

Patricia Claxton A Civil Translator

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Patricia Claxton embodies the role of the translator as a civil agent, with rights and responsibilities within a civic society, and more specifically, like the civil engineer, called upon to ensure the constructive and logistical functions that facilitate the safe circulation of people and ideas. The term “civil” has a wide variety of meanings and associations: relating to a community or citizens, touching the normal rights of individuals, conforming to the normal standards of politeness, designating what is legally recognized (civil year) or legally determined (civil liabilities). Civil rights are the traditional rights of citizens with respect to state control. Strands of all these meanings come together in the motivations that have led Claxton to become a translator. A deeply held conception of citizenship and civic duty underlies her vision of translation’s vital contribution to furthering a healthy intellectual debate within bilingual Canadian society, her sense of responsibility towards the authors and texts she translates, her dedication to “getting it right,¹ and her commitment to the legal structures that ensure translation’s place within a civic society in a context of respectful cultural exchange.

Since 1968, when she published her first translation, an article by Pierre Elliott Trudeau from *Cité Libre*, Claxton has translated some twenty books and countless articles, short stories, and poems on a wide variety of topics, including pressing Canadian political issues, feminist fiction, and a Canadian journalist’s view of human tragedy in the Rwandan genocide of 1994. She has penned into English texts by distinguished Québec historians Marcel Trudel and Fernand Ouellet, such well-known contemporary Québécois writers as Nicole Brossard, France Théoret, Jacques Godbout, (Jean-Paul Daoust, and Gil Courtemanche, and popular children’s author Cécile Gagnon. For the Canadian public, however, Claxton’s name is perhaps most often linked with that of Gabrielle Roy, the grande dame of Canadian and Québec letters. Claxton received the Governor General’s award for her translation of Roy’s posthumous autobiography, *Enchantment and Sorrow*, in 1987, and again in 1999 for *Gabrielle Roy, a Life*, by François Ricard, with whom she also shared the same year, as translator, the Drainie-Taylor Biography Prize.

Throughout her career, Claxton has been a strong advocate of the translation profession. As a member of the executive of the Société des traducteurs du Québec, precursor of the Ordre

des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec (OTTIAQ), she was responsible for the development of accreditation examination procedures and standards. Founding president of the Literary Translator's Association of Canada (LTAC), she was successful in lobbying the Canadian government for codification of copyright protection for Canadian translators. The recognition of translators as authors in their own right remains a fundamental issue for her, and she continues to monitor on behalf of LTAC any proposed federal legislation with implications for translators. Through her teaching, articles, and numerous speaking engagements across the country, she has contributed generously to a better public awareness of the complexities of the translator's craft and the importance of intercultural exchange within Canada.

Early Crossings

Difference and displacement have always been present in Claxton's life. The exotic appeal of otherness as well as its dangerous potential for violence and division, the excitement of vast distances and boundaries to cross, and a deep sense of the vulnerability of human life against the political tides of war and illness resurfaced in varied forms throughout her life, shaping her experience, framing her approach to translation, and above all, giving her intimate knowledge of the vital importance of establishing civil communication networks for the safe transit of people and ideas.

Claxton's exposure to two very different worlds, and more importantly her sense of moving from one to the other, is inscribed in the very process of her birth. Born in Kingston, Ontario, in 1929, she was conceived in British India, as it was called before Partition. A sign perhaps of things to come, the translator's task being to give texts from other cultures new life in her own, Claxton undertook her first crossing, the long passage back home from India over land and sea, as a child in her mother's womb. Dorothy Carson had almost died giving birth to her first children, male twins, and for her next two deliveries, undeterred by the uncertainties of the voyage, she preferred to return to the comfortable town on Lake Ontario where both she and her husband, Frederick, had been born. Before she was a year old, Claxton, the youngest of the family, was once more on the high seas, on her way back to Lahore. She was to live there, part of a small English-speaking enclave, until she was almost eleven.

Claxton's parents were second- and third-generation Canadians of British stock, her father of Irish and her mother of Scottish parentage. Their families were part of Kingston's town-

and-gown society: her mother had attended private school in Toronto, and her father was a graduate of Royal Military College. After a tour in the First World War, he joined the Royal Engineers of the British Army, as a means to an end, Claxton recalls, a way to “do exciting things in exotic places.” Until his retirement in 1940, he was stationed in Lahore, where he worked as an engineer on the construction of the Northwestern Railway across Pakistan and India. By Canadian standards, Claxton’s childhood in Lahore was an unusual one. She did not attend school as such, but shared her lessons with a half-dozen other young English-speaking children under the supervision of their governesses. Although Claxton had an English nanny and not an Indian *ayah*, she nonetheless enjoyed her interaction with Indian culture, including sharing riding lessons with a young Indian prince and his tutor. Summers were spent in Kashmir, which she loved. As Canadians, her parents were somewhat more interculturally open-minded than other members of the predominantly English enclave. Her mother, contrary to most of her English neighbours, was a great admirer of Gandhi.

While Claxton’s father’s retirement in 1940 was opportune in the Indian context, as the political tensions and violence between Hindu and Muslims escalated before Partition, the family’s return to Canada was set against other pressing international tensions, where the political would have an even greater effect on the personal. They were to come back via the Pacific, but as Claxton recounts, “My father was going to join us in Hong Kong when my mother got a telegram. Dunkirk had occurred and he had decided to volunteer.” Her father spent part of the Second World War in London cleaning up from the Blitz, before being sent to Iraq to oversee the construction of a railway supply line linking the Persian Gulf to the Soviet Union. As a young adolescent, Claxton was certainly able to appreciate the risks of war and the concerns her mother must have felt for their own ocean crossing, but she seems most of all to have admired her father for his sense of duty. Perhaps something of the vulnerability, uncertainty, and deep sense of displacement she must have felt nonetheless surfaces in her short but telling statement: “I hated coming back.”

