

Translating Literary Multilingualism in Jean-Simon DesRochers' *Le Sablier des solitudes*

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## ABSTRACT

It is becoming clear that a new era of multilingualism has begun, if indeed the world was ever truly otherwise. This can be seen in the language(s) now being used in literature both internationally and in Quebec specifically. The province's unique linguistic and cultural situation is reflected in the bi- and multilingual literature produced over the last century and a half. These works are increasingly open to the inclusion of languages other than French, particularly English. This poses a challenge for translators in English Canada, who must attempt to convey the linguistic alterity that is erased by the act of translation.

Drawing on Berman's deforming tendencies and Sternberg's methods for recording polylingual discourse in the novel, this thesis will examine the specific areas of concern when translating Quebec's bi- and multilingual literature for an English Canadian audience and methods for creating a hybrid text, one possible solution to this challenge. Lazer Lederhendler's translation of *Tarmac* by Nicolas Dickner will be analyzed as a potential model for translators. The thesis will then discuss possible translations for several bilingual passages taken from Jean-Simon DesRochers' novel *Le Sablier des solitudes*. Though the novel is written primarily in French, many characters are bilingual and interact with anglophones; the thoughts and dialogue for one major character, a Texan, are recorded entirely in English. Translating this linguistic alterity for an English Canadian audience will require the use of each of Sternberg's techniques. The translated excerpt will then be presented as a whole.

## RESUMÉ

Il devient de plus en plus évident que nous sommes engagés dans une nouvelle ère de multilinguisme (comme si le monde n'avait pas toujours été multilingue). Nous pouvons l'observer dans les langues qui sont aujourd'hui utilisées en littérature, à la fois à l'échelle internationale et au Québec, dont la situation unique sur les plans linguistique et culturel se reflète dans sa littérature bilingue et multilingue produite au cours des 150 dernières années. Ces œuvres s'ouvrent de plus en plus à l'inclusion de plusieurs langues, dont l'anglais en particulier. Il y a là un défi pour les traducteurs du Canada anglais, qui doivent rester fidèles à l'altérité linguistique qu'élimine normalement l'acte de traduire.

Puisant dans les tendances déformantes de Berman et les méthodes utilisées par Sternberg pour consigner le discours plurilingue dans le roman, ce mémoire portera sur les défis propres à la traduction de la littérature québécoise bilingue et multilingue à l'intention du public anglophone du Canada ainsi que sur des méthodes de création de textes hybrides – une solution potentielle à cette difficulté. La traduction faite par Lazer Lederhendler de l'œuvre *Tarmac* de Nicolas Dickner sera analysée comme modèle potentiel pour les traducteurs. Ce mémoire proposera des traductions de plusieurs passages bilingues tirés du roman *Le Sablier des solitudes* de Jean-Simon DesRochers. Bien que ce roman ait été rédigé principalement en français, plusieurs des personnages sont bilingues et interagissent avec des Anglophones. Pour traduire cette altérité linguistique pour un public du Canada anglais, il faut donc recourir à chacune des techniques de Sternberg. Par la suite, l'extrait traduit sera présenté dans son intégralité.

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## Introduction

The presence of multiple languages within a text, be they national languages or different registers of the same national language, is an old fact and longstanding tradition in world literature. Translators have grappled with this challenge for nearly as long, though no clear solutions have been found. Translating this phenomenon has been described as both a “double-edged sword” (Grutman 2006: 40) and, perhaps more kindly “un défi particulièrement stimulant” (Leclerc 112). Others, including Berman and Derrida, find that translation of linguistic difference is impossible and it tends to be lost (Stratford 463). In general, this challenge is often met with “un pessimisme écrasant” by those studying it (ibid. 462), so that ultimately, the practical aspects of translating multilingual literature are not satisfactorily addressed in the literature. It is instead studied on a case-by-case basis, and often, the decision to retain multilingual elements is fairly straightforward. Gregory Rabassa, for example, has no qualms about leaving French in his translation of Julio Cortázar’s *Rayuelas*. In his memoir, he writes “Had Julio wanted these spots in English, he would have translated them into Spanish in the first place. I also saw no reason to dumb the book down for readers of English and insult them that way.” (54). However, the challenge becomes greater when translating bilingual literature into one of the languages already being used, especially when those languages are both spoken within the same community. This is a particular challenge for those translating Quebecois literature for an English audience. When translating the English sections of a primarily French book into English how can the bilingual aspects of this work be retained? Should they be?

Drawing on the works of Grutman and Meylaerts regarding heterolingualism, with a specific focus on multilingual literature in bilingual communities like Canada, I will be attempting to address this challenge in my translation of selected excerpts from *Le Sablier des*

*solitudes* by Montreal author Jean-Simon DesRochers. Grutman, Leclerc, Simon and others will provide insight into Quebec's specific linguistic and literary history, while Berman's deforming tendencies and Bhabha's work on hybrid texts will raise areas of concern when translating linguistic difference within a text. Sternberg's classifications of multilingual literature will be examined, as they will provide an invaluable framework for discussing my own translation choices and those of other translators.

My thesis will first examine multilingualism in literature and its ties to Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, as well as other terms. A brief overview of multilingual literature, both historical and contemporary, and the different forms that it may take, will be provided. Quebec's situation will then be discussed in-depth, as its unique linguistic situation means that translations of its francophone literature are prone to specific pitfalls and considerations; this will be followed by an examination of choices made by Canadian translators when dealing with this phenomenon and a more in-depth analysis of Lazer Lederhendler's solutions in *Apocalypse for Beginners*, his translation of *Tarmac* by Nicholas Dickner. Finally, I shall introduce *Le Sablier des solitudes* by Jean-Simon DesRochers and discuss several excerpts from my translation that address the multilingual utterances in his novel.

## Chapter 1: Literary multilingualism

*A note on terminology – heteroglossia and others.*

Before I delve into the history, methods and translation of multilingual literature, a point must be made regarding the terminology. As the words used to describe this phenomenon fall in and out of favour, it seems appropriate to examine each for its merits, flaws and distinctive features.

Most notably, I have decided to forego using the term “heterolingualism” as currently preferred by Grutman, Meylaerts and other contemporary scholars whose works I have read.

It seems impossible to begin this review without first turning to the concept of “heteroglossia” as put forth by Bakhtin, the idea that language in the novel is dialogical, other-voiced. Bakhtin defines heteroglossia as “the internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects” (262), but only upon its entrance into a literary text. Bakhtin scholar Vice expands upon this definition, arguing that heteroglossia occurs in two general forms – social languages within a single national language, and different national languages within the same culture (19).

Ostensibly, as this second form of heteroglossia is indeed the literary multilingualism I am attempting to describe and create in translation, this term could have served. Vice, however, argues that Bakhtin intended for heteroglossia to deal primarily with the images of languages, not accurate use of these languages (25). The term may therefore be inadequate when an author intends for their multilingual utterances to be understood, as is often the case in Quebecois literature. Furthermore, Bakhtin’s writings contain several contradictions when discussing this concept, not only from essay to essay, but sometimes within the same work (Grutman 1997: 40). Accordingly, I find the definition of heteroglossia too broad and too vague for the purposes of this thesis.



To counter the vagueness of Bakhtin's term, Rainier Grutman offered heterolingualism as a "functional alternative" (Meylaerts 2006: 4). Defined simply as the presence of other languages within a text (Grutman 1997: 11), heteroglossia also allows for realistic reproduction of a language, whereas according to Bakhtin, "the novelist makes no effort at all to achieve a linguistically (dialectologically) exact and complete reproduction [...] he attempts merely to achieve an artistic consistency among the images of those languages (366). Meylaerts also believes that the functional nature of the term "heterolingualism" better provides for discussions about intra-national translation (2006: 5). Furthermore, as heterolingualism itself is a hybrid, Grutman feels it is a "mise en abyme" of the phenomenon it describes (1997: 37).

Despite this, I find heterolingualism to be a problematic term. Grutman argues that "bilingual" has historically had bad press as a term in Canada (1997: 28), which is one of his reasons for coining the term – but would not "plurilingual" or "multilingual" have been appropriate? Furthermore, with language being, as Bakhtin states, "on the borderline between oneself and the Other" (293), using a prefix that often means simply "different" or "other"<sup>1</sup> adds a dimension of alterity that may be unnecessary in, for example, literature written by immigrants or bilingual writers, whose presence is growing worldwide. This focus on difference, not plurality is further emphasized by Myriam Suchet when she decides to use Grutman's term (2014: 18)<sup>2</sup>. Other scholars have also chosen to focus on the Otherness inherent in the notion of heterolingualism. The idea that heterolingualism refers to the "language of the Other" was put forth in Naoki Sakai's *Translation and Subjectivity*, also published in 1997, where it was contrasted with

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<sup>1</sup> The prefix "hetero" can also mean "containing different types", but this is not the most commonly found definition, and not the one immediately reached for in common parlance – online, for example, you can find many jokes about being "homolingual", "heterolingual" or "bilingual".

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that she also redefines the word as "la mise en scène d'une langue comme plus ou moins étrangère le long d'un continuum d'altérité construit dans et par un discours (ou un texte) donné" (Suchet 2014: 19).

“homolingualism”. These definitions of the two terms were then further used by Antony Adolf in “Multilingualism and its discontents”, which examines the bias towards homolingual communities in modern times (146). In this work, “heterolingual” refers to an outsider to the community, one who does not share the language, and “polylingual” to those who speak that language as well as others (ibid. 147). Though Grutman strove for political neutrality by creating a new word that even he admits can be synonymous with heteroglossia at times (2006: 19), I ultimately find this word more linguistically confrontational at its core than the other options.

Given the focus of her studies, Leclerc’s choice of “colingualism” clearly feels much more appropriate to the Quebec situation today – a form of literary code-switching that allows for some reciprocity to take place within a literary work (73). The term itself also suggests a less antagonistic relationship between languages, which is especially relevant as multilingualism in general rises in prominence. Leclerc mentions that the term “code-switching” itself is used primarily by linguists and that alternating between languages for artistic purposes is little studied (101). Code-switching is also a problematic term because it maintains that languages require “switching”, which reifies the barrier between languages and does not necessarily reflect the reality of multilingual discourse, both in the world and in texts (Adolf 158).

Ultimately, none of the above terms fully suit my needs, and I will be opting to use “multilingual”. It is the plainest, but this plainness is necessary for the purposes of my thesis. Choosing “colingual” would be misleading: while it is the most accurate label for some of the works being produced today, especially in Quebec, the term does not apply to all multilingual literature being produced, and the challenges I am examining do not only occur in the translation of colingual works. Code-switching and heterolingualism both emphasize the divide between languages, rather than the plurality of languages being used. Heterolingualism is defined

differently from author to author, and heteroglossia has no consistent definition even within Bakhtin's own work. The term "multilingual" has none of these faults – while it is broad, it is not vague, and its meaning is both clear and neutral.

Of course, no term is without its flaws: multilingualism may be too broad, and if further qualifiers are not added, may give the impression that all languages are being used equally, when in fact instances of literary multilingualism can fall on a spectrum from the inclusion of occasional words to large portions of text.

### **Multilingual literature: Its history and translation**

Histories of multilingual literature tend to simplify the period before the twentieth century, ignoring the multilingualism that has always been a constant, "des goliards d'hier [...] aux chicanos d'aujourd'hui" (Grutman 2002: 329). This also reflects a fairly Eurocentric, post-Enlightenment view of history, which tends to overlook contributions from communities and cultures that are not dominant, including nations with less cultural capital (the symbolic and material goods needed to belong to a privileged group), and religious communities, which have a long history of extensive multilingualism in their evangelical writings (Knauth 6).

The most oft-cited examples of literary multilingualism are perhaps the works of medieval European writers, who wrote in both Latin and their own vernacular tongues (Stratford 458). This multilingualism was abetted by the period's diglossia, as knowledge was

primarily transferred in Latin. This diglossia transformed as vulgar languages rose in prominence over the centuries, and following the Enlightenment, French instead became the language of international politics (Knauth 7). At this point, numerous works of literature began to include great swathes of untranslated French – see for example, Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* or Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* (Grutman, 2002: 338). As the 19<sup>th</sup> century neared, however, the concept of nations became greater in importance, prompting multilingual authors to choose a language and thus a nationality; as Stratford states, “écrire devient un acte politiquement chargé de conséquences” (458). This notion of nations also promotes the idea that while nations are diverse, they are each naturally homogenous – and this homogeneity must be preserved (Leclerc 136). Accordingly, the amount of multilingual literature published begins to decrease.

It should be noted though, that this version of history is already hiding a number of facts about multilingualism and multilingual literature. Firstly, non-European multilingualism is erased, even immediately following the discovery of the New World – starting with Columbus, indigenous people were sent back to Europe so that they may “learn to speak”, in his words, though they certainly had their own languages at this point (Rosenwald 1998: 328). It also focuses only on the most “acceptable” form of multilingualism, where literature written in languages with lower cultural capital includes words or sentences written in languages with greater cultural capital. Meylaerts has noted that tolerance and intolerance of foreign words within a text reflects the power imbalances between the languages and literature involved (2006: 7). When French becomes an international language, for example, French literature becomes highly monolingual, and the literary culture is generally self-sufficient. At the same time that other nations are welcoming the French language and culture into their literary works,

*les belles infidèles* are creating translations that cater to the French public at the expense of remaining faithful to their sources. And while the ideal of the monolingual European nation rose in prominence throughout the 1800's, hybridity was already being established as a "positive and uniquely Brazilian" characteristic by José de Alencar (Sawyer 16), setting the stage for the 20<sup>th</sup> century *Antropofagia* movement. All of this suggests that even the historical bias towards a monolingual ideal exists only in culturally dominant nations with a stronger history of erasing and ignoring the other languages within their borders.

The concept of the monolingual nation with monolingual literature peaked shortly before WWII: in Germany, Italy and Spain in particular, monolingual literature became idealized as the symbol of patriotism, with literary and paraliterary multilingualism for the most part stigmatized unless it was being used as propaganda or to demonstrate mastery over other languages (Knauth 12).

By the end of World War II, however, many writers had been forced to leave their home countries and live elsewhere, leading to linguistic insecurity as some authors adopted new languages while others continued to use their mother tongues (Stratford 458). Forced international contact through military movement also positively affected cultural multilingualism, later helping to usher in a cosmopolitan vision of a "multiple One World", which influenced literature in turn (Knauth 12). At the same time, more local instances of linguistic alterity began appearing in literature, both in nations with colingual contact between different communities (Quebec's migrant literature, for example, which will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter) and in nations that had previously been colonized and were now reappropriating the languages of their colonizers. Continued migration, easier travel and increasing globalization are all reflected by the increased visibility of linguistic alterity and

hybridity in literary works. Post-modern literature is “haunted” by literary multilingualism (Simon 1996: 55), and pushed further by the idea of crossing boundaries between genres, media and languages (Knauth 13). From this moment onward, “monolingualism and the homo-lingual hegemony it supports” showed more signs of retreating than moving forward (Adolf 146).

Whether because they have actually increased in number or because they are afforded greater visibility (or both), multilingual societies are no longer viewed as exceptional; instead, they are the norm (Stratford 459). In keeping with this admission, the European Commission launched a program promoting trilingualism called “Mother Tongue Plus Two”, encouraging people to learn their mother tongue, English, and a third language based on their location (Knauth 17). Accordingly, more visibility is being given to fictional works that are heavily multilingual, as it transmits an experience that is itself multilingual (Leclerc 102), and national literature reflects the societies in which they are created (Stratford 459). Monolingual cultures are increasingly recognized as idealized constructions that rarely, if ever, truly existed (Meylaerts 2006: 1). At the same time, nations that were historically colonized, villainized or simply overlooked by the West are now being studied in greater depth, (and research from these nations is now able to reach a greater public). Many of these nations have multilingual populations, and evidence of multilingual literature being produced in the past is beginning to surface. This is the case for India<sup>3</sup>. Nations that have always been multilingual are rising in economic prominence and gaining cultural capital as well, further validating the concept of the multilingual nation (see the increasing importance of the “BRIC” nations – Brazil, Russia, India and China, all of which are multilingual, albeit in very different fashions). Furthermore, as mass-media promote a

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<sup>3</sup> See the description for the 2013-2014 Research Partnership Opportunity with Francesca Orsini at Harvard, which expects students to “learn and test specific strategies to multilingual literary historical research” with a focus on “secondary and primary literature on Persian, Hindi and Urdu writers from Awadh” (Orsini, n.p).

commercial diglossic conflict between a globalized English and other local languages (Knauth 13), speaking multiple languages now also has a commercial value (Leclerc 23).

Given the increasing institutionalism of multilingualism, it is reasonable to assume that the national paradigm (and monolingual ideal) may have been nothing more than a “short-lived intermezzo” (Meylaerts 2006: 1), and both inter- and intra-national multilingualism will continue to grow. Given that literature is influenced by the communities in which it is created, it is reasonable to assume that as authors and readers speak more languages, the works created will follow suit. Multilingual works are part of the literary landscape (Leclerc 44), and it would seem that multilingual translations are increasingly required, given their contexts of production and reception (Stratford 468).

## Chapter 2: A history of Quebec's multilingual literature and some translation concerns

While Canada has been officially bilingual since 1969, it would be naïve to suggest that all underlying linguistic conflict has been resolved in the one hundred and forty-eight years following the *British North America Act* of 1867, or even in the forty-six years following the *Official Languages Act*. Of all of the literature produced in Canada as a whole, it is Quebec's literature that reflects this conflict most evidently. Quebec is the only province where English is not an officially stated provincial language, and its struggle to have French (Canada's largest minority language, and the majority language of the province) recognized continues to have repercussions for both the population and its relationships with the rest of Canada. Accordingly, there has been great potential for linguistic alterity within its literature.

It must be noted, however, that literature created in the province has not been uniformly or continuously open to the inclusion of other languages. English in particular, as the language most frequently included in bi- and multilingual literature, plays different roles at different times, reflecting the power relations between Canada's two official languages (Spear 72). As Grutman states, "l'emploi des langues étrangères évolue avec les attitudes linguistiques et les projets que se donne une communauté" (1997: 44), and the stance of Quebec's authors towards the use of other languages within its literature has changed in tandem with the position held by the French language within the province.

Translation of these bilingual and multilingual works is largely carried out within Canada, as the country's literary exchanges are highly institutionalized. The literary relationships between the "source" and "target" cultures, in this case Quebec and English Canada respectively, may impact translators' choices, as the act of representing or erasing multilingualism in literature



and the methods used to do so reflect the cultural values in vogue at the time that these works are produced (Leclerc 104).

In this section, I will examine how the relationship between French-speaking Quebec and the country's other (English-speaking) provinces<sup>4</sup> has affected the province's multilingual literature and the translation thereof, then outline some of the most probable issues that may arise for translations for a Canadian audience. As the translation of multilingual texts within communities can uncover internal divides, as well as linguistic and identity-related conflicts (Meylaerts 2009: 96), Quebec's multilingual works call for careful attention in translation. I will then briefly put forward the idea of the hybrid text as a possible solution for translators.

Though Quebec has been communicating in French for over 400 years, I will begin my review in the mid-nineteenth century for two reasons. Firstly, French prior to the *British North America Acts* represented merely a "personal means of communication" (Plourde 9), as opposed to a public or institutionalized one. Secondly, Quebec's literature was also just beginning to discover its identity in relation to English Canadian or French literature.

In the mid-1800s, just over half of Quebec's population was francophone, and in Montreal, English was spoken by a slightly higher percentage of the population (Grutman 1997: 45). At this point, letters written to both the *Quebec Gazette* and *La Gazette de Québec* could be published in both languages, with no translation required (Grutman 1997: 54). Following the *British North America Acts*, from 1867-75, the country's official bilingualism reinforced the already-present inequalities between the two languages. In order to advance economically, it

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<sup>4</sup> Of course, this is a simplification. There are allophone and anglophone communities in Quebec, just as there are francophone and allophone communities in the rest of Canada, and this entirely overlooks the First Nations languages spoken in the provinces and territories.

made sense for francophone families relocating from rural areas to primarily anglophone cities to be able to communicate in English. Even elite members of society followed suit, as families in the French-speaking upper classes and government formed alliances with the English and spoke their language (Harvey 11-12). Over the century that followed, this structure became more entrenched, illustrating Meylaerts' claim that multilingualism often becomes unidirectional, away from the minority language (2009: 101).

Quebec's literature was also affected by the social diglossia prevalent in Lower Canada in the mid-to-late nineteenth century (Grutman 1997: 44). At this point, it was quite open to the inclusion of other languages, perhaps because French was increasingly positioned as a minority language in relation to English: the less prestige a language has, the more open its literature may be to the inclusion of other languages (Meylaerts 2006: 7) Indeed, *L'Influence d'un livre*, the first book to be categorized as truly "Quebecois" in Grutman's *Des langues qui résonnent*, a review of plurilingual literature in early Quebec, is described as "davantage bilingue et national, qu'unilingue et nationaliste", and assumed that its francophone audience had at least passive understanding of the other official language (1997: 62-3). French at this time was not yet a "constituent element of [Quebec's] nationality" (Plourde 8)<sup>5</sup>, and accordingly many francophone authors writing in this century felt free to increase the realism of their setting by including words and phrases in First Nations languages, Latin and English (Grutman 1997: 85).

