

# **Independent Publisher in the Networks of Translation**

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In Québec, translation and book publishing studies are two very dynamic research fields, two areas of knowledge that have nevertheless developed quite independently from one another. While sociologists and historians of the Québec book industry have analyzed the specificities of this industry as well as its relations to neighbouring (English Canadian) or foreign ones<sup>[1]</sup>, until recently they have paid little attention to the role of translation in the making of these relations. Conversely, whereas many texts and biographical analyses have been (and still are) produced by translation scholars working in the Canadian/Québec context<sup>[2]</sup>, the economic factors and the “factories” responsible for the making of literary translations in this context have been somewhat overlooked. The only exception, to my knowledge, is a 150-page report produced by Sherry Simon in 1989 at the request of the *Office de la langue française*, comprising an interesting appendix that presents the views of a few Montréal translators and publishers on literary translation. Yet since 1989, the landscape of the Québec book industry has substantially changed. Though it is still strongly supported by the government, for economic and political reasons (as a way to compensate for the limited market and to promote Québec culture), its shape is changing in a way that reflects the mutations that have been taking place worldwide<sup>[3]</sup> and the level of (horizontal) concentration among publishers, for example, is now comparable to that of France. Some of the most discussed expressions of these recent changes were the acquisition of Sogides by Quebecor in fall 2005—a vertical integration that was scrutinized but finally accepted by the Competition Bureau Canada—as well as the increasing power of online stores, book selling chains and wholesalers such as Costco. These upheavals put pressure on other actors and led them to react... by joining forces too. In October 2006, on the eve of Montréal’s *Salon du Livre*, four of the leading independent publishers (Boréal, Fides, Hurtubise HMH and Québec Amérique) announced a partnership of which the first concrete realization was the shared production of a common catalogue <sup>[4]</sup>. Five months later, 72 independent booksellers also decided to unite<sup>[5]</sup>. Of course, other publishers and booksellers were welcome to join these independent-but-allied-in-adversity leaders. In such a context, one can wonder how independent actors can remain or, rather, how interdependent they become and what kinds of relations underlie their new interdependencies. More importantly, from a translation studies perspective, one may question how the pressure and growing insecurity felt by independent publishers reflect on the latter’s attitude towards translation, and on the way they handle translation projects. This is the issue the research presented here wishes to explore.

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Translations are not necessarily more expensive to produce than original texts<sup>[6]</sup>. In a way, publishing a translation could appear, at first sight, as a less risky enterprise inasmuch as, upon making his/her decision, the publisher has some feedback to rely on: the reception of the original. In Canada, translation of the national canon in the two official languages is encouraged and strongly supported, so that a local publisher deciding to publish the French edition of an English Canadian literary work (or vice-versa) can, most of the time, count on a subsidy covering most or all of the translators’ fees. Yet while all the Montréal publishers I met insisted on the fact that translation was important, they also seemed to regard it, straight away, as something costly or difficult. “We would like to do more translations” is a sentence I heard regularly, implying “but... we can’t”. Thus, while translation projects may not be *in fine* more costly or complex, they are perceived as such. Three main reasons, at least, could explain this perception. First, these projects imply expenses that have to be made quite early in the publication process (paying installments as soon as rights are acquired, paying part of the translator’s fees<sup>[7]</sup>). Secondly, promoting the work of a “foreign” writer may appear as more expensive: one has to invite this author, pay travel and accommodation expenses, possibly hire interpreters if this author does not speak the target language, etc. Thirdly, the translated text, unlike the original, is a “negative” item on the “rights revenue/expenses” entry of the publisher’s balance sheet. In other words, acting as an importer, and generally holding rights on this title for his/her territory/language only, the publisher of a translation will not be able to sell other rights or licenses for that title. Finally, in the particular context of Québec, where most publishing companies are French-speaking, literary translation is generally limited to the range of titles that Parisian publishers (operating on a ten times bigger, hence much more attractive, market) have not yet discovered or are not interested in. But maybe one should not hold too many preconceptions, since, as the following case study will try to show, reality is often more complicated.

## I. On Theory, Methodology and Ethics

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This case study is part of a research programme inspired by the works of the French anthropologist Bruno Latour, a programme that consists in following, by use of an ethnographic approach, the production process of

literary translations in independent publishing houses: from negotiations over the acquisition of translation rights to the launch of the translation. Three Montréal publishers (Boréal, Fides and Les Allusifs) are participating in this research, and one translation project is analyzed in each company. Latour's works and their relevance to translation studies have already been explained in detail elsewhere (Buzelin 2004; 2005; forthcoming). A short overview of this theory was also presented in Chesterman (2006, pp. 21-23). As an introduction to this case study, I will simply recall that the decision to conduct an ethnographic study of the translation process was driven by the desire to account for the multiple actors taking part in this process and to analyze how each of them deals with his/her own set of constraints. By doing so, I hoped to highlight how editorial, publishing and textual (stylistic) decisions intertwine in a complex, yet concrete, and sometimes unpredictable way. Of course, the idea to look at how literary translations are produced behind publishers' doors was primarily motivated by the awareness that the publishing industry is in mutation, so that traditional models may lose their explanatory power and new empirical data would be needed.

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The first case study of this research, and the one presented here, was conducted at les éditions du Boréal. Founded in the early sixties, this now well-established and prosperous independent French-speaking publisher has a team of some 10 full-time employees and releases around 70 titles per year. Initially specialized in Québec literature and historical writing, Boréal began releasing French translations in the late seventies. At the time, and throughout the eighties, most of these translations were part of a collection that was imported from a French publisher. In the early nineties, it started to issue translations on a modest but more regular basis. Since then, nearly all the translations produced<sup>[8]</sup> by this publishing house have been works by English Canadian authors, generally eligible for the translation-subsidy programme of the Canada Council for the Arts, and the title followed in the scope of this study is no exception to the rule. At the same time though, through international co-publishing, mainly with French partners, Boréal has kept on publishing a growing number of foreign titles by European or American authors under its own name, titles that were initially translated and edited in France. The company is the only Canadian member of the "Alliance of Independent Publishers, for another Globalization", an international non-profit organization founded in 2002.

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Most of the study data were collected during a nine-month period (from the time translation rights were negotiated to the launch of the translation), by three methods: interviews, gathering of written materials and participant observation. The actors who happened to play a key role in the process (translators, senior editor, general director and rights manager) were interviewed on three to four occasions each, at critical times of the process. Nine other actors (chief reviser, production manager, distributor, sales representative, press officer, author's agent, Montréal and Paris-based co-agents, senior editor of the original text) also involved in this story but in a more limited way were met once, usually at the time they came into play. All these interviews were made in person, semi-structured, recorded and lasted between half an hour to an hour and a half each. To these interviews that constitute the core of the "non-written" material gathered, I must add informal discussions with some of these people and others such as booksellers and the author. I conducted all of the interviews myself, but two were performed (for practical reasons) by two collaborators, Philippe Barrot (in Paris) and Eric Plourde (in Montréal). The latter also replaced me in one instance of participant observation and assisted me in collecting data from Montréal booksellers. The written documents gathered and analyzed are the following: translation contract and license, promotional brochures, part of the correspondence between the parties, the various preliminary versions of the translation including the translators' first drafts, as well as data related to the book's reception (articles, reviews, radio comments, etc.). Participant observation consisted in being present at the following events: the meeting between the senior editor and the translators after the translation was submitted, and those between the author, the publisher, journalists and booksellers in connection with the translation's promotion.

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Taking up Latour's methodological guideline, I "followed the actors," which meant listening to their accounts of the translation project, enquiring about the difficulties they encountered or their concerns, observing and analyzing their participation, using written documents to fill in the gaps or to check the accuracy of their claims. This is how the "translation story" that follows gradually took shape. Like any story, this one does not claim to be entirely objective—but nor can the most abstract and depersonalized scientific essay. While this study was driven by the intention to understand the range of actors involved in the process and how they interacted, it also reflects, implicitly, my own relations to these people, in the sense that I collected as much data as they were willing to provide. From the onset, our exchanges were based on an explicit agreement: on the one hand, the publisher, his employees and the translators accepted to "play the game" and give me access to information; on the other hand, I committed myself to let them read the story before having it published, so that they would ensure it was not detrimental to their interests. These two conditions were quite

compelling for both parties. On the informants' side, it meant that they would agree to spend a few hours to reflect with me on their practices (something they usually have neither the time nor the inclination to do), as well as to "let go" pieces of their work or information often regarded as in-house (such as annotated manuscripts and proofs), confidential (such as contracts, figures on copy-runs or balance sheets) or personal (such as correspondence or the translators' drafts). The risk was also substantial on my side, since I exposed myself to potential censorship. I lived with the risk, keeping faith in these professionals who had been open-minded enough to engage in a study out of which they had nothing to gain and much time to lose.

