

**Traduzir o Latino-Canadá: Translation
Strategies of Spanish and Portuguese Speaking
Authors in Canada**

**Translate Latin-Canada: Translation
Strategies of Spanish and Portuguese Speaking
Authors in Canada**

Hugh Hazelton

Resumo: Os últimos quarenta anos têm conhecido uma onda crescente de imigrantes latino-americanos no Canadá. Esses recém-chegados incluem uma quantidade de artistas e escritores que, gradualmente, têm criado uma nova área de literatura, que se poderia chamar de latino-canadense. Mesmo que a maioria deles componham na sua língua materna, quase todos se dão conta da importância da tradução na difusão da sua obra nas correntes principais – inglesa e francesa – do país. Para fazê-lo, adotam uma variedade de estratégias engenhosas: alguns inclusive têm publicado livros híbridos em espanhol, francês e inglês ao mesmo tempo. Este artigo examina as atitudes dos escritores latino-canadenses para com a tradução, assim como os desafios e os meios utilizados para transmitir sua obra aos mundos literários das duas línguas oficiais.

Palavras-chave: Tradução de escritos latino-canadenses. Escritores luso-canadenses. Imigração latino-americana no Canadá. Livros híbridos. Autotradução hispano-canadense. Ruptures: Revue des Trois Amériques. Edições Cordilheira Conselho de Artes do Canadá, tradução Sergio Kokis.

Abstract: The past forty years have witnessed a growing stream of Latin American immigration into Canada. These new arrivals have included a large number of artists and writers who have gradually created a new branch of literature: Latino-Canadian writing. Though most Hispanic and Luso-Canadian writers create in their native language, virtually all of them realize the importance of translation in making their work known to the English and French mainstreams. In order to do so, they have adopted

a variety of different and often ingenious strategies; a few have even published hybrid books in Spanish, French, and English. This article examines the attitudes of Latino-Canadian writers toward translation, as well as the challenges and approaches involved in bringing their work into the literatures of the two official languages.

Key Words: Translation of Latino-Canadian writing. Luso-Canadian writers. Latin American immigration to Canada. Hybrid books. Hispanic Canadian self-translation. *Ruptures: Revue des Trois Amériques* Cordillera Editions Canada Council translation Sergio Kokis

Résumé: Les derniers quarante ans ont connu une vague grandissante d'immigration latino-américaine vers le Canada. Parmi ces nouveaux arrivants se trouve un grand nombre d'artistes et d'écrivains qui ont graduellement créé une nouvelle branche de la littérature qu'on qualifierait de latino-canadienne. Bien que la majorité des écrivains hispano- et luso-canadiens créent dans leur langue maternelle, ils se rendent compte presque tous de l'importance de la traduction dans la diffusion de leur oeuvre aux courants littéraires anglais et français du pays. Pour le faire, ils ont adopté une variété de stratégies ingénieuses; plusieurs ont même publié des livres hybrides en espagnol, français et anglais à la fois. Cet article examinera les attitudes des écrivains latino-canadiens vers la traduction, ainsi que les défis et les approches qu'ils utilisent pour transmettre leurs oeuvres aux mondes littéraires des deux langues officielles.

Mots-clés: Traduction d'écrits latino-canadiens. Écrivains luso-canadiens. Immigration latino-américaine au Canada. Livres hybrides. Auto-traduction hispano-canadienne. *Ruptures: Revue des Trois Amériques* Éditions Cordillera Conseil des Arts du Canada, traduction Sergio Kokis.

The Iberian and Latin American presence in Canada dates back to the very first visits to the country by Basque fishermen and whalers in the sixteenth century (and possibly earlier), followed by explorers sailing under the Portuguese flag on the east coast, as place names such as Labrador, Baccalieu, Fogo, and Bonavista attest. Later, toward the end of the eighteenth century, Spanish and Latin American explorers sailing from Mexican ports carried out cartographical and scientific expeditions along the British Columbia and Alaska coasts, naming many islands,

straits, mountains, and glaciers along the way. Alejandro Malaspina wrote a seven-volume history of his expeditions¹, and the journals of Peruvian-born Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra, a contemporary of George Vancouver, have become classics of the literature of exploration. In the early 1800s, the Cuban poet José María Heredia, an early Romantic fascinated by all things of the Americas, came to Ontario and wrote a celebrated ode to Niagara Falls. For Latin Americans, the New World forms one continuous continent, that of the Americas, stretching from Tierra del Fuego to Ellesmere Island, a concept that Canadians are only now beginning to discover and accept.

