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A Glimpse from the Chambord Staircase at Translation's Role in Comparative Literature
Un coup d'oeil depuis l'escalier de Chambord sur le rôle de la traduction dans la littérature comparée

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Résumé de l'article

Cette étude se veut une considération de la place accordée à la traduction dans les analyses qui relèvent de la littérature canadienne comparée. Si, dans le contexte canadien, la littérature comparée vise à rapprocher les « deux solitudes » et à effacer la distinction entre l'Autre et Soi, ou, pour, ainsi dire, à aligner les deux escaliers, cités souvent en tant qu'exemple, du Château de Chambord, ne le fait-elle pas en négligeant l'importance de la traduction dans une telle entreprise? Nous proposons qu'il importe de prendre en considération non seulement la qualité de la traduction ainsi que la stratégie traductrice employée, mais aussi la disponibilité des traductions.

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A Glimpse from the Chambord Staircase at Translation's Role in Comparative Literature

Jane Koustas

In his 1996 study *Impossible Nation: The Longing for Homeland in Canada and Quebec*, Ray Conlogue carries on a long tradition of associating translation practice with questions of national, political and cultural identity. He quotes P.J.O. Chauveau, Quebec's first Prime Minister who, in a 19th-century essay, compared the strange oblique glance of the Other from the double and twisting staircase of Chambord to the condition of accidental comprehension between Canada's two solitudes. Conlogue claims, "English and French, we climb by a double flight of stairs toward the destinies reserved for us on this continent without even seeing each other, except on the landing of politics" (p. 8). He further adds, "Our real lives, unglimpsed by the Other, are carried out on the staircase." Philip Stratford, Canada's pre-eminent translator and translation scholar had explored this comparison earlier and noted:

> He [Chauveau] might have seen that the whole purpose of Chambord's double staircase, the excitement and enjoyment of it, depends on the two parties mounting together, separately, each extremely conscious of the other, though invisible to him. Yet, if you rush up the stairs too fast, intent only on meeting at the top, you miss the poetry of the experience; and in missing the poetry you may miss the point too. (1979, p. 137)

The sharing of "the poetry of the experience" of the deliberate, rather than accidental, glimpse from the staircase is arguably the motivation behind much translation scholarship and practice,

Comparative Literature and explorations of *la transculture* or transculturation in Canada (see Vautier, 2003, p.168, and Cheadle and Pelletier, 2007). Furthermore, translation as an activity and the translator as a player have inspired Canadian and Quebec authors (see Woodsworth, 2007). Carol Shield's Reta in *Unless*, and Monique Rioux's "traductrice" in *Traductrice des sentiments* are both fictional characters whose life's work relies on finding "solicitude"[1] between languages, cultures, and source and target audiences. However, while the importance of the translation process remains recognized as a worthwhile activity in both literary/cultural studies and in fiction, it is frequently overlooked in larger discussions of Canadian literature, including comparative studies. While such activities aim to blur the lines between Us and Them, between Other and Self or between the Rest of Canada (the Roc) and Quebec, in other words, to align or combine the two staircases, they have, in the process, obscured other boundaries such as those between Comparative Literature and translation. Studies in Comparative Canadian Literature, for example, frequently overlook, or at least downplay, the importance of translation, neglecting to consider, for example, the translation strategy used and the selection of translated works available for comparison. This stands in sharp contrast, however, to the argument made by Emily Apter in *The Translation Zone*: *A New Comparative Literature* (2006) in which she places translation at the centre, making a case for "a program for a new Comparative Literature using translation as a fulcrum" (p. 243). As Apter's title suggests, translation is not a peripheral activity allowing for what is perceived to be the more serious pursuit of Comparative Literature but rather the guiding, centripetal force. Apter argues for "regrounding the prospects of a new Comparative Literature in the problem of translation" (*ibid.*, p. 251). For Apter then, translation is not merely a preliminary step to comparative studies; instead, the latter should take into consideration "how language thinks itself" (*ibid.*) and how this is reflected in both the original and the translation.

1 This is an allusion to the title of Margaret Atwood and Victor-Levy Beaulieu's essay on translation *Two Solicitudes* (1989), a play on words on Hugh MacLennan's title, *Two Solitudes*, which became shorthand for describing the Canadian political, cultural and linguistic divide.

The image of the spiral staircase, designed by Leonardo da Vinci between 1487 and 1490 for the Château de Chambord begun in 1519[2], offers an interesting perspective from which to consider these translations and Comparative Literature. While both aim to offer, at the very least, a privileged glimpse of the Other, the interaction between the two, in the Canadian context, suggests a lack of interplay or interaction in spite of the high profile of some of the players, such as Philip Stratford, who were heavily invested in both. This study will briefly consider the importance accorded to translation in two studies of Comparative Literature in the Canadian context and will also suggest directions for further study.

