

Translated Literature and the Literary Polysystem: the Example of Le May's *Évangéline*

E. D. Blodget

Volume 34, Number 2, juin 1989

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/002094ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/002094ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

0026-0452 (print)

1492-1421 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Blodget, E. D. (1989). Translated Literature and the Literary Polysystem: the Example of Le May's *Évangéline*. *Meta*, 34(2), 157–168.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/002094ar>

TRANSLATED LITERATURE AND THE LITERARY POLYSYSTEM : THE EXAMPLE OF LE MAY'S ÉVANGÉLINE

E.D. BLODGETT

Department of Comparative Literature, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

*«L'écho répète et nous répond : Évangéline, Évangéline.»**

I wish to address the problem of translated literature within the framework of the Canadian literary polysystem. It should be said in advance, I think, that such a word and the theory with which it is inscribed is rarely used in discussions of both the Canadian literatures and the function of translations within them. We do not have what might be called a Canadian theory of translation, which is perhaps a blessing. It is impossible to consider the history of Canada, however, without reflecting upon the fact that its history as a nation was itself an act of translation. I refer to Jacques Cartier's records of his three voyages to Canada, as well as the several accounts that followed upon them. The first translators in the more conventional sense of the term were the two natives who learned French under Cartier's supervision and who became interpreters in his subsequent negotiations with the natives in the settlement of Stadcona. This kind of translation dominated until 1760, when the English assumed the governing of British North America. At that time the history of translation between English and French was inaugurated, and it remains the dominant mode in Canada. Thus, no one should be surprised to learn that the general attitude toward translation is practical. Furthermore, literary translation has always been overshadowed by governmental and journalistic translation for financial reasons.¹ Given the polite indifference that generally obtains between francophones and anglophones, one can only admire that literary translation between them exists at all. The fact that it has flourished indeed during the last two decades may be attributed to vigorous Federal policies.

The Canadian literatures, then, if for no other reason than that they remain virtually untouched in this domain, are ripe for examination. Part of the groundwork has already been made in Philip Stratford's *Bibliography of Canadian Books in Translation: French to English and English to French / Bibliographie de livres canadiens traduits de l'anglais au français et du français à l'anglais*. The title means exactly what it says: it is concerned only with translation within Canada and does not take account of non-Canadian texts. Within that framework, however, it provides some useful, preliminary data. First of all, prior to 1960, that is, some three centuries after the Conquest, almost all literary translations were published outside Canada, which is sufficient for Stratford to observe that "there is no tradition of literary translation in Canada."² By far the great majority of translation of early Canadian material, that is, explorers' journals, which Stratford correctly considers literary, are from French to English, which has always created a scene of limited access for francophones. Even French material has sometimes gone missing for centuries, notably the original of Cartier's log-books, which has been available in the

Florio version since 1580, and which did not become available again in French until 1867.³ The same imbalance is true for other genres. Translation from French to English outnumbers the other direction by twice. This suggests, as Stratford remarks, an almost willful xenophobia, which is paradoxically reinforced by the fact that the vast majority of translation of British and American texts is selected and executed in Paris. It might also be observed that even French, as Annie Brisset recently demonstrated, is held at a certain distance in Québec theatre by a process of re-translation into *Québécois*.⁴ In sum, Stratford's preface suggests that the texts that manage to be translated and distributed are almost like diplomatic dispatches between the lines. One change has occurred, however, in the last few years that augurs well both for the country and translated literature, and this is the effect that the women's movement has had. Conferences and joint publications, which always require translation, are facilitating exchanges that seem to have broken the old barriers.⁵

A further step toward addressing the issues of translation with the Canadian poly-system was taken by the Symposium on Translation held at the University of Ottawa in 1982. The aim of the conference was to examine both the theoretical and practical issues of the problem. The value of these papers resides particularly in their sociological and political grasp of the Canadian network as it moves from text to translator to publisher, and, finally, to the sources of financial support. I do not wish to bore you with the melancholia of statistics, but some of them, as they were raised at the symposium, are of a kind that ought to be borne in mind. In the years 1972 and 1973 — years in which literary translation flourished in Canada — “the Canada Council supported 27 and 45 literary translations in English and French combined.”⁶ When these figures are compared to the 504 and 432 literary translations produced in Belgium, it must be admitted that the field we wish to examine may be fertile, but not very well seeded.

Because of the paucity of material, because indeed of the very lack of a tradition, as Stratford reminds us, of literary translation in Canada, it is difficult to develop an indigenous theory of translation. Nor is it of value, I think, to make use of those to hand. It should be said that most theories of translation, not to speak of literary translation, are primarily concerned with source texts, and as a consequence are designed to measure adequacy of equivalence.⁷ Useful as that may be, it does not assist those of us who are literary critics and historians, and it may well account for the lamentable neglect of translation studies of any scale in departments of literature. This neglect can go so far as to encourage the idea in English Canada, for example, that the French-Canadian writer Gabrielle Roy may write in French, but since she speaks for “all of Canada,” she somehow transcends her “Frenchness.” The fact that she was born in Manitoba only supports this notion. Thus, while French-Canadian translations may be read in English Canada, an essential difference is what is lost in the translation itself. In such an instance, a translation is no longer a translation, possessing something foreign with respect to the target language. Nevertheless, it still possesses a position in the target literature, and *a fortiori* its position is stronger than it would have been were it perceived primarily as translated, *i.e.*, subordinate. It is precisely in this respect, as well as many others, that Canadian literary studies need a method for addressing the literary translation within the target literature.

