

# Canadian Theatre in Latin America:

## Translation and Dissemination

Hugh Hazelton<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Canadian theatre has achieved a high level of popularity in Latin America and is now widely translated both for production and publication. Much of this success has been a mutual affair, the result of exchange programs between theatre companies in Mexico, Argentina, and other countries with those in Canada. This initiative largely originated in Quebec, which established bilateral agreements with theatre groups and cultural agencies from other countries in Latin America, especially Mexico, as early as the 1980s, and followed them up with theatre festivals, tours, and a continual stream of funding for translations. English Canadian dramatists as varied as Judith Thompson, Steve Galluccio, and Michael Mackenzie have been translated into Spanish, as well as a plethora of Quebec playwrights, from Michel Tremblay and Évelyne de la Chenelière to Chantal Bilodeau and Suzanne Lebeau. Latin Americans living in Canada have also played a role. A whole generation of experienced Latin American translators has arisen to meet this challenge, many of them in Mexico encouraged by the French playwright, actor, and translator Boris Schoemann, who immigrated to Mexico twenty years ago. This essay, then, will give an overview of the development and diffusion of Canadian theatre in Latin America, with particular attention to the cultural exchange between the two regions and to the crucial role that translation has played in the evolution of Latin American interest in Canadian drama.

**Keywords:** Canadian Theatre and Latin America. Quebec playwrights. Theatre groups and bilateral agreements. Translation.

**Resumo:** O teatro canadense atingiu um alto índice de popularidade na América Latina e agora é largamente traduzido tanto para produção quanto para publicação. Muito deste sucesso deve-se a um relacionamento duplo, resultado de programas de intercâmbio entre companhias de teatro no México, na Argentina e em outros países, como o Canadá. Esta iniciativa iniciou em grande parte no Quebec. Na verdade, atualmente há tantas peças canadenses produzidas na América Latina quanto no Canadá Inglês. Dramaturgos do Canadá Inglês, tão variados quanto Judith Thompson, Steve Galluccio e Michael Mackenzie, têm sido traduzidos para o espanhol, bem como uma plethora de dramaturgos quebequenses, de Michel Tremblay e Évelyne de la Chenelière a Chantal Bilodeau e Suzanne Lebeau. Latino americanos vivendo no Canadá também tiveram este papel. Uma geração inteira de tradutores latino americanos experientes surgiu para encarar este desafio, muitos no México, encorajados pelo ator, dramaturgo, ator e tradutor francês Boris Schoemann, que imigrou para o México 20 anos atrás. Este ensaio, então, dará uma visão do desenvolvimento e da difusão do teatro canadense na América Latina, com atenção particular ao intercâmbio cultural entre as duas regiões e ao papel crucial que a tradução desempenhou na evolução do interesse da América Latina no teatro Canadense.

**Palavras chave:** Teatro canadense e América Latina. Dramaturgos quebequenses. Grupos de teatro e acordos bilaterais. Tradução.

Canadian theatre has achieved a high level of popularity in Latin America, where its dynamism and creativity are increasingly appreciated, and it is now widely translated both for production and publication. Much of this success has been the result of exchange programs between arts groups and theatre companies in Mexico, Argentina, and other countries with those in Canada. This initiative largely originated in Quebec, which began establishing such bilateral agreements with Latin American countries, especially Mexico, as early as the 1980s, and followed them up with residencies, theatre festivals, tours, and a continual stream of funding for translations. In fact, at the present time, there are possibly as many Quebec plays produced in Latin America as in English Canada. Canadian plays, both in English and French, are also now regularly staged in Mexico, Argentina and Brazil, and have been translated, performed, and published in a number of other countries, including Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Peru. Moreover, their reach has not been limited only to national capitals: they have also toured smaller cities, thus spreading Canadian theatre far beyond the usual venues<sup>2</sup>. Quebec and many Latin American countries share a tradition of government funding and promotion of culture and art, which is also found, though with a more diffused focus, in Canadian federal government programs. Ever since the *Révolution tranquille* of the 1960s and 1970s, Quebec has been anxious to break out of its relative linguistic and cultural isolation and reach beyond the 340 million Anglophones that surround it in order to establish strong new ties with Latin America, thus reinforcing its own *latinité* and also proclaiming its *américanité*, its place in the Americas, in which the majority of inhabitants now speak languages other than English.

