

“French-English Translation in Canada” by Maynard Gertler Edited and with an introduction by Ruth Panofsky

Ruth Panofsky

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Résumé de l'article

«French-English Translation in Canada» est la transcription d'une conférence donnée par l'éditeur montréalais Maynard Gertler à un public non identifié en 1976. Lorsque Gertler a fondé Harvest House en 1959, son but était de publier les premières traductions anglaises des œuvres d'auteur-e-s québécois-e-s en éditions accessibles et peu coûteuses. La transcription de cette conférence est un document de valeur durable qui offre une analyse tranchante de l'édition canadienne contemporaine et présente les défis auxquels un éditeur national engagé à la publication d'œuvres françaises traduites en anglais était confronté à l'époque.

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Documents and Tools: “French-English Translation in Canada,” by Maynard Gertler

Edited and with an introduction by Ruth Panofsky

Abstract

“French-English Translation in Canada” is the transcript of a talk given by Montreal publisher Maynard Gertler to an unidentified audience in 1976. When Gertler founded Harvest House in 1959, his aim was to issue the first English-language translations of the works of Québécois writers in inexpensive, accessible editions. The talk is a document of enduring value that provides incisive analysis of contemporary Canadian publishing and presents the challenges facing a domestic publisher who was committed to issuing French works in English translation.

Résumé

«French-English Translation in Canada» est la transcription d’une conférence donnée par l’éditeur montréalais Maynard Gertler à un public non identifié en 1976. Lorsque Gertler a fondé Harvest House en 1959, son but était de publier les premières traductions anglaises des œuvres d’auteur-e-s québécois-e-s en éditions accessibles et peu coûteuses. La transcription de cette conférence est un document de valeur durable qui offre une analyse tranchante de l’édition canadienne contemporaine et présente les défis auxquels un éditeur national engagé à la publication d’œuvres françaises traduites en anglais était confronté à l’époque.

Introduction

In 1959, Emmanuel Maynard Gertler (1916–2011), together with his wife Ann Straus Gertler (1922–2017), founded the English-language publishing company Harvest House in Montreal. In establishing Harvest House, the Gertlers followed in the tradition of American

Jewish publishers Alfred A. Knopf and Blanche Knopf—also a husband-and-wife team—Richard (Dick) Simon and Lincoln (Max) Schuster of Simon & Schuster, Harold K. Guinzburg and George S. Oppenheim of Viking Press, and Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer of Random House, all of whom founded their respective firms out of a spirit of enterprise and innovation. Like their American confrères, the Gertlers drew on their own financial resources to realize their ambition: to issue the first English-language translations of the works of Québécois writers in inexpensive, accessible editions.

Maynard Gertler pursued multiple career paths, but his efforts as publisher earned him widest renown and the landmark books issued under the Harvest House imprint remain his greatest legacy. In the 1960s and 1970s, Harvest House was “the most important English-language publishing house”¹ in Quebec and at least one of Gertler’s contemporaries lauded its founder as “a one-man university press.”² Gertler established the company to help bridge the cultural divide between the French and English in Canada, and this mission informed his work as editor and publisher. It is notable that a number of Harvest House’s translations were undertaken before the establishment in 1972 of the Canada Council for the Arts’s translation grants program. Moreover, Gertler’s high editorial standards drove him to commission the best possible translations. He understood that “it is the publisher who takes responsibility, and who will receive the blame if the critics do not like the translation.”³ Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Gertler published on average four books per year in several fields, including history, politics, economics, and the environment, as well as foundational works of literature. Each book, produced for the mass market, was issued simultaneously in cloth and paperback. Through his original efforts, English audiences could read the incisive analysis of Québécois intellectuals and the imaginative renderings of Québécois novelists and poets.

Books about Quebec’s Quiet Revolution were among Gertler’s earliest publications. The first work issued under the Harvest House

¹ Heather Home, “Harvest House,” *Historical Perspectives on Canadian Publishing*, digitalcollections.mcmaster.ca, <http://hpcanpub.mcmaster.ca/hpcanpub/case-study/harvest-house>.

² May Cutler quoted in Joe Fiorito, “Beautiful Harvest: Press that Broadcast Quiet Revolution to English Canada Is Now Part of History,” *Gazette* (Montreal), 10 February 1996.