Contrary to conventional Canadian practice, I would like, rather than examining Canadian texts, to consider an American text, Longfellow's *Évangéline*, and its French-Canadian version by Léon-Pamphile Le May. This choice has much to recommend it. First of all, it is the recuperation of a French-Canadian legend after its passage through America. As a result, the original undergoes a number of transformations in order to be properly repatriated. Second, the poem poses for the translator a problem of some magnitude in versification because Longfellow chose to pattern his line on the classical dactylic

hexameter. Finally, the story itself possesses for the French-Canadian more than the charm that many American readers have discovered. It contains, as I shall indicate, an ideology of profoundly evocative, if ambivalent, power that is captured in the penultimate sentence of Le May's 1912 preface: "*Ceux qui aiment la justice se plaisent à croire que les choses de la terre ont toujours un écho dans le ciel.*"⁸ It must be recognized, then, as a target text of a certain merit, and that its validity as a translated text does not depend upon Le May's success in matching the original, but rather upon its mode of reception.

Before speaking of Le May, however, I want to situate Longfellow's poem within American literature. It was published in 1847, that is, before the rise of Whitman and Dickinson, and in the era of Nathaniel Hawthorne from whom he received the story. The extent to which the poem may be said to be French-Canadian beyond its provenience is open to discussion. The motif of the suffering maiden is frequently attributed to the medieval tale, *Der arme Heinrich*, known mostly in Hartmann von Aue's version, as well as its nineteenth-century variants. Its idyllic character, its motif of eviction by a conquering army, and its imitation of the classical line have frequently been attributed to Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea*, to such an extent that not only is the poem considered an example of the impact of German literature on American in the nineteenth century, but also the Germans themselves were fond of seeing it as German.⁹ Nor can Longfellow's empirical knowledge of Acadian Nova Scotia be said to have been particularly precise. As the opening lines attest, his Acadia belongs to American legend. "This," asserts Longfellow,

This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,
Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in the twilight,
Stand like Druids of eld, with voices sad and prophetic.
Stand like harpers hoar, with beards that rest on their bosoms.¹⁰

The actual site in perhaps less inspiring, without undertones of Ossian: it is, rather, unfor-ested and somewhat monotonous. But the poem is not about the landscape of Acadia, nor are any of the landscapes, that range from Nova Scotia down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to Louisiana, and westward and northward until concluding in Philadelphia, meant to be other than landscapes of the soul, the reflections of Evangeline's interior life.

Indeed, as it has been argued, the effect of the poem arises primarily from its elegiac pathos, which may be the result of making the protagonist a woman and, therefore, a figure, at least for Longfellow, who possesses "less a tragic vehemence of will than ... a capacity for passive endurance and a long-suffering patience."¹¹ As a consequence, the presence of the British is minimal in the poem, and the use of nature is a constant reminder that all creatures must submit to destiny. Thus the forest is, as we are immediately told, "primeval", and that fact is a sign of how ancient destiny is. This does not prevent Evangeline, however, from devoting her life to one object, which, one ought to be reminded, is only symbolically related to her lost homeland. She spends her life tracking her betrothed, Gabriel Lajeunesse, from whom she is separated during the evacuation. She finds him at the end, dying of yellow fever in Philadelphia. He dies in her arms, and the passage concludes with the lines:

All was ended now, the hope, and the fear, and the sorrow,
All the aching of heart, the restless, unsatisfied longing,
All the dull, deep pain, and constant anguish of patience!
And, as she pressed once more the lifeless head to her bosom,
Meekly she bowed her own, and murmured, "Father, I thank thee!"
(p. 97)

Immediately the epilogue follows with a line that, repeated in anaphora, breaks the epilogue in half: "Still stands the forest primeval (p. 98)." The forest is, besides a mark of destiny, a sign of Evangeline's faithfulness to Gabriel, who may equally represent the elusive Acadia, forever just beyond her grasp.