Institutional support through festivals and exchanges in Quebec and its relative absence in English Canada have led to a surge in the translation and diffusion of plays in French in Latin America in comparison with a relatively slower flow of works in English. The Festival de *Théâtre des Amériques*, founded in 1985 and held every two

years in Montreal, was instrumental in developing contacts between Latin American and Quebec theatre: roughly 30% of the works presented have come from Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Nicaragua, Brazil, and other Latin American countries. Although this number has diminished recently as the venue, now called the *Festival TransAmériques*, has internationalized, it has greatly strengthened bonds between the two regions. The principal association of French-language playwrights, the Centre des auteurs dramatiques (CEAD), originally founded in 1965 with the goal of supporting the creation and diffusion of plays in French in Quebec and Canada, also became active in promoting residency exchange programs and the translation of Quebec plays into Spanish during the 1980s<sup>3</sup>. The 1987 Festival de *théâtre des Amériques*, with CEAD support, also included discussions between playwrights, directors, and translators from Latin America and Quebec, such as Roberto Cossa, from Argentina, and René-Daniel Dubois. This initiative was broadened in 1995 to include a series of three-way discussions between CEAD, the Playwrights' Workshop of Montreal, and the *Coordinación de Difusión Cultural* from the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (UNAM). These panels later became a regular part of the *Festival de théâtre des Amériques*, with the participation of playwrights such as Michel Tremblay, Judith Thompson, and Felipe Santander. In Toronto, the ground-breaking World Stage Festival presented works from Argentina, Guatemala, Brazil, Mexico, and Cuba in the 1980s and 1990s (DUMAS, 2002). Since then, two other Latin American theatre festivals have been active. The De Colores Festival of New Works, held yearly from 2008 to 2014, was organized by the Alameda theatre company (now closed) and showcased new work by Latino-Canadian playwrights such as Carmen Aguirre and Guillermo Verdecchia, whose work deals with Latin American themes but is mostly in English, and is associated with Harbourfront's Ritmo y Color events. *Rutas Panamericanas*, sponsored by the Aluna Theatre, features theatre and dance from all over Latin America, in both Spanish and in English translation, as well as work by Hispanic Canadian authors. It has been held since 2014 and also includes master classes and conferences on translation, testimonial literature, migration, and First Nations theatre, with Latin American participants<sup>4</sup>.

As Quebec and Canadian contacts grew with Latin America, Mexico gradually emerged as the key interface, especially with increasing interest in the country following

the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. In 1999, the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (CALQ) and the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (CONACULTA) in Mexico established reciprocal residencies in various artistic fields, including theatre. In 2002, the Quebec Minister of Culture and Communications, Diane Lemieux, travelled to Mexico along with representatives of such Quebec theatre companies as Carbone 14, Théâtre des deux mondes, Théâtre d'aujourd'hui, and several children's theatre companies, and an agreement was drawn up between CEAD and the Centro Cultural Helénico in Mexico City for the translation of three plays per year from each country, to be staged during national drama festivals (DUMAS, 2002). These exchanges were open to translators from other nations as well: the prolific Argentine translator Jaime Arrambide, for example, translated Olivier Choinière's *Félicité* and Sébastien Harrison's *D'Alaska* while he was a resident translator at CEAD in 2010. Canada was invited to be the guest of honour at the Feria Internacional del Libro (International Book Fair) in Guadalajara, the largest in the Spanish-speaking world and the second-largest after Frankfurt<sup>5</sup>, in 1996, and Quebec was invited in 2003; both events precipitated the participation of scores of authors and cultural representatives from Canada. The Banff International Literary Translation Centre (BILTC), a three-week residency program at the Banff Centre for the Arts, has also been instrumental in the translation and diffusion of Canadian theatre. The program was founded in 2002 by Mexico, Canada, and the United States in order to encourage translators from all over the world to translate works of the Americas, and its first director was Linda Gaboriau, the premier translator of Quebec theatre into English. Many authors themselves are also invited for a week in order to work directly with their translators. In 2008, Humberto Pérez Mortero translated Évelyne de la Chenelière's *Désordre public*, with the author present, and in 2013 another Mexican participant, Rocío Morales Ugalde, translated Marco Micone's *Le figuier enchanté*, also in direct consultation with him. That same year, Claire Varin, a Quebec novelist and expert on the work of Clarice Lispector, worked with the Brazilian-born but Paris-based actress Gabriella Scheer on the adaptation of Lispector's celebrated novel *A Paixão Segundo G.H. (The Passion According to G.H.)* for the theatre, in a unique project of creation (in French) and adaptation (from Portuguese)

by a Latin American and a Québécoise. It is interesting to note the overlapping vocations and artistic roles of theatre translators as well: just as many Quebec and English Canadian playwrights are often directors, actors and occasional translators themselves, their Latin American translators are also frequently playwrights, directors, and even publishers and employees of cultural agencies.

