

The translator as historian

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In 2015, Pierre Anctil gave a keynote address at an event held at Concordia University to mark the publication of the latest edition of *Translators through History*. The title of his talk, “Traduire pour découvrir l’altérité culturelle” (Translating as a means of discovering cultural otherness), was intriguing, and the content even more so. He recounted having translated the first annual report of Montreal’s Jewish Public Library, published in 1915.¹ This slim brochure articulated lofty ideas such as “[t]he greatest, the noblest and the most learned among the men of all times and from all places speak to us through books”. It added up to a scant 50 pages, including long lists of members and donors along with copious advertisements for such mundane commodities as bread, beer, coal, lumber, and so on. This was, at first glance, a rather inconsequential document. Yet, Anctil spoke with passion about the language in which the report was written – Yiddish – and the abundance of information it contained. Decoding an opaque language, now on the wane, and translating this goldmine of a text revealed so much about the level of culture and literacy among a cohort of newcomers who had arrived in Montreal from the Russian Empire in the early part of the 20th century.

Six years after this first encounter with Pierre Anctil, I find myself at the end of a rather long journey, having just completed my English translation (2021a) of his monumental history of the Jews in Quebec, first published in 2017 (2017a). This project has not only deepened my knowledge of this fascinating slice of Canadian history; it has concurrently allowed me to become familiar with the author’s perspectives and methodology and, above all, has provided a glimpse into the links between translating and the writing of history at the hands of this accomplished scholar.

Pierre Anctil’s story is set in a specific social, cultural, and political context. It presents a unique example of the translator’s ability to enrich other spheres of activity within the humanities and social sciences, and the power of translation to influence mentalities and public opinion. With a background in social anthropology, Pierre Anctil is a prodigious and multitalented researcher. In addition to his scholarly work, he has translated poetry, biography, memoirs and journalistic material into French. He has worked primarily from Yiddish, a Jewish language, at a time when it was being abandoned or forgotten by Jews themselves. In an article pointedly titled “Nothing in My Formative Years Indicated that I Might Become a Translator”, Anctil

says that he was drawn to translation by chance, captivated by what he calls “a ghostly culture that beckoned to me from afar” (2013, 57). His is thus an ethnographic, archeological approach to translation. His work as a translator has given him access to a history that would otherwise have remained obscure, untold, and in some respects lost to current scholars who are unfamiliar with the language in which these documents were written. Anctil’s labours as a translator have opened a unique window on the past, providing him with previously untapped resources and the tools to construct a more comprehensive and balanced history of Jewish people in Quebec.

In building a case study of this particular translator, following the model initiated in Delisle and Woodsworth (2012), this article makes a contribution to translator studies, focusing on the array of material Anctil has chosen to translate and the use he has made of it in constructing his historical narrative. This study will examine his motivation to translate and, finally, will attempt to trace the wide-ranging impact of his work in literary and scholarly circles, as well as in the public sphere.

PIERRE ANCTIL: FOUR DECADES OF SCHOLARSHIP

Born in Quebec City in 1952, of French Catholic ancestry, Pierre Anctil completed an undergraduate and master’s degree at Laval University in his home town. He then left to pursue his studies, as many French Canadians did at the time, and enrolled in a doctoral program in social anthropology at the New School for Social Research in New York City. The subject of his doctoral dissertation was French-Canadian immigration to the U.S. After returning to Canada, he was a researcher from 1980 to 1988 at the Quebec Institute for Cultural Research (Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, IQRC), following which he did a post-doctorate in Jewish studies at McGill University in Montreal from 1988 to 1991. He was employed with the Quebec public service, notably with the ministry of immigration and relations with citizens. Along with a number of high-profile Québécois intellectuals and public figures, he belonged to an organization set up to promote a better understanding between the Jews and the Francophone majority in Quebec. He taught in the department of history of Université du Québec à Montréal for some years before joining the University of Ottawa, where he is currently Professor of History. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, with a long list of publications that have earned him numerous awards and distinctions. His impressive, award-winning *Histoire des Juifs du Québec* (2017; *History of the Jews in Quebec*, 2021a), is a crowning achievement, synthesizing the research and thinking he has done over a long career.

