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The “Ordinary” Translator as Cultural Intermediary

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Article abstract

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GWENDOLYN MOORE: The “Ordinary” Translator as Cultural Intermediary

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ABSTRACT

This essay draws on archival materials in the Harvest House fonds housed at Queen’s University (Kingston, Ontario) to recover and demystify the nature of Gwendolyn Moore’s formative work in French-to-English translation in the years 1970 to 1973. The essay responds to Jeremy Munday’s call to attend to the “ordinary” translator who did not gain prominence but whose work was nonetheless integral to the cultural fabric of her society. In focusing on Moore’s connection with Harvest House publisher Maynard Gertler and studying her role as the trailblazing translator of Yves Thériault and Anne Hébert, the essay argues that she became a key intermediary of cultural exchange in the early 1970s, when the Canadian government was yet in the process of formalizing a program of arts translation grants under the aegis of the Canada Council for the Arts. In essence, before translators had acquired professional standing within literary Canada, Moore conducted herself as a professional.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article, qui s’appuie sur le fonds d’archives d’Harvest House conservé à l’Université Queen’s (Kingston, Ontario), vise à mettre en lumière et à démystifier le parcours de Gwendolyn Moore, traductrice du français à l’anglais, entre 1970 et 1973. Il répond aussi en quelque sorte à l’appel lancé par Jeremy Munday, invitant à se pencher sur le travail de la traductrice « ordinaire », qui, sans avoir atteint la notoriété, n’en a pas moins produit une œuvre s’inscrivant dans le patrimoine culturel de sa société. Par le rapport qu’entretenait Gwendolyn Moore avec Maynard Gertler, éditeur fondateur d’Harvest House, et la dimension avant-gardiste de son travail sur l’œuvre d’Yves Thériault et d’Anne Hébert, la traductrice fut une intermédiaire culturelle de premier plan au début des années 1970, alors que le gouvernement canadien n’avait pas encore officiellement lancé son programme d’aide à la traduction littéraire, sous l’égide du Conseil des arts du

Canada. En définitive, avant même l'acquisition par les traductrices et les traducteurs d'un statut officiel au Canada, on pouvait déjà qualifier Gwendolyn Moore de professionnelle de la traduction.

Keywords

Translation, Canada, Gwendolyn Moore, Maynard Gertler, Harvest House

Mots-clés

Traduction, Canada, Gwendolyn Moore, Maynard Gertler, Harvest House

The rise of French-to-English translation in Canada can be traced to an intrepid few who saw value and importance in the cross-cultural work of literary exchange. Two such figures were the translator Gwendolyn Moore (1922–?) and her publisher Maynard Gertler (1916–2011). In the early 1970s, Moore and Gertler were allied in purpose and in vision, their efforts joined in a literary “act of faith.”² In 1959, Gertler and his wife Ann Straus³ had established Harvest House, a Montréal-based English-language publishing company; their ambition was to issue the first English translations of the works of Québécois writers in inexpensive, accessible editions. Moore was one of the first translators to appear in the French Writers of Canada series, a premier collection of 22 titles of prose and poetry published by Harvest House between 1965 and 1983.

Moore succeeded in bringing the Molson Prize-winning writers Yves Thériault and Anne Hébert to the attention of English readers. University of Toronto French professor Ben-Zion Shek, one of two who served as advisory editors for the Harvest House series,⁴ was not in favour of including Thériault's work in English translation. Shek was highly critical of Thériault. He rejected the novelist's “falsified picture” of Indigenous characters and believed Thériault created his “Imaginary Inuit” as “an ‘exotic’ product for mass consumption.”⁵ Shek also decried Thériault's “transposition to the Far North of a certain Quebec nationalist ‘problematique.’”⁶ Moore insisted, however, that Thériault was “one of the outstanding Canadian authors of our time,”⁷ and her view prevailed. Her Harvest House translations of *Ashini* and *N'Tsuk*, two of Thériault's more poetic novels,⁸ were praised for their accuracy, fluency, and “over-all quality.”⁹ Moore also produced *The Torrent*, the first English translation of Hébert's prose. Although the volume was less well received, the eponymous

novella and five short stories¹⁰ brought Hébert to the attention of readers outside of Québec; the majority of Hébert’s work has since been made available in English and she remains Québec’s most translated female writer.¹¹

Today, Moore’s accomplishments as a translator and her contributions to literary translation—still “an invisible, unfamiliar, even mysterious”¹² activity perceived as secondary to writing itself—have receded from view. She was not featured, for instance, among the portraits of Canadian anglophone translators included in the 2006 volume, *Writing between the Lines*, edited by Agnès Whitfield.¹³ This essay, therefore, is an attempt to recover and demystify the nature of Moore’s formative work in French-to-English translation. In focusing on Moore’s connection—sometimes fraught though always professional—with the forward-thinking Gertler, and in studying her role as a trailblazing translator of Thériault and Hébert, this essay will argue that she became a key intermediary of cultural exchange in the early 1970s, when the Canadian government was yet in the process of formalizing a program of arts translation grants under the aegis of the Canada Council for the Arts.

The “Ordinary” Translator

In 2006, Anthony Pym remarked on a notable shift in focus among some translation studies scholars, “from texts to mediators [i.e., translators and interpreters]. Many of us ... would like to know more about who is doing the mediating, for whom, within what networks, and with what social effects.”¹⁴ The following year, Riitta Jääskeläinen confirmed that the field of translation studies was expanding “to include research on translators and various aspects of their behaviour and working conditions.”¹⁵ Over the next decade, as research focused on the lives of translators advanced, the subdiscipline of translator studies emerged.¹⁶

Among those scholars who have studied the figure and role of the translator is Jeremy Munday. In 2014, nearly 10 years ago, Munday noticed the lack of “a social and cultural history ... of translation and translators.”¹⁷ As he commented at the time, “the conditions, working practices and identity of translators and ... their interaction with other participants in the translation process”—in other words, the “microhistory” of translators¹⁸—were often

overlooked in favour of their published translations. “To excavate and recover the details of lives past and to record those of current translators,”¹⁹ he argued, was an essential though difficult pursuit, for reasons that persist today.