Certain characteristics unique to theatre set its translation apart from that of other literary genres. Theatre is immediate, fluid, protean by definition. The primary goal in translating a play is for it to be performed; publication in book form, though important, is ancillary (GABORIAU, 2015). Often the director will ask the translator to work directly with him or her in adjusting or adapting a text, whether by shortening it, focusing on certain aspects, or bringing out specific elements of tone and register; like a musical score it is a process of continual interpretation, in which multiple variations are possible. Perhaps due to this fluidity, despite the strong support for theatre translation through playwright residencies and exchanges, there are generally far fewer grants and funding for the production and publication of theatre than there are for fiction. A few of the translations of the more prolific and well-known Quebec and English Canadian authors, though, have received an eclectic range of Canadian and Latin American financial backing. Suzanne Lebeau's children's play *L'Ogrelet*, translated by Cecilia Iris Fasola, an Argentine-Canadian who teaches translation at McGill, was funded by both the Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (FONCA), a cultural agency of the Mexican government, and the Délégation générale du Québec à Mexico. Two plays by Wajdi Mouawad, translated in Mexico by Humberto Pérez Mortera, also received funding from these sources, as well as from a Mexican bank (Fundación BANCOMER). Michel Marc Bouchard's *Les feluettes*, translated by Boris Schoemann and Natalia Traven, was funded by the Canada Council for the Arts and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade; Michel Ouellette's *Le testament du couturier* received funding from both the Canadian Embassy in Buenos Aires and the Argentine Association of Canadian Studies for its production in Buenos Aires. Nevertheless, these cases are atypical; most translations of Canadian and Quebec works are granted no outside funding at all, though the theatre companies involved may receive steady funding from government agencies.

Probably the principal figure in the dissemination of Quebec theatre in Mexico has been the indefatigable Boris Schoemann, a French director, actor, and translator who settled in Mexico City in the 1990s and went on to translate, direct, produce, and publish cutting-edge plays from a number of countries, including Canada. Schoemann, who translates into both Spanish and French, has been the artistic director of the La Capilla theatre in Coyoacán, an artistic neighbourhood of Mexico City, since 2001, and has travelled abroad widely as a representative of Mexican theatre. In fact, during a residency in Montreal in 2000, he translated plays by Mexican authors Humberto Leyva, David Olguín, Óscar Liera, and Antonio Serrano into French (DUMAS, 2002). He has also founded a publishing house, Los Textos de la Capilla, which has brought out forty contemporary Mexican plays, as well as nineteen translations of Quebec plays, many of them — including works by Yvan Bienvenue, Louise Bombardier, Wajdi Mouawad, Larry Tremblay, Michel Marc Bouchard, and Daniel Danis — translated or co-translated by Schoemann himself. Often he also directs the play and acts in it as well. His connections with Quebec are so deep that, following his production of a Spanish version of *Les feluettes* (*Los endebles*), Schoemann established his own theatre company and named it after the play; in 2009 he received a Governor General's award for his work in developing cultural ties between Mexico and Canada (SCHOEMANN, 2013). In addition, Teatro La Capilla has provided fertile ground for a younger generation of translators to work on Quebec theatre, many of whom, such as Humberto Pérez Mortera — translator of five Quebec authors, including Hélène Ducharme, Daniel Danis, and Jennifer Tremblay — are playwrights themselves. Pérez Mortera has also given talks on Mexican theatre and translation at CEAD, where he has participated in the *Échanges d'artistes et d'ateliers-résidences Québec-Mexique*, and gives workshops in theatre translation at La Capilla.

In 2002, Shoemann co-organized a new theatre festival, the *Semana Internacional de la Dramaturgia Contemporánea*, a joint effort of the Centro Cultural Helénico and the Teatro La Capilla which took place annually in Mexico City until 2009, after which it was held in Monterrey (2010-2011) and Guadalajara (since 2012). Over the years, the festival has included dramatic readings of plays by a number of Quebec and English-Canadian playwrights, including Normand Charette, Daniel Danis, Marie Clemens,

Jason Sherman, Michel Marc Bouchard, Louise Bombardier, Évelyne de la Chenelière, and Jasmine Dubé; many of the plays have been produced in Mexico since then. Quebec theatre is now popular, well known and respected in Mexico, and its reception has been overwhelmingly positive, not only in the Mexican press but in the media of other Spanish-speaking countries in which the plays circulate as well. The Spanish dramatist and theatre critic Juan Pablo Heras called Mouawad's *Incendies* "the best play of the twenty-first century," adding that the translation "provides the reader not conversant in French with a text that gives incalculable literary value to its theatrical potential" (HERAS, 2010)<sup>6</sup>.