I have already given some idea of Longfellow's metric, but without indicating how it entered the polysystem of American writing. Unquestionably, it was an experiment, but of a kind that was in accord with the conservative ideology of the poem. Reviewers were not, as one might suppose, as pleased with it as they were with the narrative. Friends and contemporaries found the metre at once new and hybrid, curiously forgetting the years they had laboured over Vergil. This newness, however, may rest upon the fact, as one critic has argued, that, read properly, Longfellow is more musical than the Vergil of the schools, who was taught to be read with heavy accentual scansion.¹² Thus, however the poem was read, it remains a metrical oddity, and like his *The Song of Hiawatha*, easily lends itself to parody. From such a point of view, then, despite the fact that it was considered a major international success in its time, especially in England and Germany, it is a poem that fits awkwardly into the canon of American literature. At once traditional and apparently innovative, it possesses some of the equivocal qualities that have been observed in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*, itself the object of a number of translations in France.¹³ For that very reason, perhaps, *Evangeline*, which is always placed among Longfellow's masterpieces, was widely read in Biedermeier America, and Longfellow himself was always more popular than both Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, who were undoubtedly the two most innovative poets of the nineteenth century in that country.¹⁴

It is possible that *Evangeline's* greatest success was not literary. As Ernest Martin has argued, "*l'Évangéline de Longfellow ... allait précisément contribuer, pour une large part, à faire naître ce souffle nécessaire, redonner à l'Acadie mourante la volonté de vivre, et ranimer puissamment chez tous les Acadiens dispersés la flamme presque éteinte de leur ancienne fierté française.*"¹⁵ One of the *truchements* in that process of repatriation was surely Pamphile Le May's version of Longfellow's poem. Like Longfellow, Le May was a poet, as well as a novelist and translator, and along with Louis Fréchette and Alfred Garneau may be considered one of the major poets of French-Canadian Romanticism (1860-1890). For these poets, one isotopy predominates in their work: *la patrie* and its opposite *l'exil*.¹⁶ For a translator, *Evangeline* is almost without parallel in drawing together both levels of this opposition. The poem enters the polysystem of French-Canadian literature at a primary level with respect to both the character of the translator and the ideology with which it is inscribed. Furthermore, the very fact that the poem's first author was Longfellow could only add to its lustre, inasmuch as Longfellow bears the same relation to the poetry of nineteenth-century French Canada as Walter Scott to its prose.¹⁷ Before examining the translation itself, however, I want to raise some issues regarding the translator and the manner in which *Évangéline* appeared.

Like his contemporaries the Confederation poets Archibald Lampman and Duncan Campbell Scott, Le May was a civil servant. For two years, 1865-1867, he was an official translator for the parliament of United Canada. After Confederation, he became the first Librarian of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Québec, a post he held for twenty-five years. He was twice awarded a gold medal for competitions held by the *Université de Laval*, and he can be considered one of the most highly respected men of letters of his generation in Québec.¹⁸ When his initial version of *Évangéline* appeared in 1865, he was serving as official interpreter. It formed the first part of his first collection of poems, and, commenting upon it, he remarks: "*Évangéline, voilà surtout l'ouvrage avec lequel je me présente devant le monde littéraire.*"¹⁹ Clearly the poem holds a privi-

leged position in the collection, but one wonders to what extent the poet desired it to overshadow, rather than prepare the way, for his own work, which, as he hopes, might “faire rejaillir un reflet de gloire sur mon cher Canada!” (p. xi).

As he remarks in the final edition of the poem (1912), “C’est encore une traduction libre” (p. 5). Indeed, as stated in an earlier preface (1870), “Je n’ai jamais prétendu faire une traduction tout à fait littérale. J’ai un peu suivi mon caprice. Parfois j’ai ajouté, j’ai retranché, parfois ; mais plutôt dans les paroles que dans les idées...”²⁰ The intent of the translation, then, bears upon the target system, despite the clear desire to forestall the carping of critics. Later, in a letter addressed to William Kirby, whose *The Golden Dog* he had recently translated, he confessed that “j’ai éprouvé un vif plaisir à le traduire, et pourtant la tâche était ardue pour un traducteur qui ne sait pas l’anglais.”²¹ Such a statement strikes a note of false modesty, inasmuch as twenty years before he had been an active translator. Are these not, rather, pre-systemic statements of a kind that were shaped to lead the reader toward the adequacy, and not the acceptability, of the translation? Surely Le May was in a position to do so in light of his standing as a poet. The frequent republication of both translations attests to the fact that he probably made the right decisions.²²

