A Plea for Criticism in the Translation Zone

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Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* (1974) famously features the all-important role of translation in the process of colonization, with the translator as mediator between the Crown (memorably literalized as the Grandmother's hat) and the Plains Cree. Twenty-four years later (1998), the CBC turned Wiebe's novel into a miniseries, with a script by Wiebe and director Gil Cardinal. Here, as in the novel, the Cree speak English, but the *English*, acting oddly and strangely attired, speak an invented language. The first appearance of these strange, yet familiar-looking, creatures speaking gobbledygook, jolts the viewer and radically repositions her in relation to English, which is now the language of the Cree.[1]

Much more radical than a simple shift in point of view, this cunning reversal is made possible because of the inter-semiotic translation involved in the transfer of text to film. Wiebe could not have done in print what he did with Cardinal in film. What intrigues me about this simple move is exactly that disconcerting moment of discovery which happens when the English (of the Cree)–already established as lyrical and expressive, as well as dominant–encounters the gibberish spoken by the official makers of History. Language suddenly acquires visibility, and Big Bear's opening soliloquy takes on an entirely new poignancy in retrospect. The change from text to screen exemplifies the "cultural turn" in translation studies prompted by postcolonial and feminist studies, represented in Canada by the work of Sherry Simon, Barbara Godard, and Annie Brisset among others. True, Cree is still–necessarily–spoken "in English" but necessity is turned into strategy: English, still the norm, is now the language of the Other for mainstream Canadian viewers. But the use of English as Cree is much more than a trick to elicit empathy, and the cultural turn is also an ethical one. The non-native viewer is not positioned as Cree; rather, she is denied any comfort zone. She remains outside both the Cree (no matter how much sympathy she feels

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for them, she is not part of them) and the English (whose language has been suddenly expropriated). The disconcerting effect of the language reversal also shows, I think, that even the shared burden of guilt for a shameful history is more comforting than the loneliness of being made a stranger to one's own language.

The "jolt" produced by this strategy is, of course, predicated on the viewer's knowledge of the role of English in Canadian history; she knows that the officials speak English but she cannot understand them. What is lost in translation here–twice–is the English subject; what is gained is not knowledge in the conventional sense–we all know who "really" speaks what language, just as we know the salient points of the story, which still ends in the same sad way. What is gained is something more precious: an affective experience–however fleeting–of the dislocation the drama of the Plains Cree–and by extension much of Canadian history–is all about. This is also but, I believe, secondarily, a cognitive recognition of the necessity of translation and its role in the nation's history, and of Canada's too often occluded multilingualism. What we get here is a bilingual story without bilingualism, as it were, in which the players are not French and English but Cree and not-Cree.

Now, the Cree do not become more politically powerful simply because the way they speak becomes the norm. English remains the centre–as it must as long as the readership or viewership is mainly Anglophone–but the ground of the centre is ceded to the Cree. There is an inherent dilemma here, as the hyper-valuation of marginality risks granting moral supremacy to whatever is removed from the centre. Cardinal manages to avoid this by means of a kind of generic code-switching: while the Cree act in a realist drama, the English–at least from the outset–seem to be in some baroque chamber play. All in all, then, the staging of the text allows the Other to take centre stage without becoming universalized or generalized. The Cree are very much Cree; they represent nothing but themselves, while the English become almost allegorized into personifications of empire.

Tracking Translation

The uncomfortable viewing position I have tried to unpack here is located in what Emily Apter calls the "translation zone," in which

> translation becomes a means of repositioning the subject in the world and in history; a means of rendering self-knowledge foreign to itself; a way of denaturalizing citizens, taking them out of the comfort zone of national space, daily ritual and pre-given domestic arrangements. (6)