There are also, of course, a number of other Mexican translators — including distinguished figures such as Rafael Segovia, who has translated works by Dulcinea Langfelder as well as by Michel Tremblay, Michel Marc Bouchard, Marie Laberge, and Dominic Champagne for an anthology of contemporary Canadian theatre — who are now at work on the production of Quebec plays at other theatres and universities around the country. Los Textos de La Capilla is the principal publisher of Quebec theatre in Mexico, and although it is seen to have spearheaded the movement, it is but one among many theatre companies and publishers that have recognized the unique vitality of Quebec theatre and have gone on to stage Quebec plays. Other Latin American countries have provided government and institutional funding for the translation and presentation of Quebec and Canadian theatre as well: Carole Fréchette's play *La peau d'Élisa*, for example, was presented in Buenos Aires in 2003 during the IV Festival Internacional de Teatro and the Semana Cultural Canadiense de La Plata. Canadian Studies programs in Mexico, Argentina, and particularly Brazil have also been focal points of interest in Canadian theatre and have provided subsidies for publication. Often theatre is part of Canadian literary studies and professors specialize in the study and translation of certain authors, after which their works are published by university presses. Moreover, professors and graduate students in Canadian Studies may receive grants to study in Canadian universities, where they meet authors and other scholars. The Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, the southernmost in the country, has been an intense focal point of both Canadian and Quebec literature, including indigenous work. Rubilese da Cunha, a professor there who carried out post-doctoral studies at Laurentian University in Sudbury,

together with her colleague Eloína Prati dos Santos, brought Canadian indigenous writing to attention in Brazil in the early twenty-first century, when Brazilians too were beginning to notice their own indigenous writers and artists. In 2011 Da Cunha co-translated Tomson Highway's *The Rez Sisters*, one of the few First Nations plays to be translated in Latin America, with Antonio Eduardo Oliveira, a professor who had done post-doctoral studies at the University of Toronto. And of course, a number of theatre companies, particularly from Quebec, such as the Théâtre des deux mondes and Singulier Pluriel, have toured in Mexico, Colombia, the Southern Cone, and Brazil with Spanish or Portuguese versions of their works.

Some works of theatre, especially those such as Michel Tremblay's *Les Belles-Soeurs* that deal with vernacular dialogue, are often translated and adapted in a variety of countries. Theatre translators do not generally receive exclusive rights to their work, so plays may be translated repeatedly into the same language. Certain geographical and cultural elements in the translation and production of Quebec and English Canadian theatre in Latin America are also unique to theatre translation. Some plays that have been written in a more standard idiom, such as Michel Tremblay's *Albertine en cinq temps*, have also been translated and produced in a number of countries — in this case, Spain, Mexico, Venezuela, and Chile — simply because they are of interest to so many diverse theatre companies. The same is true of John Murrell's play *Memoir*, a biographical portrait of Sarah Bernhardt, which was published in Canada in 1977 but was still being translated anew in 2006. Murrell's work has been translated into fifteen languages and performed in more than thirty countries, so it is not surprising that theatre companies in Spain, Mexico, and Chile should bring out independent versions and adaptations of it; the play was also translated into Portuguese for performance in São Paulo by the eminent Hungarian-born Brazilian playwright João Bethencourt. Other plays, such as Steve Galluccio's *Mambo Italiano*, appeal to a common ethnic group in countries that have had similar immigration patterns to those of Canada, so that the dialogue is moulded to specific linguistic particularities, whether it be a touch of *lunfardo* slang and *porteño* accent in Irene Bianchi's translation in Argentina or an Italian intonation in Brazil.



The Latin American version of a play may also be set in a local or national context: the Cuban version of Carole Fréchette's *La peau d'Élisa*, for example, takes place in various neighbourhoods of Havana that are also struggling, like the protagonist, against aging and decay. In the same way, theatre critics or the audience may find that a given play echoes conditions in their own country: Julieta Riveroll, reviewing Wajdi Mouawad's *Ni le soleil ni la mort peuvent se regarder en face* in the newspaper *Reforma* in Mexico City, observed that the play was so relevant to the violence in Ciudad Juárez that it actually seemed to be taking place there (RIVEROLL, 2008: 6). Certain plays may also initially be staged in one country and then taken to another, as was the case with Michel Ouellette's *Le testament du couturier*, translated by Carlos Vicente, an Argentine, which was first presented in Spanish by a Catalan company in Barcelona and later performed in Buenos Aires. Targeted funding from Canadian and Latin American cultural agencies has also made possible the diffusion of Quebec and Canadian plays in the interior of a number of countries. Gilberto Flores Patiño's translation of *Mémoire vive*, by Normand Canac-Marquis and Daniel Meilleur, was presented in Mexico City, Chihuahua, Juárez, Culiacán, León, Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí, and Monterrey — in addition to San José, Costa Rica; Bogotá; Madrid; and Londrina, Brazil. One unfortunate pattern that frequently occurs, though, is the failure to mention the name of the translator: although it is usually included in book publication, it is often left out of theatre billings, web sites, and sometimes the list of translated works published by Los Textos de La Capilla itself. Moreover, despite many high-quality, insightful theatre reviews, the translator's name is almost entirely omitted in Mexican newspapers, though it is more often carried in Brazilian ones. It is an odd oversight, especially given the evident importance to the reviewer of every other aspect of the play. Even Gilberto Flores Patiño, a noted Mexican writer and translator who lives in Montreal and is probably the best-known Hispanic author in Quebec, remains nameless in the Mexican reviews of the Quebec plays he has translated.

