



Sherry Simon. *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of the Divided City*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006, 280 p.

Michael Cronin

Traduire les Amériques
Translating the Americas
Volume 19, Number 2, 2e semestre 2006

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/017833ar>
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/017833ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)
Association canadienne de traductologie

ISSN
0835-8443 (print)
1708-2188 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Cronin, M. (2006). Review of [Sherry Simon. *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of the Divided City*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006, 280 p.] *TTR*, 19(2), 258–261. <https://doi.org/10.7202/017833ar>

issues of hybridity and postcolonial writing practices, bilingual writing/translating and expatriate versus impatriate writing. Michaela Wolf's analysis of female and feminist translation in German-speaking countries—primarily Austria—situates empirical data within a theoretical framework inspired by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Ieva Zauberga demonstrates that, by disregarding government-dictated linguistic norms when they translate proper nouns in travel guides for their compatriots, translators in Latvia are all but subservient agents in global communications.

The contributions serve to highlight Pym's warning that simple sociological or social approaches with their emphasis on social interaction to the exclusion of cultural products will invariably neglect the object of study in Translation and Interpretation Studies, namely the translated text or the interpreted message. As many of the papers have shown, what is needed is a combined social and cultural analysis, with a "conceptual frame located somewhere between the whole of society and the linguistic situation, between traditional sociology and close-range cultural analysis" (p. 22). Pym concludes his "Introduction: On the social and the cultural in translation studies" by affirming that the "most problematic relations of today's world are between cultures. To model those problems is our first step toward solving them" (p. 25). It is clear that this very useful book goes well beyond theoretical abstractions and parochial disciplinary concerns; the turn towards social and cultural approaches to the study of communication exchanges between different sociocultural groups based on case studies could improve our understanding of the root sources of miscommunication and contribute positively to our search for solutions. The book is therefore of obvious interest not only to translation and interpreting scholars, but also to all readers interested in the mechanics of intercultural/social communication.

Denise Merkle
Université de Moncton

Sherry Simon. *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of the Divided City*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006, 280 p.

This is not a tale of two cities nor indeed a tale of one city with two tales. It is a book about cities that have many tales to tell even if the focus is firmly and knowledgeably on Montreal. Mostar, Prague,

Trieste, Dublin, Calcutta are drawn into the examination of the city that in the words of Nicole Brossard would “glitter like a northern jewel in the consciousness of restless minds which, the world over, dream of somewhere else”. That somewhere else was not far from home in the 1960s for Anglophone writers like Malcolm Reid and F.R. Scott who had only to cross the city of Montreal in an Easterly direction to find a whole other world of sentiment and expression. The traffic will increase and go in both directions but underlying the gathering momentum of movement is a fundamental shift in context, “Where bilingualism in the 1960s meant francophones speaking English, it now means Anglophones speaking French. French is now the undisputed language of culture in Montreal, with English gradually regaining recognition as an associate” (p. 206).

Sherry Simon in this study of translation in Montreal in the late modern period usefully complicates traditional narratives on the city in two ways. Firstly, as a translation scholar, she moves our attention away from the inevitable standoff of identity politics to show how translation as the ‘consciousness of restless minds’ can never be content with the unitary anthems of one language, one people. Secondly, she tilts the French/English axis by bringing to the fore the contribution of Yiddish language and writers to the shaping of the “Jerusalem of the North” where “Montreal was second only to New York as a centre of Yiddish thought and creativity, of secular Yiddish education, publishing and labour activism” (p. 90). By focusing on ‘episodes’ of translation, Simon not only shows that there were more ‘passages’ between the different language communities than are often imagined, but that the peculiar genius of Montreal’s writers from A.M. Klein to Jacques Brault has been to exploit the translanguing creativity of the translation moment.