First, although publishers’ archives typically contain correspondence between publishers, editors, and authors, and may also—though less frequently—include manuscripts and typescripts, “traces of the translator are generally hard to find in many [publishers’] collections,”²⁰ where gaps in the archival record, both deliberate and accidental, are inevitable. Second, to uncover “material on translation and translators [that] is often housed in the collections of others,” such as novelists and poets, where one is also more likely to find draft manuscripts and typescripts, requires scholarly “detective work.”²¹ Finally, details about lesser-known translators are not widely available. Munday distinguished between such “ordinary” translators and their more “elite” colleagues—for example, the Argentinian writer and translator Jorge Luis Borges—whose public profiles and personal lives are traceable through published “biographies or autobiographies.”²²

Notwithstanding these challenges, Munday emphasized the need “to seek out and preserve such accounts ... in order to enhance our understanding of the general history of translation.”²³ In focusing on Gwendolyn Moore, who did not attain prominence and did not pursue a career in translation, this essay responds to Munday’s call to attend to the “ordinary” translator whose work was nonetheless integral to the cultural fabric of her society. Ironically, this study of a little-known translator is only possible due to the illustriousness of the authors she translated and the contemporary significance of their work, which led to the preservation of key archival materials.

Inasmuch as my work concentrates on the brief period between 1970 and 1973, when Moore was actively engaged in translating the fiction of Thériault and Hébert for publication, I am especially fortunate in having had access to the Harvest House fonds, which are open for scholarly use and housed at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario. The fonds includes a curriculum vitae of Moore’s dated November 19, 1971 that offers a capsule biography of the translator—a rare and valuable record, in the case of translators—in addition to extensive correspondence between Moore and

Gertler, and among Gertler, Hébert, and Hébert's literary representative, Gertrude Le Moyne (1912–2015). As Munday observed, such correspondence “provide[s] explicit evidence about decisions and ... motivation at different stages and shed[s] light on the cognitive translation processes at work.”²⁴ Extant correspondence also reveals that Moore and Gertler shared in-person visits and long-distance telephone conversations, the contents of which are absent from or only partially reflected in the archival record. Thus, though I am able to reconstruct some of the interactions between Moore and Gertler and interpret the sequence of events that led to the publication of Moore's translations, I do so with an awareness that both my rendering and my understanding, as presented in this essay, will be informed but unavoidably incomplete.

Harvest House

Prior to 1920, Canada produced “next to no literary translation”:²⁵ just 10 titles in English and two in French. Over the next four decades, with the publication of 39 titles in English and nine in French, there was minimal improvement.²⁶ In 1969, Philip Stratford reported that literary translation was a nascent field; “six Canadian publishers account for almost all the literary translation that is done: Clarke Irwin, Harvest House, Macmillan, McClelland and Stewart, Oxford, and Ryerson. But none do very much.”²⁷

In 1977, despite Moore's three intensive years as translator of Thériault and Hébert, Stratford declared that Canada lacked a tradition of literary translation.²⁸ At the time, translation in Canada was considered “a marginal activity, slightly frivolous, and economically uninteresting.”²⁹ For a country that has long been home to Francophone and Anglophone populations, that was recognized as bilingual in “section 133 of the British North America Act of 1867 ... with French and English as its two national languages,”³⁰ and that adopted the *Official Languages Act* in 1969, this may seem improbable. But, as Ray Ellenwood confirmed in 1982, in Canada “neither publishers nor translators have [had] the security, perhaps not even the inclination, to work with any kind of systematic vision. They proceed book-by-book, making their decisions in a variety of mysterious ways about what to translate and what translations to publish.”³¹ Thus, “literary translation in Canada ... has always been done on an *ad hoc* basis”³² and only recently has come “to be recognized as a specific activity in its own right.”³³

Though it may have evolved unsystematically—and continues to do so—the work of literary translation between French and English was based on the commonly held premise that translation served as “a bridge between people.”³⁴ This notion, Whitfield points out, was made explicit in the late 1960s, when it was perceived “that literary translation could play an important role in facilitating dialogue between Anglophone and Francophone Canadians ... The growing articulation of an independent Québec political agenda provided the key impulse, among supporters of a continued federation, for recognizing the need for greater cultural exchange.”³⁵

Harvest House, a publishing company whose principal mandate “was to bring the literature of Québec’s Quiet Revolution to English-speaking Canada,” emerged in this political context.³⁶ Gertler envisaged his firm as a vehicle “of education, of interpretation, of bringing [Québécois works] to the attention of our [broader] population and particularly to those in a position to reach students and reach the public.”³⁷ Indeed, the French Writers of Canada series, which featured everything from “the most modern work to the classic,” was launched to introduce English readers to “outstanding and representative works of fiction by French authors ... selected to reflect important literary and social trends, in addition to having evident aesthetic value.”³⁸ As someone who believed fervently in Canada as “a continued federation,” Gertler sought to further “cultural exchange” through his role as publisher of literary translations.



Figure 1: The French Writers of Canada Series, advertisement.

Gertler was born and raised in Montréal. His parents had immigrated to Canada before the First World War from what was then Austro-Hungary. His father owned a furniture factory, his mother was a homemaker, and he had two siblings, an older sister and a younger brother.

Due to restrictive quotas against Jews, Gertler was unable to attend McGill University. Instead, he studied mental and moral philosophy at Queen's University. In Kingston, he was an active member of the League for Social Reconstruction and wrote book reviews for the *Kingston Whig Standard*. He completed his BA in 1939 and pursued graduate studies at Columbia University. Gertler became an American citizen, and during the Second World War he worked for the United States Foreign Economic Administration and served in the US Army. After the war, he was research director and then president of a New York documentary film production company, The World Today. Spurred by the rise of McCarthyism, Gertler moved to Britain in 1953 and taught American history at the University of Cambridge. In 1958, he returned to Montréal and immersed himself in the culture of Québec. With his wife, he also owned and operated farms in Ontario, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.³⁹

Moore (née Pickering) was a native of British Columbia, born in Fernie and raised in Vancouver. Hers was a professional family. Her father was a dentist, her mother a teacher, and her one sibling, a sister, went on to become a biochemist. Educated at the University of British Columbia, she earned an Honours BA in English and an MA in English and Philosophy. It was when she relocated to Québec, where for 12 years she taught high school French and English in the towns of Saint Bruno, Port Cartier, Morin Heights, Chibougamau, and Lake of Two Mountains, that Moore discovered Québécois literature. During this time, she served as commissioner on the Morin Heights Protestant School Board and representative on the Laurentian Regional School Board.⁴⁰ Moore was also an aspiring painter and writer. She wrote at least one novel, completed in December 1971, but it may not have been published.⁴¹

Moore was drawn to translation for personal and political reasons. As the wife of Kermot Andrew Moore, a non-status Indian from the Kipawa Reserve at Témiscamingue, Québec, and as a friend of Yves Thériault, she felt called to translate Thériault's story of the last Innu chief in *Ashini* and

the life story of a 100-year-old Inuit woman in *N'Tsuk*. Similarly, as a transplanted Anglophone who had put down roots in her adopted province, Moore was compelled to translate the vivid violence of Hébert's Québec.