Though less often funded and promoted, English Canadian theatre has also benefited from interest in Latin America, particularly due to its forcefulness and its often cutting-edge themes and staging. In 2005, Jason Sherman's play *It's All True*, based on the life of Orson Welles, was translated into Spanish by the eminent Mexican author and theatre critic

Luz Emilia Aguilar Zinser and produced by Los Endebles at the Centro Cultural Helénico in Mexico City, as well as into Portuguese by Dinah Kleve for production at the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil in São Paulo. George F. Walker's *Tough!*, originally produced in 1993, was considered enough of a classic to be staged in 2005 in Nova Iguaçu, a suburb of Rio de Janeiro. Judith Thompson's work is also well-known in Latin America: her play *Lion in the Streets* was produced in Cuernavaca, Mexico, in 1995, and *Palace of the End*, about present-day Iraq, was performed in Rio de Janeiro in December 2011. The film version of her play *Lost and Delirious* received the award for best photography at the Festival de Cine in Mar del Plata, Argentina, and was also well received in Brazil. Michael Mackenzie's well-known play *The Baroness and the Pig* has been translated into both Spanish and Portuguese and its film version received its Latin American premiere in Mexico City in 2003, where it was well received by the press. Mackenzie himself has translated works by Robert Lepage, and most of his own work has appeared in French more often than English. In an interesting linguistic twist, *Pleasure and Pain*, a play dealing with masochism by Chantal Bilodeau, a Quebec dramatist who moved to New York in 2002 and who now writes in English, was translated for the stage in Mexico by Silvia Peláez in 2007, the same year that Bilodeau self-translated the play into French. Brad Fraser's work has received considerable attention in Latin America, perhaps due to the popularity of the film version of *Love and Human Remains* and the timeliness in Latin America of many of his themes. *Poor Superman* was translated by Jaime Nieto and staged in Lima in 2010; a local review specified that it was "the complete, uncensored version"<sup>7</sup>. Fraser's work was also popular in Brazil: *Love and Human Remains*, translated by the actor and director Marco Antônio Pâmio, was staged in São Paulo in 2008 and in Belo Horizonte in 2009. One anonymous reviewer, in an article titled "Love is NOT in the air," noted that "the stage translation avoids any kind of mannerist interlude, such as a bit of music as the actor makes an effort to 'express' the character's anguish and that is included simply to take up empty space on the stage. None of that. Pâmio follows through with Fraser's sudden cuts [...] flirting with Brecht here and there" (VALMIR, 2008). *Poor Super Man (Pobre Super-Homen)*, also translated by Pâmio, was staged in São Paulo in 2000, and *Cold Meat Party*, co-translated by Simão Ferreira and the actress Mazé Portugal, appeared in São Paulo in 2009.

Latin American writers who have settled in Canada, as well as certain native-born Quebec and English Canadian writers, have also played a supporting, often intermediary role in the diffusion of Canadian theatre. Gilberto Flores Patiño, of course, has translated works by various Quebec playwrights, especially Michel Marc Bouchard, whose play *L'Histoire de l'oie* — translated as *La historia de la oca* — won the annual award for best foreign theatre production from the Unión de Críticos y Cronistas de Teatro in Mexico City and was later staged in Montevideo<sup>8</sup>. There is also a new generation of writer-translators such as Alice Mascarenhas, a poet and painter from Belo Horizonte who now lives in Montreal, where she teaches Portuguese. Mascarenhas translates professionally as well, often for the Cirque de soleil, a fact that Dulcinea Langfelder doubtless had in mind when she asked her to translate the text of her multimedia piece *La lamentation de Dulcinea*, based on *Don Quixote*, which was staged in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Curitiba in 2010. A curious aspect of this work was that, though written in French, it was presented in English with the Portuguese text projected as subtitles onto the stage wall, a procedure frequently used by the Quebec theatre group Théâtre les deux mondes on its international tours (PATIÑO, 2013).

One of the theatre companies most directly involved in Latin American drama has been Singulier Pluriel, founded in 2000 by Danièle Panneton and the Quebec playwright and actress Julie Vincent, who has written and produced several plays set in Latin America and has toured extensively in the Southern Cone. Indicative of the troupe's future interest in cultural overlap, the first play produced by the company was Fernando Pessoa's *Le marin (O Marineiro)*, a poetic single-scene "static drama" (MONTEIRO, 2000: 65) that he originally wrote in English as a student in South Africa. In 2005, Vincent took over direction of the troupe and, soon afterward, through her friendship with Francisco Antolino, an architect and translator who fled his native Uruguay after the coup d'état of 1973, she became increasingly interested in the Río de la Plata area. Her play *La robe de mariée de Gisèle Schmidt* was translated into Spanish in Uruguay by Marta Huertas, who specializes in theatre translation, and produced at the Teatro Victoria in Montevideo in 2007; Vincent directed the play herself, and the cast included actors from both Uruguay and Quebec. In 2010 Vincent wrote and directed *Le portier de la Gare Windsor*, which