However, as tensions begin to rise between Quebec's two main linguistic communities near the turn of the century, the use of other languages within literary works became rarer, but more pointed (Grutman 1997: 190). While Grutman's analysis ends in the early 1900s, the

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that this statement by Plourde overlooks authors such as François-Xavier Garneau (1809-1866), who in an undated letter wrote, "La langue, c'est la nationalité", though this was not a preoccupation of the Quebecois people at the time (Grutman 1997: 70).

decades preceding the Quiet Revolution continue this trend. During this period, the French language is perceived as increasingly under threat (Harvey 11), and the “ludique” (Grutman 1997: 189) inclusion of English and other languages is no longer a possibility. Instead, francophone authors such as Gabrielle Roy use English in their works to show “the contradictory position of francophone Canadians as British subjects” (Ladouceur 2010: n.pag.). In the previous decades, Latin had been used to mark a French text’s belonging to the Western literary tradition (Grutman 1997: 114), but this use also declined as the French language became a more important feature of Quebec’s identity.

By the mid-twentieth century, Quebec had two literary institutions: one that wrote in French and often made it no further than the provincial borders, and a circle that wrote in English. The English circle was largely based out of Montreal and included authors such as Irving Layton, Mordecai Richler, and Mavis Gallant. These writers rarely identified themselves as belonging to Quebec and were often considered to be Canadian first and foremost. (Leclerc and Simon 16). At the same time, given the majority status of English and its attendant “cécité culturelle” (Meylaerts 2009: 104), those francophone authors wishing to enter the Canadian canon could do so only through translation. Gabrielle Roy, for example, was encouraged to not only accept, but welcome translation of her works and assimilation into English Canada (Chapman 154). As there was no category for French literature until 1959, her first two Governor General’s Awards were awarded to the English translations.

However, the relationship between both languages and both literary circles changed during the Quiet Revolution, when the Quebecois identity began to centre on the French language as its principal modern value (Thériault 2). Without its former reliance on religion, Quebec’s rising francophone middle class focused on language to increase its cultural capital

(Harvey 1). From that point onward, Quebecois literature was produced in a society that had redefined itself as one that spoke French.

Both Quebec's new insistence on its language-based identity and English-Canadian curiosity about the province prompted greater funding of translations. In the half-century preceding the Quiet Revolution, an average of one book per year was translated from French into English; this number increases to six per year in the following decades (Kousta 9). Support for translation grew throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and both a translator's prize and a literary translator's association had been formed in Quebec, where many of those translators resided (Mezei 1985: 218). However, the rise in translation, which in some ways brought Quebec closer to Canada, was viewed by some Quebecois as a means to undermine the province's democratic, separatist aspirations (Lederhendler 37). It is also common for minority language literary circles in multilingual nations to feel betrayed on some level by translation, which renders works accessible for a majority language community that rarely bothers to read these works in their original language (Meylaerts 2009: 107). All the same, perhaps because they occupied a more comfortable position, anglophones could afford to be more "philanthropic" in their views of bilingualism (Grutman 1997: 28), and English Canadians continued to push for translation between the two communities (Mezei 1985: 205). However, it should be noted that while canonical works and literary monuments were brought into Quebecois to "dédialectiser" the language (Brisset 286), few Canadian English texts were translated in the province, even with the boost in funding.

This protectionism that occurred as Quebec entered the market of symbolic goods, while attempting to reduce the number of non-Quebecois cultural products available, (Brisset 272), also affected the use of other languages within texts, especially those other than English. During

this time, immigrants and their contributions represented another “front menaçant” to Quebec’s newly established cultural identity, as it was believed they would choose to ally with the English language and its associated prestige (Brisset 274). This belief was compounded by the introduction of Bill 63, which allowed immigrants to choose between French and English as the language for their children’s education (Schwartzwald 109).

This hypervigilance caused a reaction in Quebec’s allophone and immigrant communities. Following Bill 22 in 1974 and later the *Charter of the French Language* in 1978, which pushed allophone immigrants into French schools, these communities were increasingly able to voice their frustrations about their exclusion from Quebecois society through works written in French. Multilingual works began to increase, in the form of migrant literature, which identified this exclusion, though it did not reduce it (Spear 70). This linguistic alterity is often as pointed as the use of English was in the early twentieth century, though it is no longer French-speaking citizens feeling erased and oppressed by an English population. “On ne devient pas québécois,” writes Régine Robin in 1983, and Marco Micone’s 1989 poem “Speak What” echoes this feeling of exclusion from Quebecois society. The struggle between Canada’s two largest linguistic communities had effectively obscured the presence of allophones; up until the 1980s, the term “ethnique” was not even applied to immigrant communities, but instead to the position of French Canadians within Canada (Simon 2014: 56).

During the decades following the Quiet Revolution, these allophone communities had begun to integrate themselves into the province’s literary scene in other ways as well. In the 1980s, bilingual editions of poetry books regularly appeared containing Latino-American and Latino-Canadian authors, and by the 1990s, the Montréal-based press *Trois Amériques* published works in French, English, Spanish and Portuguese (Hazelton 185-6). During these decades,

Italian immigrants also rose in visibility, appearing in trilingual magazines (Italian, French and English) and began to write in Canada's official languages (Pivato 198).

The rise in migrant literature occurred as Quebecois authors became less concerned with the legitimacy of their language; the use of English and other languages becomes less conflicted from the 1980s onward (Spear 71). Multilingualism is increasingly recognized as an integral part of the Quebec experience (Leclerc 180), and in the last few decades, Quebec's government has, with varying degrees of sincerity and success, sought to "establish new bases that would be comfortable and constructive" for the ethnically plural population of Quebec (Plourde 4). It has become increasingly evident that welcoming linguistic and religious diversity is now an important responsibility of the francophone majority (Anctil 245).

The percentage of the population able to converse in both French and English has grown substantially from 1961 to the present-day (25.5% to 42.7% according to the most recent census), while the proportion of the population speaking only French or only English at home has declined as well (72.8% and 6.2% respectively as of the latest census). The number of immigrants in Quebec has risen, as has the proportion of these that choose to speak French or French and English, as opposed to just English (Lepage and Corbeil). While Quebecois literature continues to explore the bridge between language and territory, it is no longer with the same protectionist bias; it can now serve as a cultural reference shared by a diverse population (Leclerc 186). Spear describes this passage as one from a "diglossie problematique" to a "bilinguisme de fait" (78), or a transition from "Speak White" to "Speak What" to "So what?" (91).

This openness to multiculturalism occurs throughout Canada during this same period, up to now, affects translation of these literary works in different ways. While awareness of Quebec and Canada's other linguistic communities has increased, resources remain limited for publishers. Publishing houses can be viewed as "gatekeepers" for literature (Buzelin 290), and translation grants alone do not provide enough funding to ensure a printing press' survival. Though there are Canadian and Quebec content requirements imposed by the Canadian Council for the Arts and SODEC respectively, there is ultimately a splintering consensus on who and what will be translated (Buzelin 296). Interest in Canada's "two solitudes" has decreased, shifting towards other minorities in Canada, and as funding is "streamlined", it is also spread more thinly, as support for other language pairs is also requested (Whitfield 10)<sup>6</sup>.

At the same time, Canadian translators are often recognized to have a habitus that makes them more likely to include multiple languages within their target text (Grutman 2006: 33), and indeed, refusing to erase instances of multilingualism from their text can be seen as "characteristic of avant-garde Canadian translations" (ibid. 38). This inclination in Anglo-Canadian translation practices, though, is not without flaws.

While, of course, all translations are susceptible to what Berman has called "deforming forces", from these tendencies present differently in different linguistic-cultural spaces (Berman 288). English translations of Quebec's bilingual and multilingual works are especially vulnerable to two: the destruction of the vernacular network (or the exotification thereof), and the

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<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, there is a surprising lack of empirical data on translations published in Canada. Despite the fact that many translations are funded by either the Canada Council for the Arts or SODEC, the actual amounts awarded are not readily available to the public, as is the case for fine arts awards. An article in the *National Post* suggests that CCA funding continued to increase through 2011 (with 68 English-to-French translations, 38 French-to-English, and 5 in a different language pair), though it's unclear how many of these are literary works (Medley, n.pag.).

effacement of the superimposition of languages. Both of these forces, if not kept in check, would prevent the Quebec-specific Otherness of this literature from existing in the translation, as the intentional use of multiple languages is reflective of the province in which this language is produced.

I will be focusing primarily on works whose translations could conceivably include French – not because the inclusion of other languages is less important, but because English translations of bilingual (French and English) works pose a different challenge than, for example, an English translation of a work that contains both French and Spanish.

The vernacular networks within these texts are threatened on two fronts, reflecting the province's twofold linguistic insecurity. When translated into English, all traces of linguistic alterity may be driven out. This may occur either by the translator's decision not to clutter the text, or simply because the translator is unaware of its significance, having let their attention slip while translating a neighbour that is Other, but no longer feels so foreign. At the heart of it, after all, the people of Quebec are North American, with what Spear calls "une compréhension innée des us et coutumes de l'Amérique du nord" (80). Many aspects that once divided Canada's French- and English-speaking populations, such as religion and social status, have become less visible over the last few decades (Van Drom, 53). At the same time, English still retains its majority status in the country, and majority-language audiences are often less open to intrusions by languages with less social and cultural capital (Meylaerts 2009: 104), and publishers often err on the side of caution, giving translators further incentive to domesticate their text (Grutman 2006: 26)

Even if the translator's personal ethics and publisher allow for these multilingual utterances to be retained or signalled within the text, there may also be the temptation to replace



Quebecois words with their counterparts in International or Parisian French. For example, the phrase “je suis tanné” might be replaced by “j’en ai marre”. This would retain the “French” qualities of the text in a manner that may be more palatable for audiences in both Canada and the rest of the world, which have long been accustomed to accepting International French as a benchmark and Quebec’s language as a regional variant (Martel and Cajolet-Laganière 1). This belief may have been initially reinforced by the fact that political and market reasons often pushed English-Canadian authors to be translated in France (Koustas 12), and the assumption that French readers do not find Quebec or Canadian versions acceptable (ibid 25). I find this kind of replacement patently misguided, though interesting: Berman only mentions erasure and exoticification of vernacular networks, but this substitution of one Other for another (anOther?) is both and neither at the same time.

If the translator does choose to keep some French utterances in the text, to convey that the original work was also bi- or multi-lingual, this decision may lead to the inadvertent exoticification of the vernacular networks in an attempt to create a “more authentic” work (Berman 294). While Bhabha instead uses the term “fetichization”, he and Berman both focus on the negative effects of stereotyping, “an arrested, fixated form of representation” (107). An example of this would be the translations of Tremblay’s earlier works into English, which included many gallicisms. Ladouceur notes that while this addition of an “artificial bilingualism” to the translation did underscore the alterity of the English-language translation, it also created distance between the anglophone audience and the “less-than-flattering social portraits” being conveyed (2014: 309). Ultimately, negative stereotypes may have been reinforced through this inclusion, and the fact that the audience had difficulty identifying with the characters would make it even more difficult to dispel such stereotypes.

The second deforming force, the effacement of the superimposition of languages, may at times be indistinguishable from the destruction of the vernacular when translating a multilingual work into one of the languages it contains. Translating the “relation between a dialect and a common language, a koine, or the coexistence, in the heart of a text, of two or more koines,” (Berman 295) becomes difficult when one of those koines will be erased unless effort to the contrary is made. While the multilingual utterances within a Quebecois text may no longer be as pointed as they were in previous decades, they are still included for a reason; the relationship between the primary language of the text and its other-languaged terms and phrases is intentional on the writer’s part. The intent may be simply for appearance’s sake, to heighten the reality of the setting, or for more complex, compositional purposes (Grutman 2002: 332). Whatever motivation the author has can easily be lost or subverted in translation.

Including the source language as a way to compensate for the erasure of utterances that were originally in the target language provides a solution, albeit one full of risks. When a multilingual work is translated into one of the languages it contains, the linguistic elements that signalled Otherness in the original may have their indexical meaning reversed and instead be read as “familiar” signs of sameness (Grutman 2006: 22). Simon discusses this phenomenon in a Quebec-specific context, noting that “French embedded within an English text will not necessarily be effectively rendered by English embedded within a French text” (2006: 132). Godard notes that the use of Canadian English in a Quebec text can be a sign of “imperialist hegemony” and the reverse may be a “mark of the exotic” (74); while this may not be always true, given the two languages’ less-strained relationship in the last decades, it certainly bears consideration for a translator. Even if the writer included English simply to create an “effet de réel” (Gauvin 56), including French for the same reason becomes difficult if the translator wishes

to avoid “imposing extraneous interpretations or linkages” (Simon 2006: 51). In spite of these challenges, though, it may be a greater loss to simply throw in the towel and erase this “discursive negotiation with alterity” (Suchet 2008: 155)

Translators may find a solution in the hybrid text, “a translation that is –according to the norms of conventional language transfer – deliberately unfinished” (Simon 2011: 50). If the work to be translated includes “a liberal sprinkling of other languages to a dominant language clearly identified as their central axis” (Grutman 2006: 20), it may be appropriate to mirror this form in translation. Of course, since literary multilingualism is “the result of a process of differentiation through which both the self and its other come into being”, it requires a dynamic strategy on the translator’s part (Suchet 2008: 155). One possible technique for creating a hybrid text is using the multilingual words and phrases within the text to advance the story, as opposed to retaining them solely for ornamental purposes (Leclerc 91). This would allow the hybrid translation to echo the source’s “multicultural vision [representing] a reality of interstices” (Bradford 18) without reducing the meaning of the other languages included. Of course, this must all be established on a case-by-case basis, as other methods for creating a hybrid text may prove more appropriate, such as unconventional syntax or word choices, interferences or other translation effects (Simon 2011: 50).

The hybrid translation is a viable solution for Canadian translators because their translations will, in most cases, be read first by a Canadian audience that is increasingly conditioned to accept and take pride in its firmly established pluralistic identity (Temelini 64-72). While this heightened awareness and appreciation for both official languages may be reflected first and foremost the habitus of its translators (Grutman 2006: 33), Canadians in many neighbourhoods have noticed that translation is a “condition of life” within cities where there is

sizable linguistic contact. Highlighting the internal divides within a nation through the representation of language in literature, in addition to reflecting the population's cultural values, can also in turn generate social effects (Leclerc 104).

Contemporary English-Canadian hybrid translations, in addition to having historical precedents, would find their counterparts in the colingual Anglo-Quebécois literature currently being produced. From the mid-1970's onward, Quebec authors writing in English have had to come to terms with their minority status in the province and like their French counterparts, have been subject to linguistic, cultural, territorial and political strain (Lane-Mercier 12-13). As the province's identity as a francophone society became more firmly established, those authors writing in English and identifying as Anglo-Quebécois have become increasingly bilingual and interested in participating in Quebec society (Leclerc and Simon 19-20). Many of the works now being produced are bilingual or multilingual, reinforcing the image of Quebec as a francophone society in which English and other languages continue to circulate (Leclerc 197). A hybrid text that "enables other positions to emerge" (Bhabha 211) may not be so different from Gail Scott's *Heroine*, which creates space for francophone speakers while at the same time validating the English-speaking narrator's presence within the setting (Leclerc 198). Furthermore, as noted by Leclerc and Simon, there are already close ties between Montreal's anglophone authors and translation (21).

One of the largest obstacles to the hybrid translation is audience reception. In his article "Refraction and Recognition: Literary Multilingualism in Translation", Rainier Grutman examines the reception of two translations of multilingual novels by Marie-Claire Blais. The first translation, entitled *Saint Lawrence Blues*, is a domesticating translation of *Un Joulonais, sa joualonie*. Published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux, this translation by Richard Manheim is well-

received, though Canadian translator Sheila Fishman denounces it and recommends that anyone who can read French instead purchase the original (Grutman 2006: 33). The second translation by Ray Ellenwood, is a foreignizing and dissonant translation of Blais' *Les Nuits de l'underground* that is widely criticized as an "atrocious bilingual hybrid" (Grutman 2006: 37). The ultimate conclusion of this article seems to be that "no matter how imperfect the product and how unfair the process" (40), homogenizing translations may have more to offer an author seeking international fame and status. Anecdotally speaking, several of the translators I spoke with at the Banff International Literary Translation Centre also raised marketability as a concern when translating multilingual works.

However, it seems appropriate to point out that Grutman's article was written nearly a decade ago, and that these translations were both published in the 1970's, a time when English-French relations in Quebec and Canada were still very tense, and the Western world in general was just beginning to open to other points of view: many of the most-cited post-colonial works were published in the mid-1960's and later. Furthermore, in the last decade multilingual literature has a "marked cachet in the Anglophone urban literary sphere" (Allen 2013: n.pag.). Esther Allen reflected on this when discussing her multilingual translation of Jose Manuel Prieto's *Encyclopedia of a Life in Russia*, citing the increased popularity of yoga, foodie culture and subtitles in certain Hollywood films, in addition to the "surging success" of web-based language learning sites, as proof that her audience is now more open to foreign words (Allen 2013: n.pag.). It is also worth noting that e-book readers such as Kindle can be connected to both Wikipedia and foreign-language dictionaries, and that smartphones offer nearly instantaneous access to translation programs: the world's shrinking monolingual audience can now find the meaning of foreign words and phrases with minimal effort and disruption to their reading. A

hybrid translation now has a better chance of finding its audience – in Canada and the rest of North America – than ever before.

### Chapter 3: A potential model for multilingual translation in English Canada

Though Esther Allen's article focused solely on her own translation of a multilingual, primarily Spanish work into English, her opinion could easily be echoed by many Canadian translators who translate literature from Quebec. Ray Ellenwood, mentioned previously for his translation of *Les Nuits de l'underground*, claims that his ideal reader would be open to the presence of French. "If they shut their eyes to any non-English words in the text, too bad for them." (Ellenwood 103). Indeed, the prevailing sentiment expressed by the translators included in *Culture in Transit* (Simon 1995) is that some degree of foreignness must be retained, though some translators are more open to occasionally including foreign words (Bednarski, Ellenwood, Stratford) than others (Homel). Bednarski, for example, describes her own work as a "series of compromises" (125), though she also states that "[no device] can replicate the texture of differentiation that results when English actually occurs alongside French" (118).

*Culture in Transit* was published in 1995, and the decentring stance adopted by many of the translators involved has become even more mainstream in the twenty years following its appearance. Lazer Lederhendler, whose literary translations have been published in the last decade, explicitly argues in favor of foreignizing translations (42). Though publishers ultimately have a say in how domesticated a translation must be (Bednarski 124), Lederhendler argues that both they and translators have a responsibility "to resist the globalizing temptation of allowing Montreal's *Petite Italie* to become indistinguishable from the Little Italies of Toronto, Boston or Manchester, for to do so would effect a grave distortion of the organic view of the relationship between the planetary and the particular developed in the novel." (41).

Lederhendler's translations, specifically *Apocalypse for Beginners*, his translation of *Tarmac* by Nicolas Dickner, provide an excellent model for my own for several reasons. Like *Tarmac*, the novel I am translating includes English and the presence of English while being set largely in Quebec. In *Le Sablier des solitudes*, English is used in dialogue, an area that Lederhendler specifically identifies as "vulnerable to treason" (42). Lederhendler also favours adopting a subversive stance to translation. This is similar to the concepts of hybridity, as put forth by Bhabha, and colingualism, as put forth by Leclerc, and is an avenue I find appealing – especially since my translation is currently being produced with no publishing constraints. Finally, Jean-Simon DesRochers' literary multilingualism is intended to reflect reality, and Lederhendler shares this consideration: when discussing his translation of *Nikolski*, also by Dickner, he notes that "library clerks in the Université du Québec à Montréal do not as a rule read English translations of French-Canadian authors."(41).

Nicolas Dickner's *Tarmac* was published in 2009 by Éditions Alto, a publishing house based in Quebec. The novel is set in a suburb of Rivière-du-Loup, already infiltrated by English; other languages, including brief instances of Japanese and Hebrew, are introduced through the narrator's friend Hope. This book arguably calls for an engaged representation of its multilingualism, in order to prevent any distortion of its vision or values (Lederhendler 41). His translation was published in 2010 by Vintage Canada, a division of Random House that publishes both literary and popular works. The translation deals with the multilingual source text in a variety of fashions, often with multiple techniques being used in rapid succession, to create a text that is readable yet unmistakably set outside of English Canada.

Before examining some of the choices made by Lederhendler in his translation of *Tarmac*, it seems appropriate to create a shared vocabulary for describing them. Though he is not



a Translation Studies scholar, literary critic and Bible scholar Meir Sternberg's categories for polylingual techniques in literature seem to be the most comprehensive and I will therefore be using his terminology.

The challenge of relaying a multilingual discourse in a medium that is "normally unilingual" (Sternberg 222) can be difficult and often inadequate: as Rosenwald despairs, "Why does the literature of so multilingual a world give so imperfect a portrait of that world's linguistic community?" (1998: 327). While dialects are often (and often problematically) represented in literature, languages themselves are less frequently written exactly as they are heard in real life.