The first major influx of Latin Americans arrived in Canada in the 1970s, following a series of military coups d'état that began in Brazil in 1964, continued on to Uruguay and Chile in 1973, and befell Argentina in 1976. By the end of the decade, most of southern South America was under military rule, a trend that was to continue in Central America during the 1980s. Latin Americans in Canada eventually numbered over 300,000, making Spanish the fifth-most spoken immigrant language (after Chinese, Italian, German, and Punjabi) in the country, followed closely by Portuguese². A number of the immigrants came to Canada for economic reasons, often due to the restructuring of the economies of their home countries, but many were also exiles and refugees from military regimes that hunted down, tortured, disappeared, and eliminated sectors of the population that they distrusted. In some cases, the choice of coming to Canada or another country was simply a matter of which embassy was accepting refugees on a given day. A large proportion of Latin American immigrants were artists, musicians, and writers from the most progressive sectors of their society: some had already begun to publish or produce their work before they left their home country, while others, often younger, began to write or work in other artistic endeavours once they arrived in Canada. These authors eventually created a parallel Spanish-speaking literature that included all genres of writing, from novels, poetry, essays, and journalism to children's books, history, and political science. Most wrote in Spanish, though a few preferred to work directly in English or French as well; as they became more acclimatized to the Canadian milieu, many of them wanted to reach out to a larger English-Canadian and Quebec audience, and realized that the only way to do so was through translation.

The first translators of works by Latino-Canadian writers were most

often their friends, lovers, wives, or husbands, a number of whom would go on to become professional translators and would ultimately constitute the first wave of Spanish-language literary translators in Canada. Many of the early works published by these authors, whether Chileans during the 1970s or Salvadorans during the 1980s, were brought out in bilingual Spanish-English or Spanish-French editions by small presses within the community that specialized in Spanish-language writing. The most important of these presses, Ediciones Cordillera, founded in Ottawa by Leandro Urbina, Jorge Etcheverry, and other Chilean compatriots, brought out an excellent bilingual anthology of Chilean-Canadian works, *Chilean Literature in Canada/Literatura chilena en Canadá*, edited by the distinguished poet and critic Naín Nómez, in 1982. This groundbreaking work, largely (and outstandingly) translated by Christina Schantz, Urbina's wife, set a high standard. It was followed by a trilingual anthology (Spanish/English/French) that also included works by authors from Spain, *Literatura hispano-canadiense/Hispano-Canadian Literature/Littérature hispano-canadienne*, edited by Diego Marín, a Spaniard who taught at the University of Toronto, and translated by a variety of writers and translators. In the meantime, in Montreal, a variety of bilingual editions of individual books of poetry began to appear regularly, and by the 1980s included works by the Colombian poet Yvonne América Truque (translated by her printer-publisher husband, Jean Gauthier); the illustrated *livre d'artiste* *Juglarío/Jongleries*, by Chilean poet and filmmaker Jorge Cancino (translated by friends Pierre Demers and Gloria Clunes); and the Zen children's book *Cuentos de la cabeza y la cola/Contes de la tête et de la queue*, by the Chilean playwright Rodrigo González (translated by his friend Micheline Bail).

These formative years in the 1970s and 1980s were a period of tremendous cultural effervescence in the Latin American community, characterized by *peñas* — bilingual community and family-oriented suppers and solidarity events — often held in church basements or union halls, in which exiled poets would declaim their verses in Spanish while *compañeros* and *compañeras* read messages of support from the home country announcing that the dictator was about to fall and children would chase each other around the room as their parents conversed about politics and recounted stories of the coup. There were also marches and days of remembrance, attended by many English and French-speaking Canadians who identified with the exiles' cause. Slowly, as Latin