tells the story of a Uruguayan exile who struggles to adapt to life in Montreal and eventually becomes lost in an inner world in which memories of Montevideo blend with those of Montreal, underscored by the projection of photos upon the backdrop. The play is one of the only works about the immigrant experience written by a Quebec or Canadian author and was well received in Montreal. It was translated into Spanish in Uruguay by Marta Huertas but was eventually turned down by the prestigious Teatro El Galpón in Montevideo for “ideological reasons” (PETROWSKI, 2010). It was then adapted, however, as a short stage narrative by the Argentine director Blanca Herrera and staged by her theatre company, Casa de Letras, as a dramatic monologue for four narrators in 2010 at the El Portón de Sánchez theatre in Buenos Aires, with Vincent herself narrating part of the play in Spanish.

Since then, Vincent continues to bring Quebec and Latin American theatre into contact, layering language and culture in unexpected ways and reaffirming Quebec’s own *latinité* through its parallels with South America. In 2013 Singulier Pluriel toured the Southern Cone with a French version of *Jocasta*, a play by the Uruguayan author Mariana Percovich, translated into French by Guy Lavigerie and presented in French with subtitles in Spanish and Portuguese, which was performed in Montevideo, Buenos Aires, Córdoba, Asunción, São Paulo, and Campinas. Vincent herself played the role of Jocasta, whose isolation and torment are all the greater for being the key, but perpetually forgotten character of the Oedipal tragedy. The following year, Vincent staged a new play, *Soledad au hasard*, in Montreal, which again fused Montreal, this time with Buenos Aires, through the friendship that develops between a photojournalist and a young Argentine woman who is studying in Montreal, as they meet and talk in the Métro and discover that their destinies are entwined. The play combines photos and videos of the two cities, as well as of the *corralito* demonstrations after the economic collapse in Argentina in 2001 and of the *carré rouge* student protests in Montreal in 2012, again finding parallel points between the two cultures. It was well received in Montreal and translated into Spanish by Blanca Herrera, who works with Singulier Pluriel as an artistic counsellor. The play toured South America in 2015, and was directed and staged by Vincent at the iconic San Martín cultural centre in Buenos Aires with Herrera’s troupe Casa de Letras. It was also

published in bilingual format as *Soledad au hasard/Soledad o el azar* by les Éditions de la Pleine Lune in Montreal, which has brought out all of Vincent's works.

Several Chilean-Canadians have also been active links between Quebec and Latin American theatre. The poet and film and stage actor Manuel Aránguiz translated Maryse Pelletier's play *Harmonie* into Spanish for presentation in Mexico and at Expo 2005 in Japan; ostensibly for children, the work is based on a Japanese legend and was called by *La Presse* "probably the most accomplished, universal and significant work in Quebec theatre"<sup>9</sup>. Aránguiz is also well known as an actor and played opposite Geneviève Bujold in the film *Les noces de papier* (*Paper Wedding*), directed by Michel Brault in 1989. The film, which was widely distributed in both cinema and on television, recounts a Chilean refugee's desperation to stay in Canada, which leads him to a marriage of convenience with a woman from Montreal. It was shot in both French and Spanish and also included roles by Jorge Fajardo and Alberto Kurapel, two other Chilean actors and directors living in Montreal. In fact, a number of other Chilean and Latin American refugees and exiles were active in theatre and film in Montreal in the decades after the coup d'état in Chile in 1973. Jorge Fajardo and Marilú Mallet were both making films with the National Film Board, while Rodrigo González, Enrique Sandoval, and Miguel Retamal began writing their own plays. Directors such as Gastón Iturra presented works on stage, and a nucleus of experienced, semi-professional actors such as Margarita Gutiérrez, José Venegas, and Lucie Lapointe worked with a number of playwrights and directors in both Spanish and French. Rodrigo González was a particularly prolific and inventive playwright, actor, and director, in terms of his own satirical, incisive plays and short stories, as well as the collective productions and children's theatre that he work-shopped. He wrote and directed six plays in Chile and seventeen — both in Spanish and French — while living in Canada, and toured in Chile, Belgium, France, and Burkina Faso with his *compañera*, Christine Verhas-Breyne, and the Théâtre-cirque Kaos<sup>10</sup>. In Toronto, the theatre group El Galpón, named after the famous Montevideo theatre and composed mainly of exiles from the Río de la Plata area, was instrumental in introducing the work of the great satirical Argentine playwright Osvaldo Dragún to local audiences. The Chilean actress Marcela Pizarro has also been influential in producing Latin American theatre in Quebec, a badly needed

reciprocal element made clear by theatre critics Rodolfo Obregón and Laure Rivière in their article “Le théâtre québécois au Mexique: l’échange inégal,” (2007) which criticized the relative lack of Latin American plays translated into French and staged in Quebec.