³ Maynard Gertler to Anne Hébert, 9 December 1971, Harvest House Ltd. Publishers fonds, no. 2010-101, Queen’s University Archives.

imprint was journalist Pierre Laporte's *The True Face of Duplessis* (1960) (*Le vrai visage du Duplessis*, Éditions de l'Homme, 1960) translated by Richard Daignault. Gertler himself edited the volume and presented it to "English-language readers [who] may find themselves penetrating for the first time the intimate yet fiercely passionate world of Quebec politics." In 1962, he brought out *The Impertinences of Brother Anonymous* (*Les insolences du Frère Untel*, Éditions de l'Homme, 1960) by Frère Untel (the pseudonym of Jean-Paul Desbiens), translated by Miriam Chapin. Gertler was engaged by Desbiens's scathing critique of the province's educational system. He showed editorial prescience in publishing Desbiens's work, which went through nine editions and became Harvest House's most financially successful title.

The French Writers of Canada was Harvest House's premier series of fiction and poetry. The series was advertised to English readers as "a selection of outstanding and representative works by French authors in Canada ... from the most modern ... to the classic. Our editors have examined the entire repertory of French writing in this country to ensure that each book that is selected will reflect important literary and social trends, in addition to having evident aesthetic value."⁴ The high cultural ambitions of Harvest House are felt in this statement, which revealed the aesthetic values informing Gertler's publishing enterprise. As cultural gatekeeper, Gertler was convinced that the most "outstanding," "representative," and "important" literary works of French Canada could not fail to engage an English readership. His vision of publishing as having the potential to foster mutual understanding and goodwill between French and English was a reflection of the cultural nationalism that shaped publishing practice in English Canada of the same period, exemplified by the trade lists of the country's two largest publishers, McClelland & Stewart and the Macmillan Company of Canada.

Among the twenty-two titles included in the French Writers of Canada series (published between 1965 and 1983) was the first English translation of Anne Hébert's prose. *The Torrent* (1973) (*Le torrent*, Éditions Beauchemin, 1950), a book of Hébert's short prose, was translated by Gwendolyn Moore. Although Moore's translation was poorly received, it nonetheless brought Hébert to the attention of readers outside of Quebec; today, the majority of her work has been

⁴ "The French Writers of Canada Series" poster, Harvest House Ltd. Publishers fonds, no. 2010-101, Queen's University Archives.

issued in English and she remains Quebec's most translated female writer. Other series titles included *The Complete Poems of Emile Nelligan* (1983) (Fides, 1945), published for the first time in English translation by Fred Cogswell; *The Brawl* (1976) (*La bagarre*, Cercle du livre de France, 1969) by Gérard Bessette, translated by Marc Lebel and Ronald Sutherland; *The Forest* (1976) (*La forêt*, Éditions du Totem, 1935) by Georges Bugnet, translated by David Carpenter; and *Bitter Bread* (1977) (*La Scouine*, Imprimerie Modèle, 1918) by Albert Laberge, translated by Conrad Dion. The French Writers of Canada series had a broad reach; many titles were adopted for use in university classrooms, for example, where the study of Canadian literature and culture was on the rise.

To complement his literary list, Gertler issued Ben-Zion Shek's analytical study, *Social Realism in the French-Canadian Novel* (1977). Shek also served as advisory editor on the French Writers of Canada series. Gertler's own cultural background is reflected in his decision to publish *Canadian Yiddish Writings* (1976), edited by Abraham Boyarsky and Lazar Sarna, a volume that stands out in a list dominated by French Canadian titles in translation.

In 1995, Gertler sold Harvest House to the University of Ottawa Press; at the time, thirty-one of its one hundred titles were still in print. One year after the sale, Gertler described his calling to a friend:

Good publishing is an intellectual, aesthetic, technical and judgemental task. It is very hard work. A fair return for effort and preparation—let alone windfall—is almost unknown. Books are not shoes or pants or motorcars, they are works of character. To weigh a publishing house by its numbers is irrelevant. The question is not how many titles did you publish, or how much money you made, but did you publish a good book? But I would rather manufacture and sell a good pair of boots than publish an inferior book.⁵

This comment, characteristically forthright and visionary, affirms Gertler's love of books as both "vocation and ... recreation."⁶

In 2002, Gertler was recognized with the Order of Canada and the Queen's University Alumni Achievement Award. His passion for producing titles of enduring value enlivens the Harvest House fonds

⁵ Quoted in Alan Hustak, "Maynard Gertler's Quiet Revolution Was Anything But," *Globe and Mail*, 6 May 2011.