American writers began to feel more comfortable in French and English, interested Canadian activists and artists would increasingly invite them to participate in poetry readings or small literary reviews in which their work would be translated, thus serving as a bridge between the two cultures. At the same time, the arrival of Iberian and Latin American writers to Canada and their progressive translation into English and French has put Canadian and Quebec readers and writers in contact with a variety of literatures and tendencies with which they were sometimes unfamiliar, drawing them closer to other literary traditions. This applies not only to the richness of literatures of individual countries, such as the oral and vernacular heritage of rural El Salvador, the Argentine taste for literature of the fantastic, or the Andean tradition of indigenous-based fiction, but also to the profound effects of more generalized Latin American tendencies, such as the inclusion of political activism in literary works, the imagistic experimentation that grew out of dadaism and surrealism, the use of ludic typographic and linguistic inventions in poetry, the hallucinatory energy of magic realism, or the verbal luxuriance of the neo-baroque. Contact with this profusion of otherness has been made possible largely through translation, which has often involved enormous challenges to translators in the transmission of Iberian and Latin American literary techniques to readers in English Canada and Quebec.

In tandem with the trend toward bilingual books produced within the community, several literary reviews also began to publish in multilingual form. In Montreal, Manuel Betanzos Santos, a Galician immigrant who arrived in Montreal in the early 1960s, established a trilingual review, *Boreal*, that was a pioneer in integrating work from the three languages; he also published two early anthologies of English Canadian writing in Argentina and Mexico. Later, in the 1990s, another Montreal publication, *Ruptures: la revue des Trois Amériques*, under the direction of Edgard Gousse, a Haitian-Canadian who had studied in Buenos Aires, reached a type of apotheosis of multilingualism, publishing work from the Americas and other parts of the world in the four principal languages of the western hemisphere: French, English, Spanish, and Portuguese. This attractively produced review, which included drawings, designs, and full-colour paintings on its covers, published fourteen issues between 1993 and 1999, enriching and cross-fertilizing cultures through a flood of translated work, much of it done by other writers. It also included

five thematic issues, dedicated to the literatures of Mexico, Quebec, the Caribbean, the Southern Cone (some 600 pages), and Venezuela, which were, in effect, quadrilingual anthologies of contemporary work from each country or region. Ruptures served as a nexus between translators and authors from different languages and countries and was enthusiastically received abroad, especially in Cuba, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Mexico. The fact that it published writers from outside Canada made it largely ineligible for grants, and virtually all translation and revision was done on a volunteer basis. A number of younger translators honed and developed their skills during their years of work with the review, among them the Brazilian poet and translator Álvaro Faleiros, who later returned to Brazil and now teaches French language and literature at the University of São Paulo.

As time went by, however, and Hispanic authors began to receive heightened recognition in the English and French-speaking literary worlds, small trade presses took increasing interest in their work. In the 1980s a number of both French and English-language publishers in the Montreal area brought out bilingual and unilingual French and English editions of work by Latino-Canadian authors. Humanitas published *Dieuseries et odieuseries/Dioserías y odioserías*, by the Salvadoran poet Salvador Torres (translated by his friend Laure Palin) and awarded it their annual prize in 1989. André Goulet, of Les Éditions d'Orphée, which had published early works by many of Quebec's most noted authors — including Nicole Brossard, Jacques Ferron, and Claude Gauvreau — in the 1950s and 1960s, brought out ten books of poetry by the Chilean poet Alfredo Lavergne (a number of which were translated by his compañera Sylvie Perron), four of them in back-to-back bilingual format. Cormorant Books, founded by the noted Canadian writer and activist Gary Geddes, took an interest in the Chilean authors of Ottawa and published Christina Schantz's translations of *Las malas juntas* (Lost Causes), an acclaimed collection of short stories by Leandro Urbina, as well as poetry by Naín Nómez. These works were followed by the publication of *The Better to See You*, my translation of a collection of short stories by the distinguished Salvadoran author Alfonso Quijada Urías, who now lives in Vancouver, one of the best-known Central American writers of his generation. In 1990 Cormorant also brought out *Compañeros: An Anthology of Writings about Latin America*, edited by Gary Geddes and myself, which included work by English Canadian

