

Editors' Note

Our point of departure for this issue was “translation,” in scare quotes because we’ve grown weary of the imperialism of the concept. At some juncture, we began calling it “polyvocal translation,” later shifting to “polymorphous translation,” to mark an element of perversion or disavowal in the concept, along the lines of: we know that this is not English, and yet it is.

Translation is no more innocent than poetry. Neither of these is a value in itself, any more than “Canada” is. They too have *not* been nice for 150 years, to “translate” the pernicious Roots slogan. We don’t need to look elsewhere for poetry with blood on its hands: the “Confederation Poet” and bureaucrat Duncan Campbell Scott might be a better example than the Nobel Prize winner and bureaucrat Alexis Leger (St. Jean Perse), or the Stalinist Neruda. Of the current celebratory slogan, the filmmaker Alethea Arnaquq-Baril says: “Every single time I see a Canada 150 logo I want to take a Sharpie and add a couple of zeros to the end of it” (quoted in *The Guardian Weekly*, 02.07.17).

Our approach to the issue was thus governed by a kind of wandering away from our point of departure, and all that was predetermined was that we would not be able to define our destination until we got there. If we had to map it, its projection would look something like the epistemological geography of words and streets woven together in Pascal Poyet’s “Physical Comedy.” We arrived at our destination with a heavy load of topics, none of which constituted a “theme,” and all of which can now only be derived from its content. Here’s an attempt to gather some of these topics together—there are others, of course, and these choices are not meant to confine.

The translation of peoples: history is essentially a history of migrations, from economic and ecological disasters, and from war, and its telling is a suturing of trauma. The underlying topic of our interview with Jean-Christophe Cloutier, editor and translator of Jack Kerouac’s recently discovered, extensive writings in French (patois), is the forced migration of the Québécois people into the Satanic Mills of New England between the mid 19th-century and the depression of the 1930s, and their struggle for “survivance.” As little known as the fact that Kerouac wrote substantial texts in French is the fact that Louis

Riel, leader of the Métis resistance, was a serious and lifelong poet. Riel, who also spent time in exile in New England, fell victim to the migration of English settlers into Manitoba. One of his last poems, a battle lament transcribed by Charles Sauvé under the title “Riel’s Composition,” is featured in this issue.

Deborah Koenker’s “Tortilla Portraits,” from her work on migrant Mexican farmworkers, brings the topic of immigration into the present. Her work overlaps another topic, which is the “translation” between media, in this case photographic image and text. The work of Tiziana La Melia and Rachelle Sawatsky provides another instance of this inter-media weaving. Similarly, the graphic scores included here can be approached as images, knowing full well that while they are music above all, they are also “texts” to be translated into music in endlessly reiterable, transformational dialogues between performer, composer, and audience.

Of course, this issue provides many examples of translation between languages, but being poetic translations they engage in divergence, distortion, and occasionally hubris. These range from the subtleties of more traditional —devoted, subservient—translations, to the depredations and wilful renovations of those that renew or undo.

Another mode of “translation” effects a transformation within the domain of its own language—as in Kerouac’s transcription or “sound-spelling” of patois, Sonnet L’Abbé’s colonization of Shakespeare, or Atkins’ “translations” of translations. In Anne Tardos’ poems, other languages disturb English creating a kind of polymorphous joy, not an enrichment of that language but a welcome explosion in a shingle factory.

And, not finally, on this note of language love, and the ambivalence of that love, we thought about the translation of states of mind, one into another, which could be exemplified by so much of what this issue now tries to contain, but particularly in the love poetry of Emily Dickinson and La Comtessa de Dia.

—Ted Byrne & Catriona Strang