Before delving into Anctil’s output as a scholar and translator, let us say a few words about the language and culture that is at the heart of his life’s work. The term “Yiddish” itself literally means “Jewish”. It is a Germanic language, written in the Hebrew script, which originated in the Rhineland in the 9th century. Yiddish was the language of Ashkenazic Jews (those of German descent), living in central and eastern Europe, and was once widely spoken in Jewish communities throughout the world. During the period of the great Jewish migration to Canada, from the dawn of the 20th century to the beginning of World War I, and continuing during the interwar years until the economic challenges of the 1930s slowed immigration, Yiddish

was the third language spoken in Montreal, after French and English (Anctil 2021b, 69). In 1951, Jews still made up the third largest ethnic and religious community speaking a non-official language in Montreal – the official languages being French and English. This manifested itself in a flourishing Yiddish-language literary movement, Yiddish press, theatre, cultural organizations, and schools.

Yiddish is now in decline, partly because of the decimation of Jewish communities during World War II, partly because the Yiddish language was eclipsed by Hebrew as the national tongue after the State of Israel was founded in 1948, and also because Jews migrating across the world tended to adopt the languages of their new homelands as their primary languages. Yiddish continues to be spoken by Hasidim and other ultra-Orthodox religious groups. It is enjoying somewhat of a revival in secular circles: it is taught in some Canadian and American universities, and music and theatre productions have enjoyed a certain popularity. But the language has ceased to have the same currency, vitality, and stature it once had.

Anctil's publication record – comprising books, contributions to collected volumes and journal articles – includes translations as well as scholarly writing that bridges sociology, anthropology, and history.² There was no clear transition from research to translation, or conversely from translating to writing history. That would be too simplistic; instead, the two forms of activity are intertwined. Before Anctil published his first work of translation, he had authored two studies having to do with relations between Jews and the Francophone community in Quebec: in 1988, under the aegis of the IQRC, he published *Le rendez-vous manqué: Les Juifs de Montréal face au Québec de l'entre-deux-guerres* (A missed opportunity: Montreal Jews during the inter-war years in Quebec); later, in collaboration with Jewish scholars Ira Robinson and Mervin Butovsky, he produced the edited volume *An Everyday Miracle: Yiddish Culture in Montreal* (1990).

In parallel with his research, he began taking classes in the Yiddish language in 1984, and made relatively quick progress because of a prior familiarity with the Hebrew alphabet, as he explains in his article “Nothing in My Formative Years...” (Anctil 2013, 58). While conducting research in the archives of the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), he came to know archivist David Rome. Anctil credits Rome with having “converted” him to this new field of study (Anctil 2021b, 4). Rome guided him through the mass of documents held in the archives: a rich and varied cache of letters, posters, photographs, and written reports. Eventually, he discovered the work of Yiddish poets, too. As Anctil puts it, he felt as if he had arrived at the “well-spring, the Yiddish text” (Anctil 2013, 57), although he was not yet able to fully decipher its meaning. Then, supported by a post-doctoral grant, he delved more deeply into the work of poet Jacob Isaac Segal. In 1992, a groundbreaking bilingual edition was published as *Poèmes Yiddish*.³ When Anctil's former Yiddish instructor, Leib Tencel, received a copy of the book, he was moved to tears (personal conversation with Anctil). Segal had almost never before been translated, even into English (59). More significantly, as we shall see, this was the first time that Yiddish poetry had been translated into French for a Montreal readership, which, as Anctil says, “had never before been able to grasp its meaning or understand its contribution to their literary culture” (2014, 239).

The next book he translated was a memoir by Montreal journalist Israel Medres, titled *Le Montréal juif d'autrefois*.⁴ According to its translator, this was the first book in Canada to be translated in its entirety from Yiddish into French (Anctil 2013, 63). This act of translation had a dual purpose and result in that it enabled Anctil to learn about the Jewish community and to improve his knowledge of Yiddish (63). His other works of translation have included an account of the Jewish labour movement by political activist and community leader Simon Belkin (1999), the life story of Hirsch Wolofsky (2000), founder of the Yiddish daily newspaper the *Keneder Adler*, known in English as the Jewish Canadian Eagle and, most recently, an autobiographical piece by artist Marc Chagall (2017).

Other contributions as a literary translator,⁵ in addition to his translation of Segal's poetry, include a novel by Yehuda Elberg (2001), a literary memoir by poet Sholem Shtern (2006), and a biographical dictionary of Yiddish writers by Haim Leib Fuks (2005), along with a major monograph on the subject of Segal and his milieu (Anctil 2012, 2017b).