Gertler and Moore were aligned in their Canadian pride and their idealistic faith in literary translation as a “powerful, flexible instrument of contact and connection across time and space ... [and] a dynamic site of aesthetic and cultural negotiations”—to cite a recent description provided by Anne E.B. Coldiron.⁴² Both regarded translation as “a vehicle for the transmission of emotionally and politically charged ideas which are received in the new language with a new authenticity”⁴³ and believed that “a lot more translation would be a great boon” to Canada.⁴⁴

In vocational standing they differed, however. Gertler was known publicly as a publisher, while Moore was unrecognized as a translator. She fell somewhere between “an enthusiastic amateur” who purely out of “passion” sought to bring the work of Thériault and Hébert to English readers, and “a jobber” who translated “for a flat fee,”⁴⁵ but who also demanded the legal protection of publishing contracts. Despite her tenuous status, however, it is fair to say that Moore's efforts as a translator bore fruit. Her literary sophistication and dedication to translation, her personal ambition, and her business-minded approach to her work helped advance the cause of professionalization, which resulted on May 17, 1975 in the formation of the Literary Translators' Association of Canada / L'Association des traducteurs et traductrices littéraires du Canada in Montréal.⁴⁶

Translating Yves Thériault's *Ashini* and *N'Tsuk*

The correspondence between Moore and Gertler began on March 4, 1970, although when they first connected is not known. Moore wrote to Gertler at his office in Montréal from her home in Morin Heights, a town situated in the Laurentian Mountains north of the city. From the start, their letters focused on their “mutual project”⁴⁷ of bringing the work of Thériault to an English audience. That Moore was the initiator of this joint venture was typical of “translator-generated projects finding their outlet in the smaller publishing houses.”⁴⁸ The outcome was her “on-going cooperation” with Gertler and Harvest House increasingly coming “to be identified with a specific kind of work.”⁴⁹ Moore's letter included a reader's report

commissioned by Gertler on Thériault's novel *La Fille laide* (1950), which she described as “a splendid book, and one not likely to be dated in the near future”; it closed with the confirmation that she was “going ahead full blast with translations while I have the time.”⁵⁰

Moore had an affinity for Thériault's work and had undertaken to translate his novels. Earlier that year she had submitted her translation of *Ashini* to Ryerson Press, which at one time had contracted to publish the book in English. On September 1, 1970, however, Moore received a letter from Frank Flemington, managing editor of the Toronto firm, in which he rejected the manuscript on the grounds that Ryerson was “doing very little in the field of fiction just now and what little we have done has not been encouraging.”⁵¹

Moore's search for a publisher who was interested in the literature of Québec and equally committed to issuing works in translation led her to Gertler. By September 24, 1970, just three weeks after she had received Ryerson's rejection, she had forwarded her English translation of *Ashini* to Harvest House. Although Gertler warned “that the realities of the novel market would seem to preclude” its success, Moore chose to forge ahead: “undeterred by reality, I am going to get it published anyway. Not for myself, but for the work. Because of its beauty, its truthfulness, and its timeliness.”⁵² As her comment indicates, Moore discerned “beauty” in Thériault's craft and “truthfulness” in *Ashini's* first-person narrator. She also believed in the “timeliness” of the novel's focus on Indigenous experience, in particular the Innu of Québec—Thériault claimed Acadian and Innu ancestry on his father's side.

Gertler was receptive. He responded immediately to say that he had begun to read Moore's translation, admired “its beautiful lines,” and hoped “to include some of Yves Thériault's works” in the French Writers of Canada series.⁵³ Evidently, he planned to issue more than one book by Thériault in the series. Soon afterward, he confirmed that Moore's “language is grand”;⁵⁴ as she once disclosed to the publisher, “ASHINI is the apple of my eye”⁵⁵ and in translating the work “it is poetic rather than literal realism we are after, and it is in this vein that I considered my style.”⁵⁶

On September 29, 1970, Gertler announced his decision to publish the novel. The following day, Moore visited Gertler at his Montréal office to discuss the terms of publication. She accepted a publishing contract and a separate copy was forwarded to Thériault at his farm in Saint-Denis-sur-Richelieu. In the letter that accompanied Thériault's contract, Gertler explained: "We like this book very much; we want to publish it; we are protecting ourselves with the Canada Council shield because revenues from *belles lettres* publishing have been truly awful for us."⁵⁷ Since Gertler was charting new territory as a publisher of works in translation, his decision to seek a protective "shield" in the form of a subvention grant from the Canada Council was a sound precaution. In 1959, the Canada Council had begun to subsidize translations on an ad hoc basis within its general literary mandate. The heightened demand for subsidies over the next decade, spurred by a rise in literary activity leading up to Canada's centenary in 1967, led finally to the inauguration of the Canada Council's Translation Grants Program in 1972.⁵⁸

In late November 1970, Moore withdrew *Ashini* from Harvest House. Film rights to the novel had become a point of contention between Gertler and Thériault, and Moore rightly argued that it was "impossible not to include the English translation of ASHINI in the film rights, if this work is ever to be filmed in English."⁵⁹ Without Thériault's agreement, Moore could not proceed with publication. She regretted "the inconvenience," but assured Gertler that she had acted "in good faith"⁶⁰ when she first proffered her translation of *Ashini*.