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The inductive approach adopted led me to gather much more data than what is presented here. Though this essay focuses on "interactions," I obviously took care not to reveal any direct comment (whether positive or less positive) informants might have made about other people involved in the process (as the first might bring complacency and the second jeopardize their good working relationships). I tried to stick as much as possible to the facts, privileged those that directly related to my research objectives and to what I also intuitively felt to be relevant, and paid close attention to the informants' perceptions of these facts rather than to their general opinions about broader issues. The reactions encountered after presenting a first draft to five key informants were diverse. Some made laconic comments, others made more numerous and precise ones; some seemed rather disappointed or indifferent, others were more enthusiastic. But nobody asked for any substantial change. A year later, a revised and augmented version was submitted to the translators and the general director. On the whole, none of these informants/reviewers filtered the data presented and none questioned the accuracy of the story, nor the relevance of the research hypotheses that came out of it. In fact, what was initially a constraint, a prerequisite to data collection, proved a good opportunity to fine-tune my account, to trigger more discussions and to develop particular points. One thing, however, raised concern: confidentiality.

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Providing a "thick description" in Geertz's sense compromised the ability to ensure anonymity. The many details provided in my text were as many clues that could allow readers, at last local ones, to discover the identity of the actors. Though fully conscious that confidentiality could not be guaranteed, the general director insisted on not mentioning proper names for two reasons. First, in his view, this case study pointed towards realities that were representative of the making of literary translations (at least at Boréal), so that individualizing matters too much would undermine their broader significance. Secondly, and maybe more importantly, he considered that he had committed his company and employees to this research project, but not his English Canadian and French counterparts, nor the English Canadian author and the agents, who are also present in this article in a more peripheral way. As such, he felt that the safe and smartest option was to leave things implicit. The request was legitimate. It did not prevent me from reaching my research objectives. So I complied with it, hoping that the "mystery" might actually invite curious academics to consider reading this story...

## II. A Translation Story

### Seizing and negotiating opportunities in a moving world

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In 2002, the English Canadian book industry was shattered by the bankruptcy of Stoddard Publishing and General Distribution Services, one of the biggest book distributors and publishers in the country. This collapse left many authors "orphaned" and some agents almost out of business. The author of the novel under study and her agent were among them. In the aftermath of the spate of bankruptcies, the agent in question asked for a reversion of rights with regard

to the publications of the author that had been released by the bankrupt publisher and sent tip sheets about her orphaned writer to two publishers that had survived (and were less likely to go bankrupt): Penguin and Random House. Both showed interest. The author chose to join the Canadian branch of the world's largest publishing group, a property of Bertelsmann Media Worldwide: Random House Canada. Meanwhile, a young editor originating from the same city as the author, and who presented himself to me as a "huge fan" of her (but who had never met her), wanted to change employers. On a job interview with Random House, he was told that, upon joining the company, he would work on her forthcoming novel. So he accepted the position and, for several months, worked closely with her, transforming a 90-page nearly one-block manuscript into a 250-page book divided into thirty chapters. This editor, who admitted that he had made "a long-term investment in this author," spent considerable effort ("extra energy," he said) in supporting the publication:

apart from his meticulous editorial work, he shared his passion with others and took active part in the strong promotional campaign launched by the publisher. His efforts, as well as those of his colleagues, were rewarded. In the weeks following its release, the novel was highlighted by a laudatory review in the *Globe and Mail* (by an influential literary commentator also originating from the same city as the editor and the author) and was soon kicked off on the *Globe's* best-selling list.

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In Montréal, a literary translator saw this review, read the book, fell in love with it and suggested that Boréal acquire the French rights. Why Boréal? Simply because this person, who had recently translated several titles for this publisher, had just been offered a position as literary consultant or, as the general director put it, as “headhunter” of foreign authors, primarily English Canadian authors<sup>[9]</sup>. The literary consultant being bowled over by the book was a necessary condition for considering a translation. But, as the publisher explains, it was not enough:

We don't take on a book just because of a single instance of positive feedback. It can happen but it's rare. We saw, I think either the week after or at the same time, articles in the *Globe and Mail*. We saw it was on the *Globe's* best-seller list, too. While I was in Toronto, I talked about it. I conducted a few surveys with different publishers who had nothing but good things to say to me about it. In particular, I spoke about it with the publisher [at Knopf]. I didn't actually even say anything about it to her. It was she who told me, out of the blue, “If there's one book you've just got to do, this is the one.” And she wasn't all that concerned inasmuch as she publishes it in English, but she doesn't hold the rights. So I told her that we were going to make an offer. She knew the agent well. They met at the Canadian Booksellers Association and talked about it. The Montréal agent who acts as intermediary was also there. It went well because the people were talking to one another, they were in the same physical location—Toronto, at the same time—and I'd been there three days earlier, so ... a sort of ... the stars were in alignment.<sup>[10]</sup>

This quotation comes from an exchange we had in early July, after the rights were acquired. The last time I had interviewed the publisher, a month before, he had just made his offer and was still waiting for an answer from the author's agent. At that time, he was much more reserved and insecure. He had acknowledged that he had no idea whether his offer would be accepted. He was not so much afraid of making the wrong choice as of being beaten out by another publisher, as there was quite a buzz surrounding that book. Canadian literary critics praised it, it had been strongly promoted, it sold fairly well, not only in Canada but in the UK, and rights had already been acquired by Holland and Italy. What he feared most was the possibility that a French publisher make an offer; in which case, he felt he would be unable to compete.

On the Québec Market, I think there are very few publishers who are really alert, who react quickly or who really wish to translate English Canadian literature. Some do, but not that many. As far as the French competition is concerned, one has to be quick. In any case, if a French publisher turns up, usually we can't measure up. We may sometimes get a sharing of rights, but even then, it does not always work. So, we do have to take steps before the French show interest, so that the English Canadian publishers, agents or authors will think: “Okay, nobody is interested in us, but we have this well-established Québec publishing house, Boréal, who's interested. Of course, if we had Gallimard, we would take up Gallimard, but, failing that, we could do with Boréal, something of the ‘local Gallimard’.

The very decision to hire a headhunter, or rather a “title-hunter”, should be understood from that perspective: as a full awareness (on the publisher's part) of the fact that although French Canadians like to see themselves as “the natural translators” of North American literature, they are not considered as such by foreign publishers and agents, or even by English Canadian ones, for obvious market reasons. So, to be competitive, he knew that he had to follow closely what was going on on the English Canadian market, which required time and expertise, more time than he, his current employees and the members of the editorial board could offer. Both he and the translator, who had seen many titles slip through their fingers and end up in French publishing houses, knew this from experience. They shared the same feeling in that respect, and the same desire to change things.

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In this particular case, the insecurity (at least the doubts) were quite justified. Speaking with the senior editor of the original and with the author's agent, I heard that more than six months before the release of the novel, the English Canadian publisher had already started to present this title to foreign colleagues in Europe. Around the same time, copies of the final proofs had been sent to a number of Parisian publishers, none of whom had showed any interest by the time Boréal turned up. So the author's agent readily accepted the offer from Montréal, without giving up the French market, however. For a few thousand dollars and a royalty rate of 8%, the publisher was granted the license to translate, produce and publish this title in French, but only for the

North American territory. A clause, requested and negotiated by the Montréal company, stated that if within one year no French publisher were found to produce an edition of the work in Francophone Europe, “the Territory should automatically change to World.” In other words, the rights for Francophone Europe were to remain up for sale for one year. By mid-July, the contract was signed, counter-signed, and everybody went on holidays.