⁶ Michael Gertler quoted in Alan Hustak, "Maynard Gertler's Quiet Revolution Was Anything But," *Globe and Mail*, 6 May 2011.

held at the Queen’s University Archives in Kingston, Ontario, while the hope for cultural rapprochement between French and English Canadians abides in the books issued under his imprint.

What follows is a talk entitled “French-English Translation in Canada” given by Maynard Gertler to an unidentified audience in 1976.⁷ It is a document of enduring value that provides incisive analysis of contemporary Canadian publishing and presents the challenges facing a domestic publisher who was committed to issuing French works in English translation. It also reveals Gertler’s determination to continue working to “achieve a sense of Canadian community,” as he admits in closing.

French-English Translation in Canada

Maynard Gertler

Why bother translating the French literature of Canada into English? The answer lies in the position which Canada shares with a number of other countries with a colonial history, countries that are underdeveloped culturally. We desperately need to know our own literature before we can work ourselves out of that underdeveloped category.

Knowing our own literature implies in particular an exchange between two dominant language groups in this country.⁸ This exchange has been going on in a desultory fashion for a long time. The time table has to be speeded up if we are to maintain a united country and reach our objective of a measure of autonomous cultural existence on the northern half of this continent. I say “a measure of,” not an exclusive or closed cultural life; culture is universal, necessarily.

Universality carries a wallop as far as we are concerned. The French and English languages are universal with a difference. Paris, London and New York are three of the four greatest publishing centres of the world in terms of volume of output. They pour their books into Canada virtually unhindered—to our great advantage. They also make it relatively difficult for us to find a hearing for our own writers, be

⁷ The original typescript can be found in the Harvest House Ltd. Publishers fonds, no. 2015-12-13, Queen’s University Archives.

⁸ In the typescript, the final words in this sentence were inserted by hand and are illegible.

they French or English. More, even the valid activity of translation is taken from our writers, because international translations from English to French; French to English; German to English; Russian to French, etc., takes place between the great metropolitan centres of publishing: London, Paris, Moscow, Berlin, New York. Our literary and publishing industries are correspondingly stunted and undeveloped.

Canadians had grown so used to cultural domination by Paris, London and New York that for a very long time they did not even regard it as anomalous; they thought it was a natural condition. As for Canadians whose first language is English, the proximity of the U.S.A., its presses, networks and films, has compounded the problem. The U.S. literature tends to be theirs; the U.S. national press, too; the U.S. textbook is prevalent in their schools; the U.S. paperback dominates the newsstand almost exclusively; the U.S. critical and scholarly journals tend to be theirs; their libraries, teachers and professors learn about books from U.S. journals and catalogues and from salesmen of U.S. branch plants in Canada.

I have drawn a strong picture and, to a large extent, this state of affairs is inevitable and even desirable. The vulgar conclusion may not, however, be reached from it that there is no room for the Canadian written word in Canada or even, more regrettably, that Canada has no literature of its own worthy of disseminating and cherishing. Quite simply, the consequence of the enduring triple dominance of Canadian cultural life from abroad has been that we do not know our own Canadian literatures—in French, in English, let alone in other languages. Walls and barricades of foreign books have stood between us when prejudice did not.

While the fact of foreign cultural dominance can not be altered, as such (any more than we would wish to reject the historic influence on us of Hebrew, Greek or Roman literatures), its relative influence may be shifted markedly by our own efforts.

Mutual translation, publication and distribution of Canadian literatures on a professional level and to international standard is high on our agenda, because it is by this means that we will become aware of our own literary culture. As far as French writers in Canada are concerned, a whole new group from the mid-nineteenth century to the present are being brought out of the shadow into the light and—to mix a metaphor—into the very mainstream of Canadian letters by the literary translation programs of the last decade. If the programs are carried through undeviatingly, the students

of the next generation in English schools and colleges in Canada will be as familiar with the names Aubert de Gaspé, Ringuet, Roy, Lemelin, Hébert, Ferron, Dantin, Guèvremont, Laberge, Harvey, Leclerc, Aquin, Ducharme, Thériault, Bessette, Bugnet, Blais, Martin, Girard, Savard, Carrière, Tremblay, Maillet, Richard, Renaud, Poulin, Jasmin, Godbout, Godin, Basile and Beaulieu as they will be with Haliburton, Grove, McClung, Hiebert, Roberts, Connor, Leacock, MacLennan, de la Roche, Graham, Buckler, Raddall, Hailey, Gallant, Mowat, Munro, Metcalfe, Green, Callaghan, Garner, Ross, Mitchell, Lowry, Layton, Levine, Ludwig, Wiseman, Kreisel, Howell, Nowlan, Marshall, Laurence, Godfrey, Richler, Davies, Moore, Atwood, Horwood, Watson and Wilson, though still not as familiar as with the names Steinbeck, Faulkner and Wolfe.