The movies and ice cream cones of quiet wartime Kingston could not compete with the horses and camels, the snake charmers, and the rich and varied colours of India. Claxton remembers her early years abroad with great intensity. Returning to Canada was a departure from paradise. Coming back also meant, for the first time, attending a regular school with classrooms and peers, first at Sydenham Public School and then at Kingston Collegiate and

Vocational Institute. Claxton had fought hard against being sent away as a boarder to Havergal, her mother's alma mater in Toronto. Perhaps she knew instinctively that these were precious years. Dorothy Carson died in 1945, and at fifteen years of age, Fred Carson having been appointed vice-president of the Montréal Locomotive Works, Claxton found herself once more on the move, this time to Montréal. Her arrival in Québec was a renewal with difference. Claxton's experience of French was limited. Although her classmates at the Study, a private school in Westmount, had learned the language since kindergarten, Claxton had to make do with one year of Ontario High School French. Looking back now from the distance of her accomplishments as a translator, Claxton is critical of the way French was taught then, "as a dead language like Latin or Greek, not as a living language, a means of communicating." When she arrived at McGill, she was drawn to philosophy, economics, and comparative religion, dropping French as soon as she could. She graduated with a General BA in Arts, got her first real job as an investment analyst for Sun Life, and shortly after married a young Montréal lawyer, John Claxton, with whom she had two sons.

On the surface, little in Claxton's formal education and what she herself refers to "as a relatively undistinguished record" as a university student could foretell her accomplished future as a Canadian literary translator; yet a personal sense of the essential importance of intercultural crossings, or more precisely, a realization of their troubling contentiousness, was already forming in her mind. Claxton remembers vividly having difficulty understanding the geographic borders of francophone and anglophone Montréal when she arrived in the city: "There was a wall," Claxton recalls, "you didn't go any further east than [the department store] Morgans; any French Canadian who came west spoke English." English and French Montréalers lived in separate worlds. Sports provided one of the few opportunities to cross the boundaries. Her father had wonderful hockey tickets just behind the Canadiens' bench. More significant for Claxton was the excitement she felt on those rare occasions when she "crossed the line" with her fencing teammates into parts of Montréal that, as an anglophone, she would never have otherwise visited.

As a child, Hindustani, omnipresent in the streets and shops around her, was first and foremost a language to be deciphered. However, the ensuing steps of language acquisition required for bringing the language of the other home, literally and metaphorically, were impeded by the colonial context in which she lived. If Claxton has a regret about her childhood in India, it is that she learned to speak only a little Hindustani, the lingua franca of India before Partition.

Years later, in social functions in Montréal in the mid -fifties, as the wife of a young professional, she was once again confronted with a linguistic barrier: “If we were in a group with francophones,” she recalls, “I couldn’t participate. This wasn’t right.” This time, she was determined to complete the learning process. With two small children at home, time was limited, but Claxton resourcefully kept a French dictionary by the kitchen sink for easy consultation whenever she had a free moment. When the boys were at school, she was able to devote herself more seriously to her task, picking up provincial night-school courses, then courses at McGill University where she became friends with one of her professors, Nicole Deschamps, who introduced her to Laurent Duval, a journalist at Radio Canada. She began to read *Cité libre*.

The early 1960s were heady; many would say turbulent, times in Québec. After the *grande noirceur* of the narrow clericalism of the Duplessis years, an irreversible tide of change was transforming Québec society. Caught up in the excitement of the broad exchange of new ideas surrounding her, many of which she was hearing or reading about in French, Claxton was also ready for intellectual challenge. Translating a French text into English, she decided, just for her own purposes, would be both an exercise in self-discipline and a concrete way to hone her new linguistic skills. She found an article by a writer with a compelling style, of a length she thought she could handle, and set painstakingly about her first translation. After much editing and re-editing, she showed her work to Duval, whose reaction was categorical: “You have worked very hard, and I commend you for it,” he told her, as she relates, “But if you're going to translate what this fellow wrote, you have to write what he said, and not what you think he ought to have said.”

Undaunted, Claxton took the tough advice to heart (it still resonates in her ears) and once again plunged into revising her translation. She showed the new version to the author, who liked what he read, told her she had a flair for this kind of thing, and encouraged her to pursue her work. The title of the text was “La nouvelle trahison des clercs,” and its author, Pierre Elliott Trudeau. Although she did not realize it at the time, Claxton had embarked upon what would become her life’s work.

Engineering the Crossing

The meeting with the young Montréal lawyer and parliamentarian who would become prime minister of Canada in 1967 was decisive in another, more concrete way. Through a mutual

friend, Trudeau introduced her to Jean-Paul Vinay, a professor of comparative stylistics in the Department of linguistics at the Université de Montréal and, along with his colleague Jean Darbelnet, one of Canada's pioneers in translation theory. Claxton enrolled in Vinay's course, and before she knew it, she was on the way to completing the master's degree in translation she earned in 1971. She describes Vinay as a marvellous pedagogue. The program was structured around what she refers to as "guided doing," practical translation exercises in a variety of fields, into both French and English. Well suited to her own self-directed, hands-on learning style, her studies at the Université de Montréal were to give her the tools she needed to set out the course, to crossing, so to speak, both for herself as translator and for others as readers.

"From the beginning, from the time of *Cité libre*," she recalls, "I knew translation was a way of communicating something important to people who did not speak French. Big changes were happening in Québec and English-speaking Canadians needed to understand what they were about." Her passionate sense of the broader social function of translation within Canada is pungently evident in her first article on literary translation, a short text entitled "Culture Vulture," published in 1967 in the Université de Montréal review *Méta: Journal des traducteurs/Translators Journal*. Excerpts from Québec nationalist writer Hubert Aquin's seminal novel *Prochain épisode* had just appeared in the popular *Maclean's* magazine, and Claxton was appalled by the abysmal quality of the translation: "French syntax is followed throughout, with French punctuation, and where the straight literality or *calque* yields something that is just too, too garbled for words, the translator cooks up something else which is pure invention in varying degrees of inaccuracy (or leaves it out altogether -- O happy solution!)"²

At stake are two issues of fundamental importance for Claxton: the incomprehensibility of the translation for an English readership, and its lack of historical and artistic integrity. The translator, she points out, referring to another passage, "has missed an obvious allusion" to the Québec patriots of the 1837 rebellion, while "certain sustained images of quite lyrical beauty, and allusions to other parts of the book...are completely lost."³ Both shortcomings, and this is why Claxton takes the translator to task so bluntly, prevent the translated text from carrying out what she sees as its primary function: to provide Canadian anglophone readers with accurate and informed access to Aquin's text and ideas.