It is first worth noting that both comparatists and translators see in their activities the potential to create better understanding between French and English Canada. Graeme Mercer Adam, as early as 1887, noted in his *Outline History of Canadian Literature*, that a knowledge of Quebec literature in translation could help in "promoting that entente cordiale between the two peoples, without which there can be no national fusion, and but little material, and less intellectual advancement" (cited in Hébert, 1992, p. 15). Similarly, Sherry Simon (1992) and Carolyn Perkes (1996), in their studies of prefaces to translations, point to the political message they convey. Simon notes, "Historically, prefaces to translations of French Canadian literature into English tend to underscore the humanistic functions of translation, insisting on the political desirability of increased comprehension between the peoples of Canada" (1992, pp. 160-161). These attitudes can be traced back to the beginnings of English to French literary translation. Georgiana Pennée's translation of Philippe-Joseph Aubert de Gaspé's landmark novel, *Les Anciens Canadiens* (1863), considered a classic of Quebec literature, appeared in 1864 and was reprinted in 1929, while Charles G.D. Roberts, a poet, man of letters and English professor, published his translation, *The Canadians of Old*, in 1891. Jane Brierley's more recent translation, bearing the title *A Romance: Canadians of Old* was published in 1996, and is

2 Available at: <http://www.ams.org/notices/200303/fea-coldling-web.pdf.> [consulted 14 September 2010].

the only complete and highly readable version. While the title of the ethnocentric second version and his cavalier handling of the text suggest the contrary, Roberts indicates in his forward that he translated out of respect for the original and out of a profound desire to provide English readers access to French Canada through its literature (cited in Simon, 1992, p. 163). Nonetheless, Roberts eliminated the notes and reference material that constitute an important part of the French original, replaced the French songs and poems with English counterparts and, in a latter version, altered the title to *Cameron of Locheil* (1905) which shifted the focus entirely from the French-Canadian main characters to the Scottish, secondary character. Translators of Louis Hémon's classic, *Maria Chapdelaine* (1916), W.H. Blake (1921) and Sir Andrew Macphail (1921), claim that they too were translating out of a deep, sentimental admiration for French Canada and a desire to share their experience and sentiments with English Canadians (cited in *ibid.*, pp. 163 and 165). Blake states in his introduction:

> It is only the truth to say that this little volume gives an incomparably true and beautiful picture of the French-Canadian peasant, and excels in distinction of style any other prose which has been written on Canadian soil. […].Truth is there, and nothing but the truth, if not all the truth. […] I would like to hint that in every translation lies a double task: easy it is to turn a book out of French; to clothe the living spirit in the garment of another language is difficult indeed […]. (1921, pp. vi-xiii)

Stratford too, in a much more recent example, underlines the importance of hearing the Other voice and, particularly, of being attentive to the differences as well as similarities. In his introduction to *Voices from Quebec*, a collection of translated short stories and excerpts, he states:

> In the end the senses of difference and solidarity are pretty universal. That was the point we wanted to make. The differences are definitely there—centuries of history, language and culture have confirmed them. They are important, deep-seated differences which need a great effort of understanding and which bring their own reward when they are understood. They are not just picturesque; […]. We hope to have shown, by

> borrowing the many voices you will hear in these pages, that French-Canadian experience today [1977] is not so foreign after all, but is recognizably like our own while still remaining excitingly different. Finally, though outsiders ourselves, we hope to have represented *eux-autres* broadly, truly and sympathetically. (Stratford, 1977, p. iv)

Even scholars merely attempting to catalogue translations feel compelled to comment on their political relevance. Guy Sylvestre, Brandon Conron, and Carl F. Klinck, in their introduction to *Canadian Writers* state, "Placing both French and English writers side by side needs no explanation and no defence in a country which is ever more conscious of its bilingual nature" (1964, p. vi). While this side-by-sidedness (see Vautier, 2003) is neither genuine comparison nor translation, as all texts appear in their original language and there is no commentary provided, such an approach invites the reader to compare, especially given the order of the texts. *Ellipse*, the bilingual poetry journal whose title suggests a more complex image of the positioning of Canada's "two solitudes," promotes side-by-sidedness through translation between English and French, although it occasionally includes pieces in other languages[3]. Thus, when a translation appears and hence encourages comparison, the filter of translation is not discussed even though the reader is invited, or compelled, to read both versions.