To name these Canadian writers is not to judge or to rank them; there are many more; many good ones remain unpublished and I have omitted most of the poets, dramatists and writers of popular and scholarly non-fiction for reasons of space and to spare you the litany. A heightening consciousness of Canadian writers among Canadian readers internally, as well as their comprehensive and thorough critical evaluation, will inevitably result in a greater appreciation of them abroad as well; world recognition will follow; the Nobel prize for a Canadian writer will be the symbol of our arrival on the world stage and possibly the end of our underdevelopment, culturally speaking.

There is still another primary motive for making the historic and contemporary repertory of Canadian literature in French available to the English reader in Canada, and vice versa. So far, we have had little luck in composing a unified history of Canada. (I know how provocative a remark that may appear to some, but it is not simplistic. I have taught U.S. History in both U.S. and British universities and you must be aware that in spite of the grievous Civil War which makes our "Conquest" appear like a game of croquet, by contrast, U.S. scholars—allowing for considerable differences of approach—are able to teach U.S. History, not Southern and Northern history.) No matter how long we have lived together here in relative harmony; regardless of the degree of intermarriage amongst us and interconnection in government, science, scholarship, business, and other affairs, large and small, our history is still dominated by the original dynastic rivalry between empires, churches and trading companies with which we began. If we are frustrated in developing a mature and generous

historical tradition which comprehends aborigines, the ebb and flow of population to and from the U.S.A., the internal migration of our peoples and, particularly, the more recent emigration since the turn of the century from Europe, Asia, North Africa, the West Indies and elsewhere, recourse may be had to our literatures which are a rich source of social history. The traditionalists and reactionaries amongst us may be left behind as knowledge and appreciation of the social history of Canada emerges from general familiarity with its fiction. The growth of community will advance with that familiarity; the walls that divide us will come down as we see each other as people with common problems and fates rather than as institutions, concepts, creeds and sects.

Publishers in Canada are taking a lively interest in French literature of this country. At Harvest House, we had a major translation series in mind at least fifteen years ago, studied the works of literary history and criticism and considered the means of launching such a series. Our "French-Canadian Renaissance" series was such a one but it dealt with non-fiction rather than fiction and it began with such topical books as *Le vrai visage de Duplessis* by Pierre Laporte and *Les insolences du Frère Untel* by Jean-Paul Desbiens.

It was perilous then; it is perilous still. Jean Basile came to us offering his help and advice in starting such a fiction series in translation in the mid-1960s. Despite of our awareness of its importance, we felt that we did not have the financial or staff resources to carry it through. Our resources are not much greater now. We took the plunge at last in 1971 because it was nearly inevitable for us in Montreal, knowing the publishers, the writers and the need. We selected our first few titles of "The French Writers in Canada" series due to a happy "accident." A friend of Yves Thériault, Gwendolyn Moore, who was engaged in translating several of his novels asked us to publish some of them. (How we chose *Ashini* and *N'Tsuk* to begin with is a novel in itself. But, Pierre L'Espérance and before him, his father, Edgar, had told me, upon inquiry, that Thériault was the most widely read writer among French readers in Canada.)¹ After reviewing the manuscripts and after some negotiation with Thériault himself, we made arrangements and Gwendolyn Moore later went on to translate Anne Hébert's *Le torrent* for us. I had met Thériault earlier

¹ With Jacques Hébert, Edgar L'Espérance co-founded the publishing company Éditions de l'Homme in 1958. The firm's first literary title was Yves Thériault's *Agaguk* (1961). Hébert left in 1961 to found Éditions du Jour and Pierre L'Espérance took over Éditions de l'Homme when his father died in 1964.

at a dinner honouring Jean-Charles Harvey. We had come away together and had found common ground. My agent in New York liked his books, too, and we very nearly secured serial publication in the *New Yorker* and co-publication with a New York publisher, but it did not quite come off.

Shortly after these events, Ben-Zion Shek of the University of Toronto Department of French arrived for an editorial conference about his book *Social Realism in the French-Canadian Novel* which we had undertaken to publish. I asked him if he would consider helping us to select our titles for the series. He gave enthusiastic assent and we have been in loose harness ever since—he, mainly as advisory editor, and I as shirtsleeves editor. Sometimes the roles are reversed as when I select a title and tell him about it so enthusiastically he can't say no, or when he undertakes some revisions in a manuscript where he is specially qualified.