### **From scratch to print: the many hands behind the text**

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In early September, the translation contract was prepared. Though this title was to be translated in a team effort (by the translator/consultant and a partner, a former professional “pragmatic” translator), only one contract was issued in the name of both. The deadline was the only clause to be negotiated. At the time, the translators were completing another text due in November. However, this new title was doing very well. In fact, it had been one of the summer’s bestsellers in English Canada<sup>[11]</sup> so the general director did not want to wait too long, so as to take advantage of the buzz. The rights manager proposed the end of December as the submission deadline. The translators convinced her to make it one month later, assuring they would do their best to hand in the work before the official due date. As soon as the contract was signed, an application for a translation grant was sent to the Canada Council for the Arts. The application was successful and the grant came in six months later.

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The translators’ work dynamics was based on complementarity. One of the translators produced the first draft on his own. He acknowledged that, for him, much of the pleasure in translating—and he insisted that pleasure, rather than money or prestige, is the main incentive—comes from the process of discovering a story. As such, he refused to read the book before starting his translation, even if sometimes this strategy implied some extra work in the end. His first draft was then printed and passed to his partner, who did a bilingual revision. The annotated version came back to the first translator, some points were discussed and the corrections entered by this same translator. The resulting (third) version was reread once again by each of them and the author contacted by the translator/consultant in order to solve particular points. The final version was submitted in late December. Though this translation project was not the only professional engagement the translators had at the time, the whole process had lasted less than three months.

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Once at the publishing house, the text was read by the senior editor who did a bilingual revision. That was regular procedure, as he told me. This particular translation, however, received special treatment, for when the translation reached the editor’s desk in December, the original had acquired a new status. This bestselling summer read had become, in the fall, a national canon that had won the most prestigious awards, which had generated even more sales. What had been initially perceived as a good translation opportunity and a promising author for the Montréal house suddenly looked like a much bigger shot. So the senior editor decided to have the translation revised twice and submitted it to another reader, the chief reviser, an employee of anglophone background but fully bilingual, whose work in the house consisted of supervising the logistics of the revision process—dispatching manuscripts to freelance proofreaders, checking the corrections, etc. The chief reviser’s corrections were added onto the editor’s version, which was then sent back to the translators. A few days later, the translators met with the senior editor at the publishing house offices to discuss his suggestions/corrections. Six days after their meeting, the text was edited. On that same day, one copy was then sent to a proofreader, while a PDF file was transferred by email to the press officer who would send copies to selected journalists. A week later, the text was ready to go to press.

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The whole production process of this translation differs from a “manufacturing” one insofar as, while it involved a number of people with various kinds of expertise and functions, it did not imply compartmentalization or over-specialization of the tasks. Likewise, much was decided during informal discussions, sometimes on occasional encounters at literary cocktails or launchings. As such, most of the actors continued to view themselves as *artisans*, working on a small-scale basis. Yet though they stuck to this perception, they were also fully conscious that their practice had changed over time, so as to become more efficient. The translators, who had engaged in more than 10 different translation contracts over the last two years, recalled, with some amusement, their first translation projects—when they used to both translate the text, and compare their versions, which led to endless discussions and sometimes arguments. The way they talked about it, this period sounded like a very remote one. Likewise, the chief reviser acknowledged that over the eight years he had been working in this company, the nature of his job had considerably changed, along with a rationalization and greater organization of the production process.

When I came here, I didn't even have a computer. Everything functioned a little more chaotically. Now I receive manuscripts once they are submitted and I can follow them up until they go to the printer. This makes it easier to respect deadlines.

Also, it is worth noting that the visibility of these actors was variable and not directly related to their textual input. In other words, some had little or no visibility but a significant role. Such was the case of the chief reviser, who was introduced to me by the senior editor as the "busy bee". This employee did not attend the meeting with the translators and his corrections had been added onto the editor's annotated copy by the editor himself. Yet his bilingual revision allowed him to rectify a few fuzzy areas. In the course of an informal brainstorming, he also thought up the translation's title<sup>[12]</sup>, which was then discussed by the translators and the senior editor before being approved by the general director. This points to the fallacy of making inferences, be they positive or negative, about what we think of as the *translator's* strategic choices, forgetting that what is read is the result of a negotiation process not only in the cognitive sense, but also the most concrete and social one. I do not mean to say that comparative semiotic analyses of published translations are useless (that would be silly), but simply that how much they are revealing of a translator's identity is a function of the power this translator enjoys in relation to the client, something which can be highly variable and impossible to take for granted. How much the final printed version of a translation may actually *not* reflect translators' first choices was something the translators insisted on when we discussed their work, and their major criticism to translation theorists who criticize translations. In the case under study, one issue in particular was a recurrent object of debate: readership.

### **"Translating for Greenland, in Mid-Atlantic French"**

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Translation has traditionally been conceptualized on the basis of the *source/target* dichotomy, but this dilemma did not seem to be a major torment to the translators. It was obvious to them that they worked for the author. Their recurrent source of concern was elsewhere: in the difficult necessity of translating in a way that would make the text acceptable to local and non-local francophone readers alike. Let us recall that the publisher held translation rights for Canada. For him, the best scenario was not to acquire world rights after a year. Exporting a translation is an expensive option. It is also a delicate one if the target market is France and the product is a novel initially released a year prior (an eternity in the publishing industry). Rather, the best option was to find, as soon as possible, a French co-publisher who would agree to acquire the translation and sell it on the French market under his own name. So while the translators were working on their text in the fall, the publisher was making his way, as usual, to the Frankfurt Book Fair. He met with the author's agent to enquire about her search for a French co-publisher. Learning that no offer had yet come, he—who had decided, three months earlier, that he would not interfere at this stage and would let the agents do their work—finally decided to help move things along<sup>[13]</sup>. He gave the agent the name of a Parisian publisher and friend with whom he had already co-published several titles. He also took advantage of the fair to speak with this person and persuade him to read the novel. The translators knew that their publisher would try his chance, so they knew, from the beginning, that they had to produce a translation that he would deem exportable.

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When we discussed the difficulties they encountered, the translators often mentioned this need to meet the expectations of both their local readership, a readership they described as very linguistically sensitive, and those of Québec publishers who "are never keen on using too much Québécois". In their view, a co-edition was a leveling factor that incited them to use a more European French. In this particular case, the attempt at finding a middle ground was complicated by the text being narrated and filled with dialogues written in a rather idiomatic oral style. The translators readily acknowledged that the challenge was sometimes impossible to take up. "There are a number of words and elements of culture on which you cannot compromise", one of them said, concluding, "The best solution is probably to have two slightly different versions." Much of the senior editor's work was also influenced by this dilemma. In his view, Québec readers are very sensitive to anglicisms, which is not the case with the French who, on the other hand, "are very touchy if they find what they perceive to be a Québecism." The problem is not the regional marker per se, but the regional marker in translation since, as he added, "In translation you have to be more careful and more conservative." On the whole, his annotations on the translation reflected his attempt to meet both sets of expectations. Many of the corrections concerned either potential anglicisms or expressions that he feared European readers would not like or catch.

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On the day the translators met with the senior editor, much of the discussion focused on this question of accommodating two readerships. Shall we translate *teacher* by *professeur* or *instituteur*? *Paperboard* by *babillard* or *tableau d'affichage*? *House party* by *party*, *apéro* or *5 à 7* given that the first one is likely to be perceived as an anglicism, the second as too “Frenchy” and the third as too North American. Can we translate *He lay there curled up like a Cheesie with his blanket up around his shoulders* by *Il était couché, tout recroquevillé comme une crotte de fromage*? Or shall we say *un bâtonnet* or *bretzel* maybe, as *bretzel* is definitely more intercultural...? In the process, the dynamics was often the same: the translators gently defending their initial choices, the editor usually arguing in favor of a more European equivalent. Though there were some instances of disagreement and resignation on both parts, exchanges demonstrated on the whole a shared position—a common desire to have, in the end, the book reach the largest possible readership—and, as the following passages suggest, reflexivity.

*On translating “county road”*

T1 – “Les routes de comté”, page 75, at the bottom. We had chosen this expression because it came back all the time in X’s novel and it didn’t...

T2 – It’s used in France. We checked...

Ed – “Comté” in this sense is North American.

T1 – Of course. Of course. But (*speaking of another publisher*) they accepted it.

T2 – In Ontario, we have “cantons”...

T1 – Unless we put “les petites routes”

Ed – But even for me, “routes de comté” is not so... not so specific.

T1 – It is the only occurrence, I think.

Ed – “Sur les petites routes”? “Sur les routes de campagne” or “sur les petites routes”?

T1 – “Sur les petites routes”.

T2 – As I said, they would probably prefer “communales”, but here it doesn’t work too well.