Other recent attempts at side-by-sidedness through translation which, even unintentionally, invite readers to compare and refer to cultural and political motives, rather than to just purely literary motives; publishing in both English and French is once again lauded as a politically correct move with the clichéd aim of bridging or reconciling the "two solitudes." For example, Matt Cohen begins *Parallel Voices*, a 1993 collection of short English- and French-language stories by major Canadian authors co-edited with André Carpentier, by acknowledging the role of political discussion in all undertakings involving both communities, while he comments on its inconsequence. He notes, "It might be thought many political discussions would have taken place during the preparation of this volume" (1993, p. 9). Thus,

3 Number 78, for example, featured indigenous languages.

while he attempts to downplay the role of politics, he nonetheless inadvertently points to its potential importance suggesting that the collection, in spite of its grouping of authors from Quebec and English Canada, managed to circumvent or overcome the obvious political debates. The volume includes short stories in their original language as well as their translation, both signed by recognized authors. For example, Margaret Atwood translates Monique Proulx. While the product, namely a collection of short stories in both English and French, may be of interest, the end result is decidedly uneven; in the above-mentioned case, the (writer) translator did not have a sufficient grasp of the language and produced an awkward, non-idiomatic translation. While disappointing, this should not be an entirely unexpected outcome given, as Cohen notes, "This exchange was particularly important because for most this was a first experience in translation" (1993, p. 9). Thus, while promoting cooperation between Quebec and English Canada and highlighting its benefits, Cohen and Carpentier nonetheless downplay, not to say neglect, the actual translation exercise suggesting, firstly, that "good," or at least renowned, writers automatically make good translators and, secondly, that valid comparisons between both French- and English-language versions, the stories themselves and the French and English short story tradition can be performed whatever the quality of the translation.

Interestingly, some influential Quebec critics, such as Jean-Charles Falardeau, find little use for comparative studies given the differences between the two literary traditions. The latter notes in his 1967 study *Notre Société et son roman* that English-Canadian literature finds "its basic tensions along a horizontal axis in studying man and his milieu or man and society. French-Canadian [literature], on the contrary, is situated along a vertical axis where relations between man and his destiny or man and the absolute predominate" (cited in Stratford, 1986, p. 6). Rather than trying to pull the two literatures together, Falardeau, who wrote at the height of the separatist movement, stressed the unique identity of Quebec literature and its importance in a nationalist struggle.

Translation scholarship also has a socio-political orientation. In her introduction to the *Bibliography of Criticism of*

English and French Literary Translation in Canada, Kathy Mezei quotes F.R. Scott who stated, "Translation is not an art in itself, it is also an essential ingredient in Canada's political entity" (1988, p. 3), emphasizing once again the role of translation as a cultural bridge builder. A lengthy and distinct entry is devoted to translation in both the 1983 and 1997 editions of the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, a testimony to its importance in Canadian letters, and author John O'Connor identifies translation as a "compelling necessity for cultural and political encounter and dialogue" (1997, p. 1132). As such it has become "[…] the very representation of the play of equivalence and difference in cultural interchange" (Simon, 1992, p. 159). This suggests that representing and "glimpsing" the Other have become a question, and indeed a measure, of political and cultural tolerance and good will. The above examples demonstrate that translation, and particularly the translation of literature, is seen as a means through which English and French language communities can know and understand each other. If, as Octavio Paz suggests, the history of different civilizations is the history of its translations (in conversation with Edwin Hong 1985, cited in Kundu, 2008, p. 193), the level of translation activity between the two communities is the measure of their history of tolerance of and interest in the Other.

Comparatists, and most notably Stratford, also emphasize the political, social and cultural vector of the undertaking and its role in promoting "good will." In the footsteps of Chauveau, Stratford too, in his comparative study, *All the Polarities,* evokes the Chambord staircase:

> Struck by their mutual isolation, by their ignorance of one another, and by their shared indifference to this state of affairs, he [Chauveau] likened them to the famous double spiral staircase at the Château de Chambord in France, which is built in such a way that two people can mount it without ever meeting or having more than a glimpse of each other until they reach the top. (1986, p. 3)

Stratford's purpose in *All the Polarities* was clearly, therefore, to provide a privileged glimpse of the Other from both staircases and, in doing so, to throw new light on both Quebec and English-

Canadian literature. Indeed, more than a glimpse, he hoped to provide new insight through a "meeting" of the two literatures. He states:

> By studying the two literatures side by side, one can see each other, separately, more clearly. Comparing the salient features of Quebec writing with those of English-Canadian texts draws too-familiar characteristics of the latter into a new focus. Conversely, comparison with English texts throws neglected aspects of Quebec literature into relief. (1986, p. 6)

Side-by-sidedness here, however, is not that discussed above by G. Mercer Adam, among others, for Stratford uses English translations and, in doing so, as evidenced by the following statement, blurs the line between translation and comparison; the translator and comparatist are one in the same. For Stratford, the comparatist is, by default, a translator. Translation then, once again, is subsumed by comparative study.