It is the shift from translation as a metonymy for colonization in Wiebe's novel–prompting a cognitive, albeit empathetic, rethinking of *history*–to translation as an affective experience prompting a rethinking of *subjectivity* that I want to trace briefly here before turning to a question of particular interest to practitioners of comparative

literature: is it possible to conceive of a critical and pedagogical practice that would have an effect analogous to that of Wiebe and Cardinal's strategy? I dream of seeing students–or colleagues–jolted the way I was in front of a CBC miniseries, into the sudden recognition of the precariousness of their linguistic identity. In pedagogical discussions of affect in our discipline the focus is usually on how to manage affective responses to texts, not on how to produce affect as a pedagogical or critical tool. Is the provocation of affective experience the sole prerogative of the literary, or can the classroom, the conference hall, and the critical essay become zones of productive discomfort through the use of strategies inspired by theories of translation?

I have used the two versions of *The Temptations of Big Bear* to illustrate a crucial shift in the understanding of and attitude towards translation, which has become a complicated keyword in literary and cultural theory. In a world increasingly dependent on it as practice, the concept of translation has undergone a rather dizzying metamorphosis in its way from the dictionary through metaphor to catachresis. In the following I will make three stops on this itinerary, not so much to find an answer to my question as to ponder where it would make sense–or productive non-sense–to go next.

The recovery of translation from its derivative status as the poor cousin to creative genius no doubt owes much to the renaissance of all things Benjaminian, but my journey through the translation zone begins with a contemporary of Wiebe's novel, George Steiner's observation in *After Babel* that "*inside or between languages, human communication equals translation*" (47; emphasis in the original). Close on the heels of Steiner but coming from a distinctly different place are Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, whose reflections on translation and language have influenced translation theorists and practitioners from Lawrence Venuti to Barbara Godard. In *Mille Plateaux* (1980) we read that "Le langage est fait pour cela, pour la traduction, non pour la communication" (qtd. in Godard 60). Here the relationship of equivalence turns into a relationship of hierarchy in which translation becomes the condition of possibility for communication.

The final protagonist in the story of translation I am tracing here, after Steiner and Deleuze and Guattari, is Gayatri Spivak. In "The Politics of Translation" (1993), Spivak takes recourse to the rhetoric of love to describe translation, "the most intimate act of reading" as "surrender" to the source text that is more "erotic than ethical" (183). In a later essay, "Translation as Culture" (2000), however, she turns from erotics to ethics, defining translation, more catachrestically than metaphorically, as "the violent production of the precarious subject of reparation and responsibility" (13). Spivak here refers to object-relations theory and Melanie Klein's description of how the child grabs things in a process that folds outside into inside, in a "shuttling" process. According to Spivak, the *violence* of grabbing things associated with "nature" becomes the *conscience* we associate with "culture" in this process of "translation," which thus becomes the name for the fundamental relation of self to world which is the foundation of ethics. The crucial shift here takes a step further than the one

articulated in Apter's definition of the translation zone: the object of translation is no longer a text or an utterance, language or communication, but the subject. In addition, it is no longer a temporary experience accessible to those capable of inhabiting more than one language, it is a constituent aspect of subjectivity. If translation is what makes the subject an ethical entity, this also means that the most crucial discovery in a child's life is that its language is only one among many. Both Spivak and Apter, who sees translation as "an act of love and [...] disruption" (6), thus wrestle with the relationship between affect and ethics, raising the question of how to turn affective surrender–to the pleasure of language or reading–into an ethical stance.

That translation has gained prominence as an object of inquiry in the age of transnationalism is not surprising, nor that it has become a fulcrum for the debate about the disciplinary relationship between Comparative and World Literature, but these developments do not sufficiently explain the crucial definitional shift. My intention here is not to attempt to unpack the complicated reasons for recent developments but rather to suggest that, as a sort of ready-made translation zone, Canada might be an appropriate testing ground for some of the issues arising from them. The country's history has had the unfortunate consequence that it is difficult to take language debate out of the fraught political arena. The *aesthetic* and *pedagogical* potential of bilingualism, for instance, is occluded, or restricted to discussions about the value of specific practices, such as the celebration of cultural representations of a multilingual society–often based on unpbroblematic reflection theories of literary representations.