Ed – No, it doesn’t.

T1 – “On a tellement roulé sur la communale”.

Ed – “Sur les petites routes”. That’s fine.

*On translating “You’re full of shit”*

T1 – “T’es vraiment con!” We are not really happy with this one (*editor’s suggestion*). We could say “T’es vraiment nul”.

Ed – “You’re full of shit”... “T’es vraiment nul”. Yes.

T2 – It’s just because, we already have so many things that sound a bit Frenchy.

T1 – That’s it. There is a limit.

Ed – “T’es vraiment nul”, that’s fine.

*On translating in Mid-Atlantic French*

T1 – But there’s no real Mid-Atlantic. Nobody in Québec. It doesn’t exist in Québec.

Ed – Nobody lives in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

T2 – In the end, we translate for Iceland – or the Azores.

Ed – Or Greenland.

T2 – Yes, but we can’t say in Québec “Va te faire foutre” in that context.

Ed – It might work.



T1 & T2– It depends who.

T1 – There you go.

Ed – Good. (5 seconds of silence)

What is worth noting is that for the translators as well as the senior editor, translating in what they called “Mid-Atlantic French” had become a kind of routine, an almost interiorized practice imposing its own translation norms and, as one of the translators put it, imposing a certain form of “self-censorship”. Hence, these translators had also got used to testing, occasionally, their lexical choices on *google.fr*, checking whether some expressions they spontaneously felt as idiomatic, expressions that were part of their everyday language, also existed on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. And they used to do so whether or not their publisher had already found a partner.

## Creating reception space and momentum

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The promotion of the translation was carried out by Dimedia, a Montréal-based distributor founded and owned by the general director of Boréal. The work started three months before the expected date of publication, at one of the weekly meetings between the publisher, the representatives and the press officer. On that occasion, the publisher presented the winter/spring catalogue and set out the promotional objectives. Among the numerous titles, this book (if only because of its bestseller status and prestige in English Canada) particularly stood out, so it was quickly decided that the author *should* be invited to Montréal. As the press officer explained, the author being on hand a couple of days “creates momentum”: critics and booksellers appreciate that this personality (who lives far away) has taken the trouble to come and meet them. At the same time, they recognize the encounter as a unique occasion (hence an opportunity to seize). While this will not necessarily make them like the book, it may give it a little boost by providing a teaser that prompts them to pay more attention to it and consider reading it. Finally, it is also an incentive for the press office people. It allows them to be more involved and more creative than if they only have to present the title in a glossy catalogue. And, as one informant reflected, motivating the reps is at once crucial and not simple, given that, just like journalists and booksellers, they, too, have many titles in hand.

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In early February, the author confirmed that she would come to Montréal for promotion for a couple of days, on the chosen date of release. The press office had a month to spread the buzz and organize the venue. At this stage, the pace quickened, (e)mails criss-crossed frenetically and the network of actors involved in the project expanded: within a week, about fifty booksellers received a formal invitation to a 5 à 7 cocktail-conference with the author. Exceptionally, the reception was to take place in the publishing house offices, to make things easier and friendlier. Meanwhile, the press officer conducted follow-ups among the few journalists who had already received a copy of the book (or at least the PDF file that was sent in December), sent them press kits and contacted others to arrange as many interviews as possible. In turn, the reps who had already started to introduce this title to booksellers as early as December continued touring around Québec. At the same time, the text was about to go to press. At that stage, the publisher and his collaborators had many reasons to be confident. While it had scooped the most prestigious literary prizes and had remained a bestseller throughout the year, the original had also made its way internationally. Besides Holland and Italy, it had sold for other countries (China, Norway and Germany) and FilmFour UK had taken an option for a movie adaptation. Last, but not least, a French co-editor (the one who had been suggested to the agent by the Montréal publisher) had finally turned up and decided to acquire translation rights for francophone Europe. These “little details” were as many assets that would help to arouse interest. As “the stars seemed to be [still] in alignment”, the head of distribution revised his objectives: the initial 2500-copy print run was, at the last minute, raised to 3300.

21

On the eve of the author’s arrival, many journalists had responded and were booked for interviews<sup>[14]</sup>. The feedback from the reps was also good. Yet everybody refrained from making any optimistic prediction. They knew only too well that the success of a promotional campaign also depends on a rather unpredictable human factor. Some authors like being interviewed, others resent it or, as the press officer summed it up: “some are good at promoting their work and some are not”. What worried them most, however, had little to do with the author’s personality, but related to a nationally sensitive issue: this Canadian author did not speak French. And that was a problem. “That’s *the* problem” were the general director’s precise words during the brief conversation we had a couple of days before the release. *The* problem he referred to was the fact that no

French-speaking author meant no TV or radio interviews. Besides, the fact that everything would have to be in English, or involve some kind of interpretation by a third party, might prevent open and friendly communication with the author. Given Québec's sociolinguistic climate, the author's ignorance of French could even prove a source of friction. The risk could be felt at the start of the conference with the booksellers when, after a short introduction (in French) explaining that the author would speak in English, the general director asked if anybody wanted her speech to be translated. A single but firm "Oui, s'il vous plaît" came from the audience and it felt to me as if a frozen wind had suddenly swept over the room. At that point, the general director swiftly decided to take over the role of interpreter, a function that had been assigned (a few minutes before, in the corridor) to a sales representative. He started his performance by cheerfully warning his audience that he was "not a pro at literal translation" and went ahead producing free but enthusiastic adaptations of the author's answers that made the (mostly bilingual) audience smile. Apart from maintaining control over the situation and helping to break the ice, this improvised interpretation also provided him with many occasions to infuse cultural and literary comments suggesting connections between this book and the local canon, comments that initiated a process of domestication that would continue throughout the critics' commentaries.

22

Though the timetable of the author's two-day trip was constantly updated, the whole promotional campaign had gone fine—at least as far as I could see on the spot<sup>[15]</sup> and speculate from the warm emails exchanged afterwards. Following its release, the book was extensively reviewed in the main newspapers—appearing generally on the front page of the literary supplements—and magazines. Two influential national-radio commentators also discussed it on popular programmes. All these reviews were extremely laudatory. Some even praised something not usually mentioned—the quality of the translation (though one columnist criticized a few lexical choices that were too European to his taste). Renaud-Bray Champigny (the biggest retailer owning 26 stores throughout Québec) had attached a *Coup de Coeur* ("Our choice") sticker to this title and given it prime positioning. This looked like a success story. And yet a few months later, a feeling of disappointment could be sensed among those who had been part of it. Despite the promotional efforts and in spite of the original's success and the positive critical reception of the translation, the results were not up to expectations. Most of the reviews had appeared at the same time and while sales had been good for the first couple of weeks, they had quickly slowed down—something I saw as a rather bad sign, recalling the following statement the publisher had made months earlier, in early September, at the start of the literary season:

Today, a book's reception takes place very quickly. If the reception is strong, if it's good, we know within two weeks of the launch. Often, if it's not that strong, the book may get a second chance. But if a month, a month and a half after it comes out, it still hasn't caught on, it's rare that it will get that second chance.

Speaking about this particular title, he took a different view of things. A few months after the release, he admitted that it had not caught on the way he had hoped. At that time, he estimated that the book would neither lose nor make much money for him. But he added, in the same breath, that "literature is a slow kind of food", so "one (would) have to wait and see"—which I did.

## One year later

23

A few months after the translation's launch, the paperback edition of the original took its place in English-language bookstores, along with two titles from the author's backlist. Later in the year, the original novel won the Canadian Booksellers Association Libris prize for the year's best novel<sup>[16]</sup>. It also won a very popular annual literary contest broadcast on the national radio. In the weeks following this contest, the book came back on the best-selling list of *amazon.ca*. At Chapters bookstore in downtown Montréal, some 60 copies were on display in a row on the very first bookshelves past the ground-floor main entrance. These copies were jammed between the *Da Vinci Code* and *Geisha*. Things were also bright on the international side. Rights were sold in several more countries (Brazil, Spain, Denmark and Portugal) and the author continued promoting the book worldwide, from Australia to Germany. The German edition—produced with the financial support of the Canada Council for the Arts, through the "international translation" programme—was launched during the Frankfurt Book Fair the same year. For that occasion, the English Canadian publisher invited the novel's various foreign publishers to a private after-dinner reception in the author's honor, a reception the Montréal publisher for our translation did not miss.