When *Évangéline* was re-issued for a fourth time in 1912, it carried a preface by Édouard Richard. It was not designed to treat Le May’s version as a translation so much as a literary unmasking of the glosses of historiography. Thus one might say that the growing popularity of the poem in Québec was not because it was a translation, but because it had become, through sheer ideological force, part of the literary polysystem. As a result, the preface shrewdly balances the excesses of the British invaders with the submissive loyalty of the Acadians of whom *Évangéline* herself is the ever-present symbol. Furthermore, by bringing Longfellow into his polemic as the first to challenge the iniquity of historiography, he does not function as an “original” with whose text Le May’s is being measured. Rather, Longfellow’s role is to enhance Le May as part of a literary, as opposed to an historical, tradition. And he does more: he serves to forestall what may have been a French-Canadian resentment against the British that was not felt as keenly by Longfellow. Thus he argues against those who feel that Longfellow did not take advantage of the story by introducing scenes of armed resistance, and shifts the emphasis of his response in two ways. First, he supports Longfellow’s stress on the submissive character of the Acadians as true to history, thus using literature as history in defense of the legend. Second, he praises the poem for its emphasis on spiritual values, comparing it in a suggestive way to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which led, as Richard declares, to “convulsions politiques,” but also like *Evangeline* “a touché les cœurs, élevé les pensées, adouci les sentiments, et son action, douce et pénétrante, durera indéfiniment” (p. 10). When one bears in mind that Richard refers to Longfellow as among the first rank of poets honoured by the “*Union américaine*” (p. 9), the comparison between Stowe and Longfellow acquires a certain ideological validity. It suggests that the benefacts of union have been gained in some instances, Canada as one of these, without “convulsions politiques,” and this, given the values that the preface expresses, is more desirable. Thus Richard’s preface treats the translation as a literary text which enters the polysystem on the level of the dominant ideology.²³ What matters is not how well Longfellow has been translated, but how efficiently *Évangéline* serves as a model for a politically submissive French Canada. It is in this light, furthermore, that Le May’s modesty must be seen. His text is an ideological response to the target system and not an example of unequivocal reception.²⁴

The first aspect of Le May’s poem that one notices is the metric form. To match Longfellow’s hexameters, Le May employed alexandrines, which are the conventional

French noble lines and correspond to English heroic couplets. The choice, therefore, was clearly not in the direction of innovation, and it was the same line later chosen by Fréchette for his *la Légende d'un peuple* (1887). A modern French view of his favourite metric is that his *Essais poétiques*, in which the first version of the poem appeared, "abondaient en mièvreries pré-lamartiniennes."²⁵ Thus *Évangéline* entered the target system metrically on a secondary level, allowing it to be perceived as part of its literature, as opposed to a translation.²⁶ The second and equally significant aspect of the translation is matricial strategy.²⁷ We have already observed what appears to be Le May's attitude to the source text, and it is now our task to see more clearly how he adapts and to speculate upon the purpose of that adaptation.

Longfellow's poem begins with an evocation of "the forest primeval" and almost immediately modulates to the *ubi sunt* topos:

Where is the thatched-roofed village, the home of Acadian farmers, —
Men whose lives glided on like rivers that water the woodlands,
Darkened by shadows of earth, but reflecting an image of heaven?
Waste are those pleasant farms, and the farmers forever departed!
Scattered like dust and leaves, when the mighty blasts of October
Seize them, and whirl them aloft, and sprinkle them far o'er the ocean.
Naught but tradition remains of the beautiful village of Grand-Pré.
(p. 72)

The first two lines are expanded to four in Le May, and the farmers are no longer associated with the placidity of rivers. They are now "*cœurs naïfs ... que l'on voyait bondir comme bondit le daim*"²⁸ (p. 18). This marks a clear change from the first edition in which he remains more literal. Changes of a more interesting kind are made with the line "Darkened by shadows of earth, but reflecting an image of heaven," which proleptically announces the angelic *Évangéline*. Retained in the first edition, it is modified in the final edition to read: "*Ensoleillés souvent par une paix profonde, / Assombris quelquefois par la crainte du monde.*" This image in Longfellow is carefully used to modify "rivers," which is a simile for "men." In Le May this psychological element is dropped in favour of the naturalistic, allowing the image to modify "*rivières*," which is a simile for "*jours*." Le May adds a motive, however, which cannot be found in Longfellow's prologue. While the latter concludes a sentence with the phrase "and the farmers forever departed!" Le May tells us that while there are "[p]lus de gais laboureurs," the reason is that "*La haine des méchants / Jadis les a chassés ... comme ... l'ouragan.*" This is a significant modification which permits the reader to expect an ideological shift of emphasis. It serves, however, as little more than suggestive propaganda, for in Le May's treatment of the material the role of the invader is never enhanced. It is, rather, subordinated to the ecclesiastical values of submissiveness, indicating that the Acadians prefer the pathos of the victim to the complications of "*convulsions politiques*," to use Richard's phrase from his preface.

The one meeting with the British occurs in Part the First, Canto IV. I wish to dwell upon it at some length because it illustrates Le May's practice quite clearly, particularly in the manner with which it prepares for the role of the heroine as a synecdoche of faithful suffering. When the British land in Longfellow, they march directly into the church:

With loud and dissonant clangor
Echoed the sound of their brazen drums from ceiling and casement, —
Echoed a moment only, and slowly the ponderous portal
Closed, and in silence the crowd awaited the will of the soldiers.
(pp. 79-80)

The commander then reads the notice of eviction. In the first edition these soldiers have become “*féroces*” (p. 30), but in the fourth, overlooking the drama of the drums beating in anaphora, the soldiers are not so much ferocious, but such that “*l’histoire implacable à jamais stigmatise*” (p. 58). These are soldiers who are already absorbed by memory and are, therefore, harder to confront than ordinary soldiers. It is a phrase that always belongs to the struggling minority, for history will always be, it is hoped, on their side. The commander’s edict is lengthened, but not ideologically changed, and the simile that follows allows Le May to diffuse the event at length into pastoral elegy. Longfellow’s simile takes five lines to describe the sudden onset of a summer storm that destroys the crop, shatters windows, puts out the sun, tears the thatch from the roofs, and scatters the herd. Le May expands this to some sixteen lines of a drama that recaptures in the displacement of naturalistic imagery the effect of the edict on the village.

