meanings unspoken, groped for. Both J. R. (Tim) Struthers and Linda Lamont-Stewart compare the art of Alice Munro with that of Clark Blaise, in the care to present the "texture" of life (Lamont-Stewart) and in the use of the epilogue to give stories another level (Struthers). Although the academic critics cannot imply with the richness of Alice Munro's irony, they unite in their eagerness to shore up what fragments they can grasp.

PATRICIA KÖSTER



POETIC KNOTS

CHRISTINE DONALD, *The Fat Woman Measures Up*. Ragweed, \$8.95.

DEBORAH GODIN, *Translating Genesis*. Penumbra, \$7.95.

TIM LILBURN, *Names of God*. Oolichan, \$8.95.

ONLY ONE OF these three books of poetry works on the reader's mind to any great effect. Both Deborah Godin's and Tim Lilburn's are, at best, predictable in their thematic content and their various styles. Christine Donald's *The Fat Woman Measures Up*, however, frequently surprises and, in doing so, offers short, haiku-like explosions of insight and humour.

Translating Genesis is one of those texts which make you wonder why line-breaks are used at all. There is very little to indicate that Godin has considered the possibility that much of her work is better suited to prose paragraphs. The line breaks and stanza divisions too frequently disrupt the straightforward argument of her writing. Only occasionally does the page offer that experience, specific to poetry, of opened syntax and linguistic or metaphoric resonance. Unfortunately, Godin's thematic concern to equate evolution with creationism is also grating. Flat assertion demands another medium. But too often — in poems which stretch through the spectra of mythic and personal history — that's what Godin offers. Occasionally, the writing is lifted by an incantatory rhythm, only to fall back again to the mundane. In a poem such as "Speaking in Tongues," the worst excesses are evident. Once you have figured out the somewhat predictable game involved in the writing, you've figured out a rather pedestrian poem which nonetheless purports to offer a reading of Pentecost:

a tdus kinc anmo resu
nd ayj
une twen
tsyi xni nete
en eigh tythre

eglo ria: thi
sisa hy mno fprai se

Tim Lilburn's *Names of God* promises much more, and delivers on some counts. The writing is dense, the images taut, and the subject matter most grave and solemn: a history of the spirit in relation to twentieth-century technologies of politics, science, war, and thought. Unfortunately, however, too many of these poems read as if they were pre-determined: the writing is elegant, but that elegance is a mannerism in which to couch solemn cogitations on Marx, Hitler, Einstein, Bohr, and God himself, in all of which it sounds to this reader at least that decisions were reached before pen was put to paper. *Names of God* is forcefully intertextual and impressively intellectual, and Lilburn's scope and intentions are admirable. But the poems don't stretch the imagination towards what poetry might be or do: the form is merely a well-wrought and studied vessel into which the thought is poured.

Sometimes, such as in "The Death of Christopher Okigbo," the writing overcomes the intellectual programme and that peculiarly twentieth-century history in which art engulfs the struggle against the legacies of imperialism is vibrantly alive on the page. Perhaps, too, there is a study waiting to be written of the effect of Okigbo on Canadian writers: after all, Margaret Laurence's *Long Drums and Cannons* takes its title from the same Nigerian master-poet.

Christine Donald's *The Fat Woman Measures Up* transcends its title and the reader's expectations of jokey comic-strip anecdotes of overweight life. Again and again, Donald offers imagistic, and frequently explosive, insights into gender politics, consumer capitalism, and the stresses it imposes on all of us, fashion, desire, and power. At times, as in "Sometimes the fat woman," this writing reads like R. D. Laing's *Knots* or Piet Hein's

short and sharp social insights, as Donald succinctly punctures our cultural delusions:

Sometimes the fat woman,
feeling attenuated,
fearing her substance
will drift apart
like strands of fog,
longs for a painful
hold-you-in
whalebone
lace-up-the-middle
corset.

With that shape,
with that pain,
you know where you are.

This collection is the best of the lot here, with poems that are quirky, funny, and insightful, and which draw your mind back to them long after you have closed the book to recognize, again, the rigour which goes into constructing even comic epigrams.

CRAIG TAPPING

AMOURS PERDUS

GÉRALD GODIN, *Soirs sans Atout*. Ecrits des Forges, \$8.00.

GASTON TREMBLAY, *La Veuve rouge*. Editions Prise de Parole, \$6.95.

PIERRE LABERGE, *Pris de présence*. Editions du Noroît, n.p.

FERNAND OUELLETTE, *Les Heures*. L'Hexagone, \$12.95.

UNE PREMIÈRE LECTURE de l'ouvrage de Gérard Godin révèle une dualité, soulignée par la division du recueil en deux parties, qui oppose la peine et la mélancolie de la vie à un immense désir de vivre. Le poème "Re-né" illustre ce concept en contrastant ceux qui ont "pour tout un appétit féroce," à ceux qui ne sont que des automates. Quoique les poèmes traitent de sujets différents, ils sont liés par ce thème et par une certaine ambiance de désespoir et de tristesse, créée par la perte de l'amour. Malgré la peine y associée, l'ê-

tre humain est incapable de ne pas continuer à chercher l'amour. Godin en évoque le début, "l'époque où l'âge / n'avait aucune prise sur nous" pour mieux en souligner l'absence actuelle. Vieux, fatigué et usé, comme la ville à laquelle il est comparé, le poète a perdu la fougue, l'énergie et l'amour qu'il avait connus. Pour se refaire, donc, il renoue avec son passé et, dans la deuxième partie, se réfugie dans ses souvenirs. L'accent y est alors mis sur l'esprit et la mémoire. Le poète parle de la vieillesse, des maladies du cerveau et de la défaillance graduelle du corps — "il n'y voyait plus / qu'une image incomplète / où il manquait toujours / l'objet qu'il cherchait" — pour souligner le grand désespoir de la vie: on ne sait pas ce qu'on cherche, mais on n'arrête pas de le chercher. Dans un poème révélateur, "Laissez-le," il s'agit d'un cérébro-lésé qui cherche ses mots, refusant l'aide de celui qui croit lui rendre service en les fournissant. Le malade guérira en faisant l'effort lui-même. On y décèle un plaidoyer pour toute la race humaine: il faut que nous, êtres imparfaits, fassions des faux pas, trébuchions pour avancer. Rien ne nous sera donné; le destin de l'homme se trouve entre ses mains. Avec la perte de l'amour, rien n'est plus valable; tout est artificiel. On essaie de consoler l'affligé, mais c'est par sa propre initiative qu'il se remettra, qu'il conservera son immense appétit pour la vie. Malgré le chagrin, malgré la résignation, la rupture, la déception en amour, il faut garder son désir de vivre, son "appétit."