24

On the whole, throughout the second year following its release, the original novel remained a "#1 Canadian bestseller" and kept on being reprinted. By that year end, about 89,000 hardcopies were sold, more than 150,000 paperbacks were in print, and the return rate for the book was, to take the agent's words, "simply

amazing”. Unfortunately, this continuous success did not have much impact on the reception of our translation. A year after its publication, the latter had sold to no more than 2,000 copies and had almost entirely disappeared from most Québec bookstores<sup>[17]</sup>. In terms of return, this publication had just reached the breakeven point, generating (so far) a slight profit of \$1,000. This means that without the translation grant from the Canada Council for the Arts (covering 75% of the translators’ fees), without the additional grant of the Canada Council in support of the translation’s promotion (covering around 20% of promotional costs, costs that were actually higher than the translators’ fees) and without a French co-publisher (with whom the fixed costs relating to the text editing and composition were shared), it would clearly have been produced at a loss. The publisher did not seem too bothered by this, though, maybe because he knew that, having sold about two thirds of the copy-run within a year, he would eventually clear his stock in the long run. Also, while he did not plan to publish any of the books from the author’s backlist, preferring to wait for the next new offering, he also concluded that, although the title might not have generated much financial profit (so far), it *had* created substantial symbolic capital:

What’s important for a publisher is publishing what he likes and having it received internationally as a good book. If I see a book by this author published in Slovenia or in Spain, I know it’s a publisher I’ll respect. From a financial standpoint, there’s been no happy surprise—at least no immediate one—but it hasn’t been a catastrophe, either. It’s even a bit better than usual. And the future will tell all. A book’s fate is often decided over the long run—the very long run.

Hence, *a story to be continued*... In fact, as it was disappearing from Québec bookstores, this translation was given a second lease on life. A year and a month after its publication in Québec, it was released in Paris, under the co-publisher’s name<sup>[18]</sup>. Around the same time, in London (UK) a third (and likely final) draft of the screenplay was completed, so the shooting was to go ahead. Given that movies usually enjoy more visibility than books—and that an award-winning British director is overseeing this adaptation—this, too, could well change our translation’s fate in the long run. As its publisher would wisely say: “The future will tell all.”

25

Yet so far, this case study shows us how a title with an originally fast return became one with a much s/lower return in translation—or, to use the Montréal publisher’s gastronomic metaphor: how “fast food” was changed into “slow food”. Of course, all the actors involved in producing this text and its French translation would probably refuse to consider the original as “fast-food literature”. But categories are not always as clear-cut as one would like them to be. If the original did represent a long-term investment on the part of both the individuals and the company involved (Random House Canada), it had also gone into its 9<sup>th</sup> printing within six months following its release and remained on the best-seller shelves of Canadian bookstores for almost two years, flirting with the very titles that the Montréal publisher would look down upon, with undisguised contempt, as sad examples of fast food, i.e. bad, gross, cheap, insipid, processed non-literature. What is relevant is not so much to determine whether the original rated as either “fast food” or “slow food”, but, rather, to appreciate how it succeeded in making its way, and probably could only have gone such a long way, by transcending this dichotomy. This statement may sound obvious, though it takes on another meaning considering that Random House’s owner, Bertelsmann Media Worldwide, imposes on each of its publishing companies an annual profit rate of at least 15% (Mollier, 2006). If such is the rule, then it leaves very little space left for “slow-moving” books.

### III. Making translations on a “cooperate to compete” basis

26

This case study is not about Bible translation, nor that of a classic, nor that of a complicated academic or illustrated book. It was neither a multimedia nor a multinational translation project. On the contrary, it looked *a priori* like a rather “local” and “simple” one, involving a contemporary 250-page English Canadian novel translated by an English/French Canadian team for a Montréal publisher. This team felt that, in itself, the text “had not raised major translation problems”—compared to other texts they had recently translated. “That may be disappointing or problematic to your research,” concluded one of these translators, in a half-concerned, half-amused tone. Maybe... and maybe not.

27

Let us sum up here. This project was suggested to the publisher by the above translator who, around the same time, was offered a position as literary consultant; the French rights for the North-American territory were negotiated with the author’s agent through a Montréal agent; the translation was signed by two persons who acted as a single entity in legal terms; the translation was revised twice: by the senior editor and his

closest colleague, the chief reviser; the rights for francophone Europe were later sold to a Parisian publishing house who acquired the translation produced in Montréal. As for the reception, the original text remained a bestseller for two years in English Canada, where it sold to more than 200,000 copies while in Québec it sold to no more than 2,000 copies and generated almost no financial profit (though the translation was subsidized and the production costs shared with the French co-publisher). Well, at least this case study illustrated to what extent a bestseller in one language may not be one in another language, no matter how close or even intertwined the reception contexts. Trying to find ready-made explanations for this reception gap, one could be tempted to invoke the so-called “two solitudes”. Most translations produced by Boréal are English Canadian titles. With this bestselling novel, the publisher had only reached the breakeven point (so far) and found that it was “a bit better than usual.” Many of the informants met mentioned the difficulty of promoting English Canadian literature in Québec, as if there were some kind of resistance or block—a block they were reluctant to discuss. The publisher’s interpretation was more pragmatic: “Ah yes, but there are far more of them ... 26 million, I think”. The English Canadian readership is surely bigger than the French Canadian one, but only four times bigger—not a hundred times so. Things were surely more complicated, but getting into the ins and outs of reception was not on my agenda.

28

In undertaking this study, I expected to learn more about the interactions that give shape to a translation, about the role played by editors, revisers and publishers, about the relation between the choices made by translators/editors (when they translate/edit) and those taken by publishers (when they meet their foreign homologues in book fairs). What I had not anticipated, though, was to meet so many people, more precisely so many *co-s*, along the way: co-agents, co-translator, co-reviser (in a way), co-publisher... as if all the roles were duplicated and everyone was looking for a partner to share something with. Now, how (a)typical or anecdotal is that? One cannot be too cautious before jumping to conclusions. As Gideon Toury wisely recalls, “We [translation scholars] should be prepared for a situation where there is little which is universal and even less which is unique” (2006, p. 65). But surely, the recurrence of these “co-s” in what seemed initially to be a pretty ordinary translation project must be revealing of something. The question is: revealing of what? How much of this story is representative of Boréal’s way of doing things? Of the specificities of independent publishing? Of the position of Montréal and Québec on the world literary map? Or simply of the challenges of translating fiction in an increasingly saturated and market-driven literary world? The question of “what and how much could be learnt from this case study” was in the back of my mind throughout the process of data collection and analysis. So during the second year of the research programme—once the translation was published—I gradually shifted the viewpoint to the object, moving from bottom to top. Little by little, I reintegrated this story in view of the recent history of Boréal, compared this story with the other cases that were being documented with the two other Montréal publishers participating in this research, confronted the anecdotes I collected with more general data about the Québec book industry. I also tried as much as possible to continue exchanging views with these publishers, their editors and their translators. The research is still in progress and the reflection never complete, but the work done so far allows me, at least, to spell out a few research questions and hypotheses that could be worth investigating as part of what Chesterman presented as “a sociology of the translation process” (2006, p. 23).

### **On the role of literary agents**

29

The first thing—in the chronological sense—that attracted my attention was the role played by literary agents in allocating translation rights. The rights manager at Boréal acknowledged that the development of literary agent networks over the past 15 years had led to tougher negotiations, extending such negotiating beyond the value of installments and royalties to include the true size of the territory in question (as was the case here) and eventually the duration of the translation-rights license. Agents, however, do not constitute an homogenous whole. Boréal’s general director differentiated between two types. The first type, which was in his view an American invention dating from after World War II, refers to those who take in charge an author’s career, work closely with her/him, even participate sometimes in the making of the texts, taking on part of what was “traditionally” the publisher’s role. The second type of agents, much more numerous, act more as a middlemen selling a knowledge of a particular local market; these agents usually work for other agents who can themselves be sub-agents of other entities. As he explained, these networks can be fuzzy and complex, which is another element that makes the negotiation processes more complex.