Canadian literatures are polyphonic, heteroglot, bursting with languages, and "translingualism" is, more often than not, seen as a positive effect of multiculturalism, or, as the Quebec government prefers it, *interculturalisme*. Yet criticism of these literatures, whether under the rubric of English, French, Native, or Comparative studies, remains stubbornly monolingual, exhibiting a blatant, though unconscious, lack of congruity with its object. What is it about the practice of criticism that seems to require the transformation of heteroglossia into monoglossia in spite of its increased valuation of the former? Why, in other words, are Canadian critics so unwilling to step out of their comfort zone in spite of the lively discussion about translation within the country? Can we use the promise held out by recent translation theory more effectively in our critical practice to inspire a productive rethinking of our position in the world and in Canada? As my example shows, I believe it is to cultural practices that we need to look for potential models.

Writing in the Translation Zone

In the following I will turn to texts that use translation structurally or figuratively in ways that could inform the kind of critical practice I am looking for. Not surprisingly, the examples come from two Montreal writers; as Sherry Simon has shown, Montreal

is a bellwether for Canadian multilingualism and a synecdoche for the translation zone that is Canada.

Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* is as temporally set in the mid-1960s as it is topographically set in Montreal. In terms of my discussion, the most pertinent aspect of this site-specificity on the level of contemporary politics is its association of linguistic nationalism, exemplified by Quebec separatism, with fascism, which sees the nation–as a political entity and as an imagined community–as the "naturalized" ground of subjectivity. As in Wiebe's novel the analogy between language and colonization is emphasized in the first section, the historian narrator's "History of them All," but translation eventually leaves the realm of history and enters the realm of love and subjectivity, when "I" begins to realize that his resistance to his late wife's insistence that they "be other people" is at least partly responsible for her suicide. Moving from the aloof position of the historian, "I" learns, from his mentor, F, to "see as the other sees." This progression from history and politics to ethics constitutes a step in an itinerary that aims at a spiritual destination. Against the translation modelled by the Jesuits, which aims at conversion, at turning the other into the same, the narrator "I", almost perversely, sets the language of prayer: "Prayer is translation. A man translates himself into a child asking for all there is in a language he has barely mastered" (62). By rejecting mastery, the translator/child is carried "out of the comfort zone," out of himself and, presumably, into the language of the other. The means by which this is accomplished is a Greek phrase book, originally associated with sexual favours, which becomes a sort of sacred scripture because of the completely literal–indeed childlike–translations which denaturalize the English language. The progressive self-loss of the narrator is paralleled by the increasing alienation of the Anglophone reader, culminating in the disappearance of English, as "I's" story ends with the reproduction of a page of Greek which would be unintelligible for most readers.

It would seem, then, that *Beautiful Losers* enacts a tropological itinerary similar to the one I sketched in my whirlwind trip through translation theory. It could be argued, however, that the ultimate loss of self through translation as prayer is less an act of identification than the narcissistic drowning of self through intense self-absorption and that the ethical rapprochement to the other is a transitory phase in the journey towards a Romantic–masculinist–loss of self resulting from the transcendence of the mundane life of personal and political relationships effected through a convergence of the sacred and the erotic. As Peter Wilkins points out, prayer is "monologue set up as dialogue." Yet, there is a less often noted use of translation in the novel that counterbalances this apparent privileging of the spiritual. In an experiment that seems quite Deleuzean–*avant la lettre*–Cohen's text uses translation not only as a way to a loss of meaning and self, but also as a means of generating meaning through a focus on the shape and sound–the material properties–of language. Elsewhere I have argued that the novel should be read "in translation," and Cohen literalizes the imperative of "seeing as the other sees" by playing on the phonetic simi-