Tout comme le fait Gérard Godin, Gaston Tremblay crée un univers poétique basé sur une dualité. Cependant, pour lui, celle-ci nous est assez familière, car elle reprend la vieille dialectique qui oppose la ville à la nature. L'originalité de ces poèmes réside dans la manière dont Tremblay traite cette dualité. Au contraire de la conception littéraire traditionnelle qui veut que la nature soit un lieu de renou-

vement, d'affirmation de la vie alors que la ville signifierait mort et stérilité, le poète retourne la situation. Pour lui, la nature, surtout en hiver, donne une impression de tristesse et de mélancolie alors que la ville est le lieu de l'espoir. Comme Godin encore, il divise son recueil en deux parties, dont la première évoque de la nostalgie pour des jours meilleurs. Dans la forêt, les arbres meurent et le mal du siècle s'installe. Nous sommes ces arbres: "Nos racines / . . . se sont enfoncées dans le roc"; nous habitons la forêt en silence, "nos coeurs en douleur." L'hiver cache tout, figeant nos sens et donnant un aspect rigide et morne à notre existence. En été, les branches des arbres s'entrelacent, faisant l'amour; mais en hiver, tout est mort: "nous sommes le froidure, nous sommes la haine / et la luxure, l'amour et toute la peur / qui planent au-dessus de la terre." La deuxième partie du recueil présente un changement subit avec l'entrée de la veuve rouge. On refuse désormais la mort et l'hiver: "Je ne porterai plus de noir / je ne subirai plus ton deuil." Nous sommes maintenant à la ville, lieu qui représente un éveil, un retour à la vie. On peut recommencer à zéro, face à la page blanche de la vie: "J'ai lavé tout mon corps / j'ai lavé toute mon âme." D'un style dépouillé et direct, l'écriture de Tremblay rappelle l'eau sur laquelle il a exercé le métier de draveur: limpide, concise et puissante. C'est d'ailleurs par l'image de la drave ("ma plume, qui sur notre rivière drave mes mots") qu'il parvient à exprimer son amour. On avoue le besoin de l'amour aussi à travers des images religieuses; on cherche l'ange salvateur, l'amour parfait qui saura transcender l'acte purement charnel à prix fixe: "Au-delà des gestes, il n'y a que l'amour." Le dernier poème du recueil, une reprise de "la veuve rouge," souligne le désir de vivre, de renaître à la vie, répétition qui suggère la substitution d'un cycle urbain au cycle des saisons.

Les vers de Pierre Laberge, comme ceux de Tremblay, brillent par leur économie d'expression et par leur concision. Chaque poème n'a que cinq vers et se caractérise par l'usage abondant d'infinitifs et de participes et par l'absence d'articles. Le recueil est divisé en huit parties, dont la première, "Commun des mortels," introduit le thème prédominant: la mort. Les poèmes foisonnent d'images de mort et d'affliction: "supplicié," "affligé," "damné," "atroce," "maladie," "torture," "corps en décomposition," "victime," "cadavre." Tout y est vu en termes de mort; même la vie est qualifiée de "non-mort." Ces images continueront à apparaître tout au long du recueil pour souligner le fait que, pour le poète, la vie n'est qu'un exil temporaire, une aberration passagère. La vraie existence est la non-existence, la mort. La vie est un vide et tout y est un leurre. A la fin de la troisième partie, Laberge reproduit un dessin de la structure moléculaire du L.S.D. et on pénètre dès la quatrième partie dans un monde de sensations et d'impressions extra-corporelles: "corps subtilement dégage," ". . . pour induire la transe." Son style devient alors beaucoup plus dépouillé, presque une suite de mots placés à l'aveuglette: "Le beau sans objet dit / sourd du fait voir clair" et les impressions se transforment en de véritables hallucinations: "sa tête d'oeuf éclate / En fontaine d'étincelles." C'est dans cette rêverie que l'homme parviendra à affronter la mort. Son esprit ne mourra pas, malgré la pourriture du corps: "un corps à l'intérieur respire / un coeur secret inaltérable." L'âme de l'homme transcende la temporalité de la chair, et, pour mieux le souligner, le poète présente de nouvelles images de victoire sur la mort: "il enjambe sa maladie," "divines profondeurs," "la pénétrante paix guérit," "chaînes déposées." Avec le retour à la vie, la mort n'est plus qu'un "pathétique épouvantail." Le poète se réjouit de la vie,

y trouvant "le savoir suprême." Cependant, tout ce beau rêve (induit par la drogue?) n'est que déception et illusion. Le poète s'en rend compte: "Adieu beauté féroce," et l'unique poème de la dernière section le confirme. Ayant perdu l'amour, il implore: "Que le seigneur / de l'univers / Nous achève."

Alors que les poèmes de Laberge nous présentent la mort comme quelque chose de terrifiant avec leurs images de torture et de pourriture, Fernand Ouellette, dans *Les Heures*, démystifie la mort, la transformant en une expérience presque confortante. Il l'explore en utilisant comme prétexte le trépas de son propre père. Grâce à l'effet cathartique de la poésie, on peut surmonter la mort. Ce qui ressort de ces 81 poèmes (l'âge de son père à sa mort), c'est surtout l'amour du fils pour le père. Dans la première de cinq parties, on apprend le désespoir du vieillard face à l'inévitable ainsi que le chagrin de ses proches. Le père représente la sécurité, la protection: "Il était pour nous / comme une demeure." Maintenant que ce roc s'effrite, il faut regarder la mort d'en face, constater non seulement la vulnérabilité du père mais aussi sa propre vulnérabilité: "nous nous sentions / à jamais / délogés de la montagne." L'amour des proches, l'aura qui entoure le mourant, son calme et dignité jettent une lumière sur tout, image-clé de tout le recueil. Combien de fois lisons-nous les mots "lumière," "illuminé," "le clair," "transparence," "lumineux," "limpide"? La mort illumine la vie, montrant la voie vers la connaissance suprême. Malgré le désespoir qui le gagne et la lente et inexorable détérioration du corps, le vieux attend la délivrance ultime avec une lucidité d'esprit qui suggère que l'homme n'est pas limité par son corps, mais qu'il y a quelque chose de plus profond. La mort du vieillard est aussi accompagnée d'images de lumière. La chambre n'est plus obscure et le corps du mort est envahi de clarté:

"Tout paraissait clair." De nouveau, l'image est renforcée non seulement par la reprise de certains mots-clé: "lueurs," "irradiant," mais aussi, dans la quatrième partie, par une scène qui rappelle Dante: "lentement / il glissait / vers l'orbite / des lumières / indélébiles / C'était convoquer la radiancé." De plus, des images de la mer (la mère de nous tous), du père en posture de fœtus, suggérant le retour au sein maternel, l'allusion au retour à la vie avec la mention de Lazare, nous amènent à la conclusion que le poète considère la vie comme un cycle. Rien ne meurt; ce n'est qu'une étape dans le cycle éternel. En démystifiant la mort, Ouellette apprend à vivre avec elle. Sans la mort, la vie n'a aucun sens; c'est "la révélation du vide" qui nous donne notre qualité d'être humain. Les morts, dit-il, "nous aideront / à naître."

MARK BENSON

GEDDES

GARY GEDDES, *Changes of State*. Coteau, \$7.00.

GARY GEDDES, *Hong Kong Poems*. Oberon, \$9.95.

LI PAI & TU FU, *I Didn't Notice the Mountain Growing Dark*, trans. Gary Geddes and George Liang. Cormorant Press, \$10.00.

GARY GEDDES, *The Unsettling of the West*. Oberon, \$11.95.