In his exploration of the Jewish community, Anctil focuses on two major themes. He emphasizes, first of all, the immense contribution of Quebec Jewry in a broad spectrum of fields of endeavour: at the political level (the organization of labour unions, for example), in cultural, artistic, and literary production, in the sphere of the law and the defence of basic human rights. He also tackles the thorny issue of anti-Semitism and how it has played out within Quebec society. All of these investigations have come about as a result of his combined skills as a translator and historian. Prominent Quebec poet and essayist Pierre Nepveu was one of the first to draw attention to this blend of translation and fruitful scholarship, specifically in relation to Anctil's *Tur Malka: Flâneries sur les cimes de l'histoire juive montréalaise* (*Tur Malka: Strolls on the heights of Montreal's Jewish history*, 1998), a relatively early collection of essays about the Jews during the interwar period.⁶ Indeed, while pursuing his research, Anctil has continued to mine the resources of the very considerable archives the Jewish community had taken care to build and conserve in Montreal. This has required an ongoing process of translation, of all kinds of records, both individual and institutional. He has also devoted a great deal of attention to the Yiddish press, in particular to the pages of the *Keneder Adler*.⁷

Previous scholars working in the field of Canadian Jewish studies may well have had some expertise in Yiddish, although perhaps not the same depth of knowledge across different fields, but they did not often master French. Anctil has the advantage of combining an ability to read and translate Yiddish with a grasp of the English language and easy access to French historical sources. A perfect mix, in sum, and a solid foundation for constructing his historical narrative of the Jews in Quebec. This has culminated in his most recent accomplishment, a history of four centuries of Jewish presence in Quebec, from the French Regime to modern times. It is a book weaving together the multiple strands of Jewish life and influence, the nuanced story of their integration into Quebec society, as well as their sometimes fraught relations with the Francophone majority.

THE DRIVE TO TRANSLATE

Antoine Berman has written about the drive to translate (*pulsion traductrice*) in the context of Romantic Germany (1984, 22–23), and in his study of French translations of John Donne, where he also formulates the concept of the translation project (*projet de traduction*) governing acts of translation (1995, 76–77). These concepts apply to this case as well. One may well ask what prompted such a productive scholar and historian to translate in the first place. What motivates any translator? Throughout history there have been numerous examples of writers who have chosen to translate, instead of, or in addition to, their practice as creators of (so-called) original material. Various reasons have been given: translation has been seen as a prelude to writing, as a productive exercise, or rather as the expression of a particular affinity for a specific author, as a tribute to them.⁸

In this case, there is a further complication: the crossing of religious-ethnic lines. In *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City*, Sherry Simon poses the question: “How does a non-Jew come to translate Yiddish?” (2006, 100) The question is perhaps a natural one, but it is also strikingly unusual in the context of contemporary translation practice the world over, which entails the transfer of knowledge and cultural artefacts in multiple directions. Why does this Québécois’s engagement with the language, literature, and culture of the Jewish minority in Quebec raise eyebrows? When asked about Simon’s question, in a personal conversation, Anctil replied that it was absurd, although he also acknowledged that his work has almost uniformly been met with some surprise.

One might also ask what drew Anctil to the great Jewish migration to Canada. The masses of Yiddish speakers from the Russian Empire who set foot on Canadian soil between 1900 and 1919 were often left-leaning; they were manual workers, mainly in the garment industry, but nonetheless with a high rate of literacy. They were conspicuously Jewish, as opposed to the more discreet British Jews who had settled in Canada earlier. Anctil’s patently enthusiastic interest in the challenges and achievements of this cohort of immigrants is apparent throughout his body of work and, in particular, *History of the Jews in Quebec* (2021a). This sparked an “anthropologist’s reflex” in him, in the tradition of Claude Lévy-Strauss: learning the language was critical to his investigations (personal conversation).

In his early years hunkered down in the CJC archives under the guidance of David Rome, Anctil discovered material in the Yiddish language that would help shed light on the Jewish newcomers. He evokes these times with some emotion:

I had at my fingertips the rough texture of the paper and the unreadable letters lined up according to an indecipherable order. The smell of the dust, a bit pungent, that had accumulated on the covers, reached my nostrils. A trace remained of the historic moment when there appeared in Montreal, under circumstances as yet for me obscure, those bearing witness from across the seas. There were pages and pages of Yiddish literature that these immigrants had thought good to leave to posterity, and that had slaked their thirst for writing. Who read these works now? (Anctil 2013, 56)

This startling discovery triggered in Anctil a thirst he needed to slake: a desire, even compulsion, to make sense of this body of inscrutable documentation and lit-

erature. He needed to understand, and he needed to translate. Initially concentrating on the work of poet J.I. Segal, translation was Anctil's "path to understanding" (63). The deeper he went into other forms of writing, the more familiar he became with the story of the Jewish community. Or, to return to the theme of the 2015 talk referred to in the opening paragraph, translating became a tool for discovering cultural otherness.