From the particular case of *Prochain épisode*, Claxton moves on to a scathing attack on the dismal state of literary translation in Canada in general: "I have seen enough that is bad and

read and heard enough exasperated comment to be convinced that we could and should do better.” With surprising breadth of vision and commitment for one so early in her translation career, she then proceeds to outline why and how the situation can be improved: “A glance over the fence on the part of either of our two cultures,” she affirms forthrightly, “is not likely to be habit-forming unless it pleases.”⁴ The Canada Council program of subsidies will only be successful, she warns, if both the council and the publishers who receive its grants make a serious commitment to verifying translation quality. Nor is she content to wait for good translators to simply “appear.”⁵ With considerable foresight, she calls for “the institution of a program of advanced formal study intended specifically to prepare literary translators,” offers an outline of the types of courses such a program might include, and recommends the establishment of a “Governor-General’s Prize, or an equivalent,” and “a vigilant committee set up by the profession [with] as its principal function to award stars in ascending multiples for good translation and some other appropriate symbol for bad ones; skulls and crossbones, I suggest.”⁶

Six years and many advocacy efforts later, in 1973, the Canada Council would add translation to the categories for its prestigious literary prizes, renamed the Governor General’s Awards in 1986. Eight years later, in 1975, Claxton would be one of the fourteen founding members and first president of the Literary Translators’ Association of Canada (LTAC). While it has yet to assign star and lemon ratings to published translations, LTAC has contributed significantly to improving the professionalism of literary translation in Canada.

When acknowledging the central role Claxton has played within the literary translation community in Canada, it is difficult not to call to mind both the extensive organizational abilities of her mother and the indomitable engineering eye of her father scanning the vast horizon of northwestern India or the formidable deserts of Iraq, mapping out the position of the rails to be laid. Dorothy Carson was a very strong woman with a highly developed sense of public service, an active organizer, in Second World War Kingston, of the IODE,⁷ the blood clinic, and parcels to soldiers on the front. Fred Carson was knighted in 1942 for his railway work in India. Claxton remembers her mother’s impatience to get things done, and her father’s sheer Irish bull-headedness. Endowed with both parents’ sense of public commitment, Claxton would need to call on both their strengths in her advocacy for literary translation in Canada.

One of the thorniest issues for Canadian literary translators was, and remains, professional recognition. Concretely, this includes having their name on the book cover, mention

of their work in book reviews, protection of their rights in the publishing contract, and participation in royalties. “An early LTAC initiative,” writes Claxton, “was the adoption of a watch-dog role for the Association, scrutinising reviews of translations and noticing editors of newspapers and magazines when translators were not properly acknowledged.”⁸ Claxton was at the forefront of the association’s initiative to develop a standard publishing contract for translators, and beginning in 1977, she spearheaded its determined efforts to have translators’ rights included in the changes being made to the Canadian Copyright Act. As draft after draft of amendments to the legislation were reviewed, no funds being available to hire professional counsel, Claxton found herself, as LTAC president and later copyright chair, researching British and Canadian case law, making presentations before various federal Parliamentary committees, and filing legal briefs. She still remembers the derisory attitude of many of the officials she met for whom translation was an inferior form of activity, and “translators did not count.” To give one a flavour of the debates, according to one draft amendment to the act, tabled in Parliament on May 27, 1987, “tables, compilations and computer programs”⁹ were considered literary works, but not, hard as this is to believe now, translations.

One catches a glimpse of the determination and intelligence with which Claxton tackled the legal dimensions of these lobbying efforts, and the time and energy she devoted to the cause, in a six-page “Brief on Copyright” she filed on June 10, 1985, before the Sub-Committee of the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture on the Revision of Copyright, this time with advice from expert legal counsel.¹⁰ Claxton outlines succinctly LTAC’s position that “case law precedent clearly identifies translations as original literary works in the meaning of the Copyright Act,”¹¹ and that translations should accordingly be added to the list of specific inclusions (maps, charts, plans, tables and compilations) described in the act as literary works.

She also examines in considerable depth a proposal put forward to include translations as “derivative works,” noting that the term “is pejorative, meaning just short of plagiaristic and therefore contemptible.” To avoid the impact of these negative connotations on the perception of translation, she suggests the wording “derived works” as a more positive term, totally neutral, meaning simply ‘works which have been derived,’ and which, besides, finds a totally natural and accurate equivalence with the French *oeuvres dérivées*.¹² Furthermore, she points out, “derivative works” is American terminology, and she argues against its use “on the grounds that there should be no encouragement to introduce American case law into our courts, since it would

lead to confusion between the two regimes.”¹³ She then proceeds to analyze the substantive aspects of including translation among the derived works in the new legislation, and offers precise recommendations based on an analysis of the Copyright Act and case law in both the United Kingdom and the United States. She ends the brief by outlining numerous “examples of abuses and confusion”¹⁴ affecting translators, which could and should be remedied in the new legislation.

Nor were Claxton’s efforts limited to the preparation and submission of briefs. In 1987 she wrote to Flora Macdonald, minister of Communications, protesting the inclusion in draft legislation of computer programs as literary works, but not translations. The letter was copied to the Standing Committee on Communication and Culture as well as to Harvey André, Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, for both departments were concerned, complicating Claxton’s task. The letter was also sent to a variety of anglophone and francophone arts groups, including the Canadian Conference of the Arts, the Conférence des associations de créateurs et créatrices du Québec, the Council of Translators and Interpreters of Canada, The League of Canadian Poets, the Société des traducteurs du Québec, the Writers’ Union of Canada, and the Union des écrivains québécois, all of whom Claxton had regularly consulted and mobilised over the ten years of networking and advocacy required to finally have translation included in the Canadian Copyright Act.