One of the most linguistically unique bodies of work of the period was that of the noted Chilean playwright, poet, and singer-songwriter Alberto Kurapel, whose experimental multimedia theatre, produced by his troupe La Compagnie des Arts Exilio, caused a stir in Quebec, Canadian, European and Latin American theatre circles<sup>11</sup>. Kurapel is one of the foremost innovators in recent Latin American theatre, and much of his most cutting-edge work was created while he was living in Quebec. Although he was already an experienced actor and performer when he left Santiago after the coup d’état, it was in Quebec that he developed his concept of “teatro-performance,” or “post-teatro,” a dramatic form that went beyond the scope of conventional drama in terms of its conception, objectives, focus, and use of mixed media. Exile, in all its manifestations —from nostalgia to alienation — was the driving force of his work, and the seven major performance theatre pieces that he created while living in Quebec were all written and performed simultaneously in both Spanish and French. The first five were written in both languages by Kurapel himself, while the last two were translated professionally by the distinguished Quebec translator Jean Antonin Billard.

One of the key elements in the trauma of exile is language, and in order to convey the exile’s linguistic estrangement, Kurapel wanted his pieces to be completely bilingual so that individual words, sentences, and blocks of speech would be given alternately in each language throughout the text. Most of the titles of his plays themselves are fusions of the two languages, without translation. The stage directions and material on the film clips included in the multi-media performances of his first five plays are given only in Spanish, while most of the dialogue is bilingual, translated by Kurapel himself;<sup>12</sup> no credit is given for the translation because none is needed, since all the original material in the play is by the author, whose multilingualism is integral to his work. Given that some of the translated material in French doesn’t quite match with the Spanish, it becomes apparent that Kurapel is basically writing in a hybrid language composed of both. His characters speak in two tongues in their new environment, giving rise to a linguistic

self-consciousness and even a slightly schizoid reality in which passion flows the most forcefully through the speaker's native language, while the second language often feels flat, indifferent, or remote. Sometimes, however, the French version of a passage comes first, with the original Spanish afterward, leaving the reader with the impression that the French text may in fact be the original. Although a unilingual French or Spanish speaker would understand most of these plays, it is only the bilingual who can appreciate all of their subtleties, a reality that ironically undermines the declared intention of having a transparently bilingual text accessible to speakers of either language. Moreover, the repetition of the dialogue in two languages — one of which is native to the actors, while the other has been learned and is spoken well but with a non-native accent — inadvertently changes its rhythm, acting as a slightly distorted echo that is heard even as the action of the work progresses. It is, in a sense, a metalanguage that carries over even into the characters' inner thoughts, which are at times enunciated in Spanish and then heard from an offstage recording in French, thus adding another linguistic signifier.

In September 1991 Kurapel returned to Santiago with La Compagnie des Arts Exilio and, with the help of grants from the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Canadian Embassy in Santiago, held a series of performance theatre workshops that culminated the following year in staging one of his bilingual plays at the Tercer Encuentro Internacional sobre Teatro Latinoamericano at the University of Santiago. The production was a great success: it received multiple reviews, including two in Chile's largest newspaper, *El Mercurio*, and re-established Kurapel's presence on the Chilean theatre scene. Four years later, he returned definitively to Chile, where "he continues his exile"<sup>13</sup> and is now a professor of New Tendencies in Theatre at the University of the Americas in Santiago. He received the Premio del Consejo del Libro en Teatro (the Chilean National Book Award for Theatre) in 2001, and his work has now been produced in eleven countries on three continents. Since his return to Chile, Kurapel has published a number of new works, all of them exclusively in Spanish. However, as can be seen in his memoir, *El actor-performer*, published fourteen years after leaving Montreal but dealing mostly with his life there, the bilingual plays that he wrote while in Quebec are still the centrepiece and defining experience of his work. Every time one of

them is produced, read, studied, or critiqued, due to its interactive bilingual format, it is automatically done so in translation.

Latin Americans have a long tradition of theatre for children and young audiences — productions can regularly be found on Avenida Corrientes, Buenos Aires's equivalent of Broadway, for instance — and here again there has been strong Quebec participation, largely due to the popularity of children's theatre there too. Children's plays by Jasmine Dubé have been produced and published by Los Textos de La Capilla in Mexico City, and ten plays by Suzanne Lebeau have been translated by Cecilia Fasola for production and publication in Mexico, Spain, and Argentina, and production in Venezuela. Three of Lebeau's plays have also been translated in Brazil, and one into Maya by Feliciano Sánchez Chan, who lives in the Yucatan. Fasola has also translated *Maita*, by the Franco-Ontarian children's dramatist Esther Beauchemin. Maryse Pelletier's *La musique des choses* has been translated by the prolific, multilingual Valeria Castelló-Joubert and published in Buenos Aires, and Francis Monty's more experimental theatre for young people has been translated both in Argentina and Brazil. Daniel Danis's play *Kiwi*, translated and directed by Boris Schoemann, which deals with poverty, exploitation and marginality in an unnamed place, particularly resonated with young Mexican audiences. Shoemann has also translated Louise Bombardier's children's play *Le champ*, and the Mexican actress Elena Guiochens translated Bombardier's *Pension vaudou*, though it is definitely not for children.