Sternberg first offers three processes that an author can use to skirt this challenge and avoid interacting with linguistic difference altogether: vehicular matching, homogenizing convention and referential restriction (222). These three processes fall on a spectrum from most open to least open to linguistic alterity.

The first process, vehicular matching, is self-explanatory: "whatever languages the characters are imagined or identified as speaking are the languages they actually are made to speak" (Rosenwald 2008: 2). On the surface, this reflects Grutman's "realist" motivation for including two or more languages within a literary text, though Grutman divides this phenomenon into several other categories and allows authors to alter the languages represented to increase comprehension (2002: 335), whereas Sternberg's process is purely mimetic. This process allows the author to avoid making decisions about how to convey linguistic alterity, as the languages used in the text simply mimic real life. If a book written in English is set in Mexico, for example, and the characters are hispanophone, all of their dialogue would be written in Spanish. Grutman finds this form of linguistic representation uninteresting and not particularly effective, preferring authors who use languages in a more intentional manner (2002: 335), and Sternberg agrees,

stating that the extremity of such texts “frequently disqualifies them from serving as viable artistic strategies” (225). However, the novel *Le Sablier des solitudes* can be viewed as proof that this strategy can in fact be used effectively in a text that is enjoyable to read. The novel’s multilingualism is primarily driven by a desire for realism<sup>7</sup>, and every time an anglophone character speaks or thinks, DesRochers switches from French to English. This process creates texts that are more visibly open to linguistic difference than those created using other processes, though these texts are not necessarily engaging with the languages being used.

Homogenizing convention is similar to Berman’s effacement of vernaculars (294) in translation, and is the process that is least open to linguistic alterity. With this process, the author erases all linguistic variation within his text, dismissing it as “an irrelevant, if not distracting, representational factor” (Sternberg 224). For example, Romeo and Juliet speak Shakespeare’s English, despite hailing from Verona, the animals in La Fontaine’s fables communicate in perfect French, and the inhabitants of Lewis Carroll’s Wonderland all speak to Alice in flawless and idiomatic English (ibid. 224).

Referential restriction involves manipulating the circumstances within a text so that all characters have the same limited linguistic scope, thereby eliminating the need to represent more than one language (ibid 223). Jane Austen’s works are an excellent example, as the characters within her books inhabit the same cultural and class circle as the author herself – landed English gentry. Accordingly, the narration and all of the dialogue can be written in the same variant of English and no one can accuse Austen of erasing any linguistic alterity that would be present if the events of her novel occurred in real life. Nicolas Dickner’s *Tarmac* also uses this process: throughout the novel, Dickner explicitly ensures that each character the protagonist encounters in

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<sup>7</sup> Mentioned in the author’s personal communications with me.

her international journey speaks French, even when the protagonist is travelling through Japan (180). It should be noted, though, that as some of these characters are speaking French as their second language, he does on rare occasion employ other techniques to relay their lack of fluency (160). While this process doesn't technically negate language difference, the novel's setting is so restricted that all other languages are excluded anyways, and it accordingly falls closer to homogenizing convention than vehicular matching on the spectrum.

As mentioned, none of these processes interact with linguistic difference, and Sternberg therefore provides four other strategies that he feels offer a "compromise" for authors when representing multilingual scenarios (225). These techniques also lend themselves to translations that depict linguistic alterity. These strategies – explicit attribution, conceptual reflection, verbal transposition and selective reproduction – also fall on a spectrum, from least to most engaged with the languages being used in a literary work.

Explicit attribution is the "most minimal representation of the presence of other languages possible" (Sternberg 232): it simply involves reporting that another language has been spoken, while the text itself remains unilingual. Phrases such as "he said in English" may appear in primary works, while in translations, an introduction explaining the linguistic difference that has been lost, or in-text use of italics and footnoting may be used. Bradford and Grutman both warn against this method when translating texts, respectively claiming it to be "highly artificial and intrusive" (Bradford 19) and "distracting [...] while still failing to convey linguistic differences" (Grutman 2006: 37). This is, of course, still up for debate, depending on the style of literature being translated. There have been very elegant uses of explicit attribution in translation – see for example, Ray Ellenwood's use of italics and the phrase "even though angels always speak English" in his translation of Jacques Ferron's *Papa Boss* (Mezei 1988: 21). Perhaps

Grutman and Bradford simply mean that there is a greater risk of losing your audience, as there is a greater risk of using explicit attribution improperly.

Conceptual reflection results in a unilingual text, with socio-cultural norms, semantic mappings and referential ranges maintained (Sternberg 230). If a text translated from Québécois French into Canadian English kept the underlying religious meanings behind expletives, for example, this would be a conceptual reflection. This method is harder to define or codify, and often produces a heterolingual effect through “culturally typical (or typified) topics, interests, attitudes, realia, forms of address, fields of allusion, or paralinguistic features like gesticulation” (Sternberg 231). Gesticulation in particular has a long tradition of being attributed to speakers of languages, particularly those with less cultural capital, though in reality it can be noted that speakers of almost all languages make gestures (Rosenwald 2008: 28).

Verbal transposition is the “devised translational interference” between one language or another, suggesting multilingual speech in what is an “ostensibly unilingual medium” (Sternberg 227). This interference may occur on any verbal level or aspect, be it phonetic, orthographic, grammatical or morphological, lexical or stylistic. Phonetic and orthographic transposition is used to carry a speaker’s foreign intonations, grammatical and lexical irregularities indicate the underlying presence of a difference language, though when done poorly in a translated text, this can appear to be nothing more than a calque. Bednarski also warns against the use of phonetic translations in dialogue, noting that “the French accent (and by extension the French and the speaker of French) would become a curiosity and an object of mirth” (118).

Selective reproduction, “the intermittent quotation of original heterolingual discourse as uttered by the speaker,” (Sternberg 226), ranges from the inclusion of large portions of foreign-

language texts to minimal units, which he calls mimetic clichés. The areas of concern for this technique have been described above, so there is no need for repetition here. In translation of multilingual works, selective reproduction often occurs where there was no multilingual utterance in the original, with the translator instead simply retaining the source text as is, as a form of compensation.

A breakdown of several different excerpts from *Tarmac* and *Apocalypse for Beginners* appears on the following page. Lederhendler's translation is ultimately foreignizing, as intended, but at the same time poses no challenge for an entirely monolingual reader – at no point is an understanding of French, however minimal, required to advance the plot, and there are places where all difference has been erased. All translators, even those wholeheartedly in favour of creating decentering translations, must grapple with these inconsistencies in their approach, especially where the gains from retaining the French would be less than what would be lost in readability.

Lederhendler's stance towards translation seems entirely fitting for works being published in the current climate, both in terms of original works and translated works in English Canada. It reflects current trends in Anglo-Quebecois publications and the world's increasing openness to multilingual literatures and communities. In all, it is an excellent example of where publications may be heading in the coming years, and can help me pinpoint opportunities to insert linguistic alterity within my own colingual translation. At the same time, however, perhaps some linguistic boundaries can be pushed even further than in Lederhendler's works.

## Excerpts from Tarmac and Apocalypse for Beginners

<i>Tarmac</i> (Dickner 2009)	<i>Apocalypse for Beginners</i> (Dickner and Lederhendler 2010)	Context
<p><i>So you speak French!</i> Je appris le français quand je suis jeune! [...]            - Vous avez lu le manuscrit?            Il hoché la tête.            - Ouais. Je souviens que ça parle d'aéroport.            - D'aéroport?            - <i>Yeah</i>. Bonne place pour attendre le fin du monde, non? (160)</p>	<p><i>So you speak French!</i> <i>Je appris le français quand je suis jeune!</i> [...]            "Did you read the manuscript?"            He nodded.            "<i>Oui</i>. I remember it mentioned an airport."            "An airport?"            "Yeah. Nice place to wait for the end of the world, huh?" (154)</p>	<p>Hope is speaking to a businessman who can speak a little French, but mostly speaks English.</p>
<p>- Bon matin, camarade.            Tiens, elle parle français... Hope se demanda s'il fallait s'en étonner. [...]            - Ça va mieux? Tu as fait des cauchemars toute la nuit. (180)</p>	<p>"<i>Bon matin, camarade.</i>"            So, she spoke French... Hope wondered whether this should come as a surprise. [...]            "Feeling better? You had nightmares all night long." (175)</p>	<p>Hope meets a French-Israeli woman living in Tokyo.</p>
<p>"Vous pouvez me parler en français, mademoiselle Randall [...]            Pour la première fois de ma vie, j'allais me trouver à des milliers de kilomètres de ma famille." (212-219)</p>	<p>"<i>Vous pouvez me parler en français, mademoiselle Randall</i> [...]            For the first time in my life, I was going to find myself thousands of kilometres from my family." (206-213)</p>	<p>Hope meets a Japanese man who wishes to speak to her (in French).</p>
<p>Désormais, l'illustre coin de rue était occupé par l'Ophir III, Bar Salon Fireproof – Bienvenue aux Dames. (126)</p>	<p>Since then, the renowned street corner has been occupied by the Ophir III Bar Salon Fireproof – <i>Bienvenue aux dames</i>. (119)</p>	<p>A description of the suburb in which the book is set.</p>
<p>Elle se pencha vers la plaquette de laiton, sur laquelle on lisait: « Bétons Bauermann Inc. – Fiers Bâisseurs Depuis 1953 ». (41)</p>	<p>Hope stooped down to read the little bronze plaque: <i>Bétons Bauermann Inc. – Fiers Bâisseurs Depuis 1953</i>. (32)</p>	<p>A description of a plaque in the narrator's home.</p>

- Excerpt 1: Selective reproduction in rapid succession. In this excerpt, Hope is speaking French and English to a business man who understands a little French. In the original, the text contains English, French and faulty French to mimic the businessman's inability to speak fluently: "je appris" instead of "j'ai appris" and "aéroport" instead of "aéroport". The English text compensates for the English used in the original ("yeah") by including a "oui" in the previous line of dialogue. The first two sentences appear the same in both the

original and the translation: only the italicization has moved, rendering the French “foreign” in the English text, instead of vice versa. The accent mistake in the original, an example of verbal transposition, has not been retained.

- Excerpt 2: Explicit attribution and selective representation. In this excerpt, a character meets a French-speaking woman while on her travels. The original text makes reference to the fact that the woman speaks French (failure to do so would have been an example of the process of homogenizing convention), and the translation echoes this explicit attribution. Lederhendler has also retained the greeting “bon matin, camarade”, using this mimetic cliché to signal that the following conversation was spoken in French, before continuing to write in English.
- Excerpt 3: Selective representation and verbal transposition. This excerpt begins with an announcement that Hope’s new Japanese acquaintance is fluent in French. Dickner has almost entirely avoided the process of homogenizing convention in his original work by using a novel form of referential restriction: everywhere the character visits, she encounters speakers unusually fluent in her native language. This character, being fluent but not a native speaker of French, chooses his words carefully. To match this in the translation, Lederhendler first uses selective representation – “Vous pouvez me parler en français” – then follows with verbal transposition. There is a lack of contractions when Kamaji speaks, and often the English translation is a word by word translation of the original French.

- Excerpts 4 and 5: Selective representation used as compensation. In these brief sentences, Lederhendler has used selective representation as a compensatory measure: there were no instances of multilingualism in the text at this time. Both of these phrases are accurate reflections of the reality in which the books are set: neither a bar sign in Rivière-du-Loup nor an engraved frame in a French-speaking home would be written in English.



#### Chapter 4: Translating Jean-Simon DesRochers' *Le Sablier des solitudes*

*Le Sablier des solitudes* is the second novel by Montreal author Jean-Simon DesRochers.

DesRochers has published two poetry collections and three novels; he is also a screenwriter, with a film, *Ville-Marie* being shown at the 2015 Toronto International Film Festival. All of his works have been published through Les Herbes Rouges, a Montreal publishing house known for its preference for “original” poetry and prose (Lalonde n.pag.). Many of DesRochers’ works have been critically acclaimed by the francophone literary scene, and *Le Sablier des solitudes* was a finalist for both the Governor General’s award and the Prix des libraires du Québec. DesRochers has also achieved popular success, with *Le Sablier des solitudes* appearing in the Top 5 and Top 10 Quebecois novels of the year for *Voir* and *La Presse* respectively. Though his gritty subject matter and urban settings invite comparison to Bret Easton Ellis, both his experimental narrative style and use of multiple, layered, languages are typical of recent Quebec literature. DesRochers also reflects the general shift in Montreal’s francophone population towards an openness to the English language: born in Montreal in 1976, he frequently uses English words and sentences in *Le Sablier des solitudes* with no overt political motivations.

*Le Sablier des solitudes* focuses on the events surrounding a twelve-car pileup on a January 6<sup>th</sup>, year unspecified, though most likely around 2010-2011 given the references to popular games, YouTube and MacBook sound effects. The characters live entirely separate lives which collide, literally, on a highway during a blizzard. Eleven of these thirteen point-of-view characters are Quebecers, though all hail from vastly different backgrounds, including a student born to immigrant parents, a soldier on leave from Afghanistan, a corrupt politician, a masseuse who engages in illegal activities, and a pure-hearted single mother. They come from a wide

range of classes and occupy many different professions. This novel follows each character up to, through, and following their wintry accident.

The polyphonic narrative style that Jean-Simon DesRochers introduced in his first novel, *La Canicule des pauvres*, is fine-tuned here, offering additional unique challenges for a translator. Each chapter is told from the point of view of a different character; as the accident draws near, the changes in perspective occur with increasing frequency. At the climax of the novel, less than a page is afforded to each character, mirroring the frantic pace of the story's events. As the plot winds down, the narrative follows suit, resuming its original rhythm.

Using Sternberg's terminology, DesRochers is using a combination of vehicular matching, motivated entirely by realism, and a bit of referential restriction – his characters are always speaking and thinking in either their first or second language. While a few Inuit and Arabic words are included, these occur in instances where the character central to the chapter has a working knowledge of the language, and the meanings are quickly explained, through parentheses or footnoting so that the reader will understand. The English used is for the most part grammatically correct, though there are occasional unintentional errors that the author invited me to change in my translation. Both of his other novels include English utterances, though substantially fewer than *Le Sablier des solitudes*. In both of them, as in *Le Sablier des solitudes*, English appears to be included simply because the conversations or thoughts would have occurred in English in real life: the thoughts of an anglophone, song lyrics, conversations between anglophones and francophones. DesRochers does not provide any translations of the English text he includes, implying his readers are expected to understand it.

Similar to Esther Allen's observations on the reception her translation of *Encyclopedia of a Life in Russia*, the use of English and other languages within these works has gone all but

unmentioned in the reviews published online and in print. As *Le Sablier des solitudes* also features several graphic sex scenes (which could be the topic of an entirely different thesis), most articles instead focus on his unapologetically clear depictions of both sex and violence. Only one review mentions DesRochers' desire to keep the language of his novels anchored in reality, "compatible avec ce qu'il voit et ce qu'il entend" —but the author focuses on DesRochers' use of Joual and does not mention that he uses English at all (Desmeules n.pag.). An online search for articles containing both the author's name and the word "anglais" yields a few articles on personal blogs that simply mention the use of English and other languages in *Le Sablier des solitudes* and his other novels, as well as one angry blogger who, curiously, finds that the inclusion of American English and American culture stems from a "paresse intellectuelle" (*Impressions sur livres*, n.pag.). This gives the impression that most of his readers understood enough English that this inclusion passed unnoticed.

In my translation, I cannot realistically just mimic DesRochers' decision to allow characters to think and speak in their native language, if only because I would end up leaving all dialogue untranslated in the book. Given that the proportion of bilingual anglophones in North America is smaller than the population of bilingual francophones, it would not make sense for my audience. Furthermore, the purpose behind DesRochers' colingualism is primarily realism and not necessarily anything more pointed. Language is not acting as a separate character that must be taken into consideration. DesRochers is first and foremost narrating a plot and exploring his characters (DesRochers 2014: n.pag.). The French is purposefully fast-paced and cinematic—in his words, "Je viens d'un pays inélégant, je viens d'un pays de phrases courtes. Je ne viens pas d'un pays de phrases fleuves." (ibid). To slow down the target readers too frequently with a

language they do not know much of would be betraying one of the stylistic objectives of the book.

The goal is therefore to create a text that still contains French words and phrases, but to ensure that the utterances do not play into stereotypes, challenge readers without putting them off, and provide information that isn't repeated in English. While a translation produced for academic purposes may arguably have a bit more leeway in terms of representing linguistic alterity, my goal is to create something that could conceivably be accepted by a publishing house with minimal intervention.

While DesRochers' novel does not give English anywhere near as much weight as it gives French, I think it is still an excellent candidate for introducing linguistic alterity in translation. The fact that this book includes multilingual utterances *without* being a book that purposefully presents itself as being highly bi- or multilingual gives credence to the fact that literature reflects the communities in which it is produced – and in Quebec, that means that a book can contain a fair amount of English without calling attention to itself.

For this project, I will be following four characters before, during and after the accident, in order to provide a glimpse of the novel as a whole. Each of these characters lives in a different environment and each of their relationships to French and English are different, providing me different opportunities to insert some Quebecois Otherness into my translation. While many of the other characters may have provided similar opportunities, I chose to focus on just these four because they were involved in the greatest number of situations that bring French and English into contact with each other. Before presenting my translation in its entirety, I would like to focus on each of these characters and specific instances where I was able to easily use the different techniques as outlined by Sternberg.

## *Fiona*

Fiona, the main protagonist of the novel, is francophone but serves alongside both French- and English-speaking soldiers in Afghanistan. She is an excellent example of a multilingual character: while her thoughts are always in French, she communicates in English almost as often as she does in French, and she also appears to have some familiarity with Inuktitut. The book begins and ends with chapters from her point of view, and she is the most involved character during the collision, as her ability to speak both English and French is required to coordinate rescue efforts.

Initially, I thought it might be most interesting to use Fiona as my main focus for introducing multilingualism into in my translation. After all, she navigates both languages with ease. Why not repeat that in translation? But upon reflection, I am not comfortable having Fiona continue thinking in French but speaking in English, for example, because this adds a distance that the original book did not have. Dialogue, song lyrics and signs might appear in English for francophone characters, but their thoughts are always open to the reader. Fiona often appears alone in her chapters, as do many of the other characters, so internal dialogue plays an important role in the book, even if there are fewer instances of it than there are spoken conversations. As the novel focuses on her more than any other character, I am most comfortable introducing French around her, in her vicinity, but not through her as often as I had initially assumed.

Below I have included two instances where selective reproduction might be used. The first is a fairly safe substitution, though the second is a bit riskier:

Fiona se souvient de la Transcanadienne grise bordée de champs boueux, du ciel d'automne malgré l'évidence d'un 22 décembre et du mot « NOËL » sur chaque panneau publicitaire. (DesRochers 24)

Fiona remembered the grey Trans-Canada Highway, flanked by muddy fields. The sky had been the colour of autumn, though it was December 22 and the word “*NOËL*” was plastered on every billboard.

This instance of selective reproduction would probably pass virtually unnoticed by most English speakers, as the word exists in popular Christmas carols and decorations. Though it is an entirely ornamental use of French, it is in keeping with DesRochers' desire for realism.

Elle voit un homme mal vêtu pour affronter l'hiver qui analyse l'arrière de la Subaru.

Eille, t'as scrapperé mon bumper!

Fiona fait comme si elle n'avait rien entendu, saisit son pied-de-biche, regarde le jeune homme en pointant l'autocar de sa main libre. Le visage du jeune homme change aussitôt.

Voyons donc. J'avais pas vu ça...

T'es blessé?

Non.

Viens m'aider. (DesRochers 231-2)

She saw a man, not dressed for the weather, analyzing the back of the Subaru.

*”Hey, t’as scrappé mon bumper!”*

Fiona pretended not to hear, grabbed her crowbar, looked at the young man while pointing to the bus with her free hand. The young man’s face changed instantly.

“Oh wow. I didn’t see that...”

“Are you hurt?”

“No.”

“Then come help.”

On one hand, keeping the first sentence of this dialogue in French while the rest is transcribed in English feels at odds with DesRochers’ style. At the same time, the distance an anglophone reader might feel upon reading this sentence is mitigated by the anglicisms and is also justified by the fact that the words are coming from someone who is initially a stranger to Fiona. Once he realizes there is an accident, the removal of the distance in their dialogue puts them on the same side. It’s a sentence that might challenge a purely anglophone reader, as it isn’t followed by a translation, but it also isn’t hard to decipher given the context.

Once the car accident takes place, Fiona interacts with both francophones (Martin, the boy mentioned above, Véronique, a little girl riding a bus) and anglophones (namely Finch, an American). Dialogues that include her often take place in both languages. This allows for some explicit attribution to be included – and indeed, it becomes necessary in parts to explain what is happening. Below is one instance where I could use this technique to show linguistic alterity without obscuring any of the plot from a monolingual reader.

Je l'avais presque, cinq secondes pis je l'ouvrais

Ça va nous prendre un autre gars.

*Calme-toi, c'est un civil, il est pas entraîné pour ça, reste cool.* Fiona voit une lumière balayer le sol.