During this same period, she also generously shared the results of her research on the question with other translators, through a series of articles she published in English and French in professional reviews, such as *L’Antenne* and *Circuit*. Unfailingly modest about her part in ensuring the recognition of translators’ rights in the revised Copyright Act passed by Parliament on December 11, 1987, Claxton states simply, “These efforts were successful, translations are now mentioned as literary works in the law.” Ever vigilant, the determined civic agent adds, “this had to be fought for.” Until 1994, she continued to represent LTAC at the Conférence des associations de créateurs et créatrices du Québec, a working group of arts creators formed for the joint study of copyright and the submission of consensus positions on the continuing revision of the Canadian Copyright Act.

Claxton’s fight for professional recognition for translators has gone hand in hand with a similar commitment to setting up the structures that ensure professional responsibility. In keeping with her bold recommendations in “Culture Vulture” and her concern for translation

quality, Claxton devoted considerable energy throughout the 1970s and early 1980s to the issue of translator accreditation. Within Québec and Canadian translators' associations, these were key years for issues related to professional development. From 1972 to 1974, as executive member of the Société des traucteurs du Québec, Claxton chaired the Admissions Examination Committee, with responsibility for devising and implementing examination procedures. From 1978 to 1982, she represented her provincial association on the Conseil des traducteurs et interprètes du Canada (CTIC), the pan-Canadian accreditation board. In 1981-82, as chair of the CTIC Standard Examination Board, she oversaw a major reorganization of the national accreditation procedures and prepared a procedural guide to be used by member associations from six provinces. That same year, she was also responsible for the administration of the Canada-wide certification examinations in English-French, French-English, along with a variety of other language combinations. Her professional contributions have also extended to the international arena. She has represented LTAC at the Fédération interationale des traducteurs that groups together professional translation associations from over sixty different countries. As a member of PEN International, she has taken up the cause of translators imprisoned for their work.

The Spirit of Passage

Claxton's commitment to the civic role of translators informs her own style and work. Her concern for establishing a respectful social framework for the practice of translation as intercultural exchange, for engineering the crossing, so to speak, is reflected in many different ways within the spirit of her own translation passages. Certainly, a consistent interest in Canadian social issues links the wide range of books, articles, and other works Claxton has translated since her maiden voyage with *Cité libre*. Her early commercial translations include sections of the federal Commission of Inquiry into the Non-Medical Use of Drugs (Ledain Commission), articles on labour policy and income security, and a chapter of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (Laurendeau-Dunton Commission). Her first major translations placed her squarely in the intercultural debate on the history of Québec, with books by eminent Québec historians Marcel Trudel (*The Beginnings of New France, Atlas of New France, Canadian History Textbooks: A Comparative Study*) and Fernand Ouellet (*Lower Canada, 1791-1840: Structural Change and Nationalism*). She took on articles about Québec's Quiet Revolution, including texts by Gerard Pelletier, Jacques Hébert, and Fernand Ouellet for

Thomas Axworthy and Pierre Trudeau's edited volume *Towards a Just Society*, and she continued to translate articles by the great man himself. However, increasingly uncomfortable with Trudeau's constitutional positions, and particularly with his fierce opposition to the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Agreements, Claxton discreetly passed on the opportunity to translate the former prime minister's memoirs. "I had become very disillusioned with his ideas," Claxton recalls, "I felt I had contributed, through my translations, to what he was doing, and I did not want to contribute any longer."

Trudel's book *The Beginnings of New France* gave Claxton her first nomination for the Canada Council (now the Governor General's) Award in translation (she was to be shortlisted five more times and would win the award on two occasions). New translation challenges soon arose. Remaining true to her fundamental interest in important social issues, Claxton undertook three books (*Turn of a Pang*, *French Kiss or a Pang's Progress*, and *Baroque at Dawn*) by well-known Québec feminist Nicole Brossard, as well as several short works by Suzanne Jacob and France Théoret. Short stories by Iraqi-Canadian writer Naïm Kattan explore themes from immigration, Ronald Lavallée's historical novel about the Métis, *Tchipayuk, or the Way of the Wolf*, and Gabrielle Roy's autobiography, *Enchantment and Sorrow*, address respectively the sombre side of Métis and minority francophone life in the Canadian West. Claxton's most recent translation, *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, by Québec journalist Gil Courtemanche, is set in Rwanda during the April 1994 Hutu-led, government-orchestrated genocide against the Tutsi people.

Claxton's sense of the translator as a civic agent also underlies her approach to the process of translation. As her critique of the initial translation of *Prochain épisode* so cogently demonstrated, she is intensely aware of the profound differences between languages and cultures. Not unlike her early crossings from India to Canada as a young child, intercultural passages can be arduous, slow zigzags over hostile waters, and their ultimate destination can be uncertain. Although there may be some consolation in not being alone for the passage, the presence of others increases the complexity of the crossing. Much depends on the languages themselves, the authors involved, the attitudes of the publishers, and the perceived expectations of the final readers. Claxton's need to engineer the crossing and her resulting attention to the contractual framework of the translation process reflect both her recognition of the inevitably dialogic nature of this process and her own search for respectful and secure balance within the troubled waters of

negotiated passage. It is in this sense that her dedication to “getting it right” is to be understood, not merely as a question of finding the right grammatical or terminological structure, but one of finding the exact point on the compass where a variety of forms of respect can intersect: respect for the ideas and artistic integrity of the original text, respect for the author’s underlying project, respect for the forms and values of the target language that ensure the comprehensibility of the translated text, and respect for the translator herself and her work.