*En été, quelquefois, après un jour serein
On voit, à l’horizon, un nuage s’étendre.
Un grondement lointain se fait alors entendre,
Et le soleil, pâli, semble hâter son cours.
Tout s’agite un moment, tout cherche du secours,
Puis tout se tait. L’oiseau sous la forêt s’envole,
Et vers les bords ombreux s’élance la gondole.
La feuille est immobile et l’air est étouffant.
Mais voilà que soudain le nuage se fend,
Le ciel vomit la flamme ; et la pluie et la grêle,
Sous leurs fouets crépitants, brisent l’arbuste frêle,
Le chaume d’or des toits, et les fleurs et les blés.
Alors les bestiaux se regardent troublés.
Ils ont peur. Puis ensemble, oubliant la pâture,
Ils s’élancent, beuglant, le long de la clôture,
Pour s’ouvrir un passage et chercher des abris.
Ainsi les villageois...
(pp. 59-60)*

Within the network of the translation’s signifying structure, this must be seen as more than expansion. By so dramatising a natural event and linking it so insistently with an historical event, Le May prevents the reader from perceiving the arrival of the British soldiers as other than a destiny that cannot be avoided. It is therefore no mere ornament, as it is in Longfellow, and it corresponds to Robbe-Grillet’s argument on nature and tragedy in which he asserts that: “*Confondre de cette façon ma propre tristesse avec celle que je prête à un paysage, admettre ce lien comme non superficiel, c’est reconnaître du même coup pour ma vie présente une certaine prédestination.*”²⁹ This was, evidently, a passage that held Le May’s attention from the first version, where it is already four lines longer. In both instances one of the images retained, which is not found in Longfellow, is that of the departing bird in flight, which appears to stand often in Le May’s version as a sign for *Évangéline*. It recurs in an entirely gratuitous addition in a simile immediately following the priest’s speech urging the Acadians to follow Christ’s example and pardon their enemies :

*Quand l’orage a cessé,
On entend la chanson dans le nid oppressé,
On voit le pré verdier et le calme renaître ;
Tels les cœurs abattus, aux paroles du prêtre,
Retrouvèrent la force et la tranquillité.
Tous ces bons villageois, avec humilité
Levèrent sur le Christ des regards d’espérance*

*Ils s'écrièrent tous, oubliant leur souffrance,
A genoux et plaintifs dans leur profond malheur :
— "Pitié, pitié, mon Dieu ! mon Dieu, pardonnez-leur !"
(p. 63)*

This addition, expressed in somewhat different language and without the image of the bird, was also present in the earlier versions. Its function is to recall with a certain finesse the simile of the storm illustrating the soldiers' arrival and to put the power of the storm — and indeed nature itself — back into the hands of the priest. In this way, the British are figuratively overcome, for they are shown to be subordinate to the priest within the theological hierarchy of the universe as reflected in nature. Furthermore, the image of the bird recurs to support what appears to be the true order the world. The question of why the soldiers belong to this notion of the world is not examined, nor should it be, for, presumably, they merely come and go like summer storms. They are only a sign for the natural cycle. That they impel Evangeline's wanderings across North America is not, finally, of significance. What is important is that she, who represents the medieval idea of human life as pilgrimage, never forgets her betrothed, who appears to bear far more semantic weight than that of the lost homeland.

Thus, the loss of the homeland is supported by love and sanctioned by ecclesiastical metaphor. This is sustained in general by the presence of priests who assist Evangeline everywhere in her travels, and it is particularly manifest in the additions Le May makes to Longfellow's depiction of the death of the heroine's father. As the symbol of *la patrie*, his death makes its loss appear definitive. As a consequence, its significance lies in how it is enhanced. Longfellow barely suggests its theological role by referring to the body as "sacred dust" (p. 84). Moreover, with admirable subtlety, he refers to the loss of Vergil in Dante's *Purgatorio*, by having the Acadians gaze upon the terrible sight of their burning villages and then turn to share it with her father, only to find him gone.³⁰ The first version not only fails to respond to the possibilities of "sacred dust," it in fact renders the phrase as *cliché* in the expression, "sa froide poussière" (p. 48). In the final edition, Le May took full advantage of Longfellow's direction. Where it was initially sufficient to say, "Motionless lay his form, from which the soul had departed" (p. 84), Le May intones: "*Il était mort. De l'acte impie et sacrilège / Qui l'a tué, martyr, il en appelle à Dieu*" (p. 81). To fit his intent, Le May completely modifies Longfellow's brief sermon in which the priest says:

Let us bury him here by the sea. When a happier season
Brings us again to our homes, from the unknown land of our exile,
Then shall his sacred dust be piously laid in the churchyard.