larity between the letters V and B in Greek.[2] This structural foundation would indeed appear to contradict the narrative deprivileging of the political. When Ray Charles *sings* "Ol' Man River" in the epigraph, "lift that bale" becomes a *mot d'ordre* which, reading the history of slavery in Greek translation, resonates less with the veil of Isis which figures the quest for truth in the novel than with W.E.B. DuBois's "veil" lowered over the eyes of "the Negro" (2-3). This linguistic sleight of hand thus reinstates the political alliance that makes of the Québécois the "nègres blancs d'Amérique" (cf. Vallières), thus providing an alternative reading of the separatism criticized in the famous rally scene. Although one can argue about what level, if any, is privileged, Cohen performs all of the manifold understandings of translation in this novel, as a political, cultural, ethical and spiritual phenomenon.

Cohen's use of translation is counterbalanced by Nicole Brossard's *Le désert mauve*, which explicitly mimics the process of translation while remaining resolutely monolingual, beginning with the "original" version of a novel entitled *Le désert mauve* by Laure Angstelle and ending with its translation, by Maude Laures, into *Mauve l'horizon*. The longest section, however, is the middle part, "Un livre à traduire," which focuses on the translator's encounter with the original and is consequently located in the translation zone. In an explicitly self-reflexive manner, Brossard uses translation to pose questions of subjectivity from a lesbian feminist point of view. The ground for language and subjectivity here is no longer the nation–it is not coincidental that the protagonist is a descendant of Québécois émigrés in the southern US–but the female body. The dependence of the text on the French language is reflected in a series of images and metaphors–as well as names–generated by the author's name, Laure Angstelle. As in Cohen, the sound and shape of words are at least as important as their sense; for instance, the sound "o" becomes "eau," as precious as "or" in the Arizonian desert, and which also resonates in the two Laures. The homonymity of the name of the translator, Maude Laures, with "mots de Laure" troubles the question of originality and authorship; the words of the translator are only tangentially the words of the "original" author. The latter's status is similarly undermined by the laws of verisimilitude which otherwise seem to rule the first text. Laure Angstelle certainly sounds French, but her protagonist does not understand the language, and the language spoken in the realm of the Arizonian real, with which her novel is so preoccupied, is English. There is a reversal of the "normal" relationship here; the novel comes to us, as it were, already in translation.

My use of the adjective "tangential" to characterize the relationship between the "original" and its translation is deliberate. In the process of translation, Maude Laures first divides the text into its component parts–"lieux et objets," "personnages," "scènes," "dimensions"– in an almost Barthesian high structuralist process of decoding, which is at the same time an imaginary creation of the "back stories" missing in the original. In other words, the translator uses the particulars of the text as a springboard from which to launch an imaginary universe in a way that brings to mind Benjamin's idea of translation:

> Just as a tangent touches a circle lightly and at but one point, with this touch rather than with the point setting the law according to which it is to continue on its straight path to infinity, a translation touches the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point of the sense, thereupon pursuing its own course according to the laws of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux. (80)

The coming together of the sensual–the touch–and the geometrical–the circle and tangent–is reminiscent of the angles and flux that structure Brossard's story, in a kind of literalization of Deleuze and Guattari's *ligne de fuite*, made concrete in the protagonist's travels through the desert with its ever receding horizon. The two converge in Angela Parkins, who awakens Mélanie's desire through her touch and who, in Maude Laures's interpretation, triggers the "lesbian panic" in "l'homme long." The motive for his murder of Angela remains unclear, but I would suggest that it may have to do with the man's inability to deal with what might be called her bilingualism. Angela masters both the language of men and the language of women, translating herself easily from one realm to another. As a geometrist, she understands angles and equations, but as a woman she knows the language of touch, and she rejects mastery for love.