How complex these multiple layers of negotiation can be, and how limited the rules of passage given one can be, were made painfully clear to Claxton very early in her career when she was translating Trudel and Ouellet’s historical studies. Both books were part of the McClelland and Stewart Canadian Centenary Series directed by Desmond Morton. As such, they had to conform to certain restrictions in length and format, and Claxton was asked to condense both original texts. Needless to say, this further complicated the arduous translation process. Ouellet was so incensed that “a mere translator should be cutting down his text” that Claxton had to ask both Morton, as series editor, and David Farr, the president of the Canadian Historical Association, to intervene. “In the end, Ouellet decided that I was on his side, recalls Claxton, and both he and Morton thanked me in their prefaces to the book.¹⁵ In a review published in the *Globe and Mail*, historian Ramsey Cook also paid homage to the translator’s efforts, noting that “the book has been beautifully translated and adapted by Patricia Claxton.”¹⁶

In Trudel’s case, the French text was already a condensed version of three volumes, the last of which had never been published (the manuscript had been destroyed in a fire). This meant that Claxton had no original reference point for her own process of paring down the text: “Integrating contemporary quotations into the text was another headache,” she adds. In their presentation of Trudel’s book, Desmond Morton and Donald Creighton are clearly pleased to welcome the “best French scholarship” to the series, noting that “such a contribution, moreover, greatly aids the growing integration of the Series: enfin les fleurs-de-lys!”¹⁷ They discuss the “difficulties of organising and executing such a series,” but make no mention of the translation, nor of the choices Claxton was forced to make to have the lengthy French text fit the series format.

In fact, these choices reflect several strategies generally associated with the more intrusive process of adaptation, as opposed to translation. Claxton chose to eliminate certain chapters entirely, and in other cases to cut introductory remarks and secondary themes. As a

result, the transitions between chapters and paragraphs had to be reworked in order to keep the flow of the amputated text coherent. Considerable judgement and attention to detail were required to ensure that the leaner text remained true to the spirit of the original, and that both the logical and chronological organization was maintained.

“Tooling” the Vessel

Through this meticulous process, Claxton developed an attentiveness to the external referent that was to stay with her throughout her practice as a translator. Checking the accuracy of references to time and place and making subsequent modifications are for her clearly part of the civil contract the translator undertakes with his or her reader. “Even in fiction,” she states categorically, “references to real people and places should be right.”¹⁸ While such details might be considered merely technical in nature, for Claxton they are part of the essential underpinnings of the text. If the vessel is to be seaworthy in the target language, if the new readers are to find it credible, adjusting the tooling is fundamental to safe passage.

In her translator’s note in Gabrielle Roy’s *Enchantment and Sorrow*, published in 1986, Claxton mentions several small referential details that needed to be revised. Some, such as having a character speak of the First World War in 1938 before there was a Second World War, were simply “potentially distracting anomalies”¹⁹ to be corrected. The autobiography was published posthumously and did not benefit from Gabrielle Roy’s usual careful editing. Others touch on specific local knowledge of bus routes or the length of time it takes to walk from one point to another, details that, when inaccurate, the informed reader could find troubling: “Since Charing Cross is at one side of Trafalgar Square,” notes Claxton, “a bus leaving Trafalgar Square and heading north towards Epping Forest [one of Gabrielle Roy’s destinations], will not pass Charing Cross ten minutes or so later [as indicated in the original], though it will almost certainly pass King’s Cross.” She continues, “A morning’s walk from just outside Nice to St-Tropez is clearly intended to telescope a distance of some hundred kilometres. Still, such a walk rather severely taxes the imagination for one who may know the region.”²⁰ In yet other cases, the translation activates different historical classifications: “To Gabrielle Roy, ‘Saxon’ appears to mean ‘old English’ in a broad sense,” writes Claxton, “but ‘Saxon cottages,’ thatched and half-timbered, are more accurately Tudor, and Boadicea lived before the coming of the Saxons and was therefore not a Saxon but a British queen.” She adds, “Still, designating Boadicea as

‘British’ might allow an impression that she was a rather recent queen, whereas if she is identified with the ancient Britons her antiquity is no longer in doubt.”²¹

Besides the practical clarification they provide, such details enable Claxton to establish an unintrusive, yet communicatively effective, dialogue with her readers about the translation process. By focussing on issues of external reference, as opposed to elements of a more interpretive nature, Claxton subtly sets the framework for the reception of the translated text within a dialogical space where difference can be discussed in a civil fashion, unhindered by precipitous judgements. Her friendly and unassuming tone contributes to the opening of a common space where author, text, source language, translator, target language and reader can meet for pleasant exchange. By offering to “share at least a few gleanings” from her research and reflection as translator, she communicates her own curiosity about the other to her reader: “I was puzzled by the way in which Gabrielle Roy speaks of ‘Pembina Mountain,’” she writes conversationally, “I learned that this, in the early days of Manitoba was the name used collectively for a group of small settlements on the slopes of the Pembina Escarpment.” Demystifying linguistic categorisation, she adds that she “also learned that in the Canadian Prairies the berries called pembinas, from which Pembina jelly is made, are also known as ‘mooseberries,’ and are elsewhere more prosaically called ‘hibush cranberries.’”²² By citing such concrete examples where they will be the least contested, Claxton discreetly validates the right to difference more generally and places the reading of the translation firmly within a framework of civil dialogue.

Ronald Lavallée’s historical novel *Tchipayuk, or the Way of the Wolf* takes Claxton into the core of intercultural collision in nineteenth-century Manitoba. In her translator’s note, she first draws attention to Lavallée’s extensive research, “ensuring the authenticity of countless details,” and then carefully draws a link, through terminology, between colonial past and present: “The early French penetration of the continent has left a surprising number of familiar terms and place names in English, some adapted first from Indian tongues.... I wonder how many English speakers realise that the sled drivers command, ‘Mush!’ was originally (and more sensibly) ‘Marche!’”²³ In *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, anticipating “that readers might appreciate knowing more about the background of Rwandan politics,” she has discreetly “provided a few additional footnotes and now and then added a clarifying word or two to the body of the book, hoping to give a maximum of information with a minimum of disruption to the story.”²⁴