IMPACT OF ANCTIL'S WORK

Another critical element of this case study is the impact Anctil's work has had on literature, on scholarship in the social sciences and humanities, and, more generally, on the public's attitudes. As the first French translation of Yiddish poetry, Anctil's translation of Segal was a remarkable step in Quebec letters, which he qualifies as an "awakening, as if the veil had been lifted, at least in part, from the identity and the appearance of someone who had vanished, that few really remembered ever having near, but that remained like a haunting memory from the distant past" (Anctil 2014, 240). For Anctil, this awakening would be lasting and irreversible: "A door was opened that would never again be closed [...] a radical redefinition of Montreal's literary corpus would eventually emerge, challenging perceptions of a reality that, up to that point, was thought to be shared by only two" (241).

This did not go unnoticed by leading Quebec literary figures such as Pierre Nepveu, who corroborated this signal achievement and hailed it as a turning point that revealed the full range of Montreal's literary resources:

Yiddish lives in me even though I am not even Jewish. It is an integral part of my cultural universe, a part of that great adventure of languages – an adventure that is at once universal and particular to Montreal – that every writer senses is near, that every writer and intellectual in Montreal experiences in the deepest part of themselves where languages seek life, creating against all odds, warding off those forces of nature that, sooner or later, bend them, deform them, and often utterly destroy them (Nepveu 2007, 75; quoted in Anctil 2014, 240).⁹

Anctil returns the favour, prefacing an article he wrote for a *Festschrift* in Nepveu's honour with a dedication recalling the pleasure he has had teaching Montreal Yiddish literature to Nepveu's students at Université de Montréal (Anctil 2010, 45).¹⁰

Anctil's work on history has been well received. The release of *Histoire des Juifs du Québec* (2017a), in particular, elicited favourable reactions from both sides of the linguistic divide in Canada. In his review, historian Éric Bédard comments on the translational achievements of Anctil as well as his erudite synthesis of the history of the Jews:

Thanks to his thorough command of the Yiddish language and culture, which is rare among French-speaking Quebecers, he has translated central Jewish authors, and brought them to the attention of Quebec researchers, who have for too long been unaware of them. [...] He has also sought to understand an entire community from the inside. He has synthesized their story in an important work, supported by genuine scholarship and stimulating reflections, with a sense of nuance and balance befitting a history that is both complex and tragic (Bédard 2018, 186; trans. J.W.).¹¹

Jewish studies scholar Ira Robinson, for his part, writes an equally favourable book review:

Pierre Anctil's *Histoire des Juifs du Québec* represents the culmination of four decades of the author's scholarly work on Jews in Quebec. It is a remarkable book from two perspectives. The first is that it stands as the first comprehensive, single-authored, scholarly history of the Jews in the province of Quebec. The second is that it is written in French and aimed at a francophone audience" (2018, 421).

Robinson goes on to point out how rare it once was for a non-Jewish Franco-phone scholar like Anctil to be engaged in Jewish studies. Now, however, the situation is changing:

[T]he academic study of the Jewish presence in Quebec attracts great interest from students regardless of their ethno-religious-linguistic heritage. This welcome process brings to the academic discussion of Jews in Quebec important new voices and perspectives. Anctil's latest book most certainly marks a major milestone in this process. We can and should look forward to further enrichment and cross-pollination from this quarter (423).

Thus, Anctil's contributions, which combine both translation and history, have altered the course of literary and social studies in Quebec. But there has been a broader impact, as well.

Anctil's knowledge of Yiddish, which he has learned by translating and which has yielded translations of the variety of material described above, has enabled the construction of a fresh historical narrative of the ways in which Jews have inserted themselves into Quebec society. This is a unique narrative, and one that has helped alter perceptions and affect a shift in predominant mentalities.