Jacques Hébert bears some responsibility, too. We had a long association going back to our co-publication of *Le vrai visage de Duplessis* in 1960. I listened carefully when he told me a few years ago that of all the books he had published, he expected that his novels, uniquely, might some day support his firm. As it turned out, he did not stay around long enough to find out. Original Canadian publishing—including translation—in both English and French, now as in Jacques Hébert's time, is unprofitable. We publish our series at a loss, notwithstanding the worthwhile contribution of the Canada Council in the last four years. Contrary to public understanding, the latter does not provide working capital for Canadian publishing enterprises; the current annual block grants (which are taxable) cover but a minor fraction of the cost of keeping the doors open, maintaining a basic office staff, an editorial, design, promotion, fulfilment and sales operation, including receiving and evaluating unsolicited manuscripts and publishing those which are adjudged worthy or valuable.

Unlike the theatre, ballet or symphony where the Canada Council share (and the supplementary grants of provinces and cities) may run into the hundreds of thousands and actually serve to support a company and pay a good living wage to its directors and performers, no Canadian editor that I know of is supported by the Canada Council. Maintaining a block grant is much like fulfilling a fluid milk quota. It is a treadmill; one works against ever-higher costs to publish a list as large or larger than the year before to obtain a grant of a given size.

So little is known about the function of editors and publishers that it is worth saying a word about the translation process. The editor or publisher—often the same person in Canada—must first know and select his works for translation; he must find out if the book has been or is being translated. The holder of the copyright must be identified, whether publisher, author or heir. In any case, a contract or option to publish must be drawn up; often, an advance on royalties must be paid. A translator must be found and an agreement has to be made with him. An application must be made to the Canada Council. A carefully edited sample translation must be forwarded to the Canada Council with a request for a grant proportionate to the size and complexity of the work. Such a grant application usually takes three or four months to process. Not infrequently, the application is turned down and the sample translation may be revised with considerable editorial input from the publisher and his staff and re-submitted. Some manuscripts are finally rejected on the merits. (On one occasion we were told over the phone that a manuscript had been rejected for a translation grant “because the readers did not like the book.” It was one of Thériault’s.) The process is never automatic, however, and the referee process can be capricious. In the early days, our translation of *Les insolences du Frère Untel* was turned down for a translation grant because, as the reverend gentleman said, it was a “pièce de combat”!

But the work only begins in earnest when the translator proceeds to complete the translation and to submit his work for editing. Even a short novel or book of short stories may take several hundred hours of editing time within the publishing house at an imputed cost of thousands of dollars. The only way that it can be done at all, in many cases, is by the editor-publisher working without a salary and by contributing capital as needed to the firm from personal sources.

Meanwhile, in all but a very few instances, the entire grant is parcelled out to the translator in two or more instalments as the work is undertaken and completed. (The publisher is the administrator of the grant, not its recipient, although it appears on his books as income which is potentially taxable if a profit is shown.) The publisher must also write the Canada Council at intervals to receive the amounts that are due to the translator. The process which I have described is not an adversary one. On the contrary, we have the best of relations with those who administer the grants in Ottawa. They are literary people whose interest lies in setting and maintaining high standards and in abetting the publication of fine Canadian books. However,

when editorial judgement and discretion is shared with public servants and their referees, irritation is likely to result. It is a difficult situation that requires forbearance on both sides.

The translation is ready but the book has still to be produced. That means typographic design, cover art work, production supervision, typesetting, proofreading at every stage (galleys, pages, paste-up); printing, promotion, advertising, fulfilment (including warehousing and inventory maintenance) accounting, and payment of royalties to infinity. Think of the messengers, inter-city couriers, long-distance telephone calls and correspondence (our authors and translators reside from coast to coast as do our suppliers and customers) that all this implies and that must come out of the sale of the book. It is an unenviable task and an anonymous one.

No, the translator is not overpaid. At six cents a word he has to produce his drafts (more often than not, he is a she) and submit them in clear, typewritten form to an approximate schedule, and he has to revise in consultation with his editor. Good translation is a work of art on a par with original creation and not infrequently the translated version is superior to the original. The better and more industrious translators may earn a fair portion of their living by their work, although for many, work is discontinuous and therefore chancy. Translators vary enormously in their ability to turn in a finished translation anywhere near ready to go to press. It often takes more than one experience to discover which are the reliable ones, and running a training program is expensive. Some of ours have been very good, indeed, and it would be invidious to make distinctions here. Clearly, with a large program it is not always possible to use the one or two "superior" translators who are well known and who may be too busy anyway. We have to utilize average geniuses.