*CAN I HELP?*

Fiona répond à cet homme à la voix grasse. Elle lui demande de la hisser jusqu'à la fenêtre avec Martin. (DesRochers 239)

"I almost had it! Five more seconds, and it would have opened."

"No, we need another guy."

*Calm down. He's a civilian, he's not trained for this. Stay cool.* Fiona saw a light sweeping the ground. A deep, rich voice called out in English.

"*CAN I HELP?*"

Fiona shouted back, asking him to help Martin hoist her up to the window.

This example did require a bit of manipulation of the information provided in the original, but is better than the alternatives available – either erasing the fact that Martin and Fiona were speaking French initially, or leaving the entire conversation between them in French. Moving the description of Finch's voice from later in the paragraph to before his spoken line is less awkward than leaving it where it was and simply writing "*CAN I HELP?* Someone asked in English".



## *Jacques*

Jacques is a corrupt federal minister who divides his time in this book between climbing the political ladder, engaging in erotic games with his press secretary, and thinking about his elderly mother. Following the crash, he suffers from short-term memory loss. This disability is concealed from the public by his press secretary, who also takes this occasion to gather power for herself. This brief excerpt, my final example of selective reproduction for this chapter, occurs during his recovery:

Jacques lèvera les yeux au plafond, répondra qu'il va au lit avant de fermer son micro, revisitant des idées qui lui paraissent vieilles, sans qu'il puisse l'expliquer. *Elle contrôle tout, pire qu'une mère... je suis pathétique. Je devrais l'écrire sur un post-it, m'en rappeler ...* Il prendra un crayon, écrira « je suis p », retenant son geste. *Est-ce que je veux me souvenir que je suis devenu pathétique?* Jacques hésitera devant le carré de papier jaune, le crayon en main. Juste assez pour ne plus se souvenir. Demain matin, il complètera sa phrase, comme s'il participait à un jeu-questionnaire : « je suis politicien ». (DesRochers 318).

Jacques would roll his eyes and reply that he was going to bed before shutting off his microphone, revisiting ideas that would feel old to him, though he could not explain why. She controls everything, she's worse than a mother... I'm pathetic. I should write that on a post-it, as a reminder... He would grab a pencil, write "je suis p-" before stopping himself. Do I really want to remember how pathetic I am now? Jacques would hover over

the yellow square, pencil in hand. Just long enough to forget. Tomorrow morning, he would finish his sentence, filling in the blanks. “Je suis politicien”.

This translation again presents minimal challenges to a reader, but is less ornamental than the “NOËL” mentioned previously, and the French provides information that is not repeated in English, as well as a tiny French lesson for those who know absolutely no French (that one says “I am politician” as opposed to “I am pathetic”).

### *Véronique*

Véronique is an artist who plants trees over the summer and lives on EI in the winter. Like Fiona, she is a francophone character who interacts with anglophones, though less frequently and less fluently. She also participates in society more frequently than Fiona – she visits her family and goes shopping in Quebec, and at the end of the book has a vernissage in Toronto. She provides excellent opportunities for both conceptual reflection and verbal transposition, as shown in the translations before:

Véronique a sa dose de réunions familiales. Dindes sèches, tourtières indigestes, canneberges en gelée qui gardent la forme de la boîte de conserve, ragoûts de boulettes trop gras, trop salés, vin rouge/blanc imbuvable, gros gin puant, filleuls débiles, cousines neurasthéniques, conversations sur le hockey, les politiciens, le prix de l’essence, le

dernier modèle de voiture sport made in Japan, made in America, made in Germany ; la routine moche annualisée, standardisée. (DesRochers 87).

Véronique was done with these family reunions. Dry turkeys, inedible tourtières, cranberry sauces that stayed in the shape of their cans, traditional meatball stews that were too fatty, too salty, undrinkable red/white wines, glasses of stinking genever, imbecilic godchildren, neurotic cousins, talk about hockey, politicians, gas prices, the latest sports car made in Japan, made in America, made in Germany; the whole tiresome routine, annualized and standardized.

This is an excellent place for conceptual reflection, as many of the dishes mentioned are traditionally Quebecois, though they are bookended with foods that are ubiquitous in North American Thanksgivings and Christmases. Because “meatball stew” calls to mind a very different dish than “ragoût de boulettes”, in many areas of North America<sup>8</sup>, I’ve added in the word “traditional”. “Gros gin” is also uniquely popular among the older generation in Quebec, compared to elsewhere in Canada and the United States, and without adding the explanatory “glasses of”, I felt that a reader might not know that it was a beverage.

Conceptual reflection in general was substantially more difficult to work into the translation – so much of Quebec’s culture is at least outwardly comparable to the rest of Canada and the United States. The largest difference, in terms of dialogue, is the use of religious

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<sup>8</sup> According to recipe searches conducted on websites such as *Canadian Living* and *The Food Network* (as opposed to *Ricardo Cuisine*), as well my own experience: I’m from the Midwest, where a “meatball stew” would never involve cloves, and would probably involve tomatoes.

expletives in Quebec, but this does not work well in translation. Firstly, North American English speakers already use religious exclamations such as “Christ!”, “Jesus!”, “Geez” or even “Holy Hannah!” as very mild oaths. Using literally translated *sacres* wouldn’t necessarily convey the seriousness of the situation accurately. As mentioned previously, conceptual reflection within dialogues can also read as a mistake or poor translation, or leave readers with the impression that a character is foolish or dumb, in a way that selective reproduction does not.

The next translation is from the final chapter from Véronique, who is attending a vernissage in Toronto. At this time, she regains sensation in her fingertips, which had been severed during the car crash:

Véronique garde ses mauvais doigts serrés dans la bonne main, la chaleur atténue les picotements devenus de minuscules déchirements.

*Are you OK, Veero?*

*My fuckin’ fingers decided to become sensitive again.*

*Right this moment?*

*Don’t worry, it won’t show.*

Véronique saisit la bouteille de vin portugais, avale la moitié de son contenu en deux gorgées. « *Better than Advil.* » (DesRochers 308).

Véronique held her aching fingers tightly with her good hand, and the heat eased the tingling, which had grown painful.

“Are you okay, Vero?”

“My fuckin’ fingers decided to become sensitive again.”

“Just now?”

“Don’t worry, it won’t show.”

Véronique grabbed the bottle of Portuguese wine, downed half in two swallows.

“Better than Advil”.

This translation falls somewhere between verbal transposition and selective reproduction, or perhaps it is verbal transposition with the work already done for me. The conversation between Véro and the English-speaking gallery owner does not sound natural in the original text. When I spoke with DesRochers, he invited me to correct any English mistakes I came upon, but in this instance, it feels realistic to have a francophone character speaking the English written by the francophone author. It is more realistic an accent than I could have created myself for Véro’s English. I have, however, altered the gallery owner’s question “Right this moment?” and pronunciation of the nickname “Véro” to more closely align with the speech of someone from Ontario.

Finally, Véronique’s position in the car accident allows me to highlight Fiona’s bilingualism in chapters where Fiona is not the point-of-view character. This allows me to continue introducing linguistic alterity around the chapter’s main protagonist without creating too much unnecessary distance. The following is an excerpt where both selective reproduction and explicit attribution are required to reflect the original conversation’s bilingualism. Fiona is attempting to get Véronique out of a wrecked car with Finch’s help. The conversation therefore changes from French to English, depending on who Fiona is speaking to.

On va vous tirer par la jambe, OK? Essayez de vous pousser avec votre main libre.

« *Grab the foot, I'll take the leg.* » (DesRochers 245)

“*On va vous tirer par la jambe, OK? Essayez de vous pousser avec votre main libre.*”

The woman switched to English for her companion. “We’re going to pull her by the leg.

Take her foot.”

In the original text, Fiona’s English sentence is explained by the preceding French – someone reading the book with even minimal knowledge of English would get the gist of what was being said and understand that the English is a command spoken to Finch, the American. However, leaving the conversation as-is and simply switching the italics does not work as well if we assume the anglophone reader has zero understanding of French. I have therefore slightly modified the English, though it must be noted that a reader who does understand French will be rewarded with an even greater understanding of the situation.

### *Finch*

In the original, Finch provides the most opportunities for including English in the text. He is a truck driver living in Vermont, with no knowledge of French; accordingly, his thoughts and dialogue are always in English, and during the car crash, other characters must also switch to English to communicate with him. He is also responsible for the most damaging moments in the pile-up, so it feels fitting that a francophone reader who is less fluent in English would feel the most distance from his thoughts and words. However, he provides substantially fewer

opportunities in translation, though this description of this hometown lets me allude to the presence of other languages:

À trois cents onze mètres d'altitude, à l'embranchement des rivières Dead et Androscoggin, il y a Berlin. Pas la capitale, loin de là. Cette Berlin – ses habitants disent Burrli-inn – n'a rien d'une capitale. «*The City that Trees Built* ». C'est le dicton de l'endroit, écrit en lettres bleus sur les pancartes des Lions Clubs [sic], plantées aux quatre points d'entrée de la ville. (DesRochers 78).

At three hundred and eleven meters above sea level, where the Dead and Androscoggin rivers meet, sits Berlin. Not the capital – far from it. This Berlin, whose name sounded nothing like the German, had nothing capital about it. Its motto was “The City that Trees Built”, written in blue letters on the Lions Club signs planted at the city's four entry points.

This excerpt shows that while Sternberg's categories for relaying linguistic alterity are very broad, they are not all-encompassing. Here, DesRochers provides the information necessary for a francophone reader to pronounce “Berlin” in English, thereby pointing out the Otherness in this setting (Vermont) without explicitly saying “this is English”. Translating it literally would have made no sense, because English readers do not need a pronunciation guide, and the sentence would have felt redundant. However, they can use a reminder that this name is pronounced differently outside of English. While there is no satisfactory way here to bring the

Quebec-specific Otherness of the source text, it seems appropriate to draw attention to the fact that the English way of pronouncing Berlin is just that – the English way.



## **Explanation of other translation choices: tense, spacing and intra-lingual translation**

In the course of my translation, I made several choices that can be attributed to my desire to meet readers' expectations and facilitate their reading experience. Every translator, no matter how unbiased they may strive to be, walks into translation with their own set of values and preferences. While I might not have made the same choices for a different novel, for *Le Sablier des solitudes*, I decided that, when forced to choose, I would prioritize a creating a fast-paced and flowing narrative over repeating the specific linguistic choices made by DesRochers.

The first and most obvious change is the use of the past tense in English where DesRochers employed the historic present. This was a choice that I debated throughout my translation, even re-writing entire chapters at one point, though I ultimately opted for the past tense.

DesRochers' novel is intended to be immediate and gripping, and the historic present captures this perfectly in his original work. However, while recreating this use of the present tense in translation may have felt equally fast-paced at first, readers in English are more accustomed to seeing a long novel written in the past tense. Use of the present tense in English is still typically reserved for short stories and novellas. However, *Le Sablier des solitudes* is over 350 pages. With a text of that length, any tics that may unnecessarily slow or challenge a reader begin to add up. As I have already decided to include French words and phrases, as well as other occasional lexical and stylistic interferences from the original, I feel obliged to pick my battles.

In this case, that meant staying true to the intent of this book rather than the form. The events of the novel are meant to unfold as quickly as possible for a reader, and for an English reader, this sometimes means presenting the text in the past tense. I did, however, choose to

translate Fiona's flashback in the present tense, as it is only a few pages long and is intended to be immersive, something the character and the readers cannot be dragged away from.

I had also considered translating the crash in the present tense, but had reservations about its length (over 50 pages). Furthermore, while DesRochers did use the historic present to create an effect, I feel that it is the effect that is important, not the relationship between tenses. If I very noticeably changed between tenses for different scenes (or for different characters), I would be adding something to the translation that has no basis in the original.

I also chose to introduce line breaks where DesRochers would instead leave lines of dialogue within the paragraph. This is most apparent in Fiona's flashback in chapter one. I made this decision so that a reader could quickly navigate and experience the text. While this does take away from the impression of chaos that appears on the page (long blocks of text), it allows the reader to experience the chaos of the situation more quickly than they would have otherwise. Again, this is choosing to prioritize the spirit of the work over its literal form.

I also decided to correct the English spoken by anglophones within the novel. While I did feel that the English spoken by francophones should remain "accented", adding a layer of linguistic interference to the translation, it did not feel true to the author's desire for realism to allow Finch and the other anglophones to speak unidiomatic English. DesRochers' English is not purposefully flawed; it appears that book could simply have used some input from an English copy-editor – at one point, for example, "city counselor" is used in place of "city councillor" (DesRochers 84). As DesRochers had told me that I was welcome to correct any errors I came across, I felt free to take some liberties. And, in an attempt to create as idiomatic a translation as possible, I might have done so even if I wasn't given explicit permission.

Some of these changes were quite small, such as changing a nostalgic old-timer's sigh about "the old days" to "the good old days" (DesRochers 78). Or a teacher saying "Well, it was nice seeing you outside of our official meetings" instead of "outside of those official meetings" (DesRochers 85). Some of them, however, were changed more substantially, such as Finch's internal dialogue on page 85, "*She's got her bad feeling face...but she won't tell...*", which I changed to "*She looks like she's got a bad feeling... but she won't say anything...*". If it had been a different character, who had any contact with a language other than English, I might have left it unchanged, but Finch is from Texas, living in Vermont: if anyone in the book is meant to speak idiomatically, he is (and the use of words like "wanna", "gotta", and "fixin'" suggest that he is indeed speaking idiomatic American English).

While taken one at a time, these decisions seem important but at the same time limited in scope. However, the cumulative effect is much greater. This book structurally resembles a book originally written in English, even if it retains as much linguistic alterity as I felt possible. Perhaps this is overly homogenizing, but I remain convinced that for this specific novel, the immediacy of the narrative and its cinematic, montage-like scenes are more important in spirit than the structural choices made by DesRochers (other than, of course, the hourglass shape of the narrative, which must be preserved). For a different book, where form plays a greater role, I would not have made the same choices.

## Conclusion

Though the challenge of conveying linguistic alterity can only be addressed on a case-by-case basis, it seems appropriate to expect a general shift away from more homogenizing techniques, both in Canada and abroad. Populations are increasingly multilingual, and literature produced by these communities will reflect that fact. With the tools at their disposal, authors will continue to create multilingual works – and translators can and should follow suit.

This is especially true for translations of works being produced in Quebec, as its francophone literature has included English and other languages since the 1837 publication of *L'influence d'un livre* (Grutman 1997: 13). More authors and readers are bi- or multilingual than ever before; accordingly, instead of using English in the pointed fashion observed just before and during the Quiet Revolution, authors are creating works that are more colingual in nature. Given Canada's official bilingualism and increasingly multilingual population, the country's readers should be more open to reading translations that are also open to linguistic difference. While translators translating these texts into English must work specifically to avoid erasing or subverting the linguistic alterity present in the original text, they can use the various techniques outlined by Sternberg to create texts with different levels of hybridity. Lazer Lederhendler's translation of *Tarmac* shows that a work can include a minimal amount of literary multilingualism without affecting its audience reception.

In my translation of *Le Sablier des solitudes*, I found many instances where linguistic alterity could easily be conveyed, and several instances where an actively multilingual translation was essential in order to accurately convey the events that occur in the source text. Though DesRochers arguably included English solely for the purposes of realism, his novel makes a statement about language in Quebec. He expects his francophone readers to be able to

understand his English utterances, and he feels comfortable choosing a plotline that uses the language frequently but matter-of-factly, the same way a painter would feel comfortable using both red and green in his depiction of an apple tree. While the differences between the francophone and anglophone linguistic communities of Canada meant that I could not include French with the same level of impunity, the ways I choose to convey linguistic alterity inevitably make a statement of my own: I expect that most of my (hypothetical) readers will not understand much French, but I hope that they do understand that this story mostly occurs in an area that is not anglophone.

Translation had previously been described as a bridge between two distinct cultures, with two distinct languages. However, it is increasingly clear that this metaphor is no longer adequate as monolingual nations become less common. If a metaphor must be used, perhaps instead we could say that the translator is marking a path through shared but still-unfamiliar territory: readers may need varying amounts of guidance through a text, but in some places can be left to walk on their own.

## Translation: *Le Sablier des solitudes*

Part 1: The Book of Everyday Obsessions

First the Storm

THE ETERNAL SOLDIER (15)

Fiona was still there. She couldn't escape, not even now, so very far from the war. Her mind wouldn't grasp that the fighting had stayed on the other side of the globe. Fiona closed her eyes. She dove back into it, worried, tense, her face stung by dust, her eyes half-shut. An expert would have discussed PTSD, treatment, but experts aren't called in for soldiers who must kill again. *So my mind wanders... they're like daydreams, that's all... it'll pass... everything does. And anyways, I'll be back there soon enough... there's no point in relaxing... I've got to stay alert...*

The fire in the wood-burning stove was losing strength, and a damp chill was stealing over the chalet. Fiona cracked her knuckles one at a time, standing at attention as she watched this first blizzard cover her grandfather's forest. Fiona contemplated the snow flake by flake, hoping to convince herself that they were each unique. Their delicate patterns, their six arms. Their random and perfect symmetry.

In front of Fiona, a large window framed a forest of bare trees and the white path that had sunk between them. *I should dig out my old skis...* Despite three tries, her left ring finger had refused to crack. It was swollen, irritated. Her wedding band was stuck. Fiona raised her head, searching for a break in the clouds. She saw only a grey, smooth mass. She sighed, weary. With nothing there for her to observe, she lowered her eyelids. And so it began again.

In front of Fiona, dry cracks from the many Taliban AK-47s hidden throughout the village; behind her, near the road, the deafening response of C6 machine guns and C7 assault rifles, gunners yelling “GRENADE” after every C13 launched. Dust everywhere. Under her feet, under her clothes, in her nose, eyes, boots, under her nails. Endless dust. Dry clumps of earth transformed by mortar shot into a stinging rain. Insults from the attackers and the Afghan soldiers ran together in their impossible Pashtun. The heavy, underwater sounds of light armoured vehicles. Dusty sweat under her combat gear. The sun, blinding even in the cold, dry weather. Thick sweat in her mouth.

“Bet you twenty bucks that the locals are negotiating a better deal with the Taliban.”

Unable to move, Fiona laughs at this remark from Stokes, a former member of her platoon. Former, because Stokes will die in this mission, his jugular severed by an impeccable shot.

“81 again! Fuck. They’re getting better ... gotta get movin’.”

Master Corporal Simmons is right. They need to leave. Due to an error in communication, the captain has overextended their flanks, leaving these scouts in the crossfire. By chance, there are holes already dug into the foot of a boulder, possible remnants from the first war with the Taliban or when the Mujahedeen had fought the USSR. Good holes, deep enough to hide in, but sloped so that soldiers can climb out of them without slipping. Almost comfortable. There is only one thing missing: more accurate mortar shot.

“Come on, move, move!”

One last 81mm round has landed nearby. The explosion deafens the four scouts. Fiona waits for her tinnitus to clear before looking up. She catches a new smell in the dust raised by the

blast. Half-dried shit. The shot had disturbed a pile of horse manure. Simmons' face is covered, Stokes has nearly swallowed some.

“KEEP MOVING.” Simmons glances at the enemy, yelling, “FUCK! COVER, COVER!”

The master corporal steps forward and a bullet pierces his neck, cutting his spinal cord. Simmons convulses, becoming a sharp curve that sprawls face down, inert, in dust he will never swallow.

“Fuckin' hell... SNIPER ON THE MOVE!”

Stokes takes command of the scout platoon. They need to move, no time to wait for backup from the C6 machine guns, 25mm cannons or British Harriers. It will be a crapshoot. *This is bullshit.* Nearly one hundred metres separate the scouts from the next hideout, where the rest of the battalion is positioned. One hundred metres at a 16° incline. Stokes, Blouin and Fiona know the procedure: run and cover, changing positions every twenty metres. Fiona goes first. She thinks she knows where to sweep to keep the sharpshooter at bay. If there are other attacks, she will have to rely on her bulletproof vest and the shoddy aim of the Taliban's old AK-47s.

“GO GO GO!”

Fiona counts the seconds and opens fire on the sniper's assumed location. *One... two... three... four... five... hold.* Blouin takes the lead after twenty metres, half-crouched, weapon drawn, a five-shot burst. The C6 guns from their line haven't sprayed in the right direction yet. There are no 25mm shots to subdue the enemy line. Fiona's boots slip in the gravel. Her mouth tastes like earth and dung. She reaches Blouin, who will have to fall back in several seconds. Stokes has taken his position, twenty metres ahead. Still no cover from the machine guns and nothing in the sky but a glacial sun. Fiona looks to her left, gritting her teeth. The sound of torn



meat. Blouin reels. Shot in the throat like Simmons. But Blouin isn't dead, not yet. He pushes a hand against his trachea, which is spurting blood. Fiona swiftly pulls his free arm over her neck and drags her comrade to the top of the slope. Stokes yells "FUCKERS!" and empties his cartridge at a frantic pace. Fiona hears the bullets ricochet. And finally, there it is, that powerful sound, that wind cutting through the air. *Yes!* A light armoured vehicle has arrived, firing 25mm rounds at the sharpshooter's hypothetical position as two C6 machine guns spray the opposing front line. Fiona hears a wet, muffled cry from Blouin and wonders if he has been shot again. *Shit...* Fiona looks up. She sees Stokes, busy reloading his assault rifle under the relative cover of the Canadian line. She sees Blouin, dazed, whimpering, covered in blood. *He's doing bad, really bad...*

In order, Fiona hears: first her breath, then the dry gravel rolling under her feet, the sound of ricochet, enemy shells and mortars whistling as they fall, then the 25mm cannon pounding at the rebels' positions, Stokes yelling as he shoots. *God damn it...* Blouin has fainted. She can feel it. His full weight is almost twice hers. Fiona locks her knees to keep from falling belly down, throws Blouin over her back, grunts like a bodybuilder. She raises her head. Just in time to see Stokes hit directly in the throat. Blouin's blood drips down her neck, pools under her uniform. It cuts through the coat of dust covering her back. *Too heavy...* Fiona can't go on. She grits her teeth, ready to leave him behind, ready to stand and face her death like a soldier, weapon in hand. *This is it... I'm done for...*

But no.