It is also true that many political, cultural, religious events, which have occurred since the mid-20th century, have brought about a paradigm shift in Quebec. The Quiet Revolution (*Révolution tranquille*), from the 1960s on, was a period of intense social and political change, leading to reduced powers of the Church and a corresponding secularization of government. In 1976, a sovereignist government was elected, leading to the enactment of the 1977 "Charter of the French Language", with important implications for schools and the workplace. As a new Quebec began to emerge, attitudes changed and a new openness to difference ensued.

Anctil's work forms an integral part of this movement. At the same time, he contributes to it by shining the spotlight on a group of Others who have given so much to the host society. It could be argued that the work of this particular translator-historian has been instrumental in promoting greater awareness of the unique way in which the Jewish community has become acculturated to Montreal and Quebec, through activism in the garment trade unions, through production in journalism, theatre, poetry, and the visual arts. The achievements he inventories are extensive. In a recent essay, Anctil also draws a striking parallel between the aspirations reflected in Yiddish writing and the Québécois quest for identity (2021b).

Anctil is honest and realistic, though, about fellow Québécois who will read his work:

Ill-informed about the long-standing presence of a Jewish population in Greater Montreal and unaware of the manifold facets of Jewish identity, many Francophones continued to have difficulty grasping the multitude of contributions made by the Jewish community to Quebec society as a whole.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century [...] the Francophone majority still had a relatively superficial understanding of the Jewish presence (2021b, 350).

He has sought to rectify the situation through the dissemination of information grounded in solid research, which has included translating source material. With an increasing number of translations – his own as well as that of fellow Yiddishists like Chantal Ringuet – French Canada today is beginning to understand the back story. In addition, more Jewish authors who have written in English are being translated into French. As an example, a leading Montreal publishing house, Éditions du Boréal, have commissioned re-translations of novels by Mordecai Richler.¹²

Anctil's study of the history of the Jewish communities in Quebec concludes on a positive note:

This unequalled heritage, grounded in a peripatetic history yet unwavering resistance to marginalization, has endured in a variety of forms in contemporary Quebec, where it continues to exercise a determining influence. The rising tide of pluralism has affected the very nature of Montreal, resulting in a new society that is still in the process of being imagined and circumscribed. In this new world, Jewish voices will continue to be heard. They will reiterate, as they have in the past, the importance of sustaining a dialogue between cultures and fostering an unrelenting spirit of mutual tolerance (399).

Pierre Anctil sees himself as an anthropologist and historian, whose work would not be possible without the translations that lie at its core. His method has resembled that of an archaeologist, an ethnologist, and also a publicist, as it were, for a Jewish community he claims has an identity like no other in North America. He is the quintessential cultural intermediary, embodying the figure so aptly conveyed by the French term *passseur*. He has written about his urban peregrinations: prowling the streets of New York's Lower East Side and Greenwich Village (2013, 53) and then criss-crossing Montreal some years later (54). Similarly, he has carried messages across boundaries of all kinds – ones that are at once temporal, geographic, linguistic, religious, and cultural.

CONCLUSION

As Québécois poet-translator Michel Garneau has remarked, “je traduis pour étudier / j'étudie pour apprendre” (I translate in order to study / I study in order to learn). These lines are taken from a poem that appears on the back cover of Garneau's translation of Leonard Cohen's poems, published in 2000 as *Étrange musique étrangère*. In this case, the last word is given to the translator rather than the poet. Garneau affirms his role as a translator. He is neither traitor nor drudge: instead, translation is both an honour and a pleasure. Moreover, it leads to knowledge. Michel Garneau's dictum could well be applied to Pierre Anctil. As is often the case in the history of translation, the task of translation had opened new doors. In the process

of translating, he discovered a treasure trove, which has led to numerous studies and, ultimately, a fresh history of the Jewish community and its relationship to the majority in Québécois society.

For Anctil, then, translation has been a path to learning, from his early studies of the Yiddish language, which led to his trailblazing translation of the Segal poems in 1992. His continued work as a translator, in parallel with his prolific output as a historian seeking to elucidate the complex relations Jews have maintained with a Francophone population with shifting values and priorities, has fostered a new mindset among Québécois, based on a deeper sensitivity to otherness. Previously inward looking as they endeavoured to assert their own identity and ensure their survival in a predominantly Anglophone continent, the French speakers of Quebec have begun to look upon Jews and other ethnic minorities in their midst with a more open mind. This has come about, to some extent at least, as a result of the tireless efforts of one translator.