Not infrequently works are offered to us already translated by aspiring translators. This is a potential boon, but we may discover upon inquiry that the rights belong to someone else and the work has already been translated or that it has been published; the heir is not to be found; the translation is inadequate; or that the book is not a suitable one for our series. However, the flow of unsolicited projects is a by-product of our activities that we would not care to be without. It is our feed-back. It tells us that we are being heard out there.

Of those firms that have made a major contribution to French-English translation in Canada, McClelland and Stewart must be mentioned prominently. Beginning around 1950 and extending its program to the present, it proceeded to publish the works of

Roger Lemelin, Gabrielle Roy, Marie-Claire Blais and Diane Giguère. With the first two, my surmise is that it was aided by its role as an agent for U.S. publishers and its extensive co-publishing relations. The late Miriam Chapin, U.S. citizen, journalist, author, and woman of letters, one of the best-informed people on French writing in Canada, was the sister of Curtice Nelson Hitchcock, partner in Reynal and Hitchcock, the firm which first published Roy's *Bonheur d'occasion* and Lemelin's *Au pied de la Pente douce*, in 1947 and 1948 respectively. It was due to Miriam's informed presence in Montreal that Roy was published at an early date in New York. After the death of Hitchcock, his firm's rights passed to Harcourt Brace and McClelland and Stewart apparently had to vie with that firm for rights to publish Gabrielle Roy's novels first in translation; it published Lemelin's *Les Plouffe*, however, as early as 1950 and his *Pierre le magnifique* in 1955. The first book of Roy's to be published in original translation by McClelland and Stewart was *La montagne secrète*, in 1961, although it subsequently secured the rights to publish the earlier ones in the New Canadian Library from Harcourt Brace.

Macmillan of Toronto produced important works in translation by Ringuet, Jean-Charles Harvey and Gérard Bessette: Harvey as early as 1938; Ringuet in 1960 and Bessette in 1962 and 1967. McGraw-Hill of New York likewise published an edition of Germaine Guèvremont's *Le Survenant* in translation as early as 1952 and Macmillan of New York published five works by Louis Hémon in the early 1920s. Ryerson of Toronto produced Thériault's *Agaguk* in translation in 1963 and followed it by publication of Claire Martin's two volume autobiography *Dans un gant de fer* and *La joue droite* in one volume as *In an Iron Glove* in 1968. This was the same year that McClelland and Stewart issued its edition of Jacques Godbout's *Le couteau sur la table* in translation, followed by Longman's English edition of his *Hail Galarneau!* in 1970. Incidentally, it was this firm (Ryerson) which made an early contribution to the French-English cultural exchange in Canada when its long-time editor-in-chief, Lorne Pierce, published his own *An Outline of Canadian Literature* in 1927: "the first attempt at a history of our literature, placing both French and English authors side by side." It was significant that *An Outline* was dedicated to Monseigneur Camille Roy, author of the 1918 *Manuel d'histoire de la littérature canadienne-française* "which included English authors and was the only work of its kind for many years."

The last decade has seen an extension of the activity of translation and a quickening of the pace as Philip Stratford and Maureen

Newman have pointed out in their bilingual pamphlet for the Humanities Research Council, *Bibliographie de livres canadiens traduits de l'anglais au français et du français à l'anglais*, published in 1975. "From 1920–1960 twice as many works were translated as in the preceding 350 years, in the next decade the number of translations almost tripled, and in the past five years, as many translations have been published as in 1960–1970. This rapid growth is undoubtedly due to support from the Canada Council which has been encouraging translation since the early sixties. Particularly since 1972 subsidies have been made available by the Department of the Secretary of State to the Canada Council providing a strong incentive to Canadian publishers to add translations of Canadian books to their lists."

Among the firms prominent in the translation area in the past five or six years has been the House of Anansi of Toronto which, since 1970 has translated five works by Roch Carrier, beginning with *La guerre, yes sir!* in 1970. It has followed and interspersed this with works by Jacques Poulin, Hubert Acquin, Jacques Ferron and Réjean Ducharme.

The New Press, now a branch of General Publishing, emphasized theatre, as have the Playwrights' Co-op of Toronto and Talonbooks of Vancouver. The University of Toronto Press has selected individual works to translate such as Laure Conan's *Angéline de Montbrun*. Coach House of Toronto has also produced a number of works in translation recently, notably by Jacques Ferron, Antonine Maillet and Nicole Brossard.