Most significantly, in terms of Apter's and Spivak's understanding of translation as a form of love or intimacy, the translator temporarily leaves her "real" friends behind to enter the world of the novel. In a surprising section of the "livre à traduire," just after her imaginary portraits of the fictional characters, we suddenly encounter the "Autoportrait de Maude Laures," in which the translator is addressed in the second person singular. Since the narrator throughout this section is clearly the translator, she has here, by entering the text on which she is working, accomplished the self-othering that Spivak defines as the goal of translation. This self-othering of the translator reverses or compensates for the fate of the protagonist who, at the end of the novel "ne peu[t] tutoyer personne" because she has lost her lover. Only through an affective, loving identification with the author, mediated through the text, is this achieved. The resulting translation is on the level of sense more or less equivalent with the "original" but infused with a different sensibility. In what seems like a territorializing move, the differences are in some ways site-specific, as the sharp sun and contours of Arizona melt into the grey Montreal winter, to emerge in the northern spring.

What, if any, then, are the ramifications of these two so different novels for my quest for a radical critical practice? Both are dependent on structurally significant, as well as surprising, tropologies of translation, both are formally adventurous, and both elicit affective responses. One is heteroglot and masculinist, the other monoglot and lesbianist. *Le désert mauve* is more cognizant of theoretical discourses–Brossard's interest in Deleuze and Guattari is well documented–yet I would argue that *Beautiful Losers* offers a more productive model for my purpose. The fundamental quest of Cohen's narrators is the escape from systems, of which language is one. Brossard's view of language, on the other hand, is individualist; unlike mathematics and geometry, French–the language of love–is the language of the body. Here transla-

tion is difference within sameness–same-sex relations, same-language translation–a matter of personal characteristics and habits. For all its post-structuralist splendour, then, Brossard's novel harks back to a Steinerian, humanist notion of translation as a trope for all communication between individuals. The desire that propels translation in *Le désert mauve* is that of the translator/reader for the author, for which the text becomes the conduit. If the last word of Brossard's novel is the translator/reader's, the novel nevertheless privileges the author as the inspirer of desire, hence in the end relegating the translator to the traditional position. *Beautiful Losers*, on the other hand, leaves the author with the last word, but that last word is a welcome to the reader.

Affective Affinities

When we talk about affect we necessarily talk about the body, about physical reactions. A recent study shows that infants under the age of eight months react with delight to changes in language spoken by faces on a screen–without any sound attached[3]–which also vindicates those of us whose facial muscles ache when we return to a language that has been lying fallow for a while, and which brings home the crucial fact that language begins in the body and with pleasure. Where, when and why does that pleasure of recognition of linguistic difference disappear? When does the pleasure of playing with language turn into anxiety, into the fear of failure?

The inevitability of "failure" has long been a *lieu commun* in translation studies, and most comparatists would probably agree with Charles Bernheimer's committee in the 1993 American Comparative Literature Association's report on the status of Comparative Literature in the US, that even in the face of anxiety-provoking encroachments of Cultural Studies and World Literature, mitigating "the old hostilities against translation" (Bernheimer 44) is preferable to either the "global parochialism of Anglophone monoglossia" (Cronin 60) or the purism of the old Comparative Literature. Generally speaking, even if they will not go as far as Djelal Kadir, who, in a deliberately exaggerated polemic, implies that adopting a purist attitude against translation is tantamount to abetting terrorism, most comparatists realize the necessity of compromise when it comes to allowing translated texts into the rarefied sphere of their discipline, if for no other reason than to combat the lingering rule of Eurocentrism. The necessity for compromise has, of course, long been a commonplace in translation practice, which more often than not turns "failure" into a productive strategy, as in Lawrence Venuti's prescription for "foreignizing" as a general principle.[4]

If the inevitability of failure has been turned into virtue in translation practice, however, it still provokes anxiety in literary criticism, perhaps nowhere more so than in Comparative Literature, which, Bernheimer asserts in the first sentence of his introduction to the 1993 ACLA report on the discipline, is "anxiogenic". Critical practice is consciously disingenuous in that it acknowledges the provisionality of any

interpretation, yet its practitioners are still annoyed when proved wrong. The disciplinary homelessness of Comparative Literature cannot but exacerbate the critical anxiety already inherent in the recognition it shares with translation that it can never fully do justice to its multiple objects. But if anxiety is part of the productive discomfort that Apter identifies as the hallmark of the translation zone, it would seem to be something we should celebrate, indeed seek out. The question then becomes how to perform the same operation on the notion of failure in the discipline of Comparative Literature that has been so successfully performed in translation studies.