It isn't over. New shots ring out, muffled and heavy. The long-awaited response from the Canadian line. Fiona aims her weapon at critical points in the enemy line, adding her fire power. Seven soldiers emerge from nowhere to surround Fiona, Blouin and Stokes and get them out.

“Fi, how’s Simmons?”

Fiona shouts that the Master Corporal is dead. *There’s no way he’s alive...* A colossus picks up Blouin while two others deal with Stokes, who has started convulsing. That leaves four soldiers around Fiona, who quickly retreats behind a dirt wall.

On this side of the battlefield, the sounds of the 25mm cannon have left the soldiers slightly deafened. She can’t hear much, so Fiona instead takes a breath, wipes the manure off her face, the blood from her neck. As the reserves carry Blouin and Stokes to the temporary command post, the radio announces a breakthrough in the left flank and an air unit’s arrival in the next minute. Fiona says nothing. Her rescuers are equally silent. Their faces are closed, cold, sealed. The so-called breakthrough in the left flank can barely be heard. Several grenades, three or four rounds from a C6 and then nothing.

“Now what?”

“We wait.”

Fiona watches a recruit murmur a prayer, begging for the Harrier to arrive. Fiona glances to her left. Ahead. To her right.

“TAKE COVER!”

Fiona’s voice was shrill. The enemy has moved unseen, taking them by surprise. Fiona doesn’t think. She reacts as she were invisible. From the head of the line, she tosses a C13 while yelling “GRENADE”. She moves laterally to cover the battalion’s haphazard retreat behind the light armored vehicle. Normally two gunmen would support her, but in this confusion, no one covers her as she reloads. Fiona pulls the trigger of her C7A1, discharging a volley of ten bullets. Two of them kill, one piercing a forehead, the other a liver. In return, Fiona feels one, two, three bullets hit her Kevlar vest, near her stomach. Each impact pushes her back a step. Fiona flexes,

pulls the trigger again. Fourteen bullets this time. Three in the thigh, one in the hip and one in the heart of a very young Taliban soldier, seven others in the dust, two in the lungs of a rebel holding a rocket launcher. If Fiona went by the book, she would take cover after being hit, but instead she chooses to fire a third round, since no C6 was coming in support. She hears friendly voices calling her back. *Okay, I'll stand down...* As she retreats, still facing her opponents, Fiona feels a bullet graze the skin of her left thigh. She makes no sound and shoots, sweeping through the air to keep her path clear. Behind her, the turret of the light armoured vehicle rotates. Its cannon fires on the enemy, accompanied by the sparse shot of a machine gun. Fiona had counted eight Taliban soldiers still standing, maybe three others hidden in back. Radio contact confirms that two Harriers would arrive in seconds. Fiona hears the sound of their engines. She can imagine the enemy's panic. A missile would clean this area out in two seconds if the battalion weren't so close to the point of impact.

Sergeant Toews signals for Fiona to stay behind the armoured vehicle during the next attack. She is in no shape to fight. Her leg stings. A blood stain has grown over the tear in her pants, despite the thick layer of dust on the wound. The Harriers begin their second pass. This time, they use 25mm rounds. Two poorly sheltered Taliban soldiers are torn apart like soft bread, and the others panic. Their attempts to hide from the Harriers leave them all the more exposed to the battalion. And the battalion does not hold back. Every available soldier fires without hesitation, striking enemy flesh with obvious pleasure. C6, C7A1, C9A1. The air is filled with horizontal, metallic rain. Some bodies are hit more than a dozen times. The battalion has lost too many in this patrol. There is no room for mercy. The rules of engagement are clear. Fiona allows herself to support this attack. She advances fifteen steps, crouches down, looses a three-bullet burst at the back of an enemy flushed out by the Harriers.

“CEASE FIRE!”

The sergeant’s voice silences the cannons. A thick quiet falls over the zone. All that remains is the ringing in their skulls. Fiona cracks her jaw to unblock her ears, but cannot shake off the tinnitus that had set in after the first mortar. After a patrol, the situation is deemed officially stable and their weapons are given a chance to cool down. Fiona’s first count had been right. Thirteen of the Taliban had tried to ambush them. Thirteen warm corpses in the dry earth. The silence brings several villagers out of their hideouts, hands held very high. Nobody would be dying in the next few minutes. Bodies relax, pain increases. The blood on Fiona’s leg catches the attention of a fellow soldier.

“Fuck, Fi, are you all right?”

“Just a fucking scratch, Mitch.”

Sergeant Toews approaches Fiona, eyes on her wound.

“That was some good fuckin’ work, soldier. Now go get that leg fixed.”

Fiona keeps her C7A1 at attention and replies the only way a good soldier could.

“Yes sergeant, thank you sergeant.”

Fiona walks in the direction of the temporary command post. She thinks about Blouin and Stokes, who are already there. She isn’t expecting a miracle. In her experience, Stokes wouldn’t have had a chance after those seizures. *Adrenaline, shock, a heartbeat of 130bpm, bad news when you’re losing that much blood from a main artery...* Based on her understanding of the human body, Blouin might have survived. *Maybe...* Fiona joins a group of three other injured soldiers. A bullet in the arm, mortar shell in the calf, too much sand in the eyes. The way to the command post should be safe. Should be, but death can take so many forms in this province. A teen on a bike, a handmade mine, a grenade coming out of nowhere, a hidden Taliban shooter

who would vanish as soon as he had attacked. But there is nobody on the road today. The fighting has chased away any rare travellers heading to Panjwayi. The temporary CP is on the city's border, guarded by two Leopard tanks and three battered Coyotes. Fiona examines the mud house requisitioned by the International Security Assistance Force. Dirt walls, dirt floors, folding tables, basic medical supplies, additional water, plasma, MREs. Nothing to help a soldier in serious trouble. *Nothing to keep you from heading into the light...*

Fiona approaches the CP and notices a corpse covered with a sheet next to the hut. She recognizes those size 14 boots. *Stokes...* Inside, a doctor applies pressure to Blouin's wound, trying to stop the bleeding. Given the conspicuous red pool on the table and muddy floor, Fiona doubts he will succeed. *Blouin... he's not going to make it either...* Fiona watches her platoon member fight for his life. She sees him as he is in this moment. A mass of flesh, inert and pale, busy losing the blood he has left. A motionless, pointless battle. No emotions overwhelm her, no disgust at the abundant hemoglobin, no tightening of her throat. Just one thought floats through her mind, an idea so cold that she can't bear to examine it. *Better him than me...*

Fiona opened her eyes and shivered. The snow was still falling, gracefully slow, as if suspended over the landscape. There was not much to see. Grey sky over a line of bare trees, white ground. Fiona had to convince herself that she was not seeing bodies in the dust. That she didn't see the crippled boy playing in an open sewer, or those veiled girls who slipped like shadows through the streets, or those bearded men, eyes saturated by a generation of war, the young soldiers driven on by their imam's rage. Fiona, eyes open, saw snow. Only snow.

She had been astonished by this leave. She'd had little time to gather her personal effects before flying to Germany. It had been a cold day. Kandahar had barely smelled. There had still been children running loose through the city. Boys poorly equipped to handle the dry, brittle cold, miniature beggars with their frozen hands still outstretched. Fiona had watched through the window of the four-by-four, wary of any suspicious movements: a young fundamentalist shouting insults; three men huddled in the corner of a ruined house; a wrinkled man rifling through a woven jute bag; a merchant who stared at them with murder in his eyes. "Keep goin'."

From its runway, the old Boeing 767 reserved for transporting troops had offered no reassurance. This jet from 1975 was faded, and it was rumoured that the Taliban had acquired surprisingly accurate ground-to-air missiles from Iran. *There's nothing I can do about that, is there?*

The old Boeing had taken off with no shaking or groaning. Fiona had fallen asleep as soon as her ears popped. She had no real memories of the layover in Ramstein or the transatlantic hop to Trenton. *White clouds, guys talking about Panjwayi while staring at me from the corners of their eyes...* But Fiona did remember being stiff on arrival, her heavy legs, her aching wound, the calm and orderly base with its flags at half-mast, her F-150 pickup covered in a thick layer of dust, the song that had started playing on the CD when she drove off ("Another One Bites the Dust" by Queen). The chorus had reminded her of a conversation with Blouin a week before his death, when he told her that playing the song backwards revealed the hidden message, "It's fun to smoke marijuana". Fiona remembered the grey Trans-Canada Highway, flanked by muddy fields. The sky had been the colour of autumn, though it was December 22 and the word "NOËL" was plastered on every billboard. Fiona hadn't had time to warn her family or her

husband, stuck in Haiti with the UN. She had felt suspended between two worlds. Not in the army, not with her family. *If I'm so free, though, why don't I care?* Hands on the wheel, Fiona had thought about her bank account, hardly touched during these months of war. *Why not?* She had decided to continue on to Montreal, to rent a hotel room and explore the city. *Free...* Fiona had gone shopping, decked herself in brand-name clothes, ate well, drank better, danced to pop music. Played the normal twenty-nine-year-old with the inhabitants of the country she defended. She had almost made it.

“Fuck, did you really just come from Afghanistan?”

“You know, it's not that I want to fight. It's just my job.”

“Well, your job really sucks.”

On December 24, staring at the six o'clock news on the plasma screen in her room, driven by an unsurmountable urge to see her family, Fiona had turned in her key card and pointed the wheels of her F-150 toward Richmond. Like every year, her relatives had gathered at her grandfather's home. Passing by the dining room window, Fiona had noticed an empty place setting on the fold-out table. On the plate, a picture of her in uniform. This domestic scene had made her smile, her first grin since combat.

Her arrival had been an event. The ten o'clock news had been describing another deadly ambush in Panjwayi, listing its victims. When Fiona yelled “*Joyeux Noël!*” to the worried heads turned to the screen, her godmother had nearly fainted. After the exclamations (many), kisses (dry), praise (half-hearted), and well wishes (sincere), her brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, relatives had asked how she had managed to join them. Her grandfather, stoic, had asked nothing and let his glistening eyes express his limitless pride. Fiona's response had been for him. “I got lucky and won a special leave.”

Her grandfather. This was why she had driven in the dark for over four hours. This old man understood how murder in uniform affected you, those bent and mangled bodies killed for your country, for your allies, for a principle. She had inherited this grandfather's eyes, blue like a husky's, as well as the stark line of his brow, his sturdy Highlander legs, his taciturn nature. Fiona knew that he had volunteered at age nineteen, after Hitler had taken Poland. He had been part of the light infantry, was wounded in Dieppe in 1942 (some said his legs had been crushed by a Kübelwagen, others mentioned a bayonet to the stomach), then wounded again two months after the Normandy landing in 1944, and had returned to Canada in 1946 after building bridges in the Netherlands. He had bought excellent farmland. He had married his childhood sweetheart and had six children.

Fiona's grandfather would not speak of the war. His war, with shell-shocked beaches and French towns in ruin, frozen toes and tepid showers after weeks of combat, disgusting rations swallowed with despairing hunger, soldier's whisky that made each boy a fearless man, panzers that took three bazooka shots to down, the Krauts and their vehement refusal to surrender, the gun barrels they used to keep the bunkers warm, his friends killed by artillery shells on three occasions, those light wool uniforms – too hot in the summer, too cold in the winter and too damp in between – the collaborators finished off with farmers' pickaxes, teenaged boys defending the remains of the Third Reich. When asked, he would say that he did nothing special. "I did what had to be done, that's all."

Fiona had spent most of the evening in silence, as she often did. No gifts had been waiting under the tree for her; they had been sent to Kandahar a week ago. She had been happy to see her family again. Their voices held a different timbre, their stupid game of charades had become funnier than ever before, even the dog's hair had felt softer under her palms. But she



couldn't stop herself from peeking out the windows sporadically, searching for hostile movement, the danger she was used to. Outside, there had been only Christmas decorations, lights, inflatable snowmen, stars hung up over porches. But Fiona could not shake off a feeling of impending threat, a need to move, to arm herself, to set up effective defences. *The attack will come through the living room window...* As the festivities had wound down, and the final guests left to continue their celebration in other homes, her grandfather had placed a trembling hand on her shoulder and offered her his chalet for the remainder of her leave. Fiona didn't know why, but meeting his blue and brilliant eyes, under his calloused and trembling hand, her throat had closed. Biting her lip, she had replied with a curt nod of her head. Her grandfather had tightened his grip, said these two words: "*Je sais*". Fiona had flinched at a noise coming from the basement. By the time she realized it was the furnace, adrenaline had already flooded her body. Her grandfather had repeated, "I know, I know."

## LIVE FREE OR DIE (78)

At three hundred and eleven metres above sea level, where the Dead and Androscoggin rivers meet, sits Berlin. Not the capital – far from it. This Berlin, whose name sounded nothing like the German, had nothing capital about it. Its motto is “The City that Trees Built”, and it was written in blue letters on the Lions Club signs planted at the city’s four entry points.

There were 10,122 people living in Berlin. Yesterday, there had been 10,124, but two young stoners had decided to test the new layer of ice over the Dead River. Before the end of the day, that number might climb to 10,123. All it would take was Midge Larose pushing out the baby she had been labouring on since the evening before. Colleen Applegate was also feeling the first early contractions for her third set of twins. By the next day, Berlin’s population would grow to 10,125. There would be a picture of the new Applegate twins in the next *Berlin Reporter*, under “Community News”.

Those reading the local paper would readily admit that there was no longer much to report in this part of New Hampshire. Older residents were fond of claiming, time and again, that this small city held no candle to the former, larger Berlin, with its windmills and chloroform factories. “The good old days”. Five months ago, the last paper mill had permanently closed, taking with it the last traces of prosperity. Fortunately, the Community Technical College continued to attract a few newcomers, or Berlin would have been a city headed for extinction. Since Fraser Papers had shut down the Berlin Pulp Mill, some inhabitants were counting on ecotourism to save the city. Other than a few old hippies and their children, no one really believed it. During the last town meeting, Wayne Andersen, in all his Swedish blondness, had again suggested restoring the Nansen, a ski jump his grandparents had built during the city’s

heyday, before the Great Depression. In response, fat Westley, from the warehouse on Main Street, had said, “Yeah, and what if we don’t get enough snow anymore, because of that whole climate thing? I think it’s too risky.”

This meeting had been held before the holidays, and not one miserly flake of snow had clung to the landscape. Sonja Grieg, one of the oldest citizens to still attend these assemblies, had confirmed that the last few winters had been unusually late. She had also reminded them that if daredevils really wanted a ski jump, “they could just go to Placid.”

With the official confirmation of the Pulp Mill’s demolition and the holiday season stuck in the cold mud, depression ran freely through Berlin. A few Christmas lights attempted to stave off the gloom, but between the cost of electricity and the coming end to benefits for laid-off workers, only the post office, city hall and some stores on Main Street had dared to decorate. Even those families unaffected by the Pulp Mill closure had, in a spirit of sad solidarity, gone without lights, stars or inflatable Santas. Their yards were bare.

“Dad, why don’t we put some lights up this year?”

“We don’t wanna insult anyone, son. Now go help your ma, she’s fixin’ supper.”

This deep and melodious voice belonged to Finch Clayton. One of the few Berlin residents who had anticipated the end of Fraser Papers. He had read in *Time Magazine* that the Brazilians had found a way to produce cheap paper from eucalyptus. Concerned, Finch had compared the growing times for eucalyptus plants and pulpwood trees. *That can’t be good.* Finch had already been contemplating a career change, and the *Time* article had given him a reason to move. *Gotta act fast...*

This hadn’t been his first time. Finch had left Huntsville and his job as a prison guard just as suddenly. *And what I did once, I can do twice... And if I do make a move, at least I’ll still*

*have a home this time...* Finch was a popular topic in Berlin. He had arrived during the Recession, when the rest of the Androscoggin Valley was emptying little by little. A short, stocky fellow with thick hands, a well-groomed beard, pale skin and a round stomach, Finch could easily blend into a crowd if it weren't for his habit of speaking loudly. His boisterous ways had delayed his integration. But after fifteen years, Finch and his tireless Texan accent had become part of the community, even if he was still gossiped about in the high school hallways. In Huntsville, Finch had worked on death row, and though he had only talked about it once, nearly everyone knew that he had cracked after watching an inmate wake up after his third injection.

“I never saw a man in so much pain... never...”

Those had been his words after a night of sad drinking with a work buddy from Fraser. “I can't kill to make a living.” How Finch had ended up in Berlin, only he knew. He would repeat, jokingly, that the state's motto had convinced him. “Live free or die, that's me.” In time, most people had come to believe it.

This winter, Finch would be celebrating his fifth “Independence Day,” as he said. Five years behind the wheel of his Freightliner Classic XL semi, his only instructions coming from his clean conscience. On February 15<sup>th</sup>, the Classic, christened *Joyce Forever* would be getting a new chrome grill. It was his gift to himself. That and the plow bolted to the front of his GMC pickup, a way to keep his oldest son busy. Finch had truly believed the plow would be needed by November. Each time a snowstorm had been forecast, he had waited eagerly, ready to jump behind the wheel and teach Leroy how to clear the neighbourhood driveways. And each time, Finch had gone back to bed, fuming. “Not even one inch/Damn rain again/What good is this freezing rain/God, I never should've bought that plow.” Finch loved to complain about the

weather. His wife Joyce no longer heard these comments, as if they were part of her husband's breathing.

The night before, filling his plate with fried chicken, Finch had proudly announced that the weather report had predicted a blizzard for the next day. "They say there's a 100% chance." To mark the occasion, he had offered a can of Busch to Leroy, who seemed fairly excited by the prospect of driving the GMC.

This morning, like all good truckers, Finch had woken on his own, without disturbing his wife. He had put on his jeans and turtleneck, listened for the sounds of his programmable coffeemaker, went into Leroy's bedroom, making the floorboards crack, and grabbed his son by the shoulder to get him out of bed.

"Dad... come on... it's four in the morning."

"Let's go buddy. The early bird catches the worm."

At 4:30, Finch had proudly emerged with his pickup, Leroy sitting shotgun. Finch had explained how the plow should be treated like a natural extension of the truck, to leave several inches free if he wanted to drive without scraping the ground, to watch out for icy patches and mailboxes. Finch started his demonstration by clearing his neighbour's driveway, unable to hide his smile as he effortlessly moved the piles of snow. He pushed it further into the yard, dimmed his headlights to avoid lighting up Ms. Grieg's bedroom, parked the truck in the street. "So, Leroy, ready to give it a try?" Leroy had stifled a yawn, gulped down three mouthfuls of coffee, and nodded yes. Finch asked him to practise first in the street. Leroy pushed lightly on the gas, as if driving for the first time. The pickup responded gently and pushed back the snow on the edge of the street.

"That's fucking awesome! Oh... geez, sorry Dad."

“Son, what happens in the pickup stays in the pickup.”

Finch winked at Leroy and promised him breakfast at Zia Mia, on Mason Street. “But first, let’s plow some snow.”

Joyce Clayton greeted her husband and eldest son when they returned at lunchtime. Leroy announced with pride that he had cleared forty-six of the forty-seven driveways on their list by himself. The snow was still been falling on Berlin, and Finch reminded Leroy that he would have to start over between lunchtime and the end of the afternoon. Joyce had smiled at her husband and served them plates filled with spaghetti in meat sauce. Her face hadn’t lied: she was a mother happily watching her son grow into a man. Over their steaming plates, Shaun and Lily-Ann couldn’t stop themselves from asking when they would be able to drive the truck and use the plow. Finch felt a gentle warmth in his chest when he saw their enthusiasm. Jobs in Berlin were scarce, especially for young folk. And Finch, who had started working at the age of twelve, didn’t want to see his children sitting idly. The money spent on the snow plow had been their vacation fund for the winter. With his forty-seven contracts, Finch was going to pay back his investment by spring. Leroy would have some income, and the younger kids would get a taste for work too. “Don’t worry Joyce, this is so much better than Disneyworld.” Joyce had been the only one upset by this renunciation of the holiday sun. She had gotten used to their winter getaways over the years. But during this lunch on January 3, she had to admit her husband had been right.

