

GENEVIÈVE ROBICHAUD / Ruminations on Self-Translation in Two Movements: a Dialogue and an Essay¹

*L'AUTEURE et L'AUTRE sont dans un dîner.
Assis à une autre table, à la droite d'eux,
se trouvent L'AUTEURE et L'AUTRE,
version anglophone, qui eux aussi se sont rencontrés
pour jaser.*

*L'AUTEURE and L'AUTRE are in a diner.
On the left side of room, only a few tables away,
L'AUTEURE and L'AUTRE, the francophone version,
are also partaking in a conversation.*

L'AUTEURE
La liberté. De pouvoir toutte dire,
toutte écrire.

I spent the morning trying to write
the last chapter.

L'AUTRE
So quoisie qui t'empêche?
Pourquoisie tu hōlderaiis bâck?

So what's stopping you?

L'AUTEURE
Ché pas. À cause de moi-même peut-être.
J'aime pas la wăy qu'on sonne comme Ĩ guëss.

I'm not sure.
I guess I didn't like how it was coming out.

L'AUTRE
Dommage.

That's too bad.
Maybe you should try being more lenient
with yourself.

1 An extended version of this piece was previously published in *Lemon Hound*.

L'AUTEURE

Cé supposé qu'y parlent de nous autres comme
l'esthétique d'la faiblesse?

I think it had something to do with
the background noises.

L'AUTRE

Sô?

How so?

L'AUTEURE *prend une gorgée de sa tasse.*

Sô! Sô, ça t'tannes pas qu'on est gênés d'parler?

Taking a drink from her cup.

It drowned anything that wanted to come out.

L'AUTRE

C'est vrai qu'on parle mal, bût whõ câres?

Is that like an intellectual's thing?

L'AUTEURE

Y faut qu'sa sorte, rîght?

Not really. More like nature versus nurture.

L'AUTRE

Ouaye! Comme mon père dirait : Bailles y du câble!

Why didn't you go elsewhere?

To change the background noises I mean?

L'AUTEURE

On sonnerait wăy wôrse ãny wé si on asseyait

d'imiter les Québécois ou ben donc les Français d'France.

Like switch countries?

L'AUTRE *entrain de rire.*

As-tu êver asseyé?

Well, I was thinking more like
moving to another café or something,
but wow, okay. Another country?

L'AUTEURE

Oui. C'est hõrrible.

Ej pourrais pas m'faire passer

pour un d'eux autres pour sauver ma vie.

Laughing.

Oh, sorry.

I just misunderstood what you meant.

That's all.

L'AUTRE *tendant un accent québécois.*

Ostie! C'est écoeurant du homard chaud au beurre à l'ail.

But there must be some truth to it.

It's not nothing if you were thinking about it.

L'AUTEURE *rit.*

Té même pas proche. Pis anyways,
on sé toute que du homard ça s'mange froid.

Hum...

Une pause.

Pause.

L'AUTRE

So quoisie qué note problème d'ên?

Hõw cõme qu'on a honte?

So what's the problem then?

Why couldn't you finish the final chapter?

L'AUTEURE

Ej veux dire cé pas comme si qu'on disait juste anything.

Y'a des règles.

I just don't want it to be anything.

I want it to mean something.

L'AUTRE

...

...

L'AUTEURE

Un glissement progressif vers l'anglais.

So far, I feel as though
any hopes of that happening is
slowly slipping away.

L'AUTRE

Quoi ça?

Why say it like that?
You sound so convinced.

L'AUTEURE

Un glissement progressif vers l'anglais.
C'est ça qu'y z'appelont l'chiac.

I just can't hear the characters anymore.

L'AUTRE

Awh. Cé tu sitant une mauvaise affaire que ça?

I'm sure you'll get it eventually.
Maybe it just needs more time.

L'AUTEURE

Ï guëss ça dépend à quisse que tu d'mandes.

I guess it depends who you ask.

L'AUTRE

Hum. Ben y s'attendent tu ben qu'on r'tourne toute
à la langue de Rabelais?

Why couldn't they just sound like you and I?

L'AUTEURE

Ej sé. C'est comme en anglais.
Pourrais-tu ouère qui faudrait qu'tout
l'monde commence à parler en Chãucer?

I know. I've tried that,
but every time I put them somewhere,
a diner for instance,
I can't hear them over the background noise.