Oberon of Ottawa, a latecomer to translation, but a house of quality, has chosen Félix Leclerc's *Le fou de l'île* as its first work to publish in translation. Musson, which gave us a translation of Aubert de Gaspé's *Les anciens canadiens* (1929), recently published Anne Hébert's *Les chambres de bois*. (It is to be noted, however, that a much earlier translation of Aubert de Gaspé's work appeared in 1864 under the imprint of Desbarats of Quebec.) Harvest House began its program of literary translation in 1965 with the publication of Claude Jasmin's *Ethel and the Terrorist*, followed in 1967 by the issue of Jacques Hébert's *The Temple on the River (Les écœurants)*. Our pace quickened with the inauguration of the "French Writers in Canada" series in 1972 and thereafter we published one or more works by each of Yves Thériault, Anne Hébert, Jacques Ferron, Louis Dantin, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, Jacques Benoit and Claire Martin. This year we will issue works by George Bugnet, Gérard Bessette, Albert Laberge, Rodolphe Girard, Félix-Antoine Savard, Leo-Paul

Desrosiers, and others. In our program, we are systematically trying to publish the entire (selected) repertory of French fiction in Canada from its beginning to the present.

This leads us to the question of relative weight of French-English as compared to English-French translations in Canada. Stratford and Newman in the above-mentioned publication, while not attempting to be exhaustive, listed 250 titles of literary works translated from French to English and 120 from English to French. That is to say, despite the cries of neglect from separatist and ultra-nationalist quarters of Quebec, the English presses have been translating French works at approximately twice the rate that the French presses have translated English works. I remember well the attention which the literary pages of *Saturday Night*, *The Globe and Mail* and even *The Montreal Star* gave to the French publications in Canada when I returned to this country in 1958 after twenty years absence in the U.S.A. and in the U.K. and they have hardly ceased to do so ever since. I think the English presses have met French writers and publishers more than half way.

What of the Future? The continuation of federal government support of the translation program seems fairly assured at this moment, but publishing of translations is on a much more precarious footing. In our own experience, paralleled by that of Le Cercle du livre de France and Les Éditions du Jour, I suspect, and even that of McClelland and Stewart, publication of either original works of fiction or fiction in translation does not pay. This would be even more true of poetry and theatre. Reports from the U.K. and the U.S.A. appear to suggest that fiction is not profitable there either. When it is, it is due to the sale of supplementary paperback, serial, T.V. or film rights—a rarity in Canada. Will the translation of literary works fizzle out, therefore, like the spate of poetry publishing in Canada of the past five or six years? It is hard to sell poetry these days and therefore hard to publish it.

McClelland and Stewart is often given as an example of financial success when we mention the unprofitability of original publishing in Canada. But it must be remembered that M.&S. is also a very large agent for foreign publishers and it has always had a significant textbook division. Besides its annual grants from the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council which are relatively insignificant in its large budget, it has had—and quite deservedly—to my knowledge, at least \$1,700,000.00 in low-interest loans from the Ontario government in the last four or five years.

Among provincial governments, Ontario, with its Arts Council, gives its publishers a somewhat smaller block grant roughly proportionate (and in addition) to the annual block grant which they receive from the Canada Council. Its ODC² guaranteed and subsidized loan program is the only one so far to provide working capital at a nominal interest rate to most of its medium- and large-sized publishing houses and even to some of its quite small ones. Loans are made by commercial banks at prime rate and one half of the interest is paid by the ODC. No other province has done this. Quebec, with its obvious interest in furthering the translation process, has done virtually nothing at all and its loan program is so complex and so expensive (at commercial interest rates) that not a single Quebec publisher, French or English, has thus far been able to make use of it. It does not take a genius to see that in respect to available capital, Quebec publishers, both French and English, are working at a distinct competitive disadvantage when compared to their Ontario counterparts. Their survival is indeed at stake.

In the end, I suspect that either the federal or the provincial government or both will have to guarantee loans for working capital to keep in existence the French and English publishing houses which have proven their worth through their repertory of work and critical acceptance, just as the federal government has supported repertory theatre, music, ballet, and to a certain extent, film. Only if we think "bestsellers" and Hollywood can we conceive of original publishing in Canada—as distinct from agency distribution—as a commercial venture. Well, there is no Hollywood here and bestsellers are a very modest affair in Canada—generally insufficient to support the routine list. The best evidence that Canadian publishing cannot be taken seriously in a business sense is that no Canadian bank will lend money to a Canadian publisher on the strength of its inventory or prospects; they will lend money to branch-plant firms in Canada, however, on the strength and reputation of their head offices abroad.