> Whatever figure is chosen as a guide for comparison, an element of paradox is involved that must be acknowledged and used. Canadian comparatists themselves are condemned to maintain a paradoxical duality: though blinded by proximity to their subject and swayed by politics and history, they must strive neither to unify nor to divide; they must practise subtle and unspectacular arts; they must translate while knowing that full translation is impossible; they must try to acquire the other culture while knowing that it will never become their true heritage […]; they must encourage a difficult bifocal view while knowing that it will never be adopted by more than a small elite and will never represent the full reality; when they draw parallels they must always look beyond separateness to see how disparate and distant elements condition each other. They must, in short, respect all the polarities. (1986, pp. 8-9)

Stratford searched for the appropriate "figure" to portray the two literary communities (two solitudes, overlapping circles, parallel lines, ellipsis, double polarity). All of these images, however, presuppose the existence of at least two similar objects: for instance, a line is only parallel when compared to another line, a pole exists because of a counteracting pole. However, in their study of texts, comparatists, including even Stratford, systematically

ignore the Other line, pole, circle or elliptical centre by sidelining, if not ignoring entirely, the translation, which is taken as a given, not subject to discussion, critical analysis or even historical or cultural contextualisation. He is not comparing like objects, lines or poles, but rather an original and a translation. Indeed, his advice above would seem more directed to translators than to comparatists whom he seems to lump together as he paradoxically underlines the difficulty, if not impossibility, of achieving a good translation. Furthermore, and more significant to the present study, comparatists may ignore as well the conditions which produced the translations in question. Indeed, as the following discussion illustrates, Stratford himself somewhat loses sight of the importance of translation; he compares English-language Canadian novels to Quebec novels written in French while using translations of the latter without discussing the filter itself.

From Spiral Staircase to Polarities

Stratford begins *All the Polarities* with a discussion of two landmark novels, Gabrielle Roy's *Bonheur d'occasion* and Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes*, both published in 1945. As Stratford notes, both were important novels, with Roy's "inaugurating the contemporary period" in Quebec letters and MacLennan's launching what W.H. New identified as "MacLennan's decade" (cited in Stratford, 1986, p. 12). Stratford also underlines the similarities between the writers' private and professional lives, and the importance of social realism and the urban setting in both novels. He notes:

> On the basis of so many similarities—in the authors' relationship to Quebec, in the formative circumstances of their lives, in their professional profiles, in their choice of subjects for these famous novels and the angle of their concern—we might very well seek, in continuing this examination, to establish that the two novels belong to the Canadian mainstream. (1986, p. 16)

Stratford's study focuses as well, however, on differences primarily with respect to scope and characterization. According to Stratford, while MacLennan, for example, uses a more didactic, sometimes even documentary, approach to style, Roy relies more on allusion and intervenes in her fiction more obliquely than MacLennan

(*ibid.*, pp. 24-25). In order to demonstrate these points, Stratford refers to the openings of both novels. Contrasting Roy's first chapter with MacLennan's, in which he describes in detail "the geographical, the historical, and even geological background of his setting" (*ibid.*, p. 16), Stratford notes that "the point of view is that of Florentine Lacasse" (*ibid.*, p. 17) and that little precise detail is provided about the setting: the reader sees this through Florentine's, not the narrator's, eyes. In order to demonstrate his point, Stratford uses Hannah Josephson's translation of *Bonheur d'occasion*, which suits his argument better than Alan Brown's, which is used later in the text. Stratford notes, "Clock time, in fact, is so uncertain that the first English translator felt it necessary to add, for our edification, 'The noon hour rush was in full swing'" (*ibid.*, p. 18). Roy's sentence reads as follows:

> À cette heure, Florentine s'était prise à guetter la venue du jeune homme qui, la veille, entre tant de propos railleurs, lui avait laissé entendre qu'il la trouvait jolie. (cited in Stratford, 1986, p. 9)

Josephson translated:

> Where was the young man who had given her so many admiring glances yesterday? Florentine found herself watching out for him eagerly, although the memory of his bantering tone was still afresh in her mind. The noon hour rush was in full swing. (cited in Stratford, 1986, p. 9)

Brown's reads:

> Toward noon, Florentine had taken to watching out for the young man who, yesterday, while seeming to joke around, had let her know he found her pretty. (cited in Stratford, 1986, p. 7)

While arguably neither version successfully conveys Florentine's sense of powerlessness ("s'était prise") as she awaits, and hopes for, Jean's return while she remains captive behind the counter, Stratford chose Josephson's over Brown's in this case, because it suits his argument better, while offering no justification for this choice, nor discussion of the differences between the translations. Furthermore, instead of questioning both translators' modification of the text through the addition of "noon," Stratford

defends this arguing that the translators' addition of "clock time" renders the opening sentence more in line with English language readers' expectations thereby strengthening his comparison with MacLennan. All further references to the English version are taken from Brown's translation (1986, p. 28, n. 12). While translation was not the subject of his book, his use of two different English versions with no explanation is indeed curious, especially from the hand of one of Canada's eminent scholars of English-Canadian and Comparative Literature as well as of translation. Comparing MacLennan to Roy, while using two different English versions of the latter, and choosing the one that best suits the argument, draws into question the importance placed on translation in this example of Comparative Literature.