THE EPIGRAPH TO Gary Geddes's *Changes of State*, taken from Czeslaw Milosz, begins "In the very essence of poetry there is something indecent." At first the claim seems inappropriate: Geddes's quiet tone and restrained vocabulary could be the definition of poetic decency. Like the poetry of Philip Larkin, perhaps. That analogy is urged by Geddes's own sympathetic tribute to Larkin in a poem which acknowledges the indecent heart of poetry:

He was a man whose words stopped short
of ecstasy, whose impaired tongue and ear
refused

the grand theme, the gesture of extravagance and found, instead, out along the side-roads, pantleg rolled, cycle propped against a tree, a desperation so quietly profound even toad, blinking among grass-spears, had overlooked.

Geddes's persona is not quite the abashed rustic of "Church Going," but his recurrent concern is certainly human desperation — as quiet as that of the master of horse, forced to watch his charges driven overboard; as profound as that of Paul Joseph Chartier, whose blowing himself up in a House of Commons washroom is intimately connected to the fundamental political structure of the nation.

What is indecent, that is, is the brutality of the political animal, or the brutality of the structures by means of which human beings organize their collective power. To touch this indecency of power Geddes portrays a frustrated Guatemalan union leader, tangled in negotiating with Coca-Cola and watching American football on TV — two metaphors for an overwhelming and paramilitary culture which ignores "the voice of [the] heart." In "The Uses of Poetry" Geddes tells with leisurely exactness of the work created by the artists in a Chinese ivory factory. This appreciation of ancient and meticulous craft is compromised by some glimpse or memory of a soldier — the almost overlooked indecency which so often darkens Geddes's vision: "Nothing justifies / the slaughter of elephants or innocents, / certainly not poetry."

As this poem argues, art should "recall us / in our gentler moments," and in much of this volume indecency is noticeable only in its absence. *Changes of State* is Geddes's most varied volume of poetry; the first section records impressions from his travelling abroad, especially in England and China, while the second concentrates on memories of incidents that shaped his British Columbian and Prairie childhood. Several of these latter poems are, to my mind, less effective, where the

strain to make a poem out of an anecdote shows, where experience is not qualified and reshaped by the quiet transformations of a sustained metaphor. Varieties of forms are also more noticeable here than in earlier Geddes volumes: as usual, the confidences of the epistolary form are frequently exploited, especially in a finely allusive imagined envoi from Ezra Pound. But there is also a good deal more amusing word play, witticisms prompted by a more metalinguistic consciousness, which extends his poems even as he seems to resist it. Then the book ends with several terse quasi-Confucian naked poems which answer, as it were, the descriptions of Chinese artisans in the book's opening section.

The decent constraint of Geddes's poetry has been obviously reinforced in recent years by his travels to China, and by his interest in Oriental art. *The Terracotta Army* successfully combined this interest with the monologue, which has been the poet's most effective form. His collaborative translations with George Liang, of Li Pai and Tu Fu, poets of the T'ang dynasty, is the most direct evidence of this rising interest in closer Asian literary connections. But the generalities, abstractions, the rhetorical questions at the ends of these pieces, hardly seem consistent with Geddes's talents. They are exercises, which are disappointing after the poems of *Changes of State*.

A similar disappointment accompanied, for me, the reading of Geddes's first book of short stories, *The Unsettling of the West*. Here (curiously, given fiction's more representational bent) Geddes is far less of a "political" writer. The more overtly he pays attention to indecency, as in "The Accounting," which tells of the displacement of Japanese-Canadians, the less convincing is his social commentary. What are effective subtleties within the compression of one- or two-page poetic anecdote, become disconcerting when ex-

tended to short story length. O'Rourke, a nineteenth-century Mountie who narrates the title story, is a plain innocent who incongruously overtalks in pretentious phrases like "amorous arachnids," which, even when they turn to jokes ("nocturnal omissions") seem less than spontaneous. Overly colourful adjectives and pretentious circumlocutions sprinkle most of the stories, the "gesture of extravagance" attracting attention to itself, and away from the desperation of the experiences described. The story "Common Ground" I would except from this crude generalization. Written from a woman's point of view it tells of an archivist's brief encounter with another woman, a reluctant pioneer whose taciturnity encompasses even her own mysterious death. Mrs. Albion is a marginal and laconic character, such as Geddes draws well, and the way he modulates the young woman's narration from light and sarcastic cynicism to a sober recognition of Mrs. Albion's profound insignificance is sensitively persuasive.

Hong Kong Poems, the most recent of these volumes to appear, discovers in its shifting blend of poetic monologues and background vignettes in prose a form very congenial to the author. In telling of the fate of Canadian troops in the defence of Hong Kong he draws on the appropriate sparseness of Asian poetic forms, while creating of the whole book a short story more effective than anything in *The Unsettling of the West*. "The poet, dreaming an epic, / produces, Sir, a few meagre voices / and chance fragments." These lines from the end of the book summarize the collage of imaginings, revisions of history books and oral histories which make up *Hong Kong Poems*. They also imply, indirectly, the poet's story which so interestingly holds the poem together. What did the ships departing for Hong Kong look like to the small child going over Lion's Gate Bridge? This serial poem differs from *War and Other Measures* and

The Terracotta Army in the much more obvious presence of a poet-persona named Geddes. He jokes self-reflexively about postmodern metafiction. "Warning to Literary Fifth Columnists" is, in its mocking of Harold Bloom, not only a diversion, a releasing of tension, but a signal that the anxiety of influence can serve as a methodology. Bloom provokes both overt intertextuality and a questioning of authorship. The first is particularly striking in the poem "Berrigan" which insists that Ernest Thompson Seton's *Wild Animals I Have Known* is the book with the most meaning for prisoners of war. Since Geddes, like Berrigan, is a teacher from "outside Yorkton," the second question (of who is writing or rewriting) is also subtly posed. Such self-consciousness does not dull the political force for which Geddes has become known, but it brings the indecency at the core of poetry into another focus. In the prose journal, Geddes in Hong Kong wonders why only non-combatants write about war. The book is a moving inquiry into his own obsession. 'Is that what happened?' Geddes keeps asking himself, echoing Bloom. The awareness, self-consciously awkward, of his own hidden and uncomfortably dark history makes *Hong Kong Poems* one of Geddes's most successful jugglings of the tedious banalities of unliterary people, and the "fine discriminations of language" given to the poet.

LAURIE RICOU

HINE'S MUSIC

DARYL HINE, *Academic Festival Overtures*. Athenaeum, \$16.95.

IN ENGLISH, THE Alexandrine is typically no more than a line to end a (Spenserian) stanza; it is a metre generally thought to be impossible to write in at length. That Daryl Hine sustains the "alien" metre for

189 pages is typical of the audacious intellectual and technical ambition of this poem. As Hine's title acknowledges, these overtures gather into an academic's poem: the discipline of working within strict structures is, for Hine, the very definition of poetry; the book's attempt to trace the growth of a poet's mind is confessional, like Wordsworth's, but much more a study of ideas — randomly encountered, refined, absorbed — than the model of *The Prelude* would imply.

Academic Festival Overtures is in twelve sections, one for each month of the academic year, from September to August. The ostensible narrative is the story of Hine's first year in junior high school, in New Westminster, in 1949. But these particular experiences, however imperfectly remembered and invented, are the means to mythify his whole biography, and to assimilate cultures and languages he has loved as traveller, and especially as travelling reader. For each month of the year (except, significantly, the last) Hine emphasizes a particular festival — Labour Day, All Soul's Day, D-Day (in fact, the Library of Congress catalogues the book under "Holidays"!). In this structure alone there are clues and ironies (December, for example, features not Christmas but Boxing Day) to keep an academic critic going for far longer than a review permits. Certainly the structure of festivals, not to mention the musical analogies, gives the book a celebratory exuberance more evident than in any of Hine's earlier work. As he says, "my muse is less doctrinaire today."