By December, however, the conflict had been resolved. Gertler and Thériault had signed a new contract and the project was back on track. On February 23, 1971, Moore sent Gertler her reader's reports on Thériault's novels *Les Vendeurs du temple* (1951) and *Les Commettants de Caridad* (1961) for future consideration.⁶¹ The following month, she wrote to remind him to mail her the revised contract for *Ashini*—Moore was keen "to establish" their "contractual relationship"—and to raise the subject of *N'Tsuk*.⁶² She informed Gertler that rights to *N'Tsuk* were available and asked if he would like to read her translation, which would be completed by May. In addition, she acknowledged that *Ashini* recently had been submitted to the Canada Council for review: "Now that you have put the fuse in on Ashini, I think

that you will be pleased with the results. I realize, of course, that publication is now delayed until next winter.”⁶³

On the latter point, Moore could not have predicted Gertler’s response, which revealed his caustic side and showed that he had misinterpreted her remark: “You ... have a deep need for prodding or kicking someone, and I seem to be as convenient a target as any. Please, I do not like the role. I thought that we had achieved a meeting of minds ... Like all publishers we have a pipeline and there is no such thing as instantaneous publication.”⁶⁴

Gertler was a complex character. Within the book trade, he had “established an unbeatable record” for “personal acrimony.”⁶⁵ Philip Cercone, executive director of McGill-Queen’s University Press, for example, “admired” Gertler but found him “combative.”⁶⁶ Simon Dardick, co-founder of Montréal’s Véhicule Press, knew him as an “opinionated” “curmudgeon” who was “also an inspiration.”⁶⁷ Unlike Cercone and Dardick, however, who were peers and not affected directly by Gertler’s behaviour, Moore was a translator who relied on the publisher’s good will. She was cognizant of the power differential in their relationship and the risk that, if she were to antagonize Gertler, he might renege on his commitment to publish *Ashini*.

Moore was conscious, in fact, of what has been identified by Daniel Simeoni and Hélène Buzelin as the “internalized secondariness”⁶⁸ of translators. Moore also acknowledged some degree of “subservience,” the term used by translation studies scholars to denote the compliance required of translators with regard “to the client, to the public, to the author, to the text, to language itself or even, in certain situations of close contact, to the culture or subculture within which the task is required to make sense.”⁶⁹ In the wake of her clash with Gertler, however, Moore drew knowingly on these insights. In her bid to smooth the waters, she was both astute and genuine: “I sincerely regret the annoyance I have caused you. I have the highest regard for your capacities and your work, which no passing difference of opinion would alter. I am now aware that the trouble has stemmed from my desire to pursue my first chick into your domain.”⁷⁰ Gertler was assuaged and in response asked to read *N’Tsuk*—so “we can get our grand project off the ground”⁷¹—but his earlier sharpness remained with Moore. In future dealings with Gertler, she proceeded with a new caution born of an awareness of his volatility and a deeper grasp of their unequal footing.

On April 21, 1971, when Canada Council approval came through (with a grant payable upon publication), *Ashini* went into production and Moore was consulted on its design. One month later, she sent Gertler her translation of *N'Tsuk*, commending the novel's "philosophical and prophetic aspects."⁷² By mid-June 1971, Gertler had decided to publish the work and proposed a payment of \$500 as "an outright fee for translation."⁷³ He acknowledged that the compensation was "not proportional to the amount of work involved"⁷⁴ and Moore could not disagree. Her rejection of the offer led to discussion, but in the end, she accepted the terms of the contract and Gertler's explanation "that the condition of the publishing industry is such that it does not afford a livelihood to both publishers and writers."⁷⁵ In accepting a payment of less than \$1,500, "the real value of a translation of N'TSUK," Moore conceded that, in effect, she was agreeing "to share" Gertler's losses.⁷⁶

In fairness, Gertler was not exaggerating his difficulties. All publishers struggled to meet the high costs of book production and distribution in Canada. Moreover, amid the competing presence of American and British titles, they fought to reach a limited domestic readership dispersed over a vast geography. Small firms, and those that incurred the additional expenses associated with translation, confronted even greater financial challenges. As Gertler once admitted, for companies the size of Harvest House, "The only way that it can be done at all, in many cases, is by the editor-publisher working without a salary and by contributing capital as needed to the firm from personal resources."⁷⁷ He himself drew on "personal resources" to sustain his publishing company. Thus, Gertler's assertion that "our interests and those of the author, [original] French publisher, and translator are entirely congruous"⁷⁸ largely rings true.

August 1971 was a quiet period for Moore, a month of ill health and recovery. It was followed, however, by a busy fall season, when she reviewed both the galleys and page proofs of *Ashini* and *N'Tsuk* with her "usual care."⁷⁹ After returning the corrected proofs of *N'Tsuk*, Moore received a \$300 cheque in partial payment for her work on the English translation; it was her "first income from writing" and it signalled "a milestone"⁸⁰ achievement. For a time, Gertler had planned to issue the two works as a single volume, but decided finally to publish the novels separately, each priced at \$2.00. *Ashini* appeared in 1971 and *N'Tsuk* in 1972

as the third and fourth titles, respectively, in the French Writers of Canada series. Moore was named as translator on the front cover of *N'Tsuk*.

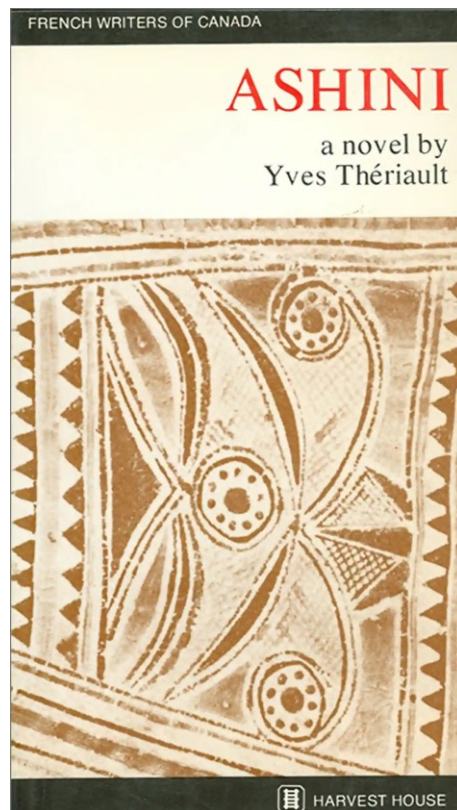


Figure 2: *Ashini*, front cover.

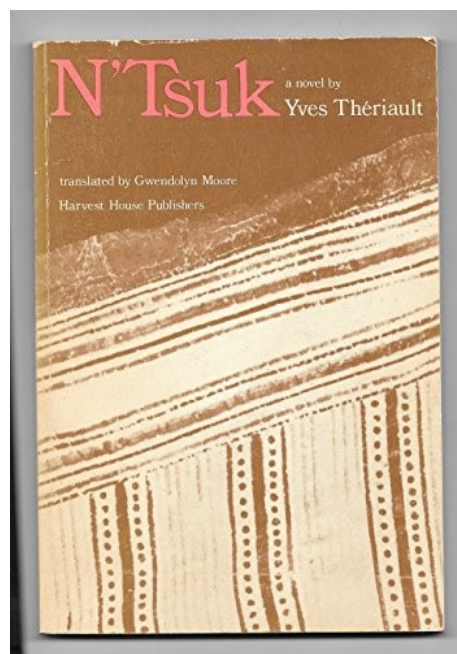


Figure 3: *N'Tsuk*, front cover.