Finch fumbled with a pack of toilet paper, a brand that ten years ago had been made in Berlin. He looked at his wife and saw that she was pretty. He looked at the wrinkles that had

never left since his nights in Huntsville, well before Leroy's birth; her hair in a messy bun, hidden under a scarf; her full lips, her nose a little larger than average. He looked at her solid hips, her proud, firm buttocks, her strong legs, her skin, more brown than black in the winter sun. Finch wasn't one to brag, especially not in front of the woman he loved. He looked Joyce in the eyes tenderly, trying to ignore the grocery store's harsh mercury lighting. In them, he saw traces of their difficult years in Berlin, the "niggers" addressed to both her and their children, the evenings of comforting her in his arms, regretting their move from Texas to this "damn white small town." Still looking into Joyce's eyes, he saw those first students sitting at the upright piano in their living room, the shift to "You're the best, Miz Clayton," and "Thank you so much for your patience with this brat," and "I apologize if I misjudged you, ma'am". And finally, "You should run for mayor, Joyce, you're the best city councillor we've had in decades."

Finch left the pack of toilet paper on the shelf and caressed his wife's face with the palm of his hand.

"I love you too, baby."

Finch pushed the cart to the end of the aisle. Leroy's young English teacher intercepted him. She set a can of coffee in her cart as she thanked him for clearing her driveway so quickly. As Joyce snapped her fingers, realizing she had forgotten to grab a cabbage from the vegetable section, Leroy's teacher smiled and asked how the transportation business was going. Finch laughed heartily to cover his flushing cheeks. He formulated a vague and blustering response, implying that things were going fine. *Just push your cart, say goodbye and keep going...* Finch pretended to step forward when Leroy's teacher asked her second question, wanting to know if he worked even when there were storms, like today. He glanced around, hoping to see Joyce arrive, cabbage in hand. *Come on honey, hurry up...* Finch didn't like talking one-on-one with

the opposite sex, especially when the woman was good-looking. He was afraid his eyes might accidentally slip to her breasts or buttocks of their own accord. He was also afraid they would hit on him, because he never knew how to act when they did. Finch preferred getting his social interaction through crowds. A group of friends to watch football with, or the counters at truck stops and mall food courts, in a pinch.

“Well, you know, I’m just like the mailman... Neither rain nor sleet nor snow...”

“Leroy told me the name of your truck... was that a tribute to James Joyce?”

Finch was now squarely embarrassed. *James Joyce... James Joyce... Who’s that guy, now? Damn teachers... always smarter than everyone... doesn’t she know Joyce is my wife’s name... everybody in Berlin knows that...* Finch didn’t answer. He felt an unstoppable awkward silence rise between him and the young teacher, who was still smiling. He would have loved to say something smart, a witty retort or joke, but it was too late to save this conversation. His eyes landed on a ketchup display near the cash registers. He couldn’t remember if they needed ketchup.

“Well, it was nice seeing you outside of our official meetings. Be careful if you go out, they say the storm’s gonna hit us pretty hard.”

“Yup... don’t worry, I’ll hold steady.”

Finch turned his cart into the pet food aisle, pulling down the zipper on his coat. His face was hot and he had the impression that his ears could set his hair smoking. *Damn cholesterol...* Joyce reappeared with an enormous cabbage in her hands. She asked what Leroy’s teacher had said, not mentioning her husband’s crimson face. Joyce was familiar with her husband’s innate discomfort. Back in the day, she had been forced to take the reins, pushing him to make up his



mind and kiss her. She had shrewdly recognized his shyness as an excellent guarantee of faithfulness. She hadn't been wrong yet.

“Can you believe it? Only a buck for all this cabbage!”

“Yup, I'll make my secret coleslaw recipe tonight... it'll be just perfect when I get back.”

“Who's the client tomorrow?”

“Same old... that window company from Connecticut.”

Joyce nodded, facing the gerbil food. *She looks like she's got a bad feeling... but she won't say anything...* Joyce took the list from her pocket and crossed off the items in the cart. Finch thought about Leroy, who had been clearing driveways for several hours now. He wondered if he would be able to finish his work if the storm lasted through the next day. He thought about Pete, an old coworker from Fraser, who could help out, if need be.

“Geez, we're forgetting the bread for your road sandwiches, baby...”

“Sure, I'll get it.”

Turning back to the bread aisle, Finch told himself he would have to get up early and clean off the *Joyce Forever*. Last winter, a state trooper had stuck him with a hefty fine for the four inches of snow on his trailer. Finch reached the plastic bags of sliced bread, and noted the absence of his favourite brand. Vaguely disappointed, he turned to the windows. The wind had risen. The gusts moved large snowy masses through the valley. He thought about the dinner Joyce would make that night. He hoped it included pork chops, canned peas and mashed potatoes. Finch felt like dipping mouthfuls of pork into cold apple sauce, swallowing each parcel of meat whole, including the fat. He thought about Leroy, who would be tired after a day like this and who also loved pork chops. Finch shifted his focus back to choosing a bread. A white bread, no whole grain or wheat flour. The kind of bread he liked. *Sweet, soft as a cloud and*

*white like fresh snow...* Finch heard the pickup's horn – the same sound as General Lee's in *The Dukes of Hazzard*. He raised his head just in time to see Leroy drive past the grocery store. He stood transfixed, one hand on the sliced bread, a delicate smile on his lips.

PLEASE, LEAVE ME ALONE (87)

“No Mom. No, I can’t. I have a business meeting. Get it? Business. As in, none of yours... .. The Epiphany? Since when do we celebrate that? ... .. Uncle Gérald? *I don’t care about Gérald and his fucking job at the credit union...* Well, yeah, he’s going to die. We’re all going to die someday, Mom... .. Listen... .. Listen, look, there’s someone at the door... .. Yeah... uh-huh... No, Mom, I don’t need money... Bye.” *What a family...*

Véronique ended the call, ready to throw her cell phone deep into her messy living room. She held herself back, aware she couldn’t afford to replace the device, placing it instead on the unvarnished pine coffee table. *Christmas, New Year’s... Now the Epiphany... Two out of three is already better than nothing.* Véronique was done with these family reunions. Dry turkeys, inedible tourtières, cranberry sauces that stayed in the shape of their cans, traditional meatball stews that were too fatty, too salty, undrinkable red/white wines, glasses of stinking genever, imbecilic godchildren, neurotic cousins, talk about hockey, politicians, gas prices, the latest sports car made in Japan, made in America, made in Germany; the whole tiresome routine, annualized and standardized. *I just can’t anymore...* Though the holidays were a pain for many, for Véronique it meant the same miserable comments made over and over, passed mouth to mouth by her numbskull relatives with their sickly bodies and malnourished minds, eternally worthless. Véronique had compiled her Top 5 list of “shit comments”, as she liked to call them.

#5: But no, seriously, what are you doing with your life?

#4: You really took out loans for that?

#3: We know, you don’t understand grown-up problems, you’re just an artist.

#2: When are you going to find a real job?

#1: Y'know, I could throw my life away too and tell people I'm an artist.

This year's top comment had come from her brother Paul, a bald man with grey skin who wore nothing but hideous striped polo shirts and pleated khakis. The same Paul who at age seventeen had come into her room, teary-eyed because every music school in the province had rejected him. The same hypocrite who had made her swear never to tell the family he was gay. *He started it...*

A bit of context is necessary.

The bungalow. Six hundred seventy-eight multicoloured Christmas lights blinking on the façade. An inflatable snowman sat on the green lawn, balanced against an abnormally tepid breeze. Inside the bungalow: one table, eighteen folding chairs. On the chairs, extended family: parents, brothers, sisters, spouses, children, etc. There were ten empty wine bottles, another three-quarters full, and another about to be opened by a sister-in-law, smiling too broadly to be sober. The plates were half-empty, because nobody had managed to finish their meal. The conversation at hand: welfare. Véronique said nothing. Véronique had nothing to say to these people. Like every year, her brother-in-law Robert headed the debate. Some guests pushed for abolishing welfare, saying "they just have to get off their lazy asses and work like everyone else, god damn it!" (the same sister-in-law busy uncorking the bottle of cheap wine). Others moderated their statements, suggesting that "everyone deserves a second chance – you never know what kind of shit you might fall into" (Jules, the oldest, a union representative). As the wine kicked in, the debate turned personal. "Personally, I don't know anyone on welfare, so they

can cut everyone off, I don't give a fuck.” (Raymond, Véronique's father, retired blue collar worker, alcoholic). At which point Paul jumped in.

“So Dad, you're saying that if you knew someone on welfare, you'd be less pissed off?”

“What the fuck are you trying to say?”

Véronique remembered a sudden desire to leave the table. She had needed a cigarette.

*Why didn't I leave? I should always trust my instincts...*

“Well, Dad, you know our little artist here spends the whole winter on EI.”

Véronique felt seventeen pairs of eyes slide over to her. Accusing looks, most of them drunk. She had seen only one way to defend herself. Dismiss the argument and counter-attack. This debate required nicotine. She took out her pack of Natives under the disapproving looks from her relatives (she had told them she quit), removed one white tube with regal delicacy, placed the pack on the table, leaned into one of the candles. Lit her cigarette.

“If only you knew how normal it was for artists in Quebec to be on EI.”

“Oh fuck off, Véronique... You know, I could throw my life away too and tell people I'm an artist.”

Véronique's eyes had met her brother's. Paul, who had bought a small painting the year before for tax credits. Paul, who was so full of weaknesses to exploit. Paul, who hadn't anticipated her deadly comeback until it was too late, the comeback that would ruin all of his future Christmases. *You asked for it, asshole...*

“Paul, honey, I'd rather be an artist on welfare than a white-collar faggot who spends his Fridays getting ass-fucked at some sauna in the Gay Village.”

Véronique took a joint out of her pack of cheap native-made cigarettes. Just before lighting the rolled tip, she snorted, remembering Paul's face. Total, frozen panic, like the tree planter who had run into a black bear last summer at Opémisca Lake. *It's not like I don't work... that little asshole... he shouldn't drink, he gets really stupid... Our family won't disown him... it will be a change... enough time for my career to take off like it's supposed to...*

In terms of work, Véronique had nothing to be ashamed of. Every June, she drove to Chibougamou and planted trees. Up there, her seniority and passion for the job had given her the nickname "*vieux truck*". At first, this nickname had weakened her morale. Now, she took a certain pride in it. "Like any old truck, I just keep on rollin'." Véronique planted tirelessly, under the beating sun, in the rain, during storms; among the mosquitoes, the no-see-ums, the deerflies, the horseflies, the wasps and the bees. She planted ten trees a minute, twelve on good days. Every year, Véronique was one of the top three planters. *It's all a matter of experience.*

She had been doing this job for six summers now, and her family knew it. She worked straight through the warmer months so that she could buy herself a little freedom in the winter. And when, during the snow, she had no income, she sometimes collected EI in order to hold onto her savings. But her family didn't need to know that small detail. *You'd think I was just sitting around...* In the winter, Véronique shut herself into the garage of her tiny bungalow and worked on her art. Large-scale acrylic paintings. *The paintings of a free woman...* After her unplanned son, born early and without a father, her part-time university studies spread out over six years on social assistance, her four years as a meat packer, two more as a hairdresser, five horrible years working under her uncle Gérald at the credit union, Véronique felt she had earned her right to create. At age thirty-nine, she could say she had risen to the challenge. This winter, though, with its stagnant gloom and the fresh snow finally covering the landscape, Véronique didn't feel right.

She drank, snorted, smoked and raged in solitude; she turned the pleasant into the ordinary, the ordinary into stupidity, stupidity into something deadly. This miserable winter had given her an alibi, but Véronique was essentially fed up with the art scene. *I'm not a guy, so I can't lure in any of the gay art dealers who rule the market; I'm not a lesbian or a feminist, so the dykes won't have me; no master's degree, no grants, so I'm always at the bottom of the pile when it comes to artists' centres...* In her five years of practice, Véronique had been featured in one article, in a magazine with limited circulation. Otherwise, there had been one Brazilian biennial show, a few solo exhibitions here and there. *That was then...* Now, she had a pile of unopened envelopes holding rejected portfolios, that exhibition slot she had lost to a Mexican artist, and just one rare light on the horizon. A guy from Toronto who she was supposed to meet on Friday, at a restaurant in Montreal. *One of these things is not like the other...* He had contacted her after visiting her website, before Christmas. He was crazy about her latest pieces. Large format suicides. Several types: group, individual, violent, medicated, sordid, touching. He had especially loved the idea of capturing the final moment before life left the body. He wrote that he could see “the perfect irony of hope in the ultimate act of despair”. Speaking practically, he claimed to have buyers for this kind of art, though Véronique didn't believe a word of it. *Until it happens, it might as well not exist...*

Véronique tightened her lips around the joint, stood, passed the mirror in the hallway leading to the kitchen. She didn't see her tangled hair, her sunken eyes, her rough skin, the constellation of small red flecks from her last application of acrylic with an airbrush. Véronique was developing an idea for a painting as she smoked: her brother, committing *hara-kiri* with a chef's knife, ripping himself open from bowels to heart. She envisioned a well-developed background, rich but domestic. The corner of a green bedroom. *No, not a corner, that's too*

*Francis Bacon... a bed with satin sheets... yeah... good idea, I could really go crazy with the satin texture, with the shadows and highlighting... that's a better approach... mixing time periods, genres... show a body emptying itself... hot intestines on white satin... that's way better...*

In the kitchen, counters overflowing with used plates, dirty glasses, stained coffee cups, boxes for pizzas, for chicken, for Chinese food, Véronique wrapped herself in a thick hunting jacket that she buttoned all the way up, walked through the back door, took twenty quick steps down the icy floor of the hallway, which resembled a narrow plastic greenhouse. She opened the red door at the other end, shivered as she entered the garage, which had been converted into a studio, wiped her feet even though they were already dry, and looked at the six paintings she had started before Christmas. *Just a few touch ups... I shouldn't do too much, I have to know when to stop...* The studio was cleaner and more organized than her house. Less dust. *That can ruin a glaze faster than anything...* Less clutter. *I don't want to have to look for my brushes when I'm in the zone...* This studio is the centre of Véronique's universe. *The reason I put up with so much bullshit...* In one corner, she had set up a hammock. In another, an old stove and mini-fridge. If she could, she would live here, shut herself in for good. *If only it didn't get so cold in here...* Véronique threw her joint into the jam jar she used as an ashtray and took a Native from her pack. This morning she had dealt with one painting. *It just needed a touch of blue...* She had been thinking about painting a self-immolation for several days now, curious to see if she could do justice to the vivid intensity of flames on a body. She had never seen a painter capture the essence of fire without creating a parody. Buoyed by the THC, Véronique turned this question over and over in her mind, identified every weak link. *Satin is easier because it reflects light... but fire is light... how can you paint light when it isn't gleaming?*



Véronique took a book on Carvaggio down from the shelf. *Glimmering, heat waves... fire is more believable when it's lighting up dull and opaque objects. What colour is firelight?*

Véronique raised her head. She looked at the canvas with its background closest to completion. A woman with a stone tied to her ankle would express, through her pallid face, the liquid agony of drowning. *I'll put her in a white dress with black polka dots... that'll be sick...* Véronique wrinkled her brow, surveyed the cracked and grey concrete floor. *Fuck... I don't have anything to wear for my meeting with Mr. Toronto...* She slammed the book as she closed it.

“Oh yeah! The gift card from Aunt Aline...”

Véronique dug through the men's wallet she had stashed deep in her pant pocket. “*Certificat-cadeau, valeur 100\$, magasin de St-Bruno seulement*”. She should be able to find something there... *Saint-Bruno, though... fucking Aunt Aline... why not pick a store in Granby?* Véronique discovered that the ash at the end of her cigarette had formed a long, flaking tube. She brought her hand in to catch it. *Just in time... OK, back to work...*

That evening, Véronique would hear a radio forecast announcing a break in the storm on the following day. *I should go shopping tomorrow...* Working on the background of her portrait of a SWAT officer, gun barrel in mouth, weapon pointing up, Véronique would think about the clothing she could buy for herself with the gift card. *I hope it's not one of those stores where everything costs fucking twice as much as it ought to... I should plan for everything to cost double...* With a large brush hooked through her belt loop, Véronique would continue to work with a vaporizer and rag, interested in seeing the effects of this last overlay of colour. To better assess the results of her experimentation, she would turn to a bottle of rum removed from her closet. In the middle of her studio, she would think about her brother's imaginary suicide. She would see the entire tableau perfectly. *This is going to be a late night... cool.*

## The Cold

### THE SAFETY OF THE TREES (139)

Ignoring the cold, Fiona had taken out her old skis, intent on enjoying the snow that had fallen the night before. She had applied her ski wax liberally to better manage the *kavisilaq*, Inuktitut term for snow that had become coarse after a deep freeze. With the northern wind now hitting her cheeks, Fiona thought back to her weeks of Arctic training in Resolute Bay. She remembered the white land, almost blue under the night sky. The vast and dizzying silence under the delicate light of the *aqsarniit*<sup>1</sup>. Fiona had fond memories of her journey north of the Arctic Circle. *Forbidding landscapes... guides who knew every detail of that place... the language they spoke... it all made so much sense... I would go back first thing tomorrow...* Despite the extreme cold and the wind that burned any inch of flesh left bare, despite the absurdity of training under those conditions, Fiona had felt sure there, at one with the territory. She had stood tall against the *anuri*<sup>2</sup>, feet planted in the *aniugaviniq*<sup>3</sup>, her eyes straight ahead, seeking a defensive position against her imaginary foes. *No, it's not that cold out today... it's that my clothes aren't as warm as my Arctic Forces uniform...* Fiona felt a mild sting in her thinly covered calves. She decided not to linger, continued to ski at a good pace. If she remembered correctly, she was now in the Van Den Hoeven's field, where the wheat had once grown so soft and blond that she had needed to fight the urge to dive in head first. Fiona looked to the southwest, at the timid sun. *It must be 10:15...* She checked her watch to confirm. *10:16, not bad...* To get back to her grandfather's woods, Fiona would have to keep the sun at her back for two kilometres. She put her mittens

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<sup>1</sup> Aurora Borealis

<sup>2</sup> Wind.

<sup>3</sup> Very hard, compressed, frozen snow

back on, flexed her swollen fingers, grabbed the pole stuck in front of her, glanced at the fringe of trees where she was heading. *The forest... it's grown even more...*

The forest was where Fiona had spent the brightest of her childhood summers. She had explored every corner, every hidden swamp, every stream, every boulder. It was here that she had begun, in fullest solitude, piece of wood in hand, to fight off invisible enemies. Soviets, mostly. She would throw herself to the ground, imagine an entire army by her side, transform trees into secret observation posts and marshes into minefields. Her parents hadn't understood her love for this forest, the need she had felt to set off for long hours, rucksack filled with sweets. Fiona would leave with no compass, no fear of getting lost. Her grandfather had explained. "To find south, east or west, look at the sun. For the north, look at the bark on tree trunks exposed to the wind. The thickest side is always the north-west. "

Fiona advanced rapidly on her skis. The forest's edge was coming up faster than she had thought. She had been seventeen the last time she had hiked through these lands. Her military training had given her muscle power. She would appreciate it once she reached the trees. She planned to walk on foot through those first maples. She remembered an enormous rock there. One she would rest upon after fighting her invisible Soviets. Fiona looked up. *Already... Good god, I am moving fast!*

The rock was still there. It formed a white hump in a landscape smoothed over by snow. Fiona stopped moving. The trees swung and cracked in the wind. This same wind that whistled between the naked branches. Fiona heard the *katakartanaq*<sup>4</sup> crumple under her skis. In film, this effect is made by crushing a box of cornstarch: it sounded nothing like that. Dry cracks, as if shattering tiny glass bubbles. Brittle sounds, sharp as the outside air. Fiona breathed in deeply

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<sup>4</sup> Snow covered in a hard crust that breaks underfoot

and flared her nostrils to keep them from sticking. This air was pure, delicious. No dust. No smells of gasoline, or trash, or open sewers. Hers was the only human body for three kilometres. Fiona used her ski to clear off the rock, revealed its grey surface, smoothed by a millennia of rain.

“Hello, old rock... So? Did you miss me? At your age, it must feel like only a second since we last met...”

Fiona patted the rock’s grey surface twice with her bare hand, as if teasing a pet. From her backpack, she took out a soy milk and a granola bar with nuts. The plastic packaging of the straw produced delicate rustles under her fingers. In her ears, this became an unbearable crush. Without knowing why this noise affected her so, Fiona unwrapped her granola bar and gritted her teeth against the sounds of the packaging. *Every noise is louder than silence...* Fiona saw her father, his hand against her cheek, explaining that nothing was more precious than silence. *Papa... I should call him when I get back. He doesn’t even know I’m on leave... I know my mother didn’t call him...* Fiona put her mittens back on before finishing her snack. Her fingers stung. Her legs itched. Fiona needed to get moving. *One last bite... one last sip.* She gave the rock another friendly tap.

“Good to see you one last time, old friend.”