Nor is dialogue confined to the readers' space. As the latter comment implies, loyalty to the text and its author are equally essential for Claxton. In her translator's notes -- she significantly refuses the more authoritarian appellation of preface -- she is careful to refrain from offering interpretations of the book she has translated. She respectfully lets the text stand for itself and leaves the reader to judge on his or her own. In this respect, her minute presentation of terms and details also reveals how scrupulous she is about even the smallest change she feels required to introduce in the translation. As an "interpretive translator," one who gives priority to the readability of the text in the target language, "intervening is part of my duty," she states in a recent, as yet unpublished, article entitled "Translating the Implied."²⁵

She clearly finds such interventions troubling, however, and she notes conscientiously that "all the interventions discussed ...were approved by the respective authors before publication of the books in translation." Even more revealing, after more than thirty years of professional practice, she remains "intrigued" at "how often [she has] found it necessary or desirable to add something not strictly called for at first sight, either to avoid ambiguity or downright inaccuracy, or to heighten the accuracy, sharpen the perception, bolden or soften the atmosphere...In other words, to fill in, in the target language, something implied in the source language."²⁶ Less frequently, she finds herself "ellipsing expressions in the target language because they seemed redundant, essential though their equivalents may have been in the source language." Her preoccupation with such changes is such that in the drafts of her translations, she now "inserts a symbol enabling her to locate interventions of both kinds, primarily to enable [her] to come back and reconsider them and eventually clear certain of them with [her] author."²⁷

Her translation of Gabrielle Roy's *Ma chère petite soeur: Lettres à Bernadette 1943-1970* offers a looking-glass view into how her desire for readability and her equally intense loyalty to the text and its author play themselves out in the process of translating. In her translator's note, she carefully sets out the frame of the letters, and at the same time presents her own translation strategy. As she explains, "Bernadette's religious name was Soeur Léon de la Croix When Gabrielle addressed her as *ma chère petite soeur* she was using the word *soeur* in the double sense of 'sister,' and avoiding the formal name, which she found forbidding Being aware of this at the outset may be helpful to English readers."²⁸ The need to "keep the double meaning," or "special significance of this phrase," she adds, "was the principal reason for leaving the letter openings in French." On the other hand, "Since the French closings are often foreign to English,

I have adapted those, lest they bewilder the reader and intrude on the substance and tone of the letters.”²⁹

She also draws the reader’s attention both to the form of the letters their “freshness and spontaneity,” and to what they reveal about the relationship between the two sisters: “after Bernadette falls seriously ill, the spontaneity does not really disappear; what is new is a depth and intensity of emotion that are glimpsed but not sustained in the family chit-chat and ups and downs of events and preoccupations in the previous letters.” Claxton admits that she has “been very conscious of these things in her translation, as well as of the fact that spontaneity and polish, while not mutually exclusive, are found in different proportions in personal letters as compared to writing intended for publication.”³⁰

Both challenges are present in the following passage from a letter Roy wrote to her sister from Paris, on June 22, 1948:

Ma chère petite soeur,

Il fait bon venir t’écrire quelques moments. Ta dernière lettre nous a donné à tous deux beaucoup de joie. Je crois d’ailleurs y avoir répondu, mais qu’importe, je suis contente de répéter que tes lettres nous apportent un gentil souvenir des heures heureuses de Kenora.

J’ai écrit à Lucille et je vais l’aider dans ses études. Plus tard, elle pourra aider sa petite soeur à son tour, et un peu de bien fera ainsi, je l’espère, beaucoup de bonheur en fin de compte.³¹

To accommodate her own literary context, Claxton has gently moved the syntax and vocabulary to a slightly more formal note in English:

Ma chère petite soeur,

It’s good to sit down and write to you for a few minutes. Your last letter brought much delight to both of us. I think I’ve already answered it, but never mind, I enjoy saying again that your letters bring us sweet memories of happy times at Kenora.

I have written to Lucille and will help her with her studies. Later on it will be her turn to help her younger sister, and this way, I hope, a little good will end up bringing much happiness.³²

At the same time, the colloquial expression, “never mind,” helps maintain the balance, and Claxton has very carefully translated the emotional vocabulary, paying special attention to the fine distinctions between such common, yet often elusive, expressions as “il fait bon,” “beaucoup de joie,” “contente,” “gentil,” “heureuses,” “beaucoup de bonheur” She also makes a small expansion, or “insertion,” in the initial sentence to capture more concretely the familiar gesture of putting pen to paper, or sitting down to write.

In the following passage, taken from a letter near the end of the volume, written just a month before Bernadette’s death, Roy’s prose is much more intense:

La beauté du monde m’est encore plus visible qu’avant grâce à toi. Tu m’enseignes aussi la générosité, l’oubli de soi et de penser aux autres. Et ce qui compte, c’est que tu m’enseignes tout cela, non par les mots qui ne laissent pas grande trace, mais par l’exemple qui, lui, est indélébile. Aujourd’hui le temps hésite entre le sombre et l’ensoleillé, entre le gris et le radieux, un peu à la manière de nos vies suspendues entre le sourire et les larmes, entre la peur et la confiance.³³

Once again, Claxton has restructured the first sentence and deftly intermingled spoken and written syntactical forms:

Thanks to you, I can see the beauty of the world even more clearly than before. You also teach me generosity, unselfishness, and thoughtfulness of others. And what really counts is that you teach me these things not with words, which fade without much trace, but through example, which cannot be erased. Today the weather is wavering between dull and sunny, between dismal and radiant -- rather the ways our lives are, somewhere between tears and laughter, between fear and confidence.³⁴

This time, to render the depth of Roy’s emotion, Claxton has chosen her equivalents for their concision and lyrical qualities. Her own judicious use of sound and rhythm echoes Roy’s writerly expressivity, particularly in the touching allusion to the ephemeral nature of the written word. There is no doubt that Claxton has engaged her own sensibilities on the side of Roy, as she literally feels her way through the process of re-expression into English for her readers.