authors and translations of works by Québécois, Haitian-Canadian, and Latino-Canadian writers. Les Éditions Fides, Boréal, and Cormorant Editions all brought out work by the accomplished Mexican novelist and short-story writer Gilberto Flores Patiño during the 1980s and 1990s: the three works published in French were translated by Patiño's wife, Ginette Hardy, and the English one by Linda Gaboriau, one of the most acclaimed literary translators in Canada. Flores Patiño, who has lived outside of Mexico for over a quarter century, writes in Spanish but publishes almost exclusively in French. Interestingly, he is a translator himself and has translated four plays by Quebec writers — including Michel Marc Bouchard's *L'Histoire de l'oise* — into Spanish for presentation in theatres in Mexico City. Meanwhile, several Toronto publishers, including Mosaic, Exile, and Oasis Editions, published a number of works by the prolific (and celebrated) Chilean surrealist poet Ludwig Zeller, who immigrated to Canada in the late 1960s, translated for the most part by Zeller's stepdaughter, Beatriz Hausner, and A.F. Moritz.

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, who founded his own theatre group, the *Compagnie des Arts Exilio*, and whose experimental multimedia theatre, influenced by Brecht, Artaud and the Living Theatre, was well received in Montreal and in Canadian theatre circles³. The seven plays that Kurapel wrote and produced in Quebec (he returned to Chile in the late 1990s), in which dialogue and stage instructions are given in succession in both Spanish and French, are always essentially bilingual, but only two of them are actually translations; both of these were done by Jean Antonin Billard, who also translated much of Kurapel's poetry. The other five plays, which do not carry the name of any translator or linguistic consultant, are essentially hybrid texts in which some passages are fully translated and others only partially so or even not at all. In some cases, the use of Spanish and French mirrors the exile experience, so that passages relevant to the larger society are in French, whereas more private thoughts or stage instructions remain in Spanish. In *Prométhée enchaîné selon Alberto Kurapel/Prometeo encadenado según Alberto Kurapel* (1989), for example, "The material in the two languages does not actually correspond [...]: often the two texts are markedly different or include only a few elements in one language of what was said in the other, contributing directly to

the forward movement of the content of the text rather than serving as a linguistic reflection. In this way, Kurapel actually [...] fuses the two languages into a single metalanguage, writing his plays in Spanish and French at once⁷⁴. These plays, then, are essentially accessible only to a public that is familiar with both languages. All seven of Kurapel's published Quebec productions were brought out by Humanitas, which also published a volume of ten of his Spanish-language plays.

Since the turn of the century, interest in Latin American writers living in Canada has accelerated, as has their rate of translation into both English and French, generally by professional translators working directly for the publisher. The Argentine satirist Pablo Urbanyi, who lives in Ottawa but whose work is widely appreciated in his home country, has now had three of his works translated into English and four into French; Nela Rio, a highly original Argentine poet and short-story writer who lives in Fredericton, has three bilingual books of poetry (and one trilingual), with another on the way, all published by Joe Blades' Broken Jaw Books of Fredericton. Though Cordillera Editions of Ottawa has now folded and Leandro Urbina has returned to Chile, Jorge Etcheverry has gone on to found his own bilingual publishing house, La Cita Trunca/Split Quotation, which has brought out a number of bilingual books of poetry, as well as translations of novels (including Urbina's *Collect Call*, which won the Chilean National Book Council award for best novel of the year in 1992), collections of short stories, and poetry. Its publication in 1991 of *Strange Houses*, a selection of poetry by the well-known Chilean poet Gonzalo Millán (translated by his former compañera, Annegrit Nil), received excellent reviews in English Canada. On the French side, VLB, Lanctôt Éditeur (which published Urbina's novel in French), and Québec-Amérique have been especially active. The interest in Spanish literary translation is paralleled and reinforced by Spanish translation in the academic, cultural, and business worlds, which has grown exponentially as Canadian connections with Latin America and investments in its industry and resource extraction have taken off⁷⁵. A number of universities, particularly York, Ottawa, McGill, the Université de Montréal, and Concordia, now have classes and programs dedicated to translation between Spanish and English or French, both on a professional and literary level, in which new and enthusiastic generations of translators are being trained.