30

The development of such networks is only quite recent, which may explain why translation scholars have so far paid scant attention to them. Yet literary agents are interesting, indeed, intriguing actors simply because

they are the most accomplished embodiment of the hybridity (and impurity) of literary and publishing practices. Unlike all other actors—publishers, authors and even literary translators and booksellers—these intermediaries, at least the second type, assume a function in which prestige is not self-evident. Worse, they seem to be looked upon with near contempt, as if they belonged to a lower and corrupted class, responsible for all the publishing industry’s evils. Interestingly, in August 2006, Boréal’s general director was invited, as a keynote speaker, to a professional summer school on publishing hosted by UBC. On the website, the issues that were to be covered in his conference entitled “Ending the two solitudes” were spelt out in the following point forms:

- What makes a book suitable to go from French to English (and vice-versa)
- The importance of establishing editorial bridges
- Differences in translating fiction and non-fiction
- Problems with agents
- The different roles translators play
- How to develop a partnership with a French-language publisher”<sup>[19]</sup>

Breaking solitudes, establishing bridges, finding partners, inviting translators to join us in the search for good translation projects... this is what “we” try to do: but agents *are* a central problem<sup>[20]</sup>. The way these agents are positioned at the Frankfurt Book Fair is quite revealing of their economic and symbolic status. While *all* the publishers’ stands and halls try to distinguish themselves (even the most modest ones, be it only by displaying a small poster or a book) and, to some extent, to choose their place according to their affinities, agents are jammed in one single hall, ranked in alphabetical order on endless lines of Formica-like identical tables. While Frankfurter Buchmesse authorities like the idea of making their fair more “glamorous”, “reflecting new trends in the book publishing industry”<sup>[21]</sup>, this hall, the size of which has apparently kept on increasing over the years, looked to me, as I first walked through it in October 2006, like a strange crossbred between a stock-exchange and a sweatshop. Though quite a lot has been written about the publisher’s, author’s and even translator’s habitus, it would be interesting to know more about these “new” intermediaries. More particularly with respect to translation studies, one should explore what part these agents play in the setting of what Toury calls preliminary norms, those norms that regulate the selection of books to be translated.

31

These intermediaries clearly exert an influence on the terms under which translation licenses are negotiated and, consequently, on the balance of power between various publishers and between literary fields. But whenever a publisher decides to invest in a foreign title, he/she has, to a certain extent, already made the most important step: that of selecting the book as worthy of being translated. The part played by literary agents in this initial decision-making process is certainly not trivial, but it *is* less clear and deserves further investigation. In that matter, one could expect to observe differences between the two types of agents. Those met in the scope of this research mainly belonged to the second type; i.e. acted as middlemen. Whether in Vancouver, Montréal, Toronto, Frankfurt or Paris, they were always “where the action was”, omnipresent in negotiations. Yet their influence upon the publishers’ inclination toward the title under study was not that obvious. It seemed to be, rather, following one-on-one informal meetings with their homologues that these publishers (both the Montréal one and the Paris one) had taken the first critical decision: that of making an offer. The English Canadian publisher talking enthusiastically about the original novel to her Montréal homologue and friend on the occasion of an informal supper seemed to have played an important part in convincing the latter to make the first step towards acquiring this title. This same Montréal publisher meeting his French homologue (and friend) at the Frankfurt Book Fair four months later had succeeded in convincing this friend to have the novel read and to consider a co-publication. And the story suggests that this “friendly advice” may have had more impact than the numerous telephone calls and copies the Paris agent had kept sending to other local publishers. Though regularly criticized by publishers (when these persons act as importers of literature), literary agents have become a precious, nearly indispensable resource for these same publishers when it comes to selling translation rights. One may thus wonder—and this could be a first research hypothesis—whether these actors and their networks are not about to become a new centre of power and how they affect publishers’ roles and leeway both in the acquisition of foreign titles and in the sale of translation licenses for “in-house” authors.

## On international co-edition publishing

32

The expansion of international literary agencies encourages alliances between publishers. Co-edition publication is one result of this phenomenon. Like the “literary agent”, “co-edition” is an umbrella term that may refer, very broadly, to a situation where two publishers work together on a particular title/project. Hence, it

can include many different scenarios, from a close co-production involving the true sharing of risks, costs and rights by two or more publishers, to the sale of a translation license for a particular territory, involving the sale of the translated text, with or without modifications. Co-edition publication has various advantages for those who undertake it. First, it allows for splitting production costs. Hence, it can be used as a *strategy* enabling small publishers (or established publishers working on small markets or with minor languages) to conduct translation projects they would otherwise not dare undertake (because they would not be eligible for a subsidy, or the project are too expensive to produce). For Québec publishers, market sharing (leading potentially to a co-edition) is also quite often a *condition* for being associated with interesting projects that would otherwise go to the competition (more often than not, and as was the case here, French publishers operating on a much larger market, hence publishers who may look more attractive to the author's agent). Though Québec's relation to France is unique, similar types of partnerships can take place between other territories sharing the same language, such as Commonwealth countries as well as Spanish or Portuguese ones. Finally, in some cases, when titles are released at the same time in different markets, co-edition may be a way of creating momentum and attracting more attention to this title.

33

So co-edition may not apply to *all* titles, but it is certainly *not* anecdotal either. In 2005, Boréal, which had maintained an average of six to nine translations per year for the past decade, released 19 new foreign titles. Seven of these were co-edited with various French publishers<sup>[22]</sup>. This rather unexpectedly high figure reflects, partly, the company's recent participation in *The Myths Series*, an ambitious co-publishing project involving some 33 publishers worldwide, including two French-language ones: Boréal and Flammarion, who share the costs and distribution of the French editions. This series, the first titles of which were launched with great pomp during the Frankfurt Book Fair in October 2005, was initiated by Canongate, the British publisher who, a couple of years before, had acquired and sold under his own name, on his domestic market, the English translation of Boréal's bestselling title (*Un dimanche à la piscine Kigali* by Gil Courtemanche), a translation initially produced and released by Random House Canada with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts. One may wonder whether the translator, Patricia Claxton, and her editors at Knopf felt a similar pressure to write in an invented "Mid-Atlantic" language as our translators did.

34

The reason why co-publishing appeared as a central issue in this case study partly relates to the trajectory of Boréal's general director<sup>[23]</sup>. It also reflects the position of the Québec literary market on the international scene: 1) its limited size, hence the necessity to find other outlets abroad; 2) its asymmetric (necessary but difficult) relation to the French literary field often regarded both as an unfair competitor and a "natural" ally in the search for outlets. In Québec, some state that co-edition publishing is expanding (Vaugeois, 2002) while others argue that such expansion is still all too rare (Godbout, 2005). In all cases, though, if we look at the catalogues of the main literary publishers, this strategy appears to be a significant driving force with respect to increasing the number of literary translations published in Québec<sup>[24]</sup>. So it is probably no coincidence that in 2006, the *Association nationale des éditeurs de livres* (ANEL) decided to organize, for the first time, a professional workshop on the subject. Co-publishing is a cost/market sharing strategy that is particularly necessary for the publishers operating on small markets and/or those engaging in expensive projects. According to Dollerup and Orel-Kos, "in Western countries where minor languages are spoken, the number of illustrated books [more particularly children's books] produced in international cooperation is steadily increasing" (2001, p. 87). In a study conducted on the French market—a market than cannot be regarded as particularly weak nor marginal—Christian Robin (2006) concluded that as far as illustrated or practical books are concerned, international co-edition or co-production has now become the norm. And *The Myths* project suggests that this publication pattern could also apply, occasionally, to more "highbrow" literature.

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Co-edition or co-printing exist independently from translation, but when applied to translations that are construed as derivative products, more than any other subject to manipulation, it raises a number of questions. Who will translate (France or Québec)? How and for how much will the translation be sold to the co-editor? What authority do translators have over the co-editor's manipulations? How does co-edition affect the selection process, the nature and pace of the publication process as well as translation strategies? As this case revealed, the need to produce one text for two markets simultaneously had a very concrete impact on stylistic choices. In this particular story, the tension and negotiations between the translators and their editor seemed to be easily overcome by shared positions and complicity. Yet this rather harmonious image should not be generalized. When we talked about this issue in more general terms, beyond this case study, the translators insisted that the negotiation process did not always go as smoothly. With other publishers, they often had to fight for their views and admitted they were not always successful in doing so. So, with time, they had tried to consider these issues with a degree of detachment or at least had learned to choose their battles.