This is especially significant because of the importance Roy herself placed on translations and because of the translation history of the novel. As François Ricard explains in *Gabrielle Roy: une vie*, the first foreign market for *Bonheur d'occasion* was not France but the US. Hannah Josephson, an American, was hired by publishers Reynal and Hitchcock, and her translation was published in 1947. John O'Connor notes in his article on translation in Canada that Josephson's translation in spite of "grave errors of interpretation" became "probably the most widely read Quebec novel in translation" (1997, p. 796). When Roy revised her novel in 1947, the new edition rendered Josephson's translation "as obsolete as it was unreliable" (*ibid.*). Alan Brown was chosen for Roy by Jack McClelland of McClelland & Stewart, her English-Canadian publishers, and a new translation was published in 1980 as part of the New Canadian Library collection. Brown subsequently translated four other novels. It is worth noting that, according to Ricard, "Gabrielle paid […] close attention to the English translation of her works and their publication on the English market. She considered the English version of her books to be practically the equals of the French, in fact, more or less a second original addressed to a readership as important in her eyes as her French readers" (1999, p. 468). This is, however, long after the publication of the Josephson translation. According to Edward Blodgett, *Bonheur d'occasion* initiated a translation practice that aimed to appropriate French-language literature through translations that deliberately obliterated any

trace of the original. Indeed, this could in fact explain many of the similarities between Roy and MacLennan. The translator adapted Roy's novel to a style more akin to MacLennan's as demonstrated in the above example where neither translation captures Roy's distance from her character. For instance, neither translation adequately conveys the reflexive sense of "s'était prise." Consequently, the translation was more marketable to an English-Canadian audience accustomed to a MacLennan-like style. More significantly, the novel's success demonstrated the capacity of translated literature to fill gaps in "national" or English-language literature: Gabrielle Roy won the 1947 Governor General's Award for "her" *The Tin Flute* in Josephson's translation[4]. Nevertheless, it is important to note that there was no translation award at the time. Thus, while earlier translators sought perhaps to rewrite, although not necessarily reclaim, French-Canadian novels, Roy's success signalled the commercial and political worth of transparent translations that deliberately obliterated any traces of the original and whose purpose was more appropriation than rapprochement.

Anglicised through transparent, fluent translations to such an extent that English-language readers thought her last name rhymed with "toy" and that she wrote in English (see Blodgett, 1983, p. 26), Roy remained at the forefront of the Canadian literary scene. For example, the English title *The Road Past Altamont* (*La Route d'Altamont*) was misleading and, for English-Canadian readers, (mis)placed the novel in the western Can. Lit. tradition (*ibid.*, p. 27). Roy considered the English-language versions of her books to be essentially the equals of the French and negotiated translations (later by Harry Lorin Binsse, Joyce Marshall and Alan Brown) immediately upon completing the text. Indeed, according to Joyce Marshall, even though Roy's command of English was not particularly good, she interfered with the translations (see Everett 2006, pp. 53-75). Interestingly, Roy was embraced unreservedly by the two literary and political communities as their own (Ricard, 1999, p. 468).

4 Jean Morency (2008). "Gabrielle Roy, prototype de l'écrivaine canadienne?" *Alternative francophone*, 1, 1, pp. 116-124 Available at: <http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/af/articl/view/4141/3385> Vol. 1, nº 1, 2008 [consulted 14 September 2010].

If the translations aimed to render Roy more marketable to English Canada as suggested above, comparisons of English versions of Roy to MacLennan would lead to decidedly skewed results; if Roy were translated in such a way as to sound more like MacLennan, or like any other English-language Canadian author, the comparatist, who uses only the translations, would obviously find more similarities than are in fact present. Stratford, however, even while using two different translations, avoids any discussions of the circumstances of the translations, of the strategies used and of the merits and failings of the two versions. His comparison between Roy and MacLennan then, based on English versions of the former, assumes that nothing has been lost, gained or even blurred, in translation, and ignores the tendency of the translators to "adapt" Roy to suit the English-Canadian reading audience even though his own example demonstrates this.