Simon does not indulge however in the easy euphoria of aestheticized multiculturalism with its clappy-happy theatrics of smiling faces and Coke consumers. She quite rightly points out that any account of translation must not only talk about point of contact but must also include the failed encounters, the missed rendezvous. *Translating Montreal* takes the icon of the bridge, a conventional image for translation as a form of reaching out, and shows how from Mostar to the depiction of the Jacques Cartier bridge in a short story by Emile Ollivier, bridges can also be about divisions, chasms of misunderstanding, material symbols of centuries of mistrust. For a language in a position where it is removed from vital sources of power

or patronage, translation can be invasive and damaging. For this reason as Simon notes, there can be “no single ideal of interlinguistic communion.” Viewing translation as process rather than product means that what goes on around language in translation is as important as translation itself. The mere fact of translation can tell us more about cultural indifference than any sense of generative possibility if politically weaker languages are thrown the legislative scraps of residual historical guilt in the form of minimalist bilingualism. Conversely, where the “conditions of translatability” (p. 17), to use Simon’s term, changes, then a culture that was formerly wary of translation, French-speaking Quebec, can embrace the possibilities of language crossover as a way of extending the potential of the culture to include other histories and forms of expression. An example of this shift in the study are Pierre Anctil’s translations from Yiddish to French which have opened up lines of communication between two communities in the city that co-existed in relative isolation.

It is generally agreed that by end of this century approximately 80% of the world’s population will be living in large urban centers. As current migratory patterns are set to continue, if not intensify as a result of impending climate changes, more and more of those living in these centers will have come from elsewhere. They will be speaking different languages or radically different varieties of a particular language. This is why translation studies of cities like Montreal are so vital. Not only because, as Mary Louise Pratt constantly reminds us, North America needs to face up to the political implications of multilingualism and the dangers of monophone triumphalism but because globally in a sense we are all Montrealers now. The translation challenges of the multilingual city are everywhere and it is translation scholars like Simon who offer a way beyond the assimilationist rhetoric of neo-con preachers of Babelian meltdown and the clenched-fist certainties of linguistic and cultural irredentism. Careful attention to the histories of cities brings to life the network of passages between cultures and languages that have revitalized them in their darkest moments. But as Simon demonstrates, it is also important not to see translation in too narrow a sense, as uniquely expressed by the conventional frame of the printed page: “Language is engraved into the surfaces of the city, through signs, through inscriptions, through graffiti. And the writing-over of these inscriptions indicates the relentless progression of languages as they come to represent time-periods in the city’s history” (p. 204). For Simon, Claudio Magris’s Triestine café is a translation zone but so also is Mount-Royal, the park in Montreal designed by Frederick Olmsted,

who also designed Central Park. How different languages and cultural practices are both inscribed in and translate the park show the immense productivity of Simon's approach to translation as it reveals how much of urban settings fall within the purview of translation analysis. Simon begins her study with an account of her clandestine crosstown crossings as a Montreal teenager, taking the bus eastward and jumping off to change buses each time a new one came her way. The excitement of those early journeys has not worn off. *Translating Montreal*, written in fluent, persuasive prose, has all the clear-sighted inquisitiveness of a genuine traveler combined with a profound and sensitive love of the place that is Montreal.

Michael Cronin
Dublin City University

Dirk Delabatista, Lieven D'hulst et Reine Meylaerts (éd.).
Functional Approaches to Culture and Translation. Selected papers by José Lambert, Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing, « Benjamins Translation Library », vol. 69, 2006, 225 p.

Professeur au Département d'études littéraires de l'Université de Louvain depuis 1979 et nommé professeur émérite en octobre 2006, José Lambert est indiscutablement une figure importante de la traductologie. Membre de l'*International Comparative Literature Association*, qui fut à l'origine du fameux colloque de Louvain *Littérature et traduction* en 1976, et l'un des fondateurs de la *European Society for Translation Studies*, José Lambert situe ses travaux dans le sillage des recherches d'Itamar Even Zohar et de Gideon Toury, tout en tentant de renouveler l'approche systémique et descriptive de la traduction. La liste de ses enseignements et de ses articles montre quel fut son engagement dans l'avancement de la recherche en traductologie, tout comme la création du CETRA (*Center for Translation, Communication and Culture*) afin de promouvoir la recherche sur la traduction comme phénomène culturel. Dans l'objectif de mieux faire connaître l'itinéraire intellectuel et la pensée d'un homme qui a su faire avancer la discipline traductologique et lui ouvrir de nouveaux horizons, l'ouvrage *Functional Approaches to Culture and Translation* rassemble une sélection de treize articles de José Lambert. Certains ont acquis le statut de « classique » dans le domaine, d'autres sont, à tort, encore peu connus.