If discord arose between Gertler and Moore during their work on *Ashini* and *N'Tsuk* it was due principally to a lack of mutual understanding. Initially, Gertler assumed that Moore was familiar with the process of bringing a book to the public. In truth, this was her first foray into publishing. She had not anticipated the complexities of contractual negotiations and had to learn patience during the slow course of book production. A further and continual source of frustration for Gertler and Moore alike was the bureaucracy of the Canada Council—especially its policies, which continue to this day, of remunerating translators via publishers and issuing grant monies post-publication—and the opacity of its review process. By the time, however, that he invited her to translate *Le Torrent*—Hébert’s first published work of 1950 that had stunned readers with its shocking portrait of a painfully repressed Jansenist society—Gertler was confident that Moore had acquired the requisite knowledge of publishing. More importantly, he had come to admire her “superlative”⁸¹ skill with language and to appreciate her “devotion to the work” of translation.⁸²

Translating Anne Hébert’s *Le Torrent*

In May 1971, when Gertler asked if she might be interested in translating the prose of other Québécois writers, Moore responded affirmatively: “I would enjoy translating any works congenial to my talents, under any reasonable arrangements.”⁸³ Gertler lost no time. In early June, he sent Moore a copy of *Le Torrent*. At the same time, he submitted an application to the Canada Council, since publication of the English translation would be contingent upon a subvention grant. When the grant was approved in early August 1971, Gertler was eager to “go ahead”⁸⁴ and wrote to hasten Moore: “We want the translation of *Le Torrent* as soon as possible.”⁸⁵ He had hoped to pair it with an English translation of Hébert’s *Kamouraska* (1970), but had learned that the rights to that award-winning novel already had been assigned to Crown Publishers of New York.

By mid-September 1971, having fully regained her health, Moore sent Gertler several pages of translation. He found them “very fine and moving”⁸⁶ and immediately mailed them to Hébert, who was living in Paris, but visiting Montréal at the time. The sample was forwarded and finally reached Montréal in early November, when Hébert acknowledged its

receipt. One month later, the author delivered her assessment of Moore as “une très bonne grammarienne française et anglaise, mais certaines intentions poétiques ou psychologiques lui échappent tout au long du récit.”⁸⁷ As Patricia Godbout has pointed out, the author believed that English was “plus concret, le français plus abstrait.”⁸⁸ Hébert also had little regard for “de traductions littérales ... toute émotion perdue, toute magie soigneusement exclue,”⁸⁹ a view she once expressed to translator Frank Scott.

Since Hébert did not have time to oversee the project herself—she was working with Claude Jutra on his film adaptation of *Kamouraska*⁹⁰—she assigned Gertrude Le Moyne as her literary representative, “c’est que j’ai la plus grande confiance en elle, en sa profonde et longue connaissance de mon oeuvre littéraire,”⁹¹ and asked that Le Moyne be permitted to review Moore’s translation “à ma place et en mon nom.”⁹² Le Moyne (née Hodge) was a published poet who also served as a literary advisor for publishing houses in Montréal and as a member of the editorial board of the literary journal *Écrits du Canada français*.⁹³ A further stipulation—“Je ne désire pas que l’Ange de Dominique soit traduit et publié” in the English translation⁹⁴—was upheld, despite an appeal from Moore that Hébert “reconsider her rejection” of the story.⁹⁵

Unlike Thériault and Moore, who were acquainted and well-matched as author and translator, Hébert and Moore would never meet. Hébert’s wishes were communicated via Gertler—whose loyalty lay with Moore—and Le Moyne, who was allied with Hébert, although paid by Gertler. At first, Gertler sought to preserve Moore’s pride, but the translator was more than willing to collaborate with Le Moyne, even after her draft of *The Torrent* was returned “with a rather heavy hand in places.”⁹⁶ Moore maintained that Le Moyne’s reading was “important” and “necessary” and found many of her revisions were “to the good”; she assured Gertler that “we shall come up [with] the final version shortly.”⁹⁷

Unexpected delays would follow. First, several missing passages, which had been overlooked, needed to be inserted into the English translation. Second, since their agreement had expired, Moore requested a new publishing contract under the existing terms of a \$600 flat fee, plus royalty payments of two percent after the sale of 5,000 copies and three percent after

10,000 copies. If Gertler did “not wish to renew negotiations,” Moore announced that she was prepared to “undertake the debt to Gertrude Le Moyne for her part in the work”⁹⁸—a flat fee of \$300—making it clear that she and Le Moyne had formed an alliance.

Gertler countered that setbacks in publication were due to Hébert’s slow initial response to Moore’s translation and Le Moyne’s unhurried work on the manuscript. He declared that his contract with Moore was “entirely valid” and reiterated his intention to publish *The Torrent* “at the earliest possible date,”⁹⁹ pending receipt of the final manuscript. “We are not the enemy,” he insisted.¹⁰⁰

Although no new contract was issued, Le Moyne helped re-establish accord by writing to Gertler to confirm that Moore had “responsibility for the final version” of *The Torrent*.¹⁰¹ Nonetheless, when she submitted the completed manuscript at the end of January 1973, Moore did so with some bitterness for Gertler—“Please note that I will not tolerate any alterations of this text, without my consent”—and gratitude for Le Moyne—“I should like to see her receive a decent acknowledgement in the published work”¹⁰²—but that suggestion was ignored.