The muse certainly provides many disparate narrative and thematic strands to follow. It is a *künstlerroman*, shaped by a growing away from, and then toward, his parents. It is a candid, and often amusing, meditation upon his awakening to his own homosexuality (shaped and extended by frequent use of the metaphors of the erotics of the text — and of bilin-

gualism). It is an engaging satire on British Columbia and Canada. But, as in music, the reader keeps getting distracted from a sustained theme by the intricacies of the moment. The alliteration, the assonance, the consonance are dazzling. Because Hine is intimate with Latin and Greek, the casual parading of obscure polysyllabic terms makes a reader pause in awe. The allusions and literary references fill every page — often quoted, sometimes parodied. Grammar and syntax are both subject and metaphor, and it is a delight to watch Hine manipulate them so that sound (and structure) echoes sense. Sound is, indeed, for Hine very much a way of knowing, and scarcely a line goes by that does not toy with a pun, or turn us slyly to a homophone of a few lines, or many pages before. At one point he "return[s] with an abridged sigh to *Death in Venice*." His schoolfellows, swinging clubs, are "for the most part dumb without being *bel*." One boyhood friend has "blooming cheeks and cheeky bloom / A prickly rose of which the anagram was Eros." Such word play, often polylingual and polyallusive, make this poem a constant pleasure. Hine says he apprehended "music as a language / Half-comprehensible." He certainly also reads language as a music half-apprehensible.

LAURIE RICOU



PAUL HIEBERT (1892-1987)

PAUL HIEBERT EMBELLISHED the Leacock tradition of Canadian university professors who moonlight by making mirth. What the author of *Sunshine Sketches* did for Brewery Bay and fat-middle Ontario, Hiebert extended to the larger and more alkali fields of Saskatchewan, when he produced the definitive work on that province's golden-throated poetess, Sarah Binks.

Sarah lives, and will continue to live, so long as the Canadian spirit rises above the manure heap and catches, on the wing, the Muse of geo-agricultural poesy. Some critics say that Binks was a figment of Hiebert's fevered academic imagination, a distillate of his tortured experiences in trying to teach chemistry to first-year students at the University of Manitoba. These sceptics would have us believe that, like Homer, the author of "Hi, Sooky, Ho Sooky" was actually several people, all of them to some degree fictitious.

Calumny. The fact of the matter is that Hiebert was Sarah's secret lover. His book of critique of her work — daring in that it carried him so far beyond the confines of the lab beaker — was the only way he could demonstrate his adoration of this woman whose poems, as he says, capture the essential flatness of the prairies.

One can only speculate, therefore, about how distressed he must have felt while giving full credit to the strong "influences" in Sarah's life, such as Ole the hired man, who for Sarah played the same sexually liberating role as the gamekeeper of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Like Van Gogh, Ole loses an ear to art (it is bitten

off by a duck), yet inspires those heart-wrenching lines of "The Cursed Duck" — "A cursed duck pecked off his ear," etc.

Thanks to the commitment, uniquely wedded to perceptiveness, that Paul Hiebert brought to Sarah's poetic canon, Canadian literature can never forget the importance to literary reputation of sheer quantity of output. Even before she entered her Regina Period, with its turbulent urbanization of her couplets, Sarah was indefatigable. Already she soared above such earth-bound bodies as the Canadian Authors Association. She did not accept, nor did she seek, a Canada Council grant. She fought her own unflinching way into the pages of every reputable farm journal in Saskatchewan that took verse without payment.

For this prodigious accomplishment alone, Canada owes Paul Hiebert a debt that the nation can never repay. To the art of literary criticism he brought the shining example that Sarah herself immortalized with those redolent lines of "Spreading Time":

It's joy again, for spreading time has found
me,
Within my own paternal field and fold,
It's spreading time, and once more all
around me,
The air is rich, and fields are flecked with
gold . . .

ERIC NICOL

A. R. M. LOWER (1889-1988)

WHEN I RETURNED to Canada in 1949 and began to study Canadian history, the writers to whom I first turned were the men who in their various ways dominated the field at that time — D. G. Creighton, A. R. M. Lower, and that very different figure, Frank Underhill, who wrote so brilliantly yet remained only a superb

essayist, never finishing a major book on the Creightonian or the Lowerian scale.

Lower was the great survivor among the three, almost making his century. His writing was less stimulating than Underhill's, less grandly impressive than Creighton's, yet he did play his part in creating some of our necessary myths, and particularly in his later works, from the mid-1940's onwards, he showed himself a man of strong opinions and an attractive, forthright, crusty personality. I am thinking particularly of what is probably his masterpiece, *Canadians in the Making* (1958), which admirably showed the patterns of struggle and co-operation by means of which the various peoples of Canada achieved a pluralist society unlike any other, and his autobiography, *My First Seventy-Five Years*, in which he showed himself engagingly opinionated and cantankerous.

For me Lower was so much the man of challenging, slightly irrational views, of rather self-righteous but usually justified angers, and of occasional salutary myth-making, that I was rather surprised to read one of the younger historians remarking at the time of his death that he "took Canadian history out of the anecdotal and into the serious, scientific study of the past."

Lower in fact would have been the last to agree that the past could be seriously studied without anecdote. But of course there were two Lowers. The young Lower was almost hypnotized by Harold Innis's obscurantist prose and his narrowly materialist historical view, and the books he wrote in the 1930's, like *The Trade in Square Timber* (1932) and *The North American Assault on the Canadian Forest* (1938), are not much more than extended footnotes to Innis. It was when he broke away from the narrow "staples thesis" and ranged over the broad scope of Canadian history in *Colony to Nation* during the mid-1940's that Lower really

spoke in his own voice. I suspect it was witnessing World War II that shook him free to write the later books by which he will be remembered as one of the historians who helped to create our collective image of ourselves as a nation, and so (like Creighton, his fellow disciple of Innis) took us beyond science into myth, where history lives.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

REFERENCE

RECENT BOOKS INCLUDE Richard Gregory's massive and instructive *The Oxford Companion to the Mind* (Oxford, \$59.95), a dictionary-guide (*Abacus to Zeno*) of people, things, and ideas to do with psychology and psychiatry. There are (signed) articles on Freud, Jung, and Kepler, for example; on pain, hallucination, mnemonics, and phonetics; on Russell, Wittgenstein, and somnambulism; but nothing on archetypes, even in passing. Designed more for psychologists than for critics, it leaves out several areas of overlap between analysis and criticism. David Crystal's *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* (\$39.50) is a work I admire more, though clearly it is also more of a lay person's introductory guide. Clearly illustrated, it takes up topics from sentence structures to naming, from acoustics to dyslexia, from language distribution to translation, from child language to graphology. Details sometimes get lost in the larger pictures (the book does not deal well with native North American languages), and while "Canada" features recurrently in the work, few particular details of Canadian language are included. Canada does feature, however, in Harold Osborne's excellent *Oxford Companion to Twentieth Century Art* (pa. \$34.95); the surveys of Canadian painters and art movements are lucidly written by Dennis Reid.