One way to capitalize on the failure to find new grounds of comparison to take the place of the nation–as well as its presumably transnational yet equally grounded alternatives like race, gender, class or disability–would be to conceive of comparison without ground. Doris Sommer's impassioned plea for a critical practice based on an aesthetics of bilingualism aims at something similar to what I am envisaging here. In taking us out of our comfort zone and opening the door to others, moving among languages exposes practitioners of bi- or multilingualism–particularly those who are not to that manner born, as it were–to ridicule and embarrassment, but in so doing also paves the way for the unexpected and for the delight of discovery, including most crucially the discovery of our own precarious subject position.

Canada would seem like an obvious place to experiment with this idea, and the present moment may be particularly propitious, in light of the recent challenges to the liberal idea of multiculturalism in the hearings of the Bouchard-Taylor commission. This radical experiment has reminded Canadians that, as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, among others, have long pointed out, democracy is predicated on antagonism and conflict rather than harmony and consensus. Sommer observes that bilingual language games "are also symptoms of democratic engagement that should not presume mutual understanding among citizens" (134), and she even suggests that bilingualism can form a bulwark against the liberal vision of multiculturalism represented by writers like Charles Taylor. Bernheimer's 1993 report on the state of Comparative Literature focused on multiculturalism, while the 2005 report shifted its focus somewhat to globalization. Both would seem to overcome the vexing dependence on "nation" as the ground of comparison, but at least in the former case, Canada complicates matters insofar as multiculturalism, as an official policy, not to mention an effective marketing ploy, has become the hallmark of Canada as a nation. It could even be argued that it, at long last, provided our country with a national identity–or a national alibi, depending on your perspective–that allowed us to overcome the outmoded but still troubling bilingual model, and to include Native peoples and immigrants alike under the abstract rubric of diversity. If the new ground for comparison is what defines Canada as a nation, then Comparative Literature in Canada faces a paradoxical dilemma. In order to transcend the outmoded ground of nation–to which it has so recently acceded, it must disavow multiculturalism as a framework for comparison.

Groundless Comparison

The most radical solution to this dilemma would be to do away with grounds altogether before the ground-hunt meets with the same frustrations as did the national ghost-hunt in the sixties and seventies. In fact, if we are to believe Walter Benn Michaels, the "ground" which seems so indispensable to Comparative Literature has been done away with already, courtesy of post-structuralism's privileging of "the shape of the signifier." It may seem counter-intuitive for someone looking for a radical critical practice to call on somebody like Michaels, who rails against the demise of authorial intention in favour of readerly subjectivity as interpretive authority. This nefarious shift, he claims, lies at the bottom of the ills of identity politics–as readers identify with identity-based interpretive communities, notably those based on gender and race. I would argue that a text like *Le désert mauve* disputes Michaels's claim in that, despite its post-structuralist reliance on the shape of the signifier and its investment in a certain identity politics, it still privileges authorial intention as the ground for interpretation.

Michaels's argument is too provocative not to take on. As a self-confessed member of the critical community he accuses and as a–however lapsed–Lutheran, I know better than to let guilt go to waste, and will merrily set out to commit the crime of which I am by association convicted. What happens, then, if critics, *really* pay homage to the shape of the signifier, if we do away with the last vestiges of logocentrism, leave the ground to go out on a limb–or two–and throw ourselves at the feet of the signifier, *aux pieds de la lettre?*

Uprooting the signifier–the most territorial aspect of language–from its hold on meaning in Canada has to begin by dismantling the link between territory and language, an operation that seems to present significantly more difficulty for critics than for creative writers. But not only do we have to deterritorialize the signifier from the linguistic ground it occupies, we also have to leave the signified behind, or take leave of sense–and you may well think I have taken leave of mine. We have to follow the transnational "*ligne de fuite*" of the signifier across every border to which it leads us, defying every homeland security on the planet. Why stop at bilingualism–or even translingualism–when we can have much more fun with something like *transliteralism*, a neologism I am proposing as a tentative response to Sommer's question: "What is the rhetorical name for a code switch that works like an escape route? What do you call purposeful mistranslations, or the sounds-like associations between words of different languages?" (120).