The Canada Council of the Arts has, of course, been the key

financial backer of the translation and publication of Hispanic-Canadian literature. Without its programs of subsidies to translators and publishers of works by Canadian citizens and landed immigrants who write in languages other than English and French, the works of Spanish-speaking authors in Canada would have gone largely unknown. The essential axis of translation in Canada, however, remains between English and French: virtually all literary translation awards in the country are only for works translated between the two official languages, the sole exception being the John Glassco Award of the Literary Translators' Association of Canada, which is open to works from any language into English or French. Moreover, translation from Spanish is certainly no guarantee of public success: the English and French-speaking literary worlds — which Jorge Etcheverry has ironically referred to as “the hegemonic literatures”⁶ — are far more receptive to the work of Hispanic and Luso-Canadian writers who work directly in one of the two official languages, without having to pass through the filter of translation, than they are to translated authors, perhaps because publishers and critics feel that translated writers will have more difficulty in promoting and discussing their works. One has only to compare the accessibility in Canada of Argentine-Canadian authors Alberto Manguel and Guillermo Verdecchia, who write directly in English, and Brazilian-born Sergio Kokis and the Catalan Jacques Folch-Ribas, who work directly in French, with the difficulty that Pablo Urbanyi and Alfonso Quijada Urías, both highly appreciated in their native countries, have had in making their works known in their adopted country, where translations of their works have been largely unnoticed. The French translation of Leandro Urbina's *Cobro revertido* (*Longues distances*), by Danièle Rudel-Tessier, received only one mention in Montreal's French-language press. Moreover, an issue of *Lettres québécoises* dedicated to immigrant writing in French (No. 66, summer 1992), was limited only to work written directly in French, thereby excluding almost all of the Latino-Québécois community⁷.

Nevertheless, translation has continued to accelerate, boosted by poetry readings and the increased publication of Hispanic works in literary reviews such as *Arc*, *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, *Lèvres urbaines*, *Canadian Literature/Littérature canadienne* and *Ellipse: Canadian Literature in Translation/Textes littéraires canadiens en traduction*. Latino-Canadian poetry readings have evolved away from the *peñas* into bilingual or multilingual events attended by a wider public at which

either the poets or their translators read their work in both Spanish or Portuguese and English or French. The indomitable Janou St-Denis, for example, always reserved several evenings per year for Latino poets at her Place aux poètes in Montreal, and poets also continue to give bilingual readings at Harbourfront's Ritmo y Color festival and the yearly Semana del Idioma Español events in Toronto, as well as multilingual readings at Noches de Poesía and Lapalabrava in Montreal. Some authors have even begun to write in both Spanish and English or French, creating their work in one language and then translating it — or writing an equivalent version — in the other. The degree of correspondence between the original text and the translation or parallel version depends on the author's linguistic interests: the Argentine author Margarita Feliciano prefers to take great leeway with the English versions in her bilingual books, which she translates herself; Jorge Etcheverry, who sometimes also writes directly in English and then translates into Spanish, works in tandem with an anglophone advisor (usually his compañera); Blanca Espinoza, a Chilean poet who is also a professional translator, prefers seamless translations of the same text; Carmen Rodríguez, who studied English before leaving Chile, brought out her last book of short stories in parallel versions almost simultaneously in Vancouver (and a body to remember with) and Santiago (*De cuerpo entero*). Other writers, often those who left their home country before adulthood, prefer to work directly in English or French. The prolific Brazilian author and painter Sergio Kokis, who fled Brazil after the military coup there in 1964, has written his fourteen novels exclusively in French; the Brazilian edition of his first book, *Le pavillon des miroirs*, was translated from French into Portuguese. Another well-known Quebec writer, Gloria Escomel, who grew up in Uruguay, writes almost exclusively in French, though she maintains strong ties with the literary community in Argentina and Uruguay and sets much of her work in the Río de la Plata region.

As the interchange between Spanish and Portuguese and English and French writing continues in Canada, a certain maturation is now taking place. Certainly new generations of Spanish and Portuguese-speaking writers will keep on arriving in the country, both as immigrants and as refugees from social and political difficulties in the score of nations where the languages are spoken. Many will continue to search for translators among friends and lovers, but a number of them will undoubtedly directly approach the experienced literary translators who

have refined their skills through the translation of an earlier generation of Latino and Luso-Canadian writers and are now available in the field, such as Beatriz Hausner, who has now brought out an anthology of Latin American poetry from across the hemisphere and has recently translated a book of short stories by the celebrated Colombian writer Álvaro Mutis; or Louis Jolicoeur, who began his career translating the work of the renowned Uruguayan novelist Juan Carlos Onetti and has gone on to translate numerous other works by Mexican authors, as well as to a career as a critic and theorist on translation itself.