Other books include a variety of indexes, of which G. F. Heggie and G. R. Adshead's *An Index to Saturday Night, 1887-1957* (Micro-media, n.p.) stands out: it is a valuable piece of work, giving easy access at last, by author and subject, to one of the most influential public arbiters of Canadian cultural life. The Public Archives of Canada has published an 816-page *Canadian Feature Film Index*, covering the years 1913-1985. Debra Barr, archivist for the University of Toronto Thomas Fisher Rare

Book Room, has compiled a *Guide to the Papers of Earle Birney* as they are held by a variety of Canadian repositories. The Association des auteurs des Cantons de l'Est has also published a useful directory: *Répertoire des écrivains francophones des Cantons de l'Est* (\$14.95), which provides biographical and bibliographical outlines of some 125 authors, mostly contemporary. A comparable service is provided by Gordon Ripley and Anne Mercer in *Who's Who in Canadian Literature, 1987-88* (Reference Press, \$35.00), though here the catchment area is nation-wide and the data more truncated, more empirical, less descriptive. From the National Library of Canada (\$16.95) comes *Checklist of Indexes to Canadian Newspapers*, compiled in both official languages by Sandra Burrows and Francine Gaudet. It usefully provides access (by date, title, and address) to numerous papers, both national and local. (Casual browsing noted one error: "Vandenhoof" instead of "Vanderhoof.") First Avenue Press has published *Abbreviations: A Canadian Handbook* (\$20.00), A to ZPG. Katherine Fishburn's brief *Doris Lessing: Life, Work, and Criticism* (York Press, \$6.95) combines critical survey with bibliographic commentary. T. G. Bergin and Jennifer Speake have compiled a clear *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance* for Facts on File; with 2,500 items and many plates (thirty-two in full colour) it would seem full, but close reading finds limitations. There are entries on Cartier and Champlain, for example, but no mention of publications. The main interest is in "hard" data, and even that is Europe-centred. *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, vol. 25 (Gale, \$92.00), contains a section on W. H. Drummond. Two new series from Gale also merit attention: *Short Story Criticism*, vol. 1 (\$70.00), a guide to research on fourteen authors (primarily American); and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism*, vol. 1 (\$80.00), this volume surveying criticism of Apuleius, *Beowulf*, Homer, Lady Murasaki, a twelfth-century Russian poem, and *La Chanson de Roland*.

Editing Canadian English (Douglas & McIntyre, \$29.95), a text-editing guidebook prepared for the Freelance Editor's Association of Canada, promises not, as might be anticipated, a "definitive solution" to Canadian problems, nor is it an "official style guide." That much is to its credit, and most of the advice in the book is lucid and to the point. Clear sections demonstrate how to handle French in an English context, how to avoid bias, how to deal with legal issues, how to use abbreviations. Among

other sections, the one that concerns spelling remains, to my mind, problematic, in that it continues the fiction that "Canadian Standard" is a mix of two "other" standards rather than something consistent in itself. An appended Glossary is a curious collage of the national psyche, perhaps, for it combines terms as disparate as *Simpsons* (no ownership apostrophe), *RCMP* (no stops), and *split infinitive*. The book promises to be useful, and I look forward to an expanded edition.

Reference works of another kind include several recent anthologies which, by attempting to redefine the canon, or by collecting or republishing material not currently available, enlarge our sense of the dimensions of culture. (1) Percy G. Adams's *Travel Literature Through the Ages* (Garland, US\$50.00) assembles 611 pages of animated discoveries of self and others (or self through others); the range is wide (Herodotus to Henry James) and the selection judicious, and given such range it seems churlish to cavil at its limits; but once again Canada is ignored — though Cook is included, and a Jesuit letter, neither conveys the sense of place or personality that had emerged in Canadian travel writing by 1900. (2) Geoffrey Grigson's *The Oxford Book of Satirical Verse* (pa. \$14.95) interprets "satire" widely, primarily in order to look at the social under-sides of the *status quo* — but many of the works collected here are penned by nonetheless "established" authors. While their observations are sometimes shrewd, their language often remains that of the educated outsider to the problem observed. (3) Cettina Tramontano Magno and D. V. Erdman have brought together a clear photographic reproduction of Blake's *The Four Zoas* manuscript (Bucknell, \$60.00) with a bibliographic supplement and extended commentary on the connections between illumination and word, extending our notion of the character of "text." (4) Roger Lonsdale's *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse* (\$18.95), by drawing more fully on the less-familiar authors of the time (including several women), demonstrates a range of poetic forms, and a range of attitudes (from the bawdy to the sublime), which the canonization of Thomsonian and Popeian conventions has until recently tended to obscure. The three last works, moreover, suggest (though not explicitly) contexts within which to read and reassess some early English-Canadian verse.

W.N.



ON THE VERGE

**** JANE ERRINGTON, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada: A Developing Colonial Ideology*. McGill-Queen's, \$30.00. This book is a study in developing political attitudes in Upper Canada, and especially in the growth of the idea of a conservative community that was still as authentically North American as the United States. Jane Errington's thesis is that the Loyalists never ceased to think of themselves as Americans, albeit loyal to the Crown, and that Upper Canada was always a British-American community rather than a merely British one, with the attachment to location ultimately triumphing over the English-oriented attitudes of transient government officials, soldiers, and recent immigrants. Errington writes a pleasant, fluent prose, and supports her thesis with an effective use of contemporary sources; this is a real contribution to our early history.

G.W.

**** W. J. ECCLES, *Essays on New France*. Oxford, \$14.95. W. J. Eccles is one of our best historians, and also a unique mediator from the anglophone side between our two Canadian cultures. His masterly biography of Frontenac revised our views of a whole period in the history of early Canada, and his various studies in the history of New France are among the classics in their field. Eccles has a unique ability to make effective use of the new techniques of social history, to work from statistics and often obscure archives, and yet in the end to present his learning with an elegant clarity few Canadian historians can rival. There is a classicist respect for fact and a perception of the structural outlines of history in his work that complement his distrust of myth passing as history, and mark him off from the historical moralists like D. G. Creighton. *Essays on New France* is a rather slim volume (though dense with good things) of occasional pieces picked out from a long career as an observer of Franco-Canadian society. They discuss such varied subjects as social welfare in New France, the French military establishment in Canada, the relation of the fur trade to French imperialism, and the role of the American colonies in the struggle between England and France. There is also a critical discussion of Harold Innis and his *The Fur Trade in Canada* that will be welcomed by all those who have recognized how dull a writer and careless a historian Innis was,

and how his reputation has been overinflated by the efforts of his distinguished disciples, Creighton and Marshall McLuhan. For that breath of fresh intelligent air alone, *Essays on New France* is worth reading.

G.W.