Passage Home

Claxton's first ocean crossing, coming home to Canada for her own birth, is a striking image of the translative passage. In such a context, the essential moment of the voyage, the final destination to which it aspires, would seem to be the arrival itself, the new beginning. When speaking of her conception of the translation process, Claxton does indeed declare herself to be an interpretive translator, or *cibliste*. Within translation studies, Claxton's attention to the readerliness of the text and her insistence on conformity to target language norms are associated with what is called a fluent or transparent translation strategy, one that gives the reader the impression, or illusion, that he or she is reading an original text.

Contemporary theorists such as Lawrence Venuti have been quick to point out that such a strategy is not value-neutral. On the contrary, it performs a labour of acculturation, which domesticates the foreign text, making it intelligible and even familiar to the target-language reader [...], enacting an imperialism that extends the dominion of transparency with other ideological discourses over a different culture.³⁵ Yet an examination of Claxton's translation process, as we have seen, offers important nuances to Venuti's dichotomy, which, in the tradition of Walter Benjamin, equates interpretive or readerly translation strategies necessarily with a domesticating approach and literalist strategies with a foreignizing orientation.

In her own life, Claxton has made the reverse crossing, back towards the other, and her interpretive orientation is tempered by an equal respect or opening up home to the foreign. More specifically, within the Canadian/Québec context in which she has chosen to live, home is both self and other, identity and difference. Claxton's translation practice is thus more accurately situated in the framework of postcolonial theories of translation, where, as Susan Bassnett points out, "linguistic exchange [is seen] as essentially dialogic, as a process that happens in a space that belongs to neither to source nor target absolutely."³⁶ Indeed, postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha uses the term translation "not to describe a transaction between texts and languages but in the etymological sense of being carried across from one place to another."³⁷ From this perspective, "translation is now rightly seen as a process of negotiation between texts and

cultures during which all kinds of translations take place mediated by the figure of the translator.”³⁸ Claxton’s personal contribution to an understanding of how this negotiated carrying across takes place lies in her sense of the civil structures necessary for a secure framework for intercultural respect.

Some of her most gratifying moments are her encounters with her fellow travellers, the exchanges prompted by each text, the letters from enchanted readers, the meetings with new and touching fictional people: “I particularly enjoyed some of the characters,” she recalls of her experience translating Gabrielle Roy’s autobiography. “I also wept at times, because I felt her emotions so deeply. I was less anxious when doing the second part, the pressure was not as great when I was finished with her exceptionally painful childhood.”³⁹ Working with the authors whom she conveys through the space in between difference has led to many privileged moments. In a break from historical texts, Claxton translated Nicole Brossard’s transgressive, postmodern, feminist text, *Turn of a Pang*. She remembers with pleasure Brossard’s endless curiosity about language, and their numerous discussions first to clarify the meaning of the French, and then to check that the English corresponded to Brossard’s feeling about her own text. Undoubtedly, Gil Courtemanche speaks for many of Claxton’s authors when he thanks Patricia Claxton “for the skill and great care she has brought to the task. As a result of our discussions, we made a few useful modifications and I took her counsel and the opportunity she offered to clarify some additional points. A good translation improves a text, and I feel this is certainly true in this case.”⁴⁰ For Claxton, learning she has contributed through her translation to the success of Courtemanche’s book in the English-speaking world, and even in other languages (as the rights sold at the Frankfurt book fair often depended on a reading of the English translation), is profoundly rewarding.

“I couldn’t imagine translating without contact with the author,” she recalls thinking, when invited to translate *Enchantment and Sorrow*. She consequently asked the publisher if Joyce Marshall, who had herself translated a number of books by Roy, and had known her well, could be her editor. Claxton speaks both fondly and respectfully of Marshall’s editing: “Joyce is very low-key,” she recalls, and “so my more colourful terms often needed to be toned down.”⁴¹ Marshall, along with her friend and mentor Philip Stratford, were Claxton’s major influences, and she generously acknowledges their

invaluable contribution to helping her learn her craft. She is also grateful to her fellow literary translators within LTAC for “so much enrichment and friendship.”⁴²

Nor is the passage home devoid of family strife. Claxton’s frustrations inevitably pinpoint relations with her publishers. Negotiating with inexperienced copy editors can be particularly trying. During her translation of *Enchantment and Sorrow*, for instance, she had decided, and Joyce Marshall had agreed, to use contractions throughout the book: “the publisher’s copy editor, an untried beginner at creative work, arbitrarily took them all out and introduced all kinds of further problems. The result was disastrous and demanded weeks of rewriting.”⁴³ When mistakes occur during the preparation of the printed copy, she is simply shattered. Coach House speeded up the publication of *French Kiss, or A Pang’s Progress* in order for the book to be available for an important colloquium Nicole Brossard was attending in Australia. Claxton was not given an opportunity to check the page proofs containing graphics. As a result, three important words, the punch line, in fact, of a comic strip in the book, were left out. Seventeen years later, Claxton’s reaction is poignant. Opening up the page, she says, her voice filled with emotion, “It breaks my heart.” In an unexpected turn of events, Claxton was contacted early in 2003 by the new Coach House Books, interested in republishing *Turn of a Pang*, *French Kiss*, and *A Book*, translated by the late Larry Shouldice, in one volume, under the title *The Blue Books*. The publisher was “anxious to put all the old errors right” and Claxton was, as she says, “overjoyed.”

Claxton lives in Montreal, with her husband, Jim McLeod, a retired dentist, with whom she enjoys playing a tough game of tennis and skiing down the slopes in the Green Mountains, especially when the snow is soft powder, or as Jim says, “une belle poudreuse.” Her friends come from both anglophone and francophone milieux, and several, like Jori Smith, from the Quebec artistic community. She is firmly rooted in her bilingual home where francophones and anglophones no longer live separate lives and the borders are more permeable. Over her thirty-year career, the spirit of her own translation passages has evolved: “I used to try to ‘get into the author’s skin,’” Claxton confides, “but couldn’t always do so and felt guilty. Now I try to hear what the writer has to say, and choose an appropriate way of relating it, but without suppressing my own voice.”⁴⁴

Paradoxically, translation has enabled her, through penning the lines of others, to discover her own voice, the words and rhythms, the colours and emotions, the sounds and riggings of the passage itself.