As multilingualism becomes increasingly common, perhaps even the norm in the future, more young authors will also work both in Spanish or Portuguese and in English or French, writing with equal ease in both languages, and translating between them too, as does Paulo da Costa, an Angolan-born poet and translator now living in Vancouver, one of a new generation of bilingual writer/translators. Some authors now prefer to write books in multiple languages, as Bolivian-born Alejandro Saravia has done in *Lettres de Nootka*, a hybrid book that contains poems composed directly in Spanish, English, and French; others, such as Salvador Torres, will continue to bring a hispanicized, baroque style and sensibility to the poetry they compose directly in French or English, enriching their texts with the echoing strangeness of another language. Latin America has come to Canada, bringing with it new linguistic, literary, and cultural relationships that increase Canadian and Quebec awareness of the north as being part of the Americas. Both Canadians and Latin Americans now realize that they share as much, if not more, with the other countries of the hemisphere as they traditionally have with Europe.

Endnotes

- ¹ See Alejandro Malaspina, *Portrait of a Visionary*, by John Kendrick (McGill-Queen's, 1999) for an excellent recounting of the scientific voyages of discovery of one of the three great European circumnavigators of the Age of Enlightenment (along with James Cook and Louis Antoine de Bougainville). The Peruvian mariner Juan Francisco Bodega y Quadra's colourful and insightful account of his explorations of the west coast, *El descubrimiento del fin del mundo* (Alianza, 1990) is also of interest.
- ² "Population by mother tongue, by province and territory (2006 Census)". Statistics Canada <<http://www40.statcan.gc.ca/101/cst01/demo11a-eng.htm>>. As of the 2006 census, some 26,505 Chileans had immigrated to Canada, the third-largest Spanish-

speaking nationality in the country, after Mexicans (49,924) and Salvadorans (42,780). Portuguese immigrants numbered 150,390 and Spaniards 10,290; Brazilians accounted for 15,120 immigrants (“Place of birth for the immigrant population by period of immigration, 2006 counts and percentage distribution, for Canada”. Statistics Canada <<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/highlights/Immigration/ Table404>>.

³ See Peter Klaus’s “Latin American Literature in Canada and Quebec: A Genesis?” in *Encounters with Quebec*, ed. Susan L. Rosenstreic (Global, 1998), pp. 161-178, as well as “Infinite Signs: Alberto Kurapel and the Semiotics of Exile,” by Mayté Gómez, in *Canadian Literature/Littérature canadienne*, No. 142-143, pp. 38-48.

⁴ See Hugh Hazelton’s article “Polylingual Identities: Writing in Multiple Languages.” *The Canadian Cultural Exchange/Échanges culturels au Canada: Translation and Transculturation/traduction et transculturation*, ed. Norman Cheadle and Lucien Pelletier; Waterloo, Ontario: Sir Wilfred Laurier UP, 2007: 229.

⁵ “Opening Doors to the World: Canada’s International Market Access Priorities 2006”. *Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada* <<http://www.international.gc.ca/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/cimar-cami/2006>>.

⁶ “The more optimistic among us believe that a Spanish-speaking literature is now beginning to arise that is increasingly autonomous in relation to the English and French-speaking hegemonic literatures” (my translation). “Notas para situar la literatura chilena en Canadá” <<http://www.esritores.cl/base.php?f1-articulos/texto/congreso.htm>>.

⁸ “De l’autre littérature québécoise, autoportraits,” ed. Jean Jonaissant. *Lettres québécoises* 66, supplement (1992): 2-16. The linguistic parameters had been tightly set: the only Latino- Québécois author included was the Uruguayan-Canadian literary critic Javier García Méndez. Jonaissant, himself a Haitian-Canadian, had previously lauded the work of Latino-Québécois authors in his review of the first French-language anthology of their work, *La Présence d’une autre Amérique* (Naine Blanche, 1990), “Les poésies québécoises actuelles,” *Lettres québécoises* 62 (1991): 37-37.

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