Walter Benjamin famously likened translation to a robe enveloping the body of the original in its rich–excessive, even baroque–*Fälte*, folds, wrinkles, or *plis*. According to the–from a logocentric point of view admittedly absurd–logic I am trying out here, my plea for a transliteral critical practice then becomes le pli de la traduction, which brings us back to the folding movement of Spivak's emerging ethical subject, who

suddenly seems to be hiding in plain sight in the title of Gilles Deleuze's reading of Leibniz and the baroque, *Le Pli*. Baroque is a word commonly associated with the kinds of signifier-dependent practices that characterize the postmodern texts that I see as offering potential models for my dreamed-of critical practice, in which unfolding or becoming takes the place of any ontological notion of being. Why not a neo-baroque critical practice, a practice of unfolding that leads not to the revelation of something hidden but to yet another wrinkle in the exfoliation of something that was always already there but unseen? In Swedish *pli* means a certain kind of discipline, in the sense of asserting discipline over, oneself or others, as in "hon har ingen pli," meaning she has no sense of discipline; she has no control over herself. (This means basically "she's a bad Swede; she'd better emigrate," to Canada for instance, though read transliterally, of course, as I prefer, it can also mean "no wrinkle on her.")

If translation can migrate from being a property of a text or language to becoming a property of the subject, why cannot a phenomenon like "migrancy" or "vagabondage" undergo an analogous reversal from being a property of language *users* to becoming a property of language itself? Might not such a reversal accomplish the conflation of translation and transnation that theorists like Apter call for as an ethical practice?

Perhaps all I have done here is take a joyride on a migrant signifier, transgressing in the process all boundaries of reason and discipline, exhibiting a reckless lack of *pli*. Rather than making any new "sense" I have followed the sense, or senses, already there, visibly and aurally, in the signifier. My practice may have been self-indulgent, even manipulative, possibly irresponsible, and certainly open to the usual accusations of elitism levelled at comparatists. If it has led to any revelation at all it is simply to the experience of linguistic difference, with its both pleasurable–I hope–and disconcerting sense of being taken "out of the comfort zone of national space, daily ritual and pre-given domestic [read familiar critical] arrangements" (Apter 6)–that is, into "the translation zone." And this is exactly the point of a truly radical transliteral practice: to leave the ground while also foregoing the transcendence associated with revelation, instead paying the closest possible attention to the mani*fold* possibilities of the linguistic veil–*qui n'est sûrement pas de pure laine* but a coat of many colours.

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ENDNOTES

1. The term "gobbledygook" was used by Federal Minister of Indian Affairs Judd Buchanan in 1975, in rejecting the Dene Declaration (also known as the Dene Manifesto). See Henderson 230. I am grateful to Len Findlay for providing this piece of information, which lends additional poignancy to my use of the word as well as to Wiebe and Cardinal's practice.

2. See *Margin/Alias*, chapter two.

3. See http://www.cbc.ca/technology/story/2007/05/24/baby-languages.html#skip300x250.

4. The criticism directed, most persuasively by Edwin Gentzler, against Lawrence Venuti's "elitism," which presupposes that the reader of a translation will be able to distinguish between a deliberate strategy and an error resulting from lack of competence is reminiscent of similar, and inevitable, accusations against Comparative Literature. The two are equally inevitable because, as far as any discussion of language and translation goes, bilingualism necessarily trumps monolingualism.