His deliberate obscuration of the issue is even more evident in a subsequent chapter in which he compares Robert Kroetsch's *The Studhorseman* to Roch Carrier's *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* in English translation. Firstly, Stratford makes no reference to the English title of Carrier's novel, which, on its own, suggests a very different strategy than that used by Roy's translators cited above. In the introduction, the translator, Sheila Fischman, explained her motives for leaving both the title and much of the cursing in the original French. Noting that "a little personal bilingualism never hurt anybody" (1970, p. 3), she thus signalled an important turn away from accessible translations, such as *The Tin Flute,* that had been appropriated and anglicised unashamedly to build a collection of quality "English-language" prose fiction that included Roy. Fischman introduced English-language readers to a more resistant translation style that challenged the reader to perform an act of interpretation in order to understand Québécois culture. She refused to patronize or to reclaim the original by rewriting or by rendering it more familiar through a translation that obliterated any trace of the language of origin. *La guerre, Yes Sir!* was, as well, English-language readers' introduction to *joual*, or Quebec slang. Peppered with anglicisms and profanity, this form of street-language French became identified with the urban poor and hence with popular, frequently even separatist, movements in Quebec. Fischman comments on the importance

of profanity/joual as a trope of the novel and as a translation challenge:

> The swearing has been left in French […]. [T]he relationship of the villagers to the Church is perhaps the novel's single most important theme […]. [R]ebellion is achieved in a figurative way by the use of a most amazing collection of oaths and curses, which call on virtually every object of religious significance to Roman Catholics […]. To translate them [by Anglo-Saxon expletives] would have been to distort the values of the people who use them; on the other hand, literal translations would have been at best perplexing, more often simply absurd. (cited in Grant, 2006, p. 184)

This strategy is demonstrated by examples, such as "*Calice hostie de tabernacle!* I'll be glad when this war is over" (Fischman, 1970, p. 12).

Fischman's English version outsold the original, its runaway success partially attributable to misinterpretation by many English-language readers, including some critics, who saw in Carrier's caricature of Quebec society a true-to-life portrait that corresponded to the folkloric, patronizing, image of the fun-loving but crude, Quebecker it held dear (Hébert, 1992, pp. 199-201). The translation's popularity thus raised important questions about the reception and potential misinterpretation of Quebec literature in translation. Stratford, however, while referring to the success of the novel in English Canada (1986, p. 72) and citing examples from Fischman's translation in which French is used, such as "Maudit wagon de Christ à deux rangées de bancs, deux Christs par banc" (p. 108, cited in Stratford, 1986, p. 80), discusses neither. While he applauds Fischman's use of the term "Anglais" to avoid differentiating between British, Canadian or American (*ibid.*, p. 77), he does not comment on the potential effect of this on the English-language reader nor on the significant translation turn this signals. Furthermore, Stratford comments on the black humour of the novel, much of which is created through the characters' creative cursing, most frequently at the expense of the Catholic Church. However, as in the following example, Stratford demonstrates the novel's comic elements by using these humorous passages, which Fischman

left in the original language, without commenting on the non-transparent, foreignizing translation strategy brought into play. Stratford notes, "The pathos of the tears and prayers around young Corriveau's coffin is broken by the marvellously garbled version of the Hail Mary, 'Je vous salue Marie, pleine et grasse, le Seigneur avez-vous et Bénédict et toutes les femmes et le fruit de tes entailles, Albanie'" (Fischman, 1970, p. 49, cited in Stratford 1986, p. 80). Furthermore, he makes no mention of the socio-political context that motivated the translation and conditioned Fischman's style. The translator notes:

> The reason that it [translation activity] started to blossom, at least from French to English, was because there was this explosion of new writing talent in Quebec and a few of us who were there wanted to make this known. (cited in Grant, 2006, p. 173)

Unlike Roy's translators who arguably sought to assimilate her writing, Fischman endeavoured to accurately represent Quebec authors, such as Carrier, to English Canada through translations that did not betray the context of the original. Stratford, however, makes no mention of this. Once again, as in the case for his discussion of Roy, Stratford's focus is not on translation but rather on comparison. However, the implication is that Fischman's translation and Carrier's original are one and the same, while it is clear that the former acquired, through the passage from one language and one culture to another, additional socio-cultural and political "baggage" through its representation of a Quebec radically different than that portrayed by earlier Quebec writers, such as Roy or Ringuet, and in which the linguistic, cultural and political divide is a central trope. While this by no means renders a comparison with Kroetsch's English-Canadian novel invalid or impracticable, the particularly significant conditions of the translation, as in Roy's case, merit mention. Fischman's use of French stands in sharp contrast to the assimilation strategies at work in translations of Roy, but Stratford compares the English-language versions of Carrier and Roy to English-language novels as if the translations were entirely neutral, uninfluenced by the social and political contexts in which they were produced and by the motives of the translators themselves.

Finally, Stratford concludes as follows: "The number of novels that might be compared in the way I have shown is limited only by the critic's stamina and ingenuity" (1986, p. 96). He fails to mention, however, another major limitation, namely the number of novels available in reliable translation. Indeed, several of the novels to which he refers in his conclusion, namely Claude Jasmin's *La petite patrie*, Yves Thériault's *Les commettants du Caridad*, and Réjean Ducharme's *L'hiver de force* were unavailable in translation at the time his study was published. If comparative studies choose to compare like objects, namely English-language texts, whether they be original works or works in translation, their capacity to do so is severely limited by the corpus of translations. The alternative, of course, would be to compare like objects that are the indigenous products of their respective literary systems; for example, English-Canadian and Quebec literature, in a gross simplification of the complexity of the Canadian literary landscape. Indeed, this is the traditional comparative position.