In the meantime, Gertler privately hoped to retain another translator “to help reconcile”¹⁰³ the completed manuscript with the French original. Seeking to avoid “being caught in the middle between”¹⁰⁴ Moore and Le Moyne, Gertler intended to ask Sheila Fischman to provide a final review of *The Torrent*. Fischman, who went on to become one of Canada’s first “elite” translators and is now the country’s leading literary translator, was attracting attention for her English translations of Québécois fiction.¹⁰⁵ In correspondence with Naim Kattan, head of the Canada Council’s Literary Section, Gertler confided his belief that Fischman’s skill would bring “this complex process”¹⁰⁶ of translation to a satisfactory close. That he kept his plan secret is not surprising, for Gertler’s subterfuge undoubtedly would have further alienated Moore and angered Le Moyne. In the end, however, Gertler did not approach Fischman.¹⁰⁷

The Torrent was published in 1973 with the support of a Canada Council grant in the amount of \$1,750, and a supplementary grant of \$350 to cover the fee paid to Le Moyne. Priced at \$2.50, it was the fifth title in the French

Writers of Canada series. Although Moore regarded Le Moyne as a partner in translation—a mark of her intelligence, generosity, and professionalism—Gertler credited Moore alone on the titlepage of *The Torrent*. Neither Moore nor Le Moyne was named on the front cover. Hébert, however, in approving of their work—she declared it “soignée”¹⁰⁸—acknowledged the women’s fruitful collaboration.

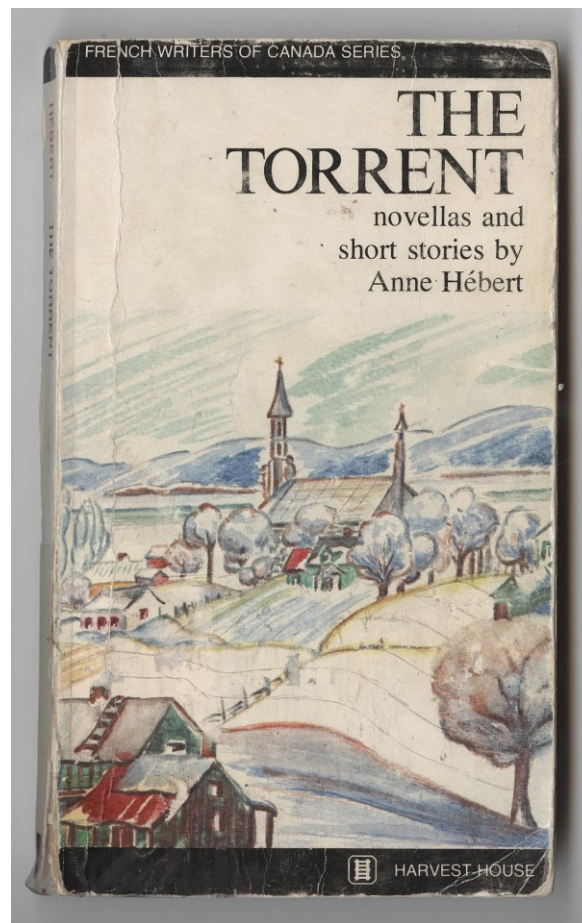


Figure 4: *The Torrent*, front cover.

Conclusion

Some reviewers, as Heather Home observes, deemed *The Torrent* “too literal” and lacking “much of the charm and nuance of the original texts.”¹⁰⁹ Francis M. Macri, for instance, writing in the *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, claimed that Moore’s English did “not rise to the poetic qualities” of Hébert’s “elliptical and deceptive French.”¹¹⁰ But the immediate reception of Moore’s three works of translation concerns me less than the nature and process of their production. That process, as reconstructed here, is based on

the “analysis and ... intensive study of ... documentary material”¹¹¹ that Munday advocated. In facilitating this attempt to recover and contextualize Moore’s particular achievement in bringing the work of Thériault and Hébert to English readers, that “documentary material” has helped deepen our understanding of “the wider social and cultural conditions” that have shaped “the general history of translation”¹¹² in Canada. In addition, that material has formed the basis for this representation of Moore as an “ordinary” translator—to invoke Munday’s term—whose critical efforts helped advance French-to-English translation in Québec.

Indeed, is it not possible to read this chronicle of Moore’s years as a translator as an example of what Munday called a “new narrative” that has “the potential to challenge dominant historical discourses of textual production, which are in turn dominated by prominent literary figures and translators”?¹¹³ Moore was, in fact, at the vanguard of literary translation in Canada. In pursuing translation independently, without communal support and institutional sanction, she mined “a fund of literary knowledge.”¹¹⁴ In negotiating publishing contracts that protected her labour and guaranteed remuneration, she demonstrated “entrepreneurial skill.”¹¹⁵ More personally, Moore worked cooperatively with Gertler and collaboratively with Le Moyne. Above all, she respected the writers she translated and the original spirit of their work. In essence, before translators had acquired professional standing within literary Canada, Moore conducted herself as a professional.

After producing three translations in rapid succession, Moore retreated from publishing. Although she went on to translate Ginette Paris’s 1986 *Pagan Meditations: The Worlds of Aphrodite, Artemis, and Hestia*,¹¹⁶ her translations of the prose of Thériault and Hébert remain clearest evidence of the ambition and accomplishment of this “ordinary” translator. In following a largely untrodden path, Moore was, as translator Pablo Strauss admitted recently, “unafraid to break rules, thorough enough to leave no stone unturned, modest enough to check ... [her] worst impulses, [and] selfish enough to hone ... [her] voice.”¹¹⁷

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Notes

¹ I am grateful to Kathleen Kellett and *Mémoires du livre / Studies in Book Culture*'s two anonymous peer reviewers for their helpful responses to an earlier version of this essay. Thanks also to Heather Home of Queen's University Archives for her guidance and to Elias Friedman-Burley for his research assistance.

² Maynard Gertler to Gwendolyn Moore, September 25, 1970, no. 2151, box, 54, file 12, Harvest House Ltd. Publishers fonds, Queen's University Archives (hereafter HH).

³ Straus was a granddaughter of Nathan Straus, co-owner of R.H. Macy & Company.

⁴ The other was Réjean Robidoux.

⁵ Ben-Z. Shek, "Yves Thériault: The Would-be Amerindian and His Imaginary Inuit," in *The Canadian North: Essays in Culture and Literature. Proceedings from the Second International Conference of the Nordic Association for Canadian Studies, University of Lund 1987*, Nordic Association for Canadian Studies 5, eds. Jørn Carlsen and Bengt Streijffert (Lund: Nordic Association for Canadian Studies, 1989), 123.

⁶ Ibid., 122. Shek's response aligns with more recent criticism of Thériault's representation of Indigenous characters and Québécois society. Unfortunately, the scope of this essay does not permit a full analysis of the critical reception of Thériault's work.

⁷ Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, March 4, 1970, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.