NOTES

- ¹ *Premier rapport annuel de la Bibliothèque publique juive et de l'Université populaire, ouverte à Montréal le 1^{er} mai 1914*. Trans. by Pierre Anctil. Originally published as *Ershter yerlikher barikht fun der Yidisher Folks Biblyotek un Folks Universitet, erefnt Montreal, 1en may 1914*. Also published in 2013 in English as *First Annual Report of the Jewish Public Library and People's University, opened in Montreal May 1st 1914*. https://www.cjhn.ca/en/viewer?file=%2fmedia%2fJPLA%2fDOCS%2f1000JPL%2f1000_001_1.pdf#search=Jewish%20public%20library%20annual%20report%201914&phrase=false.
- ² A separate, chronological list of Anctil's principal book-length translations is included in the reference section at the end of this article.
- ³ Not only was the edition bilingual, but it was arranged in the Hebrew manner, with the order of pages reversed, to be read from right to left, creating a sense of "surprise" in the reader (Anctil 2014, 239).
- ⁴ Anctil has transcribed the author's name as Israël Medresh, but the latter's granddaughter, Vivian Felsen, spells the name as Israel Medres. Felsen translated the same memoir, the original title of which was *Montreal fun Nekhten* as *Montreal of Yesterday: Jewish Life in Montreal 1900–1920*. Anctil followed up with *Le Montréal juif entre les deux guerres (2001)*, a translation of *Tsvishn Tsvey Velt Milkhomes* (1964), translated into English by Felsen as *Between the Wars: Canadian Jews in Transition* (2003).
- ⁵ Anctil has been an active member of the Literary Translators' Association of Canada for many years.
- ⁶ Anctil's *Tur Malka* is considered to have been the first synthesis of Jewish culture and history for a French readership. The original French citation ("ces études sont des passages éclairés et savants (sans ostentation) vers des lieux, des textes, des êtres [...] travail de connaissance, de frayage, de traduction") is taken from the publishers webpage, <https://www.septentrion.qc.ca/catalogue/tur-malka>.
- ⁷ His current research project involves examining Yiddish-language editorials published in the *Keneder Adler* during the 1930s.
- ⁸ These questions have been pursued in Woodsworth 2017.
- ⁹ The original French reads: "Le yiddish vit en moi qui ne suis même pas Juif ; il fait partie intégrante de mon univers culturel, il s'inscrit dans cette grande aventure des langues, une aventure à la fois montréalaise et universelle, que tout écrivain perçoit comme proche, et que tout écrivain et intellectuel montréalais éprouve au plus profond de lui-même, là où les langues veulent vivre, créer contre vents et marées, conjurer la force du temps qui, tôt ou tard, les infléchit, les déforme et souvent les anéantit" (Nepveu 2007, 75).

- ¹⁰ “En rappel de tout le plaisir que j’ai eu à faire découvrir la littérature yiddish montréalaise dans ses cours dispensés au Département des littératures de langue française de l’Université de Montréal.”
- ¹¹ “Grâce à sa connaissance approfondie de la langue et de la culture yiddish, rare chez les Québécois de langue française, il a traduit et fait connaître des auteurs juifs marquants, trop longtemps ignorés par les chercheurs québécois. [...] Il s’est aussi employé à comprendre de l’intérieur toute une communauté. La synthèse qu’il nous propose est une somme, nourrie par une véritable érudition, des réflexions stimulantes, mais aussi par un art de la nuance et de la mesure qui sert bien une histoire à la fois complexe et tragique.”
- ¹² Mordecai Richler grew up in Montreal’s Jewish quarter. The grandson of Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg, who translated into Hebrew and wrote folktales in Yiddish (Anctil 2021b, 154), Richler was part of the Canadian-born generation of Jews who forsook Yiddish for English. Several of his novels have been re-translated into French by accomplished, award-winning translators Lori Saint-Martin and her husband Paul Gagné, and more are underway.

PIERRE ANCTIL’S TRANSLATIONS FROM THE YIDDISH (LISTED CHRONOLOGICALLY)

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This case study of Québécois scholar Pierre Anctil reveals the unusual intellectual trajectory of a social anthropologist who has translated an assortment of material from Yiddish into French: poetry, memoirs, literary history, and archival material. He has drawn on these sources, previously unavailable to scholars unfamiliar with the language in which they were written, and has made use of them to construct a fresh historical narrative. The article examines his motives for translating, along with the wide-ranging impact of his work in literary and scholarly circles, as well as in the public sphere.

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