Le May's priest is more metaphorical:

*— Portons les restes saints de notre ami fidèle
A l'ombre de cet arbre, au bord de cette mer
Et si nous revenons de notre exil amer,
Nous irons, louant Dieu, le mettre en terre sainte...
La haine des méchants sera peut-être éteinte.
(p. 82)*

Not only does the father's holiness echo in the repetition of the word *saint*, but also the use of "*méchants*" reminds us of its use in the prologue, reinforcing the notion of the British not as a secular army but as a moral force. As "the wicked," they will always be morally inferior to the Acadians, who never lose their faith no matter where they are. And

this is precisely the semantic force of “*notre exil amer*,” a phrase which was also used by French-Canadians to signal their difference from the degenerate Republic of France, as well as the British who surrounded them in North America. Such a phrase makes the poem *national*, in the French-Canadian sense.

Finally, when he is buried, even the sea in Longfellow joins the service with a sound “like the voice of a vast congregation” (p. 84). Taking this cue, Le May writes that one seemed to hear

*Les versets alternés et l'accent solennel
Des moines à genoux dans l'amour fraternel.³¹
C'était le grondement lointain de la marée.*
(pp. 82-83)

What for Longfellow was complete as simile is now a metaphor in which the waves have become monks, thus displaying the order of liturgy everywhere in the natural world. And in the end, as they depart, mention is made in Longfellow of “the dead on the shore,” which in Le May becomes as an addition to the final version, in a word which gathers the whole theological movement of the passage, “*un martyr sur la grève voisine*” (p. 83).

After all her travels, *Évangéline* is finally rewarded by being reunited with her dying beloved. She meets him by chance in a hospital in Philadelphia during an epidemic of yellow fever. This death too is carefully and insistently enhanced with theological overtones. Where Longfellow is satisfied with one reference to Hebrew ritual, Le May wants the reader to perceive the forever elusive Gabriel as dying with God's blessing. When *Évangéline* finally sees him again,

*Il était là, cet homme, immobile et sans voix,
Le regard attaché sur la petite croix
Qu'on venait de suspendre au mur, près de la couche.*
(pp. 158-159)

This addition to Longfellow fixes Gabriel within an ecclesiastical semiotic system that, once established, has not been neglected. When *Évangéline* speaks, all she can say in Longfellow is “Gabriel! Oh my beloved!” (p. 97), but in Le May she adds after “Gabriel! Gabriel!” the words: “*Bénis, mon bien-aimé, le ciel qui nous rassemble*”³² (p. 159). The line is sufficient to guarantee the theological structure of the poem, reminding the reader that wherever the faithful are, God is there too, enhancing the meaning of exile. As he opens his eyes, he does not see merely *Évangéline*, as in Longfellow, he sees “*une forme angélique / Et c'est Évangéline*” (p. 160), thus privileging one of the connotations of her names. While in Longfellow “Vainly he strove to whisper her name,” here he not only makes an effort to speak, but also “*en une sainte ivresse, / il attache sur elle un regard de tendresse*” (p. 160). As he dies in Longfellow, “Meekly she bowed her [head],” but in Le May, “près de ce mort béni qu'elle avait aimé tant, / La pauvre *Évangéline* est à genoux” (p. 161). Finally, returning to the words of the prologue, Longfellow begins with his conclusion:

Still stands the forest primeval; but far away from its shadow.
Side by side, in their nameless graves, the lovers are sleeping.
Under the humble walls of the little Catholic churchyard,
In the heart of the city, they lie, unknown and unnoticed.
(p. 98)

In order to underline the intimate relationship that obtains between God and the natural world, which is adumbrated throughout the poem, Le May writes:

*C'est l'antique forêt ... Noyés dans la pénombre,
Vieux et moussus, drapés dans leur feuillage sombre,
Les pins au long murmure et les cyprès altiers
Se balancent encore sur les fauves sentiers,
Mais loin, bien loin de leurs discrets ombrages
Les fiancés constants, sur d'étrangères plages
Dorment l'un près de l'autre, à jamais réunis...
La paix est éternelle où les maux sont finis.*
(pp. 161-162)

After an emphatic space in the text, he continues following the earlier versions :

*Ils sont là, sous les murs du temple catholique,
Au sein de la cité ; mais la croix symbolique
Qui disait au passant le lieu de leur repos,
La croix ne se voit plus.*

First, the pastoral contrast between country and city is used to advantage, indicating that even “[a]u sein de la cité” the divinely sanctioned constancy of nature endures. Second, even the absence of the cross is used to present advantage inasmuch as it signs the lovers into legend and into Le May’s text.

One of the difficulties of assessing Le May’s *Évangéline* within the literary polysystem of nineteenth-century French Canada is the lack of translated literature with which to measure it.³³ With the exception of other poems by Longfellow, by far the great majority of translation is fiction and non-fiction.³⁴ Because this poem attracted Le May’s interest for some three decades, the changes that occur between the first and fourth editions — some of which I have already indicated — suggest to a certain extent the place of translated literature within the polysystem. This must be said, however, *toutes proportions gardées*, inasmuch as we are only examining one text, no matter how significant it may be. There are, however, two levels on which I wish to probe it, the one formal and the other ideological.