⁸ See Yves Thériault, *Ashini* (Montréal: Fides, 1960) and *N'Tsuk* (Montréal: Éditions de l'Homme, 1968). *Ashini* won the Governor General's Literary Award for French-language fiction and the Prix France-Canada.

⁹ Hector Cowan, "Thériault's Lament," review of *Ashini* and *N'Tsuk*, by Yves Thériault, trans. Gwendolyn Moore, *Canadian Literature* 59 (Winter 1974): 125–26.

¹⁰ See Anne Hébert, *Le Torrent* (Montréal: Éditions Beauchemin, 1950).

¹¹ Heather Home, “Harvest House,” *Historical Perspectives on Canadian Publishing*, <https://digitalcollections.mcmaster.ca/hpcanpub/case-study/harvest-house>.

¹² Agnès Whitfield, Introduction, in *Writing between the Lines: Portraits of Canadian Anglophone Translators*, ed. Agnès Whitfield (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 1.

¹³ See Agnès Whitfield, ed., *Writing between the Lines: Portraits of Canadian Anglophone Translators* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006). The volume features the following translators: William Hume Blake, John Glassco, Joyce Marshall, Philip Stratford, D.G. Jones, Patricia Claxton, Sheila Fischman, Barbara Godard, Ray Ellenwood, Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood, John Van Burek, and Linda Gaboriau.

¹⁴ Anthony Pym, “On the Social and the Cultural in Translation Studies,” in *Sociocultural Aspects of Translating and Interpreting*, Benjamins Translation Library 67, eds. Anthony Pym, Miriam Shlesinger, and Zuzana Jettmarová (Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2006), 4.

¹⁵ Riitta Jääskeläinen, “The Changing Position of ‘the Translator’ in Research and in Practice,” *Journal of Translation Studies* 10, no. 1 (2007): 9.

¹⁶ See the recent volume, *Literary Translator Studies*, Benjamins Translations Library 156, eds. Klaus Kaindl, Waltraud Kolb, and Daniela Schlager (Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2021).

¹⁷ Jeremy Munday, “Using Primary Sources to Produce a Microhistory of Translation and Translators: Theoretical and Methodological Concerns,” *The Translator* 20, no. 1 (2014): 64.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 71.

²¹ Ibid., 72.

²² Ibid., 77.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 72.

²⁵ Ruth Virginia Martin, “Norms of the Translated Novel: Canada 1967–1982” (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 1993), 16.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Philip Stratford, “French-Canadian Literature in Translation,” *Meta: Translators’ Journal* 13, no. 4 (December 1968): 181.

²⁸ Philip Stratford, *Bibliography of Canadian Books in Translation: French to English and English to French / Bibliographie de livres canadiens traduits de l'anglais au français et du français à l'anglais*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa: Humanities Research Council of Canada / Conseil canadien de recherches sur les humanités, 1977), ii. Stratford was referring strictly to translation between French and English.

²⁹ Stratford, *Bibliography of Canadian Books*, ii.

³⁰ Jean Delisle and Gilles Gallichan, "Translating the Two Solitudes," in *History of the Book in Canada*, vol. 3, 1918–1980, eds. Carole Gerson and Jacques Michon (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 52.

³¹ Ray Ellenwood, "Some Actualities of Canadian Literary Translation," in *Translation in Canadian Literature Symposium 1982*, Reappraisals: Canadian Writers 9, ed. Camille R. La Bossière (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1983), 68.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Whitfield, Introduction, 4.

³⁴ Stratford, "French-Canadian Literature," 183.

³⁵ Agnès Whitfield, "Promoting Cultural Exchange and Sharing Each Other's Significant Works: French-English / English-French Literary Translation in Canada," *TransCanadiana: Polish Journal of Canadian Studies* 4 (2011): 14.

³⁶ Home, "Harvest House." The Quiet Revolution or Révolution tranquille of the 1960s was a period of great political and societal change in Québec.

³⁷ Claude X. LaBrecque, Interview with Maynard Gertler, [1974], typescript, p. 5, no. 2151, box 12, file 13, HH.

³⁸ "The French Writers of Canada Series" poster, no. 2010–101, HH.

³⁹ See the obituary for Maynard Gertler, *New York Times*, June 5, 2011.

⁴⁰ Mary Gwendolyn Moore, curriculum vitae, November 19, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.

⁴¹ Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, December 31, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH. I have not found a record of the novel's publication.

⁴² A.E.B. Coldiron, "Special Topics: Translation," *PMLA* 135, no. 5 (October 2020): 840.

⁴³ Larry Shouldice, "On the Politics of Literary Translation in Canada," in *Translation in Canadian Literature Symposium 1982*, Reappraisals: Canadian Writers 9, ed. Camille R. La Bossière (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1983), 81.

⁴⁴ Stratford, "French-Canadian Literature," 183.

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- ⁴⁵ Ellenwood, “Some Actualities,” 63.
- ⁴⁶ Whitfield, Introduction, 8.
- ⁴⁷ Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, February 23, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.
- ⁴⁸ Ellenwood, “Some Actualities,” 69.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, March 4, 1970, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.
- ⁵¹ Frank Flemington to Gwendolyn Moore, September 1, 1970, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.
- ⁵² Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, September 24, 1970, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.
- ⁵³ Maynard Gertler to Gwendolyn Moore, September 25, 1970, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.
- ⁵⁴ Maynard Gertler to Gwendolyn Moore, September 29, 1970, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.
- ⁵⁵ Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, April 26, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.
- ⁵⁶ Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, December 31, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.
- ⁵⁷ Maynard Gertler to Yves Thériault, September 30, 1970, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.
- ⁵⁸ Whitfield, “Promoting,” 14.
- ⁵⁹ Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, November 30, 1970, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.
- ⁶⁰ Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, November 30, 1970, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.
- ⁶¹ For every report she provided, Moore received a reading fee of \$10.00.
- ⁶² Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, March 22, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.
- ⁶³ Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, March 22, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.
- ⁶⁴ Maynard Gertler to Gwendolyn Moore, March 24, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.
- ⁶⁵ Shouldice, 77.

⁶⁶ Philip Cercone quoted in Alan Hustak, “Maynard Gertler’s Quiet Revolution Was Anything But,” *Globe and Mail*, May 6, 2011.

⁶⁷ Simon Dardick quoted in Alan Hustak, “Maynard Gertler’s Quiet Revolution Was Anything But,” *Globe and Mail*, May 6, 2011.

⁶⁸ H  l  ne Buzelin, “How Devoted Can Translators Be? Revisiting the Subservience Hypothesis,” *Target* 26, no. 1 (2014): 65.