**** REG WHITAKER, *Double Standard: The Secret History of Canadian Immigration*. Lester & Orpen Dennys, \$24.95. There is a deep vein of hypocrisy running through Canadian life, and nowhere does it appear more strongly than in the show of virtue Canadian politicians display when they compare Canadian sanity with the hysteria that periodically sweeps the United States, expressed in Red Scares and the like, and suggest that in a free and open country like Canada such enormities as the McCarran Act, which until recently barred people from entering the United States because of the colour of their politics, would not be possible. It is true that nothing quite so ferociously explicit as the McCarran Act has existed in the Canadian statute books; it does not need to be there since, as Reg Whitaker shows very convincingly, everything here is done secretly under vague clauses of the Immigration Act, administered by immigration officials and by security services maniacally devoted to secrecy. We may have given up rejecting people for the colour of their skin, but we still reject them for the colour of their views. And while politicians publicly deplored the McCarran Act, the RCMP until 1980 was freely providing American immigration officials with the information on which they could base their exclusion of Canadians. As one of those formerly banned, this reviewer resents perhaps more than the American action the fact that it was due to distorted information provided by the RCMP, whose tradition of utter secrecy makes it impossible to prove the case in a court of law. As Whitaker shows, this maniacal secrecy and suspicion have penetrated every level of the immigration process. He writes with an indignation that at times gives an obsessive touch to his prose, but what he says is convincing, and it is time more anger of this kind was expended on these reactionary policies of ours and on the totalitarian character of our security agencies.

G.W.

*** *Raincoast Chronicles: Forgotten Villages of the BC Coast*, edited by Howard White. Harbour Publishing, \$8.95. *Raincoast Chronicles* is a series of occasional volumes which Howard White has been publishing for a num-

ber of years and which has provided a remarkable folk history of the West Coast. The present collection resembles the earlier ones in that it consists of recollections by people who have lived on the coast during its dynamic period, when the fish flows were great and vast first growth forests were waiting to be felled from the mountainsides sloping down to the inlets. The fish and the big trees are now largely gone, and so are the villages that sprang up while they were being exploited. Howard White's remembrances provide a vivid tapestry of recollection of that vigorous and violent coastal life which was so well celebrated by Martin Allerdale Grainger in his autobiographical novel, *Woodsmen of the West*, as long ago as 1908, but has had few adequate chroniclers since that time.

G.W.

*** DAVID SUZUKI, *Metamorphosis: Stages in a Life*. Stoddard, \$24.95. The travel books and memoirs of Victorian field naturalists like Darwin and Wallace, Bates and Belt were absorbing narratives, written in clear and accessible prose, packed with description, full of interesting facts, and dedicated to opening up to the layman not only the wonders of a world he hardly knew if he had not travelled, but also the daily discoveries of the steadily advancing sciences of zoology and botany; nobody talked of biology in those days, and the world was open and unspoiled enough for nobody to have even thought of ecology. I once thought that that age had passed away. A range of far more complex sciences, defended by almost impenetrable walls of jargon, seemed to have brought an end to the old easy communication between layman and the natural scientist. But David Suzuki over many years has been systematically trying to prove that this need not be the case, that the layman can be reached — and *must* be reached if science is not to fail in its major task for our day, to keep life going on this earth. *Metamorphosis* is Suzuki's autobiography, a very humane story of a Canadian of Japanese descent coming to terms with his chosen land, but also a fascinating and timely restatement of the responsibilities of scientists. Suzuki is one scientist eloquently on the side of the angels. I hope there are others, and that they will speak and act before it is too late for our precarious planet and its besieged inhabitants.

G.W.

*** KARL A. PETER, *The Dynamics of Hutterite Society*. Univ. of Alberta Press, \$16.95. The history of minorities who in some way

seem to challenge the security of the majority are important not only for what they tell us about the group in question, but also for what they tell us obliquely about the general society in which such groups find an uncomfortable place. Any history of the Doukhobors is bound to reveal Canadian majoritarian values in the first half of our century as blind and brutal, and any humane study of the treatment of the Japanese in World War II must — *pace* J. L. Granatstein — dwell on the irrational fears that underlie such blindness and brutality. In its own way, each of these minorities presented a challenge the majority does not want to face. The same has applied to the Hutterites. They are a remarkable group because their peculiar type of shared economy, detested by their neighbours, has enabled them to sustain their unorthodox way of life while almost every other kind of intentional community has disintegrated. It is not merely a matter of religious faith. Doukhobors had religious faith but failed to sustain their communitarian organization. What the Hutterites have done successfully is to master modern techniques that ensure their continuing economic success and weld them on to a religiously ordered way of life that has not changed radically since the early Reformation. It is a unique achievement, and Karl Peter's book, pedantic though at times it seems, not only is the best study of Hutterite communities to date but also provides illuminating insights into the relationship between Canadian majorities and minorities, which in recent years has perceptibly improved.

G.W.

*** PETER THOMAS, *Strangers from a Secret Land*. Univ. of Toronto Press, \$14.95. Compared with the more numerous English and the more vociferous Scots and Irish, the Welsh have always been treated as junior members of the British cluster of peoples, more important perhaps than Manxmen and Cornishmen, but not greatly so. The same fate has followed them in Canada, and though they have a small entry in the *Canadian Encyclopedia*, they have not greatly attracted historians; as Peter Thomas remarks in *Strangers from a Secret Land*, "A general account of the Welsh in Canada has yet to be written." *Strangers from a Secret Land* concerns a small part of the nineteenth-century Welsh immigration to Canada: people from Pembroke and Cardigan who sailed on local boats to New Brunswick and established impermanent settlements there. In a couple of generations they had lost their language and

dispersed, mingling in the general population as the Welsh have tended to do, with little effort to sustain their traditions. But the account which Thomas offers of the experiences of these first emigrants from the Cambrian hills, apart from the drama of human endurance and conflict it projects, is a valuable contribution to Maritime history and even more to that of West Wales in the early nineteenth century. Some interesting questions remain for which there may not be answers, particularly why Gaelic survived among the Scots of Cape Breton while Welsh vanished in the New Brunswick settlements. Perhaps it was merely a matter of numbers; a language needs a minimum mass of speakers if it is to survive, and if that does not exist it is likely to vanish like threatened species of animals whose numbers drop too low. G.W.

** ROBERT BOTHWELL, IAN DRUMMOND, JOHN ENGLISH, *Canada, 1900-1945*. Univ. of Toronto Press, \$27.50. Clio was nodding when this book was written, for it falls into the category of useful rather than inspiring histories. Its authors refer slightly, in their Bibliography, to the work of Donald Creighton, but a dash of Creighton's eloquence would have made their account far more accessible, and some of Creighton's bold conjectures, which the sensible reader knew when to discount, might have opened windows of enlightenment in these wooden walls of bleak, judicious prose. I am not sure that, after the volumes in McClelland & Stewart's Centenary Series which dealt with the period, we really require for the time being another earnest general history of the first half of this century. Regional and cultural histories are much more needed. Still, a brilliant and imaginative analysis of our early twentieth-century attitudes, a Canadian equivalent of *Democracy in America*, might have been welcome. But the combined talents of Bothwell, Drummond, and English are far from adding up to a new Tocqueville or even a second Creighton. For a short while after the centennial of Confederation, Canadian historians were unorthodox and lively. Now those heady days are past, they are falling away into the same worthy Whig dullness as of old. Facts are there, though you can gather the same facts elsewhere if you take a little time. It is the interest they should inspire that is not generated. Canada, we are allowed to believe, is a good, grey country once again. G.W.