However, failure to acknowledge the unavailability of translations pushes major issues, such as the difficulty in funding and marketing French-language fiction in reliable and, perhaps ideally, "made-in-Canada" translations, to the background in an officially bilingual Canada. This constitutes not only a major obstacle, but raises as well the thorny issue of the relational imbalance between dominant and minority cultures, a topic worthy of discussion in any study of Comparative Literature. If comparisons are made using translations, such as in Stratford's study, the lack of reliable translations, particularly of canonical works, severely curtails the possible scope and depth of the comparatist's analysis. In the Canadian context, for example, due to an uneven translation practice and a tradition that neglects canonical works while, at times, focussing on less mainstream literature, the availability of Quebec literature in translation remains limited (see Koustas, 1997). Similar issues are central to Translation Studies in other post-colonial societies, such as Ireland (see Cronin, 1996) or India (see Simon and St. Pierre, 2000), where the dominance of one language and commensurate subjugation of another have led to an imbalance between English-language literature and national literature available in translation.

This question arises again in Marie Vautier's impressive work, *New World Myth*: *Postmodernism and Postcolonialism in Canadian Fiction*, "a study of various reworkings of myth in six selected historiographic novels from English-speaking Canada and Quebec" (1998, p. ix). The author begins by acknowledging the contribution of scholars such as Caroline Bayard, E.D. Blodgett, Barbara Godard, Rosemarin Heidenreich, Eva-Marie Kröller, Clément Moisan, Joseph Pivato, Winfried Siemerling, Antoine Sirois, Syvia Söderland, Ronald Sutherland, Christl Verduyn and, of course, Philip Stratford, many of whom focused on translation, to the field of Canadian Comparative Literature. However, the extent to which the scholars cited by Vautier, and including Vautier herself, ignore the filter of translation in their comparisons arguably determines, to some extent at least, the practicability, if not the validity of these comparisons. Vautier is limited, for example, by the unavailability of an English translation of François Barcello's *La tribu* and therefore expects her readers to be familiar with the original French-language novel. However, unlike Stratford, Vautier uses the original French text even when a translation is available, such as in the case of Jovette Marchessault's *Comme une enfant de la terre*. While this strategy clearly spares Vautier the difficulty of choosing among various translations, as was the case for Stratford's study of *Bonheur d'occasion* or of comparing French and English texts in which the latter very obviously posits a particular translation strategy, such as Fishchman's translation of Carrier, it assumes that all readers master French sufficiently to understand the examples, and therefore, to translate for themselves. Translation is arguably not central to Vautier's compelling study that takes comparative studies beyond notions of plot and style to that of underlying and overreaching tropes and worldviews. This reliance on the reader's ability to move between cultures, languages and texts may signal a salutary development in Canadian letters. Nonetheless, failure to mention, other than in the bibliography, translations when available and to tackle the issue of why some novels were not translated, sidelines the potential contribution of translation to the comparison. That Marchessault's novel was translated while Barcelo's was not may suggest that the former was seen to be more marketable in English Canada or more significant within the broader spectrum of Canadian letters (perhaps, for example,

because of its feminist perspective); this, in itself, is perhaps significant in the comparison across literatures. That readers from different cultures and languages have different horizons of expectations, and that this influences the marketability and hence selection of translations (see Koustas, 2008), suggests that comparative studies should consider not only the way in which a book was translated but also why and for whom.

It is worth noting that if Vautier's strategic avoidance of translations enables her to steer clear of certain dilemmas, including, among others, a discussion of the translations themselves, it nonetheless does not spare her having to deal with the topic entirely. For example, in several of the novels studied, notably in *Les têtes à Papineau* and *The Scorched-Wood People*, translation plays a key role. In the former, French-speaking Charles F. Papineau ends the novel with a letter in English, and poor translation is blamed for the death of Thomas Scott in the latter. Commenting on *The Scorched-Wood People*, Vautier notes:

> Cross-cultural confusion, such as we see here, is frequently portrayed in New World Myth novels. By insisting on the problems of translation, the text thematizes Falcon's struggle to "translate" the history of his people. (p. 76)

Recognition of translation as a trope central to the comparison of French- and English-language Canadian literature constitutes, in itself, a validation of its central role in Canadian letters. Whether comparatists such as Stratford rely on published translations or others such as Vautier count on their readers' ability to compare French and English side-by-side, we would argue that Comparative Literature in Canada merits, in keeping with Apter's conceptualisation, to be firmly grounded in translation. This consideration of only two comparatists, in works twelve years apart, is clearly limited in scope. It nonetheless suggests that literary Translation Studies, while central to the comparatists' practical and theoretical work, is not given its due and that, if judiciously considered, would broaden and deepen the comparatists' studies by offering a different perspective from which to consider the role and place of works of literature and the horizon of expectations of its audiences. For example, as discussed above, Gabrielle Roy in an English translation devised to make

her sound more English Canadian was not the same as Gabrielle Roy in the original French. Consequently, the comparison of this translation to the work of MacLennan is decidedly limited if not skewed.