Notes:

1. Patricia Claxton, Interview with the author, Montreal, Oct. 30 and 31, 2002. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations of remarks by Patricia Claxton refer to this interview.
- 2 Patricia Claxton, "Culture Vulture," *Méta* 12, no. 1 (March 1967): 9.
- 3 Claxton, "Culture Vulture," p. 9.
- 4 Claxton, "Culture Vulture," pp. 9, 12.
- 5 Harry Lorin Binsse, "An Intellectual Iron Curtain?" *Montreal Star*, Sept. 22, 1962, Entertainment Section, p. 2.
6. Claxton, "Culture Vulture," p. 13.
7. Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire.
8. Patricia Claxton, "Introduction: Looking Back," in "La Traduction littéraire au Canada/ Literary Translation in Canada," *Méta* 45, no. 1 (Apr. 2000): 9. During this same period, professional recognition, including visibility on book jackets, was also an important issue for American translators. See Marilyn Gaddis-Rose, "Like the Paths Around Combray, Humanistic Translation Theories Diverge and Converge," in *Translation Horizons: Beyond the Boundaries of Translation Spectrum*, ed. M. Gaddis-Rose, Translation Perspectives 9 (Binghampton: Center for Research in Translation, State University of New York, 1996), pp. 62, 66.
9. Claxton, "Introduction: Looking Back," p. 9.
10. Patricia Claxton, translator's note, in Gabrielle Roy, *Enchantment and Sorrow: The Autobiography of Gabrielle Roy* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1987), pp. viii, ix.
11. The lawyer was Marian Hebb. She had some input with the brief, in particular, as Claxton recalls, as to how to best structure it, and was beside Claxton when the latter made the presentation: "She was in Ottawa for other clients, which meant that her fee to LTAC was modest."
12. Patricia Claxton, Brief on Copyright Introductory Remarks presented before the Subcommittee of the Standing Committee on Communications and Culture on the revision

- of Copyright on behalf of the Literary Translators' Association of Canada, June 10, 1985, p. 1. For an indication of translation and copyright issues in Europe and the United States, see Cay Dollerup, "Copyright and Translation," in *Beyond the Western Tradition*, ed. M. Gaddis-Rose, Translation Perspectives 11 (Binghamton: Center for Research in Translation, State University of New York, 2000), pp. 347-49; and Marilyn Gaddis-Rose, "The Indispensable Details of Copyright and Permissions," in *Beyond the Western Tradition*, ed. M. Gaddis-Rose, Translation Perspectives 11 (Binghamton: Center for Research in Translation, State University of New York, 2000), pp. 351-53.
13. Claxton, Brief on Copyright Introductory Remarks, p. 2.
 14. Claxton, Brief on Copyright Introductory Remarks. This latter argument was Hebb's.
 15. Claxton, Brief on Copyright Introductory Remarks, p. 5
 16. "I must finally thank Patricia Claxton who has assumed the difficult task of translating and adapting *Le Bas-Canada* for the Canadian Centenary Series," writes Ouellet. Fernand Ouellet, *Lower Canada, 1791-1840: Structural Change and Nationalism*, trans. P. Claxton (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990), p. xiv. The book, writes Morton in his preface, "has been skillfully and painstakingly adapted for the Series by the translator, Patricia Claxton." In *Ouellet, Lower Canada, 1791-1840*, p. x.
 17. Cook, "Lower Canada 1791-1840."
 18. W.L. Morton and D.G. Creighton, "The Canadian Centenary Series," in *The Beginnings of New France 1524-1663*, by Marcel Trudel, trans. P. Claxton (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), p. x.
 19. Patricia Claxton, "Enchantment and Sorrow in the Life of a Literary Translator," Interview with Mary Plaice, *Circuit*, no. 21 (June 1988): 21.
 20. Claxton, translator's note in Roy, *Enchantment and Sorrow*, p. viii.
 21. Claxton, translator's note in Roy, *Enchantment and Sorrow*, p. viii.
 22. Claxton, translator's note in Roy, *Enchantment and Sorrow*, pp. viii.
 23. Ronald Lavallée, *Tchipayuk, or the Way of the Wolf* (Vancouver: Talon Books, 1994), p. ix.
 24. Patricia Claxton, translator's note, in Gil Courtemanche, *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, trans. Patricia Claxton (Toronto, Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2003), n.p.
 25. Patricia Claxton, "Translating the Implied," unpublished manuscript, p. 2.

26. Claxton, "Translating the Implied," pp. 2, 3-4.
27. Claxton, "Translating the Implied," p. 4.
28. Patricia Claxton, translator's note, in Gabrielle Roy, *Ma chère petite soeur: Lettres à Bernadette 1943-1970* (Montreal: Boreal, 1988), p. vii.
29. Claxton, translator's note in Roy, *Ma chère petite soeur*, pp. vii, vii.
30. Claxton, translator's note in Roy, *Ma chère petite soeur*, p. vii.
31. Gabrielle Roy, *Ma chère petite soeur: Lettres à Bernadette 1943-1970*, p. 27.
32. Gabrielle Roy, *Letters to Bernadette*, trans. P. Claxton, ed. François Ricard (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1990), p. 12.
33. Roy, *Ma chère petite soeur*, p. 207.
34. Roy, *Letters to Bernadette*, p. 167.
35. Lawrence Venuti, *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 5.
36. Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, 3rd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 6.
37. The synthesis of Bhabha's position is given by Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, p. 6.
38. Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, p. 6.
39. Claxton, "Enchantment and Sorrow in the Life of a Literary Translator," p. 20.
40. Gil Courtemanche, *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali*, trans. P. Claxton (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2003), n.p.
41. Patricia Claxton, telephone interview, November 1, 2002.
42. Claxton, "Introduction: Looking Back," p. 11-12.
43. Claxton, "Enchantment and Sorrow in the Life of a Literary Translator," p. 21.
44. Claxton, "Enchantment and Sorrow in the Life of a Literary Translator," p. 20.

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