** JEAN TETREAU, *Hertel, l'homme et l'oeuvre*. Tisseyre, \$19.95. For anyone wishing to gain a sense of François Hertel's life as lapsed Jesuit priest, friend and supporter of experimental writers and artists, émigré, philosopher, poet, and novelist, this book is a clearly presented and informative introduction. But Tétreau writes as Hertel's friend, which sometimes gives the book the character of a eulogy rather than a critical analysis. Tétreau writes from a conservative point of view, which many readers will occasionally find difficult to accept; for instance, he makes much of Hertel's attraction to women, adding "il comprenait que Dieu permet que l'on soit tenté et qu'il donne au pécheur la force de repousser la tentation." To the suggestion that Hertel may have been homosexual, he responds, "Hertel pédéraste? Hertel sodomite? C'était bien la plus stupide des plaisanteries." On the whole, there are too many personal anecdotes designed to prove Hertel's integrity: the book occasionally reminded me of nineteenth-century hagiographies published by the disciples of the Curé Labelle and the Abbé Provancher.

E.-M.K.

*** PETER TROWER, *The Slidingback Hills*. Oberon, \$12.95. Like most of Trower's books this collection contains a large number of poems reprinted from earlier works: in such a context, new poems are likely to blur into the familiar Trower complaints about being at the mercy of moneyed men and machines. But there is a good deal more to this typically elegant Oberon tribute than mudcaked boots and grumbling powersaws. A section on doing time in Oakalla Prison is anchored by a fascinating extended anecdote about Trower's unmet *doppelgänger*. When the abashed poet (like several other of the poet's books, the volume is edited by Al Purdy, whose apologies for poetry Trower so often shares) dares to leave aside the talky grumbling narrative for a study in imagery and metaphor he proves brashly delicate, as in the intense looking of "Summer Microcosm":

Small red eyes in the raspberry bushes
are only specks of summer blood
waiting for quick hands or beaks
to wipe them away.

Tiny orange fragment
of nervous muslin,
a butterfly takes inventory
among the fevered roses.

L.R.

REPRINTS

PAPERBACK REPRINTS INCLUDE Hugh Hood's *Flying a Red Kite* (Porcupine's Quill, \$12.95), the first volume of a series devoted to his "Collected Stories"; three books from Penguin: David Helwig's *The Only Son* (\$8.95), Marian Engel's *Monodromos* (\$8.95), and Pierre Berton's 1812 history, *The Invasion of Canada* (\$6.95); Judith Skelton Grant's anthology, *The Enthusiasms of Robertson Davies* (Macmillan, \$14.95); George Woodcock's biography *Proudhon* (Black Rose, \$36.95; pa. \$16.95); three works from Boréal: Jacques Savoie's novel *Le Récif du Prince* (\$9.95), Louis Hémon's *Maria Chapdelaine* (\$9.95), and Michel Jurdant's ecological essays, *Le défi écologiste* (\$14.95).

W.N.

LAST PAGE

THE TITLE OF *The Mechanical Eye in Australia* (by Alan Davies and Peter Stanbury; Oxford, A\$45.00) suggests the concerns of a number of recent works, both in fiction and non-fiction. How do we see? What constraints are there on the ways we see? How much of what we see do we invent? How much is determined by the limits of technology or convention? *The Mechanical Eye* itself is a history of photography in Australia between 1841 and 1900; more particularly, it surveys the industry of photography, tracing the emergence of photographic techniques and demonstrating (by catalogue, cartoon, and illustration) the way in which the new images of self and reality were sold at the time to the public at large. The photographs, each one analyzed for context and method, primarily depict people: soldiers, aborigines, matrons, children, and a lot of other people with cameras. There are clues for dating photographs by the techniques used, and a splendid set of posters: "Persons having Weak Eyes, will be more likely to get a satisfactory Picture on a Cloudy than on a Bright Day," "A GENTLEMAN Arriving from Oatlands WITH FIVE CHILDREN . . . , being IN WANT OF a handsome present to warm the affections of A DEAR WIFE repaired forthwith to . . . where the whole were Daguerrotyped in one group, which has given . . . unbounded satisfaction . . . , " "Ladies will please . . . Avoid light blue," "CHILDREN TAKEN BY THE INSTANTANEOUS PROCESS."

"Genuine" and "perfect" were marketable adjectives; these purveyors of image were "artists" in "fidelity," they claimed. It was an idea that gave photography its mechanical (therefore "objective," "truth-telling") face — even after 1895, when the hand-held Kodak came on the market, and people, who began using cameras for themselves, should have known better.

That false images are projected by language as well is the central subject of Peter Hulme's *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797* (Methuen, \$39.95). Written within a Marxist framework, the book is concerned to demonstrate Foucault's notion that images of "truth" depend not on epistemology but on power. Hence the epigraph (from the Bishop of Avila in 1492: "Language is the perfect instrument of empire") introduces a study of the power-plays built into the conventional images of the Caribbean, images accepted simultaneously in Europe as empirical truths of a far, strange land, and as metaphors of cultural superiority. Analyzing the language of Columbus's journal and of anthropological accounts of body-type and language among the indigenous peoples, Hulme is most concerned to demonstrate the power-message inherent in the literary strategy of portraying cultural relations by means of unmatched pairs: Prospero and Caliban, John Smith and Pocahontas, Crusoe and Friday, or the less familiar now (though they were widely known in the eighteenth century) Inkle and Yarico. That such paradigms operate in Canada, too, will be readily apparent: Prospero and Crusoe have visited these shores as well. And Australia. And South Africa: J. M. Coetzee's recent novel *Foe* (Stoddart, \$16.95) in fact makes use of the particular motif in order to argue in yet another way the power of language over the shapes of reality. Initially the narrative of one Susan Barton, a castaway on "Cruso's" island, who tries to tell what *really* happened. In some degree a feminist re-vision of history, and a reclamation of Friday from Crusoe's control, the novel turns increasingly self-conscious. Susan discovers, on returning to England, that it doesn't matter what details of experience she tells to Mr. Foe, the author, he is determined to write his version of events come what may; the second dimension of resistance comes from the language itself, when Coetzee as author begins to impose his shapes of meaning both upon these realities and upon Susan's experience as she remembers it, or as she is said to remember it. The novel turns slowly into an authorial fantasy. In such a milieu, the words

carry reality ostensibly by themselves; the author is enemy, Foe.

Several other books deal also with Caribbean and South African political circumstances as the contexts for literature, demonstrating variously how life and art intertwine both in records of events and in paradigms of political priority. *Whole of a Morning Sky* (Virago/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, \$8.95) is Grace Nichols's fictional evocation of a Georgetown childhood, and of the effects of street conflict and abrupt political change. Teresa O'Connor's *Jean Rhys: The West Indian Fictions* (New York Univ. Press, \$35.00), one of the best books yet on this writer, suggests how Rhys's life in Dominica and in England shaped the way she drew the Caribbean in fiction. David Coplan's *In Township Tonight!* (Longman, £8.95) is a clearly worded social survey of the three-century-old urban black musical theatre convention in South Africa — one which demonstrates the importance of jazz and dance as political gestures, arguing that "performance events" are "ideological," helping to reshape communities and social values "despite apartheid." Stephen Clingman's *The Novels of Nadine Gordimer* announces its concerns by its subtitle: "History from the Inside" (Allen & Unwin, \$29.95). Quoting from Gordimer herself — to the effect that you can read a history book for the facts of, say, the retreat from Moscow, but you read fiction, e.g., *War and Peace*, for a sense of what war is like and of how war affects people individually — Clingman argues that Gordimer writes by means of a "philosophy of the extreme example." Persuasively, he shows how the specific historical contexts of South African political events shape the symbolic structures of Gordimer's novels; but he is further concerned to demonstrate the "deep structures" of the fiction: the paradigms of power that shape (sometimes unthinkingly) the daily lives of individual persons. Marked also by the critical theories of Terry Eagleton, the book further argues a reason for the renewed interest in historical fiction: the recognition that history is not merely the backdrop to action, nor romantic trope, but the process of structuring relationships and of assigning to them a priority of values — which is the intrinsic subject of much fiction in a time of social discontent.