Fiona gazed on the Van Den Hoeven field and put her skis back on. She didn’t reflect on what she had just said. The sentence seemed natural, appropriate. Now that she was gliding among her grandfather’s trees, she thought only of avoiding the patches of swamp that had not frozen under the *katakartanaq*. She would think back on her words once she returned to the chalet, as she went over her trek. Feeling contrite, her skin whiter than normal, she would wonder why she had said “one last time”. Over the steam from her pot of onion soup, she would

again have the feeling that she could never return to this place. Each wall took on a new appeal, every object on the shelf unleashed a tide of new memories. Fiona stood straight as a rod, at attention for nobody. She turned down the heat under her soup, try and fail to reach her husband by telephone, ditto her father. Fiona had a throat as dry as a corpse's, alone against the backdrop of her dearest memories. At that moment, she wondered if she had died in Panjwayi with Blouin, Stokes and Simmons. If this leave was a hallucination. In order to convince herself otherwise, she burned her palm on the handle of the pot. And then, one hand placed over her mouth like a gag, Fiona would be sure that she had heard the countdown to her own demise.

## AN UNSUITABLE MAN

How he had committed such a blunder, Jacques had no idea. *The cleaners must have made a mistake... this can't be my fault.* His morning had been otherwise calm. Ten minutes before sunrise, his 5.1 surround sound speakers had woken him with “Allegro” from *The Brandenburg Concerto no. 1*. Jacques had risen, smiling at that raw morning light typically reserved for cold days. He had brushed past a stand of African violets, kept in bloom through the singular talents of his housekeeper, yawned as he strolled into his stainless steel and black granite kitchen, picked up the portafilter for his espresso machine, left to dry by the sink, filled it with fresh grounds given to him monthly by a friend well-versed in the subject, allowed the machine to warm up, started the hot water. This first morning *café allongé* had filled Jacques with such blissful warmth that he could not resist the temptation to drink a second, then a third, then a fourth. His final cup emptied, not without a twinge of guilt, Jacques had noticed the prevailing chill in his loft and realized that he had forgotten to change the programming on his electric thermostat. At eight a.m., the television had automatically turned to CBC News, and Jacques had reviewed the news to be covered by the station’s replacement journalists. His ideas had borne fruit. The Prime Minister’s meetings with the ambassadors from Afghanistan, the United States, France and England would be receiving only routine coverage. *I love the holidays... these second-string reporters never see the real news behind the press conferences...*

At this moment in his day, Jacques had felt the first stirrings of hunger deep in his stomach. In ten minutes, his chauffeur Yvan would take him to his daily breakfast at the club. Jacques chose a dark suit from his wardrobe as he slid a cordless razor over his stubble. He stared at his throat as he tied his tie, admired his clean shave, noted the asymmetry in his Windsor knot, started again, pulled on his jacket, cast an artificial smile at his reflection. “You

are going to have a good day. You will.” During these ten routine minutes, Jacques’ face had clouded. *Mama...* Jacques imagined his elderly mother, sickly, bedridden, face wracked with terrible pain. A vision of less than five seconds. Long enough for his hand to touch a black jacket instead of the appropriate navy. The unbearable image had been stamped onto his mind like the sun on a retina. He was still pondering its final traces when the chauffeur rang.

Jacques was wearing a long coat. Yvan, normally attuned to these details, could not detect the difference between the minister’s pants and jacket. Jacques had taken his place in the back of the black Chrysler 300 with tinted windows and let himself be driven through the city streets to his club. Upon arrival, Jacques had waved to several esteemed members, pressed a hand to his heart when he saw a potential candidate for a by-election, sat down alone with a copy of the *Wall Street Journal* provided by the valet. Nobody had noticed the minister’s sartorial gaffe. The lighting made it impossible to recognize the chromatic disparity. With breakfast finished and a fifth coffee consumed, Jacques had walked to the vestibule and asked Yvan to drive him to visit the Minister of Health. This brief meeting had been planned a week ago, part of Jacques’ covert agenda. While the size of this minister’s portfolio made him Jacques’ superior, the rumours swirling through the Cabinet were true. Jacques Samson was a snake in sheep’s clothing.

“Mr. Samson, how are you? Horrible weather... Winter is finally here. Let me get you a coffee... Rajib, two coffees, please.”

Jacques had politely returned the greeting, looking the Minister of Health straight in the eyes, and stood facing his desk. He had quickly noticed a new addition to the décor since his last visit: a photo taken with Bill Gates, during a conference organized to fund AIDS research in Africa. The picture was not flattering. From that angle, the minister's double chin resembled a

pair of buttocks. Gates looked like same as always, a multibillionaire in glasses. *The fat man and the nerd... nothing that'll go down in history...*

“So, Jacques, how goes our joint anti-obesity campaign?”

Jacques replied with a minimal nod of his head, meaning that the program was going as expected. He couldn't stop himself from noting the irony of an overweight minister leading the fight against fat. *Anyways, when we reveal his cover-up of tuberculosis cases on First Nations reserves, he'll be pushed back to the sidelines... You fat upstart, all you had to do was stay out of our way...*

Jacques wet his lips on his sixth coffee of the morning. The cumulative effect of this caffeine unsettled him. Jacques tried not to treat the Minister of Health like the political pariah he would become in a few weeks. He and the prime minister were planning to modify capital gains taxation, a favour for the big banks. As this measure would prove unpopular, a media diversion would be necessary. Tamara would leak information, leading a young journalist from Radio-Canada to some incriminating reports, confirming the rumours printed in *Le Devoir*. The small scandal would shift attention to the Minister of Health, who would be alone on the frontlines. The tuberculosis cases would prolong this isolation. The opposition would tear him apart when recess was over, minimizing debate on the tax bill. But until then, Jacques would have to act like a subordinate. Answer yes and no in response to the obese minister's statements, support his good ideas, play the role of vaguely stupid yes-man.

During the twenty long minutes of their meeting, Jacques could not stop wondering about his mother, about the horrible visions that had assaulted him. *I should call her after this... find out what's happening...*



“Are you okay, Jacques? You don’t seem all there...”

Jacques excused his troubled expression and asked the Minister of Health if they could cut the meeting short.

“I was going to ask you for some hockey tickets, but sure, no problem. In fact, it looks like you got dressed too quickly this morning... your suit... is that a new style?”

Jacques saw the hem of his black jacket falling against navy pants. He could not stop himself from feeling indignant rage at this oversight. *I need to go home... this is ridiculous... and Fat Paxton was the one to tell me... How embarrassing...*

Yvan parked in front of the office building. Jacques pulled up the collar of his coat before exiting. There were thirty steps to the car door. Just enough to feel the cold nip at his earlobes and calves. Yvan welcomed Jacques with his usual courtesy.

“How did your meeting go, sir?”

“Okay, I guess... We have to go back to my house, Yvan... I... I’m wearing the wrong jacket.”

“If I may, sir, that doesn’t seem like you.”

“That goes without saying.”

“Might I ask if there is something new troubling you?”

Jacques hesitated a few seconds. Though he knew his chauffeur’s reputation, Jacques wondered at the potential consequences of trusting him. Jacques quickly inventoried the people in whom he could confide. In the end, Yvan remained the best option.

“I don’t want to bother you with my problems, Yvan.”

“Not at all, sir.”

Jacques drummed both hands on his thighs. More fallout from his six coffees. He knew that Yvan was a chauffeur by trade, had driven more ministers in the last twenty years than were currently in the Cabinet. *And this entire time, he’s never shared even the smallest detail about his former employers...might as well, here goes...*

“Do you have any family, Yvan?”

“I have two brothers, both younger... a pair of petty thugs.”

“And your parents?”

“Nobody knows what my father is up to. As for my mother, she died when I was young. Her brother raised us.”

“And how is he doing?”

“Dead. Just before the heatwave last summer.”

“Sorry to hear that...”

Yvan stopped the Chrysler 300 at a red light. Each vehicle was trailed by a cloud of grey emissions, as if dragging their own smog through the glacial air. Jacques saw his chauffeur’s eyes turn to meet his in the rear-view mirror.

“And yourself, if I may ask?”

“My father is dead as well... kidney failure in Costa Rica... wrong place, wrong time... but that was years ago.”

The car started moving again, bouncing gently over the multiple cracks in the frozen pavement.

“And your mother?”

“Last I heard, everything was fine...”

“Where is she?”

“She’s in a home, in Sherbrooke. She doesn’t want anything to do with Ottawa or Montreal.”

“We’re here, sir.”

“Thank you, Yvan.”

“Sir, I am sure that your mother is doing well.”

“I hope so.”

## Part 2: The Book of Impotence

### North Wind, Whiteout Conditions

#### **Fiona Tremblay, Ford F-150 (231)**

Fiona had been relying on the Subaru's taillights to guide her through the blizzard. *Bad idea.* Out of habit, she put the pickup in reverse, prepared to pull away. *But wait, no... this isn't Kandahar...* She should get out and assess the damage, sign an accident report. Luckily, she was prepared for this cold. Fiona looked to the right. *Nothing, not even the horizon...* Looked to the left. *That can't be real...* Fiona saw a car's undercarriage, standing upright, and a bus rammed into the trailer of a semi-truck.

Fiona stopped being the civilian she had been for the last dozen days. She grabbed her first aid kit, took out her flares, put on her gloves, adjusted her tuque. Zipped up. Her foot touched the frozen road, as icy as a skating rink. She lit the first flare and held it close so she would be seen. She paced fifty steps uproad of the accident, marked the zone off with her flares. *This should be okay...* The grey band dissipated little by little at the site of the accident. Through the encroaching darkness, Fiona could see the bus embedded in the semi-trailer. She guessed that more cars had crashed on the other side. *No police cars... help hasn't arrived...* Fiona planned as quickly as if she were under attack. She should help the wounded. *The bus, I should go there first...* Fiona inspected the vehicle, looking for a point of entry, an emergency exit opened by passengers. Left side. *Nothing.* Right side. *Nothing here either, not a good sign...* Fiona returned to her F-150. *I hope I still have my crowbar...* She saw a boy, not dressed for the weather, scanning the back of the Subaru.

*"Hey, t'as scrappé mon bumper!"*

Fiona pretended not to hear, grabbed her crowbar, looked at the young man while pointing to the bus with her free hand. The young man's face changed instantly.

“Oh wow. I didn't see that...”

“Are you hurt?”

“No.”

“Then come help.”

### **Finch Clayton (237)**

*Is it over?* Finch decided it was time to get out. He rummaged through his cabin, grabbed a flashlight, a sleeping bag, a polar fleece blanket, an emergency kit, a twelve-ounce bottle of cognac. He pulled on his thick coat, tightened his bootlaces, straightened his hood. Finch glanced out the window. He swept over the scene with his powerful flashlight, assessing the best route to take. Straight ahead, he saw an FX45 with its passenger door open. Behind him, an old Jetta was backing up. Finch guessed that there was a car against his bumper. *Top priority.* To his right, he made out the remains of a large black car crushed under an Audi. A bit farther off, he saw a man removing a body from a metal frame so damaged it was impossible to guess the make of the car. Finch knew he had to turn left, look behind him. He hoped he would see a truck, a semi – anything but a bus. He guided his flashlight, sliding its beam along the road. He saw two large tires, a white body, the letters “MOCAR”. *It's a Limocar coach. Holy shit.*

Dozens of images entered his mind, all horrifying. He saw bodies, too many dead bodies... “DON'T FUCKING THINK ABOUT YOURSELF.” Finch shocked himself with this reproach. Spoken out loud, as if his own father had possessed him for those seconds.

“Go.”

Finch opened his door. He saw the New Beetle and its driver, lifeless. Without taking the time to check her vitals, Finch covered her with his sleeping bag, mumbled a quick prayer on her behalf. *Now for the bus...*

### **Martin Labonté (238)**

He never could have believed this would happen. Martin had assumed that the bus was stopped because of a traffic bottleneck. If he had known people were suffering, he wouldn't have wasted any time complaining about the scratches on his Subaru. He wanted to explain himself to the woman by his side. *Later, once there's time.* They were on their fourth attempt. The woman had managed to break one window with her crowbar, but instead of clearing it out, she had only managed a cracked circle like a spider's web. Three times now, Martin had tried to boost this woman up. *She doesn't look that heavy, though...* This time, he chose to act like a step stool. He positioned himself on all fours alongside the bus, flexed his slight muscles. The woman placed one foot, then the other. She had been standing on his kidneys for ten seconds now. Martin heard her force the window. Twelve seconds.

“This is starting to hurt!”

“Just a little longer, just a little.”

“I can't, I can't!”

“*Fuck!*”

Martin collapsed, taking the woman with him. She had expected more from him. She wasn't hurt. The crowbar was still anchored in the window.

**Fiona Tremblay (239)**

“I almost had it! Five more seconds, and it would have opened.”

“No, we need another guy.”

*Calm down. He’s a civilian. He’s not trained for this. Stay cool.* Fiona saw a light sweeping the ground. A deep, rich voice called out in English.

“*CAN I HELP?*”

Fiona shouted back, asking him to help Martin hoist her up to the window.

And there she was again, crowbar in hand. She pushed against the frame so it would give way and activate the emergency opening mechanism, just like she had learned in her first year of service. “YES!” The window opened. Fiona lifted it with one hand and passed the other through to the bus’s interior. “OKAY. PUSH ME UP!” The two men pushed, hoisting Fiona up and inside. *I hope I don’t land on anyone.*

**Martin Labonté (244)**

A chubby young girl hung down from the bus window. The American caught her by the thigh, while Martin, without realizing, grabbed her crotch. “Sorry.” The girl hadn’t noticed. Her gaze remained neutral, as if she was looking at raw meat and not a human being. The woman’s head poked out. She explained in French and then English that nobody else was in the bus except the driver, dead. Her legs swung from the open window. This time, to be safe, Martin stopped his hands on an especially firm thigh. The woman landed. She looked at the American, then turned to Martin.

“Listen, take care of the girl, her nose must be broken. Go around, I saw lights flashing on the other side.”

Martin was struck by the woman's authoritarian, mechanical tone, though her face remained kind. She switched to English.

*"You, come with me. I saw a woman in this car."*

The woman and the American headed toward the Hyundai, still leaning against the front bumper. Martin looked at the chubby girl. A large amount of blood had stained the middle of her coat.

"Can you walk? I can carry you, if you want."

The young girl with the neutral face looked into Martin's face for a long time. Without changing her expression, she said yes.

### **Veronique Choinière (244)**

Véronique was starting to find this situation ridiculous. Her foot was stuck in the steering wheel, and her hip had been caught in the narrow space between the dashboard and windshield. *How am I going to get out of here?* When it broke, the windshield had folded around her as the car tilted upwards. Véronique hated being at someone else's mercy for such a small thing. *If I was actually hurt, I wouldn't complain. But this, this is stupid...*

Someone was walking outside. Véronique heard English, a woman's voice. The voice approached.

"HEY, *PAR ICITTE!* OVER HERE!"

"God, I'm so sorry!" A man's voice this time, again in English.

"Are you hurt?"

Véronique couldn't see who had spoken, but that didn't stop her from pouting as she replied.



“No, I don’t think so, nothing serious. I’m stuck really good, though.”

“I’m going to take off your boot, so you can get your leg out of the steering wheel.”

Véronique felt two hands pull on her boot. The leather had already torn two winters ago. She was wearing a grey work sock with a white tip over a second, thinner one. Even with these two layers, she could feel the icy wind thread between her toes. She bent her knee towards the gear shaft, twisted her ankle, pulled her leg through the steering wheel. Véronique felt the tip of her grey sock fold back over her toes. She hated when that happened.

*“On va vous tirer par la jambe, OK? Essayez de vous pousser avec votre main libre.”*

The woman switched to English for her companion. “We’re going to pull her by the leg. Take her foot.”

The woman counted to three. On “go”, Véronique gained traction and pushed her free hand against a piece of windshield. She felt cold air seeping in beneath her thinly covered hip. “All right!” Her hip moved. Véronique managed to climb free of her car, standing on the road with her two saviours. She tried to fix her hair with her left hand. *Wait. Why isn’t this working?*

*“Madame, your hand...”*

Véronique was tempted to reply “What about my hand?” but decided to squint and check for herself.

“Are you okay?”

Véronique couldn’t say anything, couldn’t think anything. Three of the fingers on her left hand were missing their tops. She could make out the rounded edges of her phalanges through the blood flow.

“We need to find them, they can put them back on. I’m sure they can.”

The American charged into the cabin of the vertical Hyundai with his flashlight turned on. In less than a minute, he had found them. Véronique stood. She watched a bearded, middle-aged man bring her the missing parts of her body. “I’m sure they’ll be able to,” he repeated. Véronique held out her hand, looked at the three fingertips in his palm. Without understanding why, she broke into laughter, honest and unrestrained. She had just found new subject for a series of paintings.

### **Jacques Samson (250)**

Jacques understood that he was in the Chrysler, that an accident had occurred. He guessed that Yvan hadn’t survived. *Given the state of this limo, that’s no surprise.* Jacques was fenced in by warped metal. The cold was beginning to scare him. His feet, his legs, his hands were swollen and heavy. Like prosthetics made from damp wood. Jacques had spoken to people, EMTs, he supposed. Now, he thought he could see a fireman – with his limited view of the outside world, he couldn’t be sure.

“Sir, this is really important. If you feel any pain, anywhere, yell as loud as you can. OK?”

Jacques answered, not knowing the reason for his suffering. *Besides the cold, I don’t get it.* He flinched at the sudden sound of breaking metal. The noise was quickly followed by another, then another. Jacques screwed his eyes shut, trying to guess what the firemen could be doing. He was sure he knew the answer. *Let’s see... let’s see...* Jacques tried to move an arm. Out of habit, unthinkingly, he attempted to stroke his chin as he thought. His arm shifted only a few inches, trapped in a fold of machinery. *What’s this? Why is my arm stuck? Oh, right, the accident...* “YSAN? YSAN!”

**Veronique Choinière (250)**

Her laugh had been nervous, a reaction to ward off unbridled panic. Véronique didn't feel any pain. She kept her hand raised to slow the bleeding, as the authoritative woman had advised. *It could have been worse. At least I'm right-handed, and my hands were insured... Uncle Gérald was right about that.* Véronique studied the three fingertips in the palm of her right hand. She recognized the nails, the curve of the tips, the grooves of the prints. *This is so fucked up... and why doesn't it hurt?* Véronique no longer felt very cold. She was careful not to slip as she walked toward the ambulance, up road from the accident. She didn't take a picture of the pileup, as she would have under normal circumstances. Her miniature digital camera was intact, though, in an inner pocket of her coat. She could have captured the Jaws of Life, the firemen working on the metal corpse of a black car, a semi-truck leaning on its side next to the road. More ideas for paintings, visual notes. *I don't feel like recording this... and besides where would I put my fingers?*

A Fine Snow

I KILLED AGAIN (265)

Finch had joined the passengers in the second ambulance a few minutes after the woman with the severed fingers. He could remember a man with an injured arm, wearing a tie. A chubby girl with a broken nose. A scrawny young man. He remembered the silence he had held like precious cargo for the length of the journey, the faces he didn't see, the terror at every skid in the icy road. Finch had kept his head down, resting on his double chin. The firemen had recovered one man from a demolished Chrysler, his neck broken, and Finch's eyes had detected a body bag on one stretcher as he was walking to the ambulance. *Two, maybe three with the New Beetle girl... all because of me.*

His wife's voice did not ease Finch's torment. As soon as he had passed his medical examination – severe bruising, minor contusions, a mild concussion – Finch had thrown himself upon the first available payphone. It had been late. The phone rang four times.

“Hello?”

Joyce had been drowsy, her voice slurred. Finch felt his eyes well up. The hand on the receiver had begun to tremble. “Hon...”

“Baby?”

Joyce had paused. She was suddenly alert. It had been this way many years ago, when she had risen in the night to comfort her children after their bad dreams. Finch heard rustling. Joyce had brought the receiver closer to her mouth. She repeated her last word. Finch breathed in through his mouth, an inhalation that struggled against the sobs blocking his throat.

“Hon... I killed again...”

His voice had been neither deep nor melodious. On “killed”, it had risen an octave. Finch brought his other hand to his mouth. He would have liked to sit down.

“Baby, what happened? Where are you?”

Finch spoke with his wife for more than an hour. She had done her best to convince him there was nothing he could have done, that these people were dead because of the accident, that it was God’s will, that it had nothing to do with Huntsville’s death row. His wife’s sensible words had allowed him to find some rest on his narrow cot in the hallway of the emergency room. But this morning, as he gulped down soft toast in a quiet corner of the cafeteria, Finch was convinced that he alone was responsible for those killed the night before. *I had no reason to be cruising at that speed. The client knew about the driving conditions... I’m a monster...* Finch didn’t look at the food on his tray. He brought it to his mouth automatically as he focused on an invisible spot, on an empty wall. He thought again about the F-150 he had passed. *That was the army lady’s pickup... If I had stayed behind her, nobody would have died.* Finch had spoken with his client that morning. He said that he understood, wished him the best of luck in recovering from the shock, getting back on the road, moving on. *Keep going? How can I keep going?*

Finch was driven to the lot where the *Joyce* had been towed. The police officers brought him there, ask for his version of the accident but would not record his statement. Finch hid nothing, aware that the truck’s black box had recorded even the smallest details. The oldest of the officers parked his car on the shoulder before commenting. He pulled his square glasses down the bridge of his nose, turn to look at Finch, man to man. “You know, you were driving

exactly at the speed limit. There is no infraction and anyway, the no-fault system prevails here. But between you and me, off the record, you should have been cruising at a lower speed in these conditions...”