As I have indicated, the major changes in the development of the translation were made along clerical lines. That is, wherever it is possible to transpose secular conflict into theological issues, Le May does not hesitate to do so. Thus the modifications in his text reflect the general shift in ideological attitudes that took place in the latter half of the nineteenth century in Québec. This is clearly illustrated in the attacks levelled on the successive editions of François-Xavier Garneau’s *Histoire du Canada depuis sa découverte jusqu’à nos jours*. In fact its continual modifications at the hands of the censors is the literal evidence of the change from the anticlerical, enlightenment ideals of the first of the century to the *ultramontanisme* of its decline.³⁵ I should not, of course, go so far as to accuse Le May of the latter, for there are more conspicuous examples such as Jules-Paul Tardivel’s *Pour la patrie*. Nevertheless, the changes that Le May makes with Longfellow’s poem in the course of his own development are always in accordance with the dominant ideology.³⁶ In this sense, at least, Le May’s version may be said to enter the polysystem on a primary level. This is especially true, I think, when we bear in mind that Le May, on the one hand, is deliberately careless in his remarks about the accuracy of his translation and that Richard, on the other, plays down Longfellow’s role as originator, and treats him rather as a source for ideas and attitudes.

On the formal level, Le May’s translation is more equivocal. The early editions of his poem (1865 and 1870) reflect both Octave Crémazie’s and Paul Fréchette’s penchant for the long line, especially the latter’s use of alexandrines in his epic, *la Légende d’un peuple*. By the time of the final edition, the long line had not died but its use has changed,

and a greater interest in other verse forms had developed.³⁷ The shift in attitude toward the function of poetry that occurred during the 1890s may be attributed to the activity of the *École littéraire de Montréal*, which evinced both the influence of Rimbaud and Verlaine and the notion that poetry was not a diversion but rather a vocation.³⁸ This means that the old dominant themes of the nation and its past were replaced by less clearly referential levels, which one might expect from the presence of Verlaine, at least. As a consequence, it may be said that within the avant-garde Le May's 1912 edition would have appeared distinctly *vieux jeu*.³⁹

In sum, then, it ought to be remarked first that Le May's *Évangéline* is a floating text that reflects the polysystem on several levels. While following the curve of ideology, it remains at a primary level of significance. As literature, however, its final edition represents a shift to a secondary level. At such a point, one might surmise, the translation would appear to be more of a translation than a literary text in its own right. To avoid this would seem to have been Le May's intent from the earliest version, which was published along with his own verse following a preface in which his mention of Longfellow occurs in half a page out of six and a half. The last edition, devoted entirely to translations of Longfellow, could hardly afford to be so laconic. Here it is deliberately called a "*traduction libre*," and the preface by Richard seems deliberately designed to deflect the reader from perceiving it as a translation and into issues central to the ideology of the target system. One must, of course, be wary of generalizations made from one example, but the arguments raised by Annie Brisset regarding the retranslation of French plays into *Québécois*, as well as those of Z.-Ben Shek and especially of Jacques Brault, who feels that the best protection against English is the "*non-traduction*,"⁴⁰ would lead me to state that Le May is at the beginning of an attitude and practice in French Canada that would militate against the advertisement of outside influence. Certainly the general paucity of translation in Québec would suggest this. Indeed, the closer one can come to the target system the better. This would, as a corollary, mean that ideological conformity is as necessary as a general tendency on the formal level away from experimentation. Any rupture on this level would call attention to the translated text as being unusual, more like a translation than a native product. This, of course, makes the discussion of translated literature in French-Canadian a highly problematic enterprise indeed, but the value of Le May is that he sets the stage for what are in fact enduring issues in the literary polysystem within which he was working.

Notes

* I am indebted to Professor Jacques Julien of the University of Saskatchewan for bringing A. T. Bourque's song to my attention and to my colleague Anthony Purdy for his useful suggestions.

1. Cf. Philip Stratford (1977): *Bibliography of Canadian Books in Translation: French to English and English to French / Bibliographie de livres canadiens traduits de l'anglais au français et du français à l'anglais*, Ottawa, HRCC/CCRH, p. iii. On the history of translation in Canada, see "Histoire de la traduction au Canada," *META*, 22:1 (1977).
2. Stratford, p. ii.
3. On the history of Cartier's text, see H. P. Biggar (1924): *The Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, Publications of the Public Archives of Canada, n° 11, Ottawa, F. A. Acland.
4. Annie Brisset (1985): "La fonction des (re)traductions du répertoire dramatique au Québec," read at the XIth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association, Paris-Sorbonne, August 20-25.
5. Cf. two special issues of the Tessera group, *Room of One's Own*, 8:4 (January 1984) and "l'Écriture comme lecture," *la Nouvelle Barre du Jour*, n° 157 (1985).
6. Ray Ellenwood (1983): "Some Actualities of Canadian Literary Translation," in *Reappraisals: Canadian Writers — Translation in Canadian Literature*, Ed. Camille La Bossière, Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, p. 61.
7. Cf. Gideon Toury (1980): "The Nature and Role of Norms in Literary Translation," in *Search of a Theory of Translation*, Jerusalem, Academic Press.