As they develop, these forms of international (unilingual) cooperation will compel translation scholars to rethink, or at least fine-tune, their theoretical models, in particular those designed to account for the formation of *operational norms*. One may argue that French translations produced in Québec are only a very small drop in the ocean of French translations circulating in the world literary market. Indeed, the number of titles translated by Québec publishers is still small and, as such, most informants met during this research—publishers, translators and revisers—felt that they had to comply with a norm that was still by and large imposed by Paris. But considering the recent history of literary translation in Québec, there are tangible signs of change. And, as this case study reveals, translators and publishers (more rarely authors) take active part in these changes. As different as their habitus and ambitions might be, these actors share a common desire to alter traditional patterns and to make a place for themselves. About twenty years ago, probably no Parisian publisher would have even had the idea of acquiring a literary translation made in Québec. Nowadays, most established literary publishers have succeeded in concluding some form of partnership with their French homologues. And, more importantly, they are gradually more involved in the making of these translations. So further case studies may be undertaken in order to determine whether the type of compromise observed here is a common one. Here, a corpus-based analysis of translations combined with more ethnographic data on the perceptions of other Québec translators, editors and publishers (as well as those of their foreign partners), could be extremely useful in trying to address the following question (that could constitute another working hypothesis): to what extent do international partnerships, such as those developed by Québec and French publishers, impede the formation of translation norms? As literary markets seem to show some signs of interest towards linguistic and cultural diversity, and to the so-called “world literature”—an expression usually associated with the production of authors originating from formerly colonized countries—, are readers bound to discover these “new” literatures in translations that will no longer be “ethnocentric” but, on the contrary, written in the most “universal” French possible, translations designed for Francophony at large? Is co-edition a factor of linguistic diversity/hybridity or one of homogenization in translation? What is the pattern underlying Québec/France co-edition relations? To what extent does this pattern subvert or reproduce former power relationships? Is this pattern different from or similar to that prevailing among Commonwealth countries, Portuguese or Spanish speaking ones? To what extent are the power relations underlying these alliances informed by international political history or demography? So far, the discussion relates to unilingual international projects, but another set of questions would arise when studying multilingual ones.

### On co-translation

The third and final point that was peculiar about this case study is collective translation. Once again, this practice has received little attention and could be regarded as marginal. In fact, when we discussed this issue, the translators did seem to regard this work-in-team pattern as rather unusual. But is it really atypical in nature? Half of the translations published by Boréal in 2005 were produced in tandem. Also, of the three translation projects tracked in Montréal, the first was a translation produced by two partners, the second was an essay whose translation had been split among three persons, and the third was another novel translated by two friends. These cases involve three different publishers and three different teams and, in all three publishing houses, this configuration was far from exceptional. In two of the three cases, the idea to associate came from the translators themselves. In such cases, the translators always acted as a single entity in relation to the publisher. As Boréal’s general director explained: “I don’t want to know who does what, how they share the work or the contract. On the contrary, what’s important to me is to deal with one and the same person”. Hence, in all instances of collective translations initiated by translators, whether at Boréal or elsewhere, one of the members of the team is responsible for all the “public” relations or, as one translator put it, “after-sale service” with the publishing house. The motivations underlying this sharing of the work are complex. Translation is often regarded as a solitary activity and translators as rather subservient (Simeoni, 1997), even sometimes insecure professionals. The possibility to break loneliness, to communicate one’s enthusiasm about a book, to share responsibilities (hence carrying less on one’s back) was often mentioned by the informants I met. In the case under study, the translators also acknowledged that working together was more pleasant and reassuring. But they also added that, given the deadlines, they thought it would be quite difficult, nearly impossible, to work on one’s own:

More and more, publishers seem to be in a hurry, for different reasons. If you had three years to do everything, you could put aside your own work and come back to it with a completely fresh pair of eyes.

But since it doesn't work that way, well, when he has finished the first draft, I read it and, because it's all new to me, I can be very severe and very detached.

In their view, working together was a way of "polishing" the translation, of achieving better standards without extending deadlines. As such, it also allowed these translators to remain highly competitive (with regards to other translators working on their own) and attractive (to publishers). At least that is what one would be tempted to conclude by considering the number of offers these translators have received in the last three years.

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Collective translation projects initiated by publishers are more obviously aimed at reducing production deadlines by splitting up the text among various translators. In such cases, each translator has a contract in his/her name, works on his/her own and may not even have any direct contact with the other members of the "team". Though this configuration makes the reviser's and project coordinator's tasks far more complex and delicate, it has one advantage—beyond time saving—that an editor summed up as follows: "if a translator does not work properly, then the "damage" is more limited than if this person had been entrusted with the translation of the whole text". From that perspective, translation-sharing appears as a way of distributing, managing and controlling the risks of "translation failure" in an environment where publication deadlines are extremely tight. The various publishers I met admitted what most ordinary readers would think: there are too many books on the shelves for too short a period (the shelf-life of books in North America is about three months). These same publishers would also complain about how the Frankfurt Book Fair has gradually become a too big and purely commercial fair, with little literary soul. But none of these independent publishers seem willing or capable to stop the process. Rather, they try to go with the flow: keeping up a breathtaking publication rhythm, without extending costs nor sacrificing quality and originality, since originality and quality are often their trademark. As such, co-translation should not be dismissed as a marginal phenomenon but, on the contrary, ought to be considered as an emerging, or at least *potentially* emerging one that would no longer apply to ambitious translation projects alone (as has traditionally been the case), but also to more mundane and ordinary ones. At least, that would be another hypothesis to work on. And, again, this type of work sharing raises a number of questions: what are the legal and financial implications of it? How could such configurations affect the shape of the process and that of the final product? Exploring more closely these atypical scenarios—their motivation, their nature and their outcome—might tell us a lot about the literary translator's habitus as well as the power relations between these translators, their revisers and the publishers.

#### IV. Conclusion

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Inspired by recent post-colonial and cultural approaches in translation studies, I expected this research to highlight to what extent the translation process is a locus of tension, negotiation, confrontation or even conflict. The picture that emerged from this first case study is more nuanced. What was most striking and recurrent about this translation story had less to do with conflicts or confrontations, than cooperation, at all levels of the process. This work-in-team pattern should not be idealized however, nor understood in a complacent way. Underlined by (political and economic) power as much as affection relationships, it did not appear at all as a panacea, and did not seem to be experienced as such, but looked rather like a realistic condition necessary for survival or growth (depending on one's position and ambition) in a increasingly demanding work environment.

40

The various hypotheses that are coming out of this research—with respect to co-edition publishing, collective translation, the role of literary agents, the importance, difficulty and costs of promoting a translation, particularly if the text is a fictional one—are different manifestations of the same reality: far from waiting for the foreign, literary markets are saturated, and there does not seem to be many "gaps to fill" to take up Toury's words (Toury, 1995, p. 27). To find its place, each new title must compete with all the others on the market, not to mention other products of the cultural industry; and the game is all the tougher when the publisher is a small one, the book written by a "foreign" and unknown writer, the content fictional rather than factual, the local audience both marginal in number and mainstream in terms of language (compelling publishers to compete with other more powerful industries). So the key actors involved in this book's production have to be all the more dedicated, creative and cunning: they have to take full advantage of the structural "comparative advantages" they hold<sup>[25]</sup> and use these advantages as a way to convince others to join them in their projects,



hence reducing the risks or costs they involve, while consolidating their position in the networks of literary translation.

41

As I tried to show in this case study, this search for partners and the redistribution of roles it entails make the process of publication and translation much more complex than traditional translation models—of the kind suggested by functionalist or skopos theories—have led us to believe, for two main reasons at least. First it compels each of these actors to deal with new sets of questions and make further compromises. Secondly, it tends to blur the boundaries of each actor's role (and maybe makes the habitus of this actor more complex to define): the translator becoming a "headhunter" takes on part of the workload of the senior editor; the publisher is also head of distribution; the agent regarded as a "problem" becomes an ally (and takes on part of the publisher's role) in the search for a French co-editor; this French publisher, regarded as a potential competitor in the rush for rights acquisition, later becomes a partner with whom translation costs will be shared, etc. Beyond the actors' identities, strategies such as international co-edition, which are nothing new to publishers but seem to be definitely on the increase, also tend to blur the boundaries of more abstract constituencies, such as literary "fields." Now one may argue that boundaries have always been fuzzy, but it seems fair to assume that this fuzziness, from its underlying continuous movements to its ensuing hybridity, is a prevailing feature of our time, maybe a condition for living in it, a condition that makes any attempt at drawing general predictions or establishing norms, perhaps not impossible, but at least more difficult than ever.