The officer looked at Finch with practiced severity, would not blink.

“Your truck has been inspected. Only superficial damages. You’ll be able to drive back home today.”

Finch would bear the policeman’s gaze until the end, his lips sealed. His eyes reddened under a rush of tears held in too tightly. The officer would keep this stare locked upon him for a long moment. Finch would lower first his eyes, then his head. Exhale a gust of wind through his nose. He was convinced that there was a rock in his thorax, a wrecking ball chained to his heart. He heard the police officer return to his place behind the wheel, turned his eyes to the white landscape, icy, dotted with bare trees, straight as prison bars.

## THE WAR WILL NOT WAIT (274)

Fiona could not delay her return under any circumstances except for force majeure. *And even then... that's force majeure by their definition.* Once she had arrived at the hospital, she had contacted the Saint-Jean military base and asked the operator to notify Trenton of her problem. After hearing her explanation, the captain on duty had asked her to undergo a full medical exam. "If you're clear, report to Saint-Jean. How many people did you rescue, soldier?" Fiona answered that she had assisted four people, including two before help had arrived. "Good work, Tremblay. I bet you'll be up for the Distinguished Conduct Medal in the next few months. Come back soon, we need you out there."

The emergency room doctor had conducted the physical exam ordered by the Canadian Forces. He had been unfamiliar with the procedure.

"Sorry, I am new here. Are you stationed at the base?"

"No, I'm from Trenton."

"That's not the regiment in Afghanistan, is it?"

"That's the one."

The doctor had looked at Fiona with a new expression on his face. A chilly respect that Fiona had easily detected. "Hmmp. The war..."

Fiona took this opportunity to read the name on his badge. Dr. Bao Dai Nguyen. *Vietnamese.* She realized that this middle-aged man had been born in the midst of conflict. That he had known its victims, maybe even lost brothers, uncles.

"There's nothing wrong with you." He had narrowed his slanted eyes until they were transformed into thin slits. "Unless you wish for there to be something wrong with you."

Fiona hadn't caught the meaning of this suggestion at first. She had replied unthinkingly, almost mechanically.

"Nobody wants there to be something wrong with them."

As she left the hospital, early that morning, Fiona had passed the beds where the accident's victims slept. She had lingered over the chubby young girl, already a killer at age ten. This child's coolness had disturbed her. *Like a little robot.* Fiona had examined her face with care, wanting to memorize her juvenile features. In case their paths should meet again.

Fiona was riding towards an impound lot near the site of the accident. A tight-lipped soldier was driving the jeep with evident contempt. The vehicle gave off the same smell of gas as in Kandahar. She could almost believe she was there. The soldier grunted and jerked his head to the right. "Yeah, it should be there." With a brusque gesture, he braked, swerved to the right, swung through the entrance of the impound lot. "There. I see it."

The F-150 was intact, hardly any dings in the chrome of its front bumper. A snowy film covered its frame. Fiona stepped out of the jeep, set one foot in the fresh snow.

"Everything okay?"

"Yes, I'm fine. Thanks."

The soldier replied with a listless salute, turned the wheel, left the impound. Fiona looked at the block of vehicles, each one bound to the next. The bus was missing its front panels, a black heap with a Chrysler logo was entirely ruined, the New Beetle resembled a ball of scrap iron. *Just one more type of violence.* Five hours of driving separated Fiona from Trenton, where she was expected that evening. *This is no time to get emotional. We're at war.*



## BON APPÉTIT (284)

Véronique could not look away from her hand. The three fingers had been reattached. *No smoking... no smoking for at least ten days.... Slows my circulation, they say...* She felt the tip of her left index finger. The pale flesh registered no sensation, as if the finger belonged to someone else. *The doc had said what? Two and a half centimetres a month for the nerves... it'll take me a month before I can feel anything... That is so messed up.* The surgeon had placed two leeches on each of the reattached fingers. They had been there for an hour, feeding without rest. Véronique had become used to their presence. The surgeon had been frank. “Not only will they clean your fingers, they will help restore circulation while decreasing your pain.” *It's true they don't hurt as much...*

The surgeon was keeping her under observation for a few days. *In any case, my car is totalled and my art dealer must have left.* Véronique hadn't checked her voicemail. Her phone had been broken in the accident. She was waiting for dinner before finding a public phone and clarifying the situation. *I'm too hungry to speak in English.*

Véronique wondered who would meet her when she needed a ride home. Before Christmas, Paul would have done it. *But now, no way. Maybe Louis... no, that would be pathetic, not an ex...* Véronique rifled through her imaginary address book, sifted carefully through each identity: *Him? We haven't talked in a long time... I don't want to apologize to her for the last time... Dan, no, he smokes too much, we'd just end up back at the hospital...* Véronique wanted to avoid contacting her father. *I am thirty-nine years old, I should know someone who could help me!* A cafeteria employee appeared in the hallway, pushing a cart loaded with covered trays. *Eating, that will help me think...*

Véronique massaged her forehead with the tips of her fingers. The leeches were still working on her other hand. They had doubled in volume. Véronique gagged as she watched the hypnotising pulse of their oblong bodies on her fingers. The cafeteria employee placed a tray on the bedtable. Véronique caught a whiff of brown sauce and Brussels sprouts. The removal of the cover confirmed her olfactory suspicions. Véronique closed her eyes. Hunger had given her a mineral headache, cold as marble. She looked at the ball of ground beef resting in a puddle of sauce, the sphere of reconstituted mashed potatoes molded by an ice cream scoop, the pile of thawed macedoine vegetables, the two Brussels sprouts stuck in the middle of the plate. *I'll just have to pretend I'm there, at their Epiphany dinner.* Véronique gave one final glance to the six leeches engorged with blood. She chuckled to herself. *"Bon appétit"*.

Part 3: The Book of Renunciations

April

FEELING IS BETTER THAN DREAMING (p.305)

Véronique still couldn't believe it. She saw her paintings hanging, tags below with four-digit prices, three of which were already marked with a red dot. *And those aren't even the most accessible ones... that's almost eight thousand... and the vernissage hasn't even started...* The events had unfolded too quickly for her to accept this new version of her reality. The dealer had come to see her, at home, in the studio. One week after the accident, he had parked his Maserati behind the seven-hundred-dollar Golf she had bought. The guy hadn't stopped using exclamation points. *Wonderful! Brilliant! Strong! Powerful!* He had said he had some free space in April, the perfect occasion for fresh blood. The gallerist had left an exclusive North American rights agreement on the edge of her counter, between the washed brushes and three bottles of acrylic. "I really have to get back to Toronto. Read this. If I get a fax from you in the next week, we'll be in business!"

The contract had remained on the counter for approximately thirty seconds. As soon as the Maserati was out of sight, Véronique had rushed to the document. After the fourth reading, she had decided that the paper was fair, signed it in two places, initialed five others. The next day, upon receipt of the sheet confirming her fax had been received, she felt that her hard luck had turned, the dream was becoming a reality.

"So, Vero, I'm opening the door in ten minutes. You ready?"

"Little nervous."

"Want some medicine for that?"

“What kind?”

“The kind you snort.”

“Sure!”

The art dealer wrapped an arm around her shoulder and escorted her to the office. From a drawer, he took out a mirror, a baggie of powder, a Platinum credit card, a one hundred dollar bill. With an efficiency that betrayed his familiarity, he traced four long lines on the mirror, rolled the bill with one hand, sniffed the first line, lifted his head while fluttering his eyelids, index finger pressed to his powdery nostril. “Whoa! You won’t find this stuff anywhere else.” Véronique smiled in response. She hadn’t had any since the accident. Her doctor had advised against it. “Not good for circulation, and it overstimulates the heart.” She pinched the one hundred dollar bill between her thumb and index finger, brought her head to the mirror, sniffed hard.

“Wow!”

“Told you.”

Véronique realized that she had never had any real cocaine until this line. She had only snorted mixtures cut with speed, baking powder, sugar, lactose.

“Now that’s the stuff!”

The second lines joined their nostrils as quickly as the first. Véronique felt as if she could solve global warming as her brain rushed into overdrive. She heard an excerpt from “In the Upper Room” by Philip Glass. The dealer’s ringtone. “Devon! Oh honey, you HAVE to come and see this, believe me...” Véronique turned toward the showroom, where the caterers had arrived. “Can I...?”

“Go ahead!”

Véronique helped herself to a glass of Portuguese red wine, rinsing the cocaine's bitter aftertaste from the back of her throat. She studied her art as if it had been made by another hand. *Honestly, I'm really good... seriously. I deserve this.* A noise filtered through the opaque, locked door. People were waiting in the street. *Maybe there's a line... it would be crazy if they had to line up to see my paintings!*

The art dealer came back to Véronique. He had sold one of her works over the phone. He explained that he had sent a picture to his client. "He went crazy... I told him this one was going out tonight. This is gonna be a goooood evening." Veronique saw a red dot appear underneath the portrait of her disemboweled brother. The central piece of the exhibition. Nine thousand dollars. *Come on now, this is completely insane.*

Véronique rapped her reattached fingers against her thigh, a habit she had formed as sensation gradually returned. According to her doctor, her nerves were growing back at a slower pace than usual. "Nothing too serious, it'll happen at some point." Véronique set her bad hand on the buffet table. The wineglass was already empty. Still out of habit, she tapped the table with the ends of her bad fingers, vaguely amused by the idea of hearing something she couldn't really feel. *Wait a minute though...* Véronique lifted her left index finger to her mouth and bit the end. *Okay...*

Sensation had returned. Véronique didn't know when or why, but it was there. An internal tingling, similar to what had kept her up at night, mid-finger, just a little after the accident. *Yeah, but now, this is starting to hurt...* Véronique had the impression that her nerves didn't realize they had reached her fingertips, that they wanted to push through her skin. She intercepted the dealer to ask if he had any Advil. "Sorry, I'm out. I can send my assistant to grab

some if you want.” Véronique held her aching fingers tightly with her good hand, and the heat eased the tingling, which had grown painful.

“Are you okay, Vero?”

“My fuckin’ fingers decided to become sensitive again.”

“Just now?”

“Don’t worry, it won’t show.”

Véronique grabbed the bottle of Portuguese wine, downed half in two swallows. “Better than Advil”.

The dealer smiled. He liked when his artists were special cases, especially when they flaunted this hedonism during their vernissage. Véronique emptied the bottle in three more gulps, belched noiselessly, and wiped her lips on the back of her bad hand without setting down the bottle. “Can you still walk?”

“Sure I can.”

Véronique walked straight. She looked normal. She would ask to do a line of cocaine every fifteen minutes to keep her mind sharp. She would swallow three Advil with a mouthful of red wine as soon as the assistant returned. She would mingle with her guests, excited by the prospect of beautifully large cheques, stunned by the reasons behind these purchases. But for now, Véronique watched her dealer open the door to a small crowd of figures in overpriced clothing. Her fingers itched and stung. The wine hadn’t solved anything. *I just feel less bad. I should maybe set the bottle down.* The gallery filled with exclusive bodies, many of them with eyes already riveted on her paintings. Véronique saw one image that would make her smile for the rest of the evening: a suicide bomber in this crowd, twenty milliseconds after detonating her explosive belt; her body shredded, splinters of bone planted in the bodies that surrounded her. At

the end of the night, Véronique would tell her dealer about this idea. She would tell him she wanted to do it the size of *Guernica*. Gigantic.

“Vero, that’s just fucking perfect.”

## THE THREE-MINUTE MEMORY (p.315)

Jacques had never liked his apartment in Ottawa. Too austere, too banal. The former tenant had been Minister of Industry for the previous government. A man with neither taste nor culture, now sitting on the other side of the Chamber of Commons, the opposition, those who slowed down the parliamentary process on principle. “What will they do, beside grumble? They can’t do anything.”

“Jacques, I think we should start the briefing over.”

“Again?”

“There are still a lot of people to convince. What question did I just ask you?”

Jacques hesitated, lowered his eyelids. “Something about the briefing.”

Jacques Samson was unaware that from now on he would be part of a plan, that his role was that of a puppet, a common tool. Even if he had been able to detect the slightest erosion in his real power, he couldn’t dedicate a moment of reflection to it. Tamara’s orders had already infiltrated his poor memory.

“So, let’s start again. Where are we going tomorrow?”

“Honestly, Tamara...”

“I’m serious.”

“Tomorrow I am going to the Chamber. I will sit down and be quiet.”

“And if an opposition member asks you a question?”

“I will listen to you and repeat what you say.”



Tamara favoured him with a schoolmarm's smile. She took a headset from her briefcase. "One last test." Pushing a lock of blond hair behind her ear, she walked into the bathroom.

Jacques had gotten increasingly used to his dental implant, though he still had some difficulties listening and repeating simultaneously. The idea had come from Tamara. A microwave receiver embedded in a molar, transmitting the signal through his bones and into his ear canal. "This is the only way, Jacques, your memory is too bad. George W. Bush used something like this for his speeches." The procedure had been more painful than expected, not to mention the adjustments it took, the disagreeable sensation of having a strange voice in his cranium.

Tamara installed the headset, activated the contact. She murmured a few words. From the living room, the response was immediate. "I CAN HEAR YOU".

In the weeks that followed the accident, Jacques had thought about resigning. His weakened short-term memory had made each task more difficult. Jacques felt like a computer missing its RAM. *It's as if I've been living in between moments.* Encouraged by Tamara, Jacques had tasked himself with mnemonic exercises. "The brain can always reconfigure itself, it just takes some effort." By mid-February, Jacques had managed to redefine minimal access to his long-term memory. He had been sitting, BlackBerry in hand, screen showing the day's agenda. The top of the screen displayed "*Jeudi*". The only task for Thursday: "*Téléphoner PM 23h30.*" He had looked at that screen for more than an hour. That evening, as the credits played on CBC, Jacques had called Tamara to his office. Bags under her eyes, her wrinkles concealed by makeup, her hair greasy, Tamara had abandoned the stack of documents piled on her desk. "I remember something. I need to call the Prime Minister at 11:30 tonight." Tamara looked at Jacques' desk,

making sure that he hadn't read the information on his BlackBerry. The device had been asleep.  
"Good job, Jacques. That's splendid."

Tamara stepped out of the bathroom. She needed a break. "Go to sleep. The more you rest, the better tomorrow will go." Jacques watched his assistant pull on a light jacket before leaving. He would forget this image in several seconds, but would remember that Tamara had left, though he wouldn't know why. *At least the PM agrees with this solution... he trusts Tamara...* Jacques hated this situation. *Even though it's the best option.* Jacques didn't believe that he had become his assistant's marionette. While his capacity for analysis had atrophied, he remained aware. *Impossible to go back to law, I don't want to retire alone... my mother... I won't help anything with my piss-poor memory. The only logical choice is to continue to work at Parliament, as long as it lasts.* A voice resonated through his skull. Tamara. "I'm just testing the range." Jacques formulated an affirmative response. "Activate your microphone, I don't hear anything."

"I said I could hear you."

"Splendid."

Jacques returned to sit in front of the television, which was broadcasting continuous news coverage on mute. Tamara hadn't played with him since the accident. *I have to admit her workload has tripled, I understand.* Now that Tamara held the reins, Jacques understood that he could no longer claim any favours. *I don't have anything left in my hand... she has everything... it's almost dangerous.* Jacques inhaled deeply. A new chauffeur would be assigned to him tomorrow. Tamara had taken care of hiring a week ago. *Even that, she controls... pathetic.*

In the living room of this unloved apartment, Jacques would sit up in his chair, look around him. In eight seconds, he would have forgotten this last thought, returning to the flawed balance of his normal perception. He would see the television, left on but muted, read the headline written below the bespectacled anchor. On the door, he would read the note scrawled by Tamara and remember with difficulty that she had left.

“Jacques, go to sleep. You need to be rested for tomorrow.”

Jacques would roll his eyes and reply that he was going to bed before shutting off his microphone, revisiting ideas that would feel old to him, though he could not explain why. *She controls everything, she's worse than a mother... I'm pathetic. I should write that on a post-it, as a reminder...* He would grab a pencil, write “*je suis p-*” before stopping himself. *Do I really want to remember how pathetic I am now?* Jacques would hover over the yellow square, pencil in hand. Just long enough to forget. Tomorrow morning, he would finish his sentence, filling in the blanks. “*Je suis politicien*”.

## THE SAND (p.356)

Three weeks. That was the time left before the occupants of the light armoured vehicle could go home. They were five, all from Trenton, heading for the outpost. The vehicle could have held eleven, but given the amount of supplies they were carrying, the dispatcher had assigned the relief forces to two other vehicles. Fiona was sitting on the right, as usual. Smithson occupied the gun-turret. A guy whose name Fiona always forgot was driving. Lajoie and Penfield slept with one eye open on the left. The dirt road had been swept for mines the night before. Even so, the convoy's speed would not exceed 30km/h. Most of the troops were in the vehicles at the front and rear. Fiona didn't like travelling with these dozens of boxes of ammunition an arm's length away.

The convoy had been rolling for three hours. They were halfway there. Fiona had joined her companions in their nap. She was dreaming. Her grandfather, the chalet, the forest, the rock, the sound of snow under her skis. The driver announced that he was slowing down to pass through a bottleneck. Without opening her eyes, Fiona gripped the butt of her C9A1. She was still seeing her rock, grey and smooth under the summer sky. She would sunbathe there, breathing in the scent of the forest around her, listening to the rustle of hundreds, millions of leaves, the creak of the trees, the ripples of wheat. Fiona had been smiling when the light armoured vehicle drove over the remote-controlled mine.

The noise had been brief but deafening. Hot metal, twisted in a mighty wind. Fiona had lost her hearing just before losing consciousness. As her spirit temporarily shut down, she had become weightless. She flew through the dust.

Fiona opened her eyes. She was lying on her back. The ground was sandy, already warm in the morning sun. Her ears no longer offered any information. She rolled her eyes to the left. The light armoured vehicle was overturned, its stomach opened like a metal flower. Several wheels were missing. Two bodies, were stretched face down against the earth. Impossible to identify. Fiona thought that one had been cut in two. To her right, she saw the convoy's rear vehicle, shooting at a ridge in retaliation. Soldiers had been deployed. No sign of the head vehicle. Fiona turned her head to the right. *Slowly, slowly.* She felt no pain. Her body was nothing more than an enormous numb mass. She didn't notice that her leg was gone, carelessly torn off mid-thigh. She was unaware of the blood escaping her femoral artery. She didn't see the scrap of plating that had pierced her Kevlar and slashed through four centimetres of liver. Fiona's breath was laboured. Sand covered her lips and face.

Soldiers attempted to close in on the damaged vehicle. They failed. The Taliban had posted gunners to cut them off. The mountain slopes nearby prevented them from using their 25mm cannon. *This is a bad fight.* Fiona left her head tilted to the right. The sun, already high, flooded the road with a cruel light. She did not hear the sounds, the weapons, the whistling ricochet, the cries from the soldiers caught in this ambush. Fiona watched the dust raised by enemy fire. She was tired. The air had thickened in her throat. *They're not shooting at me. I must look dead...*

Fiona did not yet resemble a corpse. Her head moved back and forth, and the fingers of her right hand scabbled in the dust. If the enemy wasn't finishing her off, it's because they were saving their bullets for real threats. *I must look done for... that's it...* The dust pricked at her eyes. Her eyelids closed for several seconds.

Her rock stood before her. In her hand was a stone. Fiona traced her name across its surface, next to a tied game of tic-tac-toe. But she felt heat. A scorching heat. Fiona opened her eyes, brought a hand to the source of her pain, touched the opened Kevlar, her bare flesh, her exposed liver. She gritted her teeth against the sensation. Her heart beat an arrhythmic measure. Her eyes no longer registered the far-off battle. Her field of vision centered on her right hand, outstretched in the sand. The left palpated her liver. A poultice of dust-covered flesh, drowning in blood. *Okay... okay.*

This was a matter of seconds. One hundred, maybe two. Fiona knew she had to keep her eyes open until the end. Fiona thought about her husband, on the other side of the world. Her grandfather and his trembling hands. Another shooting pain from her abdomen. Bile ate into the neighbouring flesh, gnawing at it. Fiona tensed. Inflated her lungs as best she could. Let the air filter through her sandy lips. *It's going to be okay.*

There was less blood now. The flow from her femoral artery had stopped. Fiona had become used to her pain. Her head was a slow and hazy whirl, only the smallest amount of air entered her lungs. Fiona lowered her eyelids, then recoiled. *No. Not yet. Not so soon.*

The fingers that had scabbled through the dust folded back into her palm. Fiona saw her hand, filled with coarse and pebbly sand. She raised her hand, using her elbow for leverage. Her head was rapidly fogging up. *Let me keep my eyes... my eyes... my eyes...* She eased the pressure in her fingers, freeing a thin trickle of sand. Fiona watched this hand as it released each grain, watched them return to the earth. Her eyes stayed open. Her thoughts moved to oblivion. Her hand fell back. The sand stopped.

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