8. Henry W. Longfellow, *Évangéline et autres poèmes de Longfellow*, trad. Léon-Pamphile Le May, 3^e éd. (Montréal, J.-Alfred Guay : 1912), p. 6. All further references to this work are in the text. It should be noted that while designated as a third edition, this is the fourth version Le May made of the poem.
9. See James Taft Hatfield (1933): *New Light on Longfellow with Special Reference to His Relations to Germany*, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin, p. 114.
10. *The Poetical Works of Longfellow*, ed. Horace E. Scudder (1975) : Boston, Houghton Mifflin, p. 71. All further references to this work are in the text.
11. Newton Arvin (1963) : *Longfellow : His Life and Work*, Boston and Toronto, Little, Brown and Company, p. 101.
12. Hatfield, pp. 116-117.
13. Cf. José Lambert et Katrin Van Bragt (1980) : "*The Vicar of Wakefield*" en langue française. *Traditions et ruptures dans la littérature traduite*, Preprint Literaturwetenschap n° 3, Leuven, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, pp. 4-6.
14. William B. Cairns (1930) : *A History of American Literature*, New York and London, Johnson Reprint, 1969, pp. 297-298.
15. Ernest Martin (1936) : *l'Évangéline de Longfellow et la suite merveilleuse d'un poème*, Paris, Hachette, p. 218.
16. Cf. David M. Hayne (1969) : "La poésie romantique au Canada français (1860-1890)," in *la Poésie canadienne-française*, Archives des lettres canadiennes, IV, Montréal, Fides, p. 67.
17. Hayne, "La poésie romantique," p. 70.
18. Hayne (1983) : "Literary Translation in Nineteenth-Century Canada," in *Reappraisals : Canadian Writers — Translation in Canadian Literature*, ed. Camille La Bossière, Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, p. 44. Cf. John Ellis Hare (1963) : *A Bibliography of the Works of Leon Pamphile Le May (1837-1918)*, *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 57 :1 (First Quarter), p. 50.
19. *Essais poétiques* (Québec, G. E. Desbarats, 1865), pp. x-xi. All further references to his work are in the text.
20. *Évangéline*, traduction du poème acadien de Longfellow, 2^e éd. (Québec, P.-G. Delisle, 1870), p. 6.
21. Cited in Hayne, "Literary Translation," p. 45.
22. Cf. Hayne, "Literary Translation," p. 45. On pre-systemic statements, see Toury, p. 58.
23. For a discussion of the ideology of the period, see Denis Mounière (1977) : *le Développement des idéologies au Québec des origines à nos jours*, Montréal, Éditions Québec/Amérique, pp. 189-226.
24. Le May's own preface to the 1870 edition, while initially truculent with respect of the British invader, finally emphasizes the union of Confederation also.
25. Auguste Viatte (1954) : *Histoire littéraire de l'Amérique française des origines à 1950*, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, p. 129.
26. On primary and secondary levels, see Itamar Even-Zohar (1978) : "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem," in *Literature and Translation : New Perspectives in Literary Studies*, ed. James S. Holmes, José Lambert and Raymond Van den Broek, Leuven, Acco. Cf. Jurij Lotman (1976) : "The Content and Structure of the Concept 'Literature,'" *PTL A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature*, 1, pp. 339-356.
27. Cf. Toury, p. 54.
28. When no other version is mentioned, the text examined is that of the 1912 edition.
29. *Pour un nouveau roman*, Paris, Éditions de minuit, 1963.
30. Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXX, pp. 40-54.
31. The earlier versions give "*Des moines à genoux devant les saints autels*," which is more exclusively ecclesiastical than the final version.
32. In the previous versions, this line is "*Je te retrouve enfin et nous mourrons*." And so they do in the first edition, but a letter from Longfellow, published in the 1870 edition, reminded Le May that he had not been faithful to the "original." *Évangéline's* vain prophecy was not corrected until the final version.
33. For a useful discussion of this context of literary translation, see Lambert and Van Bragt, pp. 44-67.
34. Cf. Hayne, "La poésie romantique," p. 65, note 96.
35. See Serge Gagnon (1978) : *le Québec et ses historiens de 1840 à 1920 : la nouvelle France de Garneau à Groulx*, Québec, les Presses de l'Université Laval, pp. 321-324.
36. See Hayne, "La poésie romantique," p. 65, note 96.
37. See Hayne, "La poésie romantique," pp. 70-71 and Paul Wyczynski (1969) : "L'héritage poétique de l'École littéraire de Montréal," in *Archives des lettres canadiennes*, IV, Montréal, Fides, 1969, p. 79.