There is one final matter that requires emphasis. If translations are to take place, rights must be acquired. If the flurry of interest, especially in French-English literary translation, is taken to mean that it represents profitable business now, that is a sorry misconception. If there is a "pot of gold at the end of the rainbow" it is some years off. Meanwhile, continued translation publishing implies that

² Ontario Development Corporation

the (original) publishers and authors make their rights available to Canadian publishers on terms that they can afford. If there are to be advances, they should be modest in the light of the real circumstances. If, eventually, a broad market is established, all will benefit together. Not the least of the beneficiaries will be the reading public and ourselves who achieve a sense of Canadian community and self-esteem.

[1976]

Appendix: Titles in Harvest House's French Writers of Canada Series

- 1965 *Ethel and the Terrorist*, translated by David Walker
Ethel et le terroriste par Claude Jasmin (Librairie Déom, 1964)
- 1967 *The Temple on the River*, translated by Gerald Taaffe
Les éœurants par Jacques Hébert (Éditions du jour, 1966)
- 1971 *Ashini*, translated by Gwendolyn Moore
Ashini par Yves Thériault (Fides, 1960)
- 1972 *N'Tsuk*, translated by Gwendolyn Moore
N'Tsuk par Yves Thériault (Éditions de l'Homme, 1968)
- 1973 *Dr. Cotnoir*, translated by Pierre Cloutier
Cotnoir par Jacques Ferron (Éditions d'Orphée, 1962)
- 1973 *The Torrent*, translated by Gwendolyn Moore
Le torrent par Anne Hébert (Éditions Beauchemin, 1950)
- 1974 *Fanny*, translated by Raymond Chamberlain
Les fiançances de Fanny par Louis Dantin (Chantecler, 1951)
- 1974 *Jos Carbone*, translated by Sheila Fischman
Jos Carbone par Jacques Benoit (Éditions du jour, 1967)
- 1975 *The Grandfathers*, translated by Marc Plourde
Les grands-pères par Victor-Lévy Beaulieu (Éditions du jour, 1971)
- 1975 *In an Iron Glove: An Autobiography*, translated by Philip Stratford
Dans un gant de fer par Claire Martin (Cercle du livre de France, 1966)

- 1975 *The Juneberry Tree*, translated by Raymond Chamberlain
L'amélanchier par Jacques Ferron (Éditions du jour, 1970)
- 1975 *The Saint Elias*, translated by Pierre Cloutier
Le Saint-Élias par Jacques Ferron (Éditions du jour, 1972)
- 1976 *The Brawl*, translated by Marc Lebel and Ronald Sutherland
La bagarre par Gérard Bessette (Cercle du livre de France, 1969)
- 1976 *The Forest*, translated by David Carpenter
La forêt by Georges Bugnet (Éditions du Totem, 1935)
- 1976 *Marie Calumet*, translated by Irène Currie
Marie Calumet par Rodolphe Girard (Montréal, 1904)
- 1976 *Master of the River*, translated by Richard Howard
Menaud: maître-draveur par Félix-Antoine Savard (Fides, 1937)
- 1976 *The Poetry of Modern Quebec: An Anthology*, edited and translated by Fred Cogswell
- 1977 *Bitter Bread*, translated by Conrad Dion
La Scouine par Albert Laberge (Imprimerie Modèle, 1918)
- 1978 *French Canadian Prose Masters: The Nineteenth Century*, edited and translated by Yves Brunelle
- 1978 *The Making of Nicolas Montour*, translated by Christina Roberts
Les engagés du Grand Portage par Léo-Paul Desrosiers (Gallimard, 1938)
- 1978 *The Woman and the Miser*, translated by Yves Brunelle
Un homme et son péché par Claude-Henri Gignon (Éditions du Totem, 1933)
- 1983 *The Complete Poems of Emile Nelligan*, translated by Fred Cogswell

Author Biography

Ruth Panofsky, FRSC is Professor of English at Ryerson University. She is the author of *Toronto Trailblazers: Women in Canadian*

Publishing (2019) and *The Literary Legacy of the Macmillan Company of Canada: Making Books and Mapping Culture* (2012). Her current SSHRC-funded project is a study of publisher Anna Porter and Key Porter Books.