L'AUTRE *retenant à peine son fou rire.*

Ouaye, comme avec des yës mē lōrd pis des yës mē lādy.

Maybe it's because you're listening
for the wrong thing.

L'AUTEURE *riant.*

T'as jamais trop lu du Chãucer toi, ein?

Laughing. Then still laughing while talking.
And next thing you're gonna tell me is
that my characters and I don't even speak
the same language.

L'AUTRE

Cé tu thât óbvious? Bût sēriously,
as-tu décidé quoisse tu vas faire about ton projet?

Isn't that obvious?

L'AUTEURE

Ej crois qu'y faut qu'ej r'tourne au commencement de nouveau.

That's weird.

I think I'm experiencing déjà vu.

L'AUTRE

Ben, ma mère m'a toujours dit :
ya rien d'mal avec stârter du début.

You know, in French that means already seen.

L'AUTEURE

Cé vrai. Ãnyways, si personne s'attend trop d'affaires des Acadiens,
on peut bāsically faire ānything cousse qu'on veut.

I knew you'd say that.

L'AUTRE: Yâ! Comme révolutionner le texte?

How so?

L'AUTEURE: Réviser tu veux dire?

I don't know. I just did.

L'AUTRE: Non, ej voulais dire ça que j'ai dit : révolutionner.

Right, the déjà vu.

L'AUTEURE

Rĩght.

Ya, maybe.

Fin / Blackout

I am not a theoretician of the bilingual text. Not yet anyway. I have merely, like other writers who find themselves in the bind of a “dual linguistic identity,” sought, on one hand, to channel the otherness of the self in self-translation, and, on the other hand, to highlight, indeed play with, the privilege of living in translation.

From a purely aesthetic point of view, especially in the way they subvert origins and notions of author(ity), self-translations complicate notions of authorship, originality, and commensurability. What has been carefully chosen in one version while being omitted or altered in the other points to a particular play of mirrors—one that launches the idea of the original down the rabbit hole; it is no longer a question of being faithful to the text but of expanding it, or as Sherry Simon writes in *Cities in Translation*, it is the moment when “the confrontation of languages results in entanglements which are both conflictual and productive.”¹

What self-translation makes increasingly visible, moreover, is the translation itself as well as the translator, which enlarges the productivity of meaning (in several ways the process is also analogous to the playful exchange between the dialogues and this essay). Beyond enlarging the productive signifier of the text, the dialogues evince a continuation of the writing process where the bilingual text uses two language systems to complete its meaning. Viewed another way, *l'Auteure* (in English) and *l'Auteure (en Chiac)*, a Moncton-based Acadian French that fuses French and contemporary English) unfold the fugitive character that is (self) translation practices.

If the act of self-translation is a creative one, then perhaps it is more apt to speak of two versions, each one furthering the other. “In the shadowing of one language by another,” Sherry Simon writes, “in the ghostly presence of one behind the other, there is a widening of the frame of reference. No one vocabulary will suffice, no one channel can access the multiple planes of expression. Just as visual and plastic arts today abandon the single frame, the written word expands its reach.”² This was true of the writing process itself where the Chiac version sent me to the English version to expand upon some of the anarchic features that were emerging between the two.

What I wish to argue, then, is that the friction between both versions of the text makes the self available to the reader in a way that other kinds of translations do not. This self is not

1 Sherry Simon, *Cities in Translation: Intersections of Language and Memory*, ed. Michael Cronin (London & New York: Routledge, 2012), 18.

2 Sherry Simon, *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 2006), 321.

necessarily me, the dialogue's author (though it can be), but a self that emerges in the formal décalage between author and reader, between interlingual and intralingual exchanges. One might say that self-translation, in its construction of the double, allows the text the possibility of being its first reader, its first critic, especially if we concede that this fracture between author and reader, English and French, also implies a constant cohabitation with the other. But perhaps that is already made obvious in the diner scene where the Chiac characters and their English doppelgangers remain in constant earshot of each other, and where the knowledge of the other seems to grant these two characters a kind of temporal reprieve where they can “bâsically faire anything cousse qu'on veut. // L'AUTRE: Comme révolutionner le texte? // L'AUTEURE: Réviser tu veux dire? // L'AUTRE: Non, ej voulais dire ça que j'ai dit : révolutionner”.