It is indicative of the reach of Canadian and Quebec theatre in Latin America that virtually every aspect of drama is represented, all through the nexus of translation. Interest in theatre from Quebec and English Canada is strong, as is identification with Canadian culture and perspectives, both in terms of Quebec's *latinité* and cultural renaissance and English Canada's progressive approach to societal and moral questions. What is important now is to return the favour as fully as possible, and bring more Latin American theatre to Canadian and Quebec stages, thus balancing and enriching the exchange. In order to do so, translation in Canada will have to move beyond its traditional binary axis centred solely on work between English and French, and expand into work from Spanish and Portuguese. Theatre companies, directors, producers and audiences must also take



a deeper look at Latin American theatre, which is extraordinarily inventive and comes from a score of different countries. Up till now, it is Canada that has benefitted from the exchange, thanks to Latin American interest in Canadian and Quebec plays and to the work of Latin American and Latino-Canadian translators. In the future, it will be up to Canada to host Latin American work as well. For the moment, though, the flow from Canada, and especially Quebec, is thriving, and Canadian work has an excellent role on Latin American stages.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Profesor emérito de Español, Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. [hhazelton@videotron.ca](mailto:hhazelton@videotron.ca).
- <sup>2</sup> *Translate Canada: A Collection of Translations*. <<http://ccttest.k1nlitra.ca/welcome.php>>. My thanks to Raúl Ernesto and Carlos Villar Corrales, working with the School of Translation and Interpretation at the University of Ottawa, for assembling this very thorough database of translations of Canadian works, especially in Latin America. Much of the information in this article and many of the statistics are sourced from this database. This acknowledgement will serve for all relevant detailed information from the site in the present article, unless otherwise specified.
- <sup>3</sup> CEAD: “Résidences et séminaire”. <<http://www.cead.qc.ca/pour-les-membres/activites-dramaturgiques/residences-et-seminaire>>.
- <sup>4</sup> Aluna Theatre. “Festival Line-Up”. <<http://www.alunatheatre.ca/panamerican-routes/festival-lineup>>. Consulted on 21 March 2016.
- <sup>5</sup> <<http://www.udg.mx/es/servicios/empresas/feria-internacional-del-libro>>.
- <sup>6</sup> This, and all succeeding translations of theatre reviews, are my own.
- <sup>7</sup> *RRP Noticias*. “Pobre Superman en el Centro Cultural Juan Parra del Riego”. <http://sientemag.com/%E2%80%98pobre-superman%E2%80%99>. Consulted on 29 September 2017.
- <sup>8</sup> Email from Flores Patiño. 21 October 2011.
- <sup>9</sup> <<http://damedecoeur.com/spectacles/harmonie>>.
- <sup>10</sup> Email from Christine Verhas-Breyne. 12 March 2016.
- <sup>11</sup> Doug Smith, in his essay “Traducción del exilio, en exilio; exilio en traducción: El caso de Chile”, included, along with the present essay in Spanish, in *Por casualidad y otras razones: traducción y difusión de la dramaturgia y el cine de Canadá en Latinoamérica*, ed. Marc Charon, Luise von Flotow and Claudia Lucotti, Mexico City, Bonilla Artigas Editores, 2018, writes extensively on Kurapel’s work and activities in Montreal and Chile. My perspective on Kurapel’s theatre deals chiefly with his linguistic experimentation while he was in Quebec, particularly in respect to translation: HAZELTON, “The Bilingual Performance Theatre of Alberto Kurapel” in *Latin@Canadian Theatre and Performance*, ed. Natalie Alvarez; Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2013; 109-132, and “Kurapel’s Prometheus: Breaking the Bounds”, prologue to “Prometheus Bound According to Alberto Kurapel/Prométhée enchaîné selon Alberto Kurapel”, in *Fronteras Vivientes: Eight Latin@ Canadian Plays*, ed. Natalie Alvarez; Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 2013; 2-10. Some of the material from those two articles has been used here.
- <sup>12</sup> Kurapel, Alberto. E-mail from the author. 3 September 2012.
- <sup>13</sup> Kurapel, Alberto. “Alberto Kurapel.” Blog: <[elcatalajeo.com/alberto-kurapel-actor-dramaturgo-poeta-cantautor.html](http://elcatalajeo.com/alberto-kurapel-actor-dramaturgo-poeta-cantautor.html)>. Consulted on 21 March 2016.