⁶⁹ Daniel Simeoni, “The Pivotal Status of the Translator’s Habitus,” *Target* 10, no. 1 (1998): 12.

⁷⁰ Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, March 26, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.

⁷¹ Maynard Gertler to Gwendolyn Moore, March 30, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.

⁷² Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, May 21, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.

⁷³ Maynard Gertler to Gwendolyn Moore, June 18, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.

⁷⁴ Maynard Gertler to Gwendolyn Moore, June 18, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.

⁷⁵ Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, July 22, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.

⁷⁶ Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, July 22, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.

⁷⁷ Maynard Gertler, “French-English Translation in Canada,” ed. Ruth Panofsky, *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada* 58 (2020): 164.

⁷⁸ Maynard Gertler to Gwendolyn Moore, September 17, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.

⁷⁹ Maynard Gertler to Gwendolyn Moore, December 24, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.

⁸⁰ Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, November 25, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.

⁸¹ Maynard Gertler to Anne H  bert, September 14, 1971, no. 2151, box 58, file 17, HH.

⁸² Maynard Gertler to Gwendolyn Moore, March 30, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.

⁸³ Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, May 21, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.

⁸⁴ Maynard Gertler to Gwendolyn Moore, August 6, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.

⁸⁵ Maynard Gertler to Gwendolyn Moore, September 10, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.

⁸⁶ Maynard Gertler to Gwendolyn Moore, September 10, 1971, no. 2151, box 54, file 12, HH.

⁸⁷ Anne Hébert à Maynard Gertler, 2 decembre 1971, no. 2151, box 58, file 17, HH.

⁸⁸ Patricia Godbout, dir., *Dialogue sur la traduction: à propos du Tombeau des rois*, par Anne Hébert et Frank Scott, dans *Œuvres complètes d'Anne Hébert*, vol. 1 : *Poésie* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2013), 625, note 84.

⁸⁹ Lettre d'Anne Hébert à Frank Scott, *Dialogue sur la traduction*, 609.

⁹⁰ Hébert was the film's screenwriter. See *Kamouraska*, directed by Claude Jutra (France Cinéma Productions, 1973) and starring Geneviève Bujold.

⁹¹ Anne Hébert à Maynard Gertler, 3 janvier 1972, no. 2151, box 58, file 17, HH.

⁹² Anne Hébert à Maynard Gertler, 26 mars 1972, no. 2151, box 58, file 17, HH. Hébert's interest in the dynamics and practice of translation ran deep. See Anne Hébert et Frank Scott, *Dialogue sur la traduction: à propos du Tombeau des rois*, dir. Patricia Godbout, dans *Œuvres complètes d'Anne Hébert*, vol. 1: *Poésie* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2013), 581–638.

⁹³ See Gertrude Le Moyne, *Factures acquittées*, Collections Les matinaux 14 (Montréal: Les éditions de l'Hexagone, 1964). <https://www.groupenotabene.com/auteur/lemoyne-gertrude>.

⁹⁴ Anne Hébert à Maynard Gertler, 26 mars 1972, no. 2151, box 58, file 17, HH.

⁹⁵ Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, 6 fevrier 1972, no. 2151, box 58, file 16, HH.

⁹⁶ Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, October 28, 1972, no. 2151, box 58, file 16, HH.

⁹⁷ Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, October 28, 1972, no. 2151, box 58, file 16, HH.

⁹⁸ Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, December 1, 1972, no. 2151, box 58, file 16, HH.

⁹⁹ Maynard Gertler to Gwendolyn Moore, December 7, 1972, no. 2151, box 58, file 16, HH.

¹⁰⁰ Maynard Gertler to Gwendolyn Moore, December 7, 1972, no. 2151, box 58, file 16, HH.

¹⁰¹ Gwendolyn Moore to Gertrude Le Moyne, January 5, 1973, no. 2151, box 58, file 16, HH.

¹⁰² Gwendolyn Moore to Maynard Gertler, January 31, 1973, no. 2151, box 58, file 16, HH.

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- ¹⁰³ Maynard Gertler to Naim Kattan, September 25, 1972, no. 2151, box 58, file 20, HH.
- ¹⁰⁴ Maynard Gertler to Naim Kattan, September 25, 1972, no. 2151, box 58, file 20, HH.
- ¹⁰⁵ For a profile of Sheila Fischman, see Derek Webster, “How One Translator Brought Quebec’s Greatest Authors to English Canada,” *The Walrus*, December 2017, <https://thewalrus.ca/how-one-translator-brought-quebecs-greatest-authors-to-english-canada/>.
- ¹⁰⁶ Maynard Gertler to Naim Kattan, September 25, 1972, no. 2151, box 58, file 20, HH.
- ¹⁰⁷ Sheila Fischman, email message to author, January 29, 2022. More than two decades later, Fischman herself would translate Hébert’s novella for an anthology of Québécois short fiction. See Anne Hébert, “‘The Torrent’ 1947,” trans. Sheila Fischman, in *The Quebec Anthology: 1830–1990*, Canadian Short Story Library, eds. Matt Cohen and Wayne Grady (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1996), 183–218.
- ¹⁰⁸ Anne Hébert à Maynard Gertler, 15 janvier 1974, no. 2151, box 58, file 17, HH.
- ¹⁰⁹ Home, “Harvest House.”
- ¹¹⁰ Francis M. Macri, “A Skeleton Closet,” *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 3, no. 2 (1974): 105. See also Annie Tanguay, “*Le Torrent*: Adaptations et traductions,” dans *Œuvres complètes d’Anne Hébert*, vol. 5 : *Théâtre, nouvelles et prose diverses* (Montréal: Les Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 2015), 652–54.
- ¹¹¹ Giovanni Levi quoted in Munday, “Using Primary Sources,” 75.
- ¹¹² Munday, “Using Primary Sources,” 77.
- ¹¹³ Ibid.
- ¹¹⁴ Ellenwood, “Some Actualities,” 70.
- ¹¹⁵ Ibid., 70–71.
- ¹¹⁶ See Ginette Paris, *Pagan Meditations: The Worlds of Aphrodite, Artemis, and Hestia*, trans. Gwendolyn Moore (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1986). From 1982 to 1995, Paris was a Communications professor at Université du Québec à Montréal.
- ¹¹⁷ Pablo Strauss, “Bricks without Straw,” *Literary Review of Canada* 28, no. 8 (October 2020): 40.

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