This is not to detract from the considerable contribution of Comparative Literature to Canadian letters in general and to larger considerations of glimpsing the other. Yet, Canadian comparatists have often failed to recognize the dependency of their studies on a practice that is left frequently unacknowledged. Their wholesale use of translations without consideration of the agenda influencing the production of translations, including the selection of books to be translated and the strategies used in doing so, invites reflection and further research. Even in cases where translations are not used, the obscuration of the language difference merely underlines the essential role that translation could play. The considerable body of valuable comparative studies, such as those cited by Vautier and referred to above, suggests that the comparison between the oblique glance offered by the Chambord staircase and the interaction between Canada's French- and English-language communities made by Conlogue and others before him are no longer valid. According to Rowland Smith, research in post-colonialism has "moved beyond an oppositional stance […] to investigate new kinds of side-by-sidedness which leads to the possibility of sharing cultural experience rather than resisting the imposition of alien forms of culture" (cited in Vautier, 2003, p. 269). Similarly, comparatists, no longer satisfied with a mere glimpse from the opposing staircase, have become increasingly engaged in discussions of the transculturation of "similarity in difference" (Smith, cited in Vautier, 2003, p. 278). For example, in Norman Cheadle and Lucien Pelletier's collection, *Canadian Cultural Exchange/ Échanges culturels au Canada*, the authors seek to provide:

> a nuanced view of Canadian transcultural experience. Rather than considering Canada as a bicultural dichotomy of colonizer/colonized, [they] examine a field of many cultures and the creative interactions among them [and] discuss, from various perspectives, Canadian cultural space as being in process of continual translation of both the other and oneself (2007, cover).

In sum, scholars on both sides of the linguistic divide, such as Stratford, Vautier and the contributors to Cheadle and Pelletier's collection, demonstrate genuine interest in the "poetry of the experience" (Stratford, 1979, p. 137) through compelling and in-depth studies that consider the aesthetic, social and cultural underpinnings of Quebec and Canadian literature. It would seem, therefore, that the "rush to the top of the staircase" has been somewhat forestalled by comparatists whose scholarly practice consists precisely in a long, penetrating glance. Furthermore, Conlogue ignores a modern use of the Chambord design. The latter is frequently used by architects to provide a quick exit since a staircase of double capacity offers a faster way to the bottom for more people. However, perhaps in their rush to the bottom—or to the bottom line of similarities—to the reduction of two texts to one common language heading in one direction down the staircase, comparatists miss the poetry, mechanics and contribution of the translation experience.

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ABSTRACT: A Glimpse from the Chambord Staircase at Translation's Role in Comparative Literature — While the importance of the translation process remains recognized as a worthwhile activity in both Literary/Cultural Studies and in fiction, it is frequently overlooked in larger discussions of Canadian literature, including comparative studies. Such activities aim to blur the lines between Us and Them, between Other and Self, or between the Rest of Canada (the Roc) and Quebec, in other words, to align or combine the frequently cited legendary two staircases of Château de Chambord. However, in the process, they have obscured other boundaries, such as those between Comparative Literature and Translation. Studies in Comparative Canadian Literature, for example, frequently overlook, or at least downplay, the importance of translation, neglecting to consider, for example, the translation strategy used and the selection of translated works available for comparison.

RÉSUMÉ : Un coup d'œil depuis l'escalier de Chambord sur le rôle de la traduction dans la littérature comparée — Cette étude se veut une considération de la place accordée à la traduction dans les analyses qui relèvent de la littérature canadienne comparée. Si, dans le contexte canadien, la littérature comparée vise à rapprocher les « deux solitudes » et à effacer la distinction entre l'Autre et Soi, ou, pour, ainsi dire, à aligner les deux escaliers, cités souvent en tant qu'exemple, du Château de Chambord, ne

le fait-elle pas en négligeant l'importance de la traduction dans une telle entreprise? Nous proposons qu'il importe de prendre en considération non seulement la qualité de la traduction ainsi que la stratégie traductrice employée, mais aussi la disponibilité des traductions.

Keywords: Translation, Comparative Literature, Château de Chambord, "rest of Canada", Quebec

Mots-clés : Traduction, littérature comparée, Château de Chambord, « reste du Canada », Québec

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