42

One can still look at literary translation, though, in a functionalist way, as a practice aimed at "filling in gaps". In Canada at least, literary translation is often thought of (and institutionally promoted) as a way of "breaking the two solitudes", hence of filling some kind of cultural gap between the French and the English sides of the country. The same applies, though to a lesser extent, to Europe, where recent sources of funding for literary translation, such as the "Culture 2000" programme, aim at encouraging literary exchanges within the European community. From a more personalized viewpoint, translation is also a way of generating symbolic capital for those who undertake it (Casanova, 2002)—translators as much as publishers. "If I see a book by this author published in Slovenia or in Spain, I know it's a publisher I'll respect" had commented the general director of Boréal, "and vice versa", one may add. On a less symbolic level, translation is essential for any publisher who wishes to get a space (however small) on the world literary market. It requires as much as it helps to "build editorial bridges" and to "find partners", hence to strengthen one's position. So it is a risk that remains worth taking.

43

Surprisingly, the number of translations produced by the three publishing houses that were part of this research programme did not decrease, but increased, and in some cases quite drastically, over the past ten years. And more interestingly, many of these texts were not essays or biographies, but fiction—one of the most difficult genres to promote. This suggests that, at least in the short run, the insecurity felt by independent publishing houses does not lead to domestic withdrawal. So, at this stage, the question that needs to be addressed may not be so much *why* publishers do/will keep on producing translations—functionalist and Bourdieu's theories have already provided convincing answers to that—but rather *how* they manage to do it, and to play the game well: how do they go about spotting promising titles, to save cost and time, to increase outlets... and basically to remain competitive?

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Now there will not be any quick answer to this question. Just like there are many types of translation practices, there are many types of publishing ones in terms of genre (fiction vs. factual), structure (independent houses vs. integrated ones), target audience (children, students or adults), format (illustrated vs. non-illustrated), etc. Even if boundaries are not clear-cut, those categories remain useful. Tracing the genesis of a specific translation project hosted by Boréal gave me the opportunity to unveil, in a very localized way, some of the strategies an independent publisher and his collaborators may use in producing a translation. Having just completed data collection with the two other companies that are part of this research programme, Fides and Les Allusifs, it is now clear that these strategies were neither exclusive to Boréal, nor the only possible ones.

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## Notes

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- [1] See in particular works by Yvan Lamonde, Michel Lacroix, Jacques Michon, Josée Vincent and their research teams for the sociology and history of literature in Québec; Marc Dubé (2001) and the report from the *Observatoire de la culture et des communications du Québec* (2004) for economic analyses.
- [2] See in particular works by Jean Delisle, Jane Koustas, Sherry Simon & David Homel, Gillian Lane-Mercier, Louise Ladouceur, Agnès Whitfield, Patricia Godbout and Catherine Leclerc.
- [3] These changes in the publishing industry have been thoroughly documented and analyzed by Jean-Yves Mollier and the World Observatory of Contemporary Publishing. André Schiffrin (1999, 2005) has provided a more subjective and less detailed yet insightful analysis focusing on the American and French industries.
- [4] *Le Devoir*, 31 octobre 2006.
- [5] *Le Devoir*, 23 février 2007.
- [6] In literary genres involving high production costs such as practical, art or children's illustrated books, publishing a translation may actually be much less costly than producing an original text that would involve several days of shooting, hiring of illustrators, etc. As far as usually non-illustrated genres are concerned (fiction, essays, biographies), it all depends on the status and visibility of the author, the nature of his/her contract with the publisher and that of the work, his/her rhythm of production, etc. So generalizations in that respect are difficult to make.
- [7] If a translation is to be subsidized, the check from the Canada Council for the Arts will usually be sent several months after the translation contract is signed, hence after the first installment is paid to the translators. Interestingly, the Council changed its guidelines in 2007 so as to allow more flexibility to the publishers applying for this program.
- [8] By which I mean home-made translations, rather than acquired from a French publisher and sold under Boréal's name.
- [9] With this new position, the translator/consultant would have the possibility of translating books she liked in the first place, likely receiving a percentage from the sales (something not included in the translation contract). On the other hand, the publisher would get the consultant's exclusive services—i.e. the consultant would no longer suggest translation projects to competitors.
- [10] Interviews with the employees of Boréal and Dimedia, with the translators, as well as with French-speaking agents and booksellers were performed in French, transcribed and later translated into English by Peter Vranckx. Interviews with the author, her agent, her editor and English booksellers were performed in English.
- [11] Two months after release, Indigo Chief Executive Heather Reisman had elected this title as one of her prize "picks." From that moment, the book received prime positioning in the biggest stores nationwide.
- [12] This was, however, in his opinion, exceptional.
- [13] The feedback I received around the same time from the Paris-based co-agent was not good. This agent, who had had the title in hand for months, was still waiting for a positive reply. According to some of the answers she had received, the subject of this book was regarded as not topical, or it was *déjà vu* or, as she added, reading aloud the latest answer she had received from a publishing house: "It had not impressed those who work with critics and booksellers, and this is very important." The agent was even more pessimistic as she felt that French publishers preferred to buy world translation rights and were often suspicious about made-in-Québec translations.
- [14] The exception was an influential journalist to whom a one-on-one interview had been offered, but who had failed to reply, compelling the general director to make a last-minute phone call to the head of the newspaper in order to make an alternative arrangement.
- [15]

Though I attended the meeting with booksellers as well as the breakfast with the journalists, I was not present at the one-on-one interviews.

[16] Its editor and the publicist were both short-listed as editor/publicist of the year.

[17] When I asked for the translation, most of the French-language independent booksellers I spoke to had a spark of recognition in their eyes: "Ah, yes, that sounds familiar. I think I remember that title". Of the 20 independent bookstores contacted, only five still had a single copy on shelves. Across its network of 26 stores, Renaud-Bray had sold 484 copies since publication and kept eight copies in circulation. Across its 15 stores, Archambault had six copies on the shelves. These two chains held more copies of the original than of the translation. All the French-language booksellers I met mentioned that the title could be easily ordered. Indeed, while no more than about 30 copies of this translation were in circulation, more than 1000 were "sleeping" in the distributor's warehouse. According to the purchasing manager, Renaud-Bray had received 358 copies (for its whole network) on the first standing order, which, in her estimation, was rather high given that the title was by a young, foreign author largely unknown to the (Québec) public. During the 14 months following publication, 207 new copies were reordered and 72 were returned to the distributor. Most sales had been made during the first couple of weeks.

[18] The author, translators and title were the same; but the product was clearly a new one. The difference lay not so much in the text as in the packaging, more particularly, the front cover. While the original cover and that of the Québec publisher were minimalist but rather gay and ironic illustrations, the French one was a black and white hyper-realistic photograph with clearly sexual and somewhat disturbing overtones. The translation was given an entirely new skin and this suggested a repositioning and likely a different reading of the original work.

[19] [http://www.culturalhrc.ca/minisites/Writing\\_publishing/e/PDFs/CHRC\\_BookPublisher\\_TGA-en.pdf](http://www.culturalhrc.ca/minisites/Writing_publishing/e/PDFs/CHRC_BookPublisher_TGA-en.pdf)

[20] How much of this "we" could refer to Boréal or Canadian (independent) publishing, how prescriptive or descriptive the "how to" was meant to be, I cannot tell—I did not attend the workshop. But let us keep in mind that Boréal's presence was probably not random. The company has now become a leader on the Québec literary market (at least among independent publishers), it behaves as such, and seems to be regarded as such. Hence its general director is now in a position to give advice and, to some extent, to set the trend.

[21] Interview with Caroline Vogel, Deputy Director Press & Corporate Communications, Frankfurt Book Fair, 7 October 2006.

[22] The translation projects that were eligible to the subsidy program of the Canada Council for the Arts were produced by Boréal; the others were handled by the Parisian co-publisher.

[23] For more information on the connections between Boréal, Dimedia and the French house Le Seuil, see "Le catalogue des 40 ans du Boréal" on <http://www.editionsboreal.qc.ca/fr-boreal.php>.

[24] See Buzelin 2006 for more details.

[25] In Canada, for example, publishers can count on grants from the Canada Council for the Arts (for the translation of Canadian literary works); while translators' main advantage may be their closeness to and understanding of North American cultural realities.

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