Westerly's December 1986 issue on the 1930's in Australia points to another time when upheaval affected social and literary values (a particularly instructive article is Robert Darby's account of the effects of "The Censor as Literary Critic": when so-called revolutionary

movements are as puritanical as conservative ones, there is little freedom from constraint — verbal, and therefore political — with the result that people sometimes begin to believe that the institutions that control them are somehow natural). Another sociopolitical disquisition is Margaret Drabble's novel *The Radiant Way* (McClelland & Stewart, \$24.95), the latest in a series of despairing revelations of the banality of Thatcher's England and of the emptiness of a society where people suffer because they do not consider themselves a real part of it.

V. S. Naipaul, too, both in his autobiographical novel *Enigma of Arrival* (Penguin, \$22.95) and in his autobiographical narrative essays, *Finding the Centre* (Collins, \$19.95), reflects on the power of language to recreate the past and on the potential dishonesty of words as they reinvent the past (sometimes in order to portray the present more acceptably than common clarity would allow). *Finding the Centre* is both a quest for the state of mind of the young man who would become the Writer Naipaul, and a search for the difference between the "cult of personality" that governs, he argues, both Africa and modern England (and by inference, much literary judgment), and any coherent sense of permanent value. "Centre" is important to Naipaul, and it derives from history. Recounting at one point how he thought he had a story and began to write, only to abandon it, he explains that "It had no centre. I hadn't yet found the story that would do the narrative binding — gather together all the strands of my background. . . ." Here, *travel* supplies the narrative and metaphoric parallel to *writing*: the arrival at the unknown, in preparedness for adventure, in need of discovery. But in *Enigma of Values*, the discovery is once more that of encroachment — of Mrs. Thatcher's world upon his own, in an England (or a settlement of values) to which memory now gives greater access than does life.

As several other books declare (Drabble's among them), one can feel foreign at home, alone and isolated, apart from the structures that the society accepts as normal, true, or real. Maurice Shadbolt writes in his conventional historical fiction, *Season of the Jew* (Hodder & Stoughton, NZ\$32.95), of a Maori group who in the late 1860's identify with the wandering tribes of Israel. While Shadbolt's emphasis is on the climactic, romantic drama of historical events, other writers write not to demonstrate the effects of a departure from the cultural norm but to reveal the experience of being unable to identify with the norm that the society projects to everyone in it. Chinese-born Jye

Kang writes in *Guests of the New Gold Hill* (General, \$27.95), a novel about exclusion and power: of the failure of the Chinese immigrants to achieve success on the New Zealand gold-fields, of bias and isolation, and of the cultural pride in the success of a younger generation. The novels of the Samoan writer Albert Wendt (*Pouliuli* and *Sons For the Return Home* are newly released by Penguin, NZ\$8.99 and NZ\$9.99, as is *Potiki*, by Maori writer Patricia Grace, NZ\$15.99) argue for cultural respect in cultures that have not lost their past but are in danger of losing their consciousness of self-worth. The stories in Apirana Taylor's *He Rau Aroha / A Hundred Leaves of Love* (Penguin, NZ\$14.25) further spell out a contemporary Maori position; the collection is partly anecdotal, partly mythic, sometimes seemingly fragmentary, always political. In "The Carving," a character, first satisfied with his shaping of wood into Te Toa, the warrior, becomes gradually uncomfortable with what he has created. He takes his carving and sharply dismembers it: "Where's your land, eh. . . . Gone stolen sold. You've got no land for your body to stand on. You don't have any legs. . . . Yes, you. . . . The warrior of a race whose language is being killed. You don't have a tongue." Splitting the Manuka bares a heart still there, however. And by implication at least, a lineage, both matrilineal and patrilineal — which is the main claim of another Maori poet, Alistair Campbell, in two lyric sequences, *The Dark Lord of Savaiki* and *Soul Traps* (Te Kotare Press, NZ\$5.00 and NZ\$10.00). In part based on ancient Tongarevan chants, the poems tell of trickster figures, initiation rites, and death rituals. They tell of the "peaceful dreams" of children, who "smile to see / Father and Mother / walking hand in hand / across the swirling waters / of Taruia Passage, / where the leaping dolphins / celebrate the dawn," and of the "time to go, / to walk the steep track / to Savaiki" — alone or with a "fellow voyager." Throughout, salutation and ritual honour the past, in order to reinvest the present with significance. But for Hinewirangi Kohu, Maoridom is in need of much more abrupt reawakening; the poems of *Screaming Moko* (Tauranga Moana Press, NZ\$8.95) are an angry, fluent shape for an attack against a "white system" that "has denied / my vital growing stages, / and still oppresses all of my people." Individually the lyrics tell of rape and race dismissal; but they close in pride and *aroha*, using the Maori tongue to reclaim a sense of love.

It would be dangerous to draw restrictive conclusions from such a range of literary ex-

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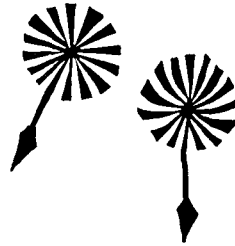
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pressions. The essays of the late Shiva Naipaul, *An Unfinished Journey* (Hamish Hamilton, \$9.95), argue precisely against the tropes of enclosure that permeate Western rhetoric. "The idea of a Third World," he writes, for example, "despite its congenial simplicity, is too shadowy to be of any use. When, for instance, India is casually included in the unholy brood, what are we really attempting to say? That India is a hot country with many poor people? But the same India has launched satellites, has atomic power-stations, has sophisticated research establishments." (His distinction, it is worth noting, reminds us of the "mechanical eye," though he does go on to observe the complexities of an ancient civilization.) "All poverty may look alike from a comfortable arm-chair, may seem susceptible to the same remedies": it is a conclusion he disputes. It may be "nice," he says, "to possess a euphemism for backwardness and — perhaps — for blackness." But sometimes the solidarity of the inexactness — whether used by rebels or reactionaries — is a simplicity born more of the desire for power than of the desire for solution. "This travesty unites the Far Left and the Far Right," he writes; "In the name of the Third World, we madden ourselves with untruth." Or with, one might add, the biases of preconception.

W.N.



OPINIONS AND NOTES

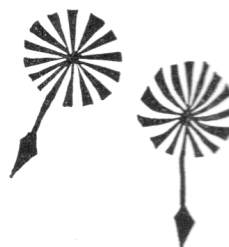
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THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH at Simon Fraser University is attempting to raise funds to buy the papers of Betty Lambert. These papers include correspondence, diaries and unfinished drafts of plays. Individuals wishing to contribute to this worthwhile project are asked to send their donations care of:

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