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Jean-Charles Pandosy: De Marseille à l’Ouest Canadien, 1847 à 1891, compiled and written by Edmond Rivère (2002), presents the history of the founding of La Mission, a settlement which is now Kelowna, British Columbia. The book includes some of the legends about, and letters written by, Jean-Charles Pandosy, the Oblate priest from Marseilles, France, who founded La Mission. My translation of the book into English proved to be a challenging task. In this essay I will discuss some of the difficulties involved, and why the task turned out to be more daunting than it appeared at first sight.

1. The Challenge. On examination, the physical appearance of the book is meant to remind the reader of an authentic diary-type chapbook, of the sort kept by Kevin Costner’s character, John Dunbar, featured in the film Dances with Wolves. Its glossy cover has a brownish hue reminiscent of a well-used, dusty diary from the Far West, and the pictures and maps it contains are mostly hand-drawn, in a manner similar to Dunbar’s diary. The book’s opening story recounts a tale about the time when some Okanagan Natives came to visit the new priest upon his arrival in the Okanagan Valley. At this meeting, Pandosy, from a few paces back, threw his knife at a target carved in a tree, hitting a makeshift bull’s eye several times. At that moment, Pandosy gained the respect and awe of the Natives among whom he had come to found the settlement which, along with L’Anse au sable (Sandy Cove), would grow into Kelowna. The book is told as a story, “un récit”, yet it also contains official history, following Pandosy in his trek westward from Marseilles to the Canadian West, and covers the years from 1847 to 1891. In the Preface, Rivère, who is himself originally from Toulon, near Marseilles, and who has lived in Kelowna for close to twenty years, notes that he feels an affinity for Pandosy’s trek and his life in British Columbia. Such a mixed diachronic and synchronic text presents a number of inherent difficulties that must be solved to achieve a good quality translation.

2. Text Linguistics. In order to prepare the text for translation, I adopted a text linguistics approach that first requires an analysis of the major characteristics of the text, in order to ensure that those characteristics are translated or that equivalences are produced for them. The text is multilayered, and written in a somewhat telegraphic style; it also contains a number of implicit ideas that need explicitation in English. Rivère’s text flows nicely, and

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1 The fact that Rivère has become a close friend and colleague of mine only increases my desire to produce a translation that does the book justice.
the style is literary and quite elevated. But the text also presents a selection of Pandosy’s letters written using archaic constructions and a high literary style. His letters include some scripture and expressions in Latin, and some expressions in Provençal. In addition, there is Rivère’s recounting of official history blended with Native legends such as that of Ogo-pogo, the sea monster lurking at the bottom of Lake Okanagan, and the story of Pandosy’s knife-throwing prowess. Those legends are recounted in a more conversational, though still literary tone.

Rivère’s French text uses mainly the *présent historique* and partly the *futur antérieur*, but what should be adequate English equivalents of these tenses? I have worked on this translation with three classes of advanced French-to-English translation students at the University of British Columbia Okanagan, and my students have assisted immensely in finding appropriate word choices and style; they have almost unanimously chosen to render the *présent historique* in the English simple past tense, thus creating a grammatical transposition. Most reference books concur that the historical present in English serves to render the action of a story more vivid, but Ruge (1979), among other authorities, notes that it is difficult to sustain the use of that tense in a longer text. It also did not “feel right” to use this tense throughout the translation. This choice was confirmed by a number of LACUS members at the 35th annual conference held at Université Laval in June 2008, following a very interesting and in-depth discussion on the place of the historical present in English. Examples (1) and (2) below show representative and vivid, though not exhaustive, cases of the *présent historique* and the *futur antérieur* in the original text:

(1) *La Robe noire*... *taille alors à hauteur d’épaules un cercle..., recule... et lance son couteau vers la cible.* (13)

‘The Black Robe... carved a circle at shoulder height... backed up... and threw his knife at the target....’

(2) *Il n’aura pas été seul. Le chef François lui aura longtemps tenu la main.* (201)

‘Yet he would not be alone. Chief François watched over him for a long time, holding his hand.’

In (1), it would have sounded odd to use the historical present in English to elevate Pandosy to the level of a legend, as it seems too informal and not remote enough in time. Attempts to compensate for the loss of immediacy which use of the historical present might have given include the accumulation of verbs in the simple past to make the actions described seem “matter of fact” in English, and the choice of the more familiar *backed up* instead of a more formal yet less vivid *retraced his steps*. In the second example, the idiom *watched over him* and the gerund *holding his hand* are used in an attempt to render the on-going present action of the *futur antérieur*.

Pandosy’s prose is much more formal, and indeed archaic (i.e., in structures, word choice, etc.) than Rivère’s. It thus demands a more formal and archaic sounding translation. The following representative example, (3), demonstrates such a diachronic translation:
Rivère’s prose is less formal, as demonstrated by the following representative, synchronic example in (4):

(4) **Pandosy s’est constamment penché sur la langue des autochtones afin de pouvoir mieux les évangéliser** (119).

‘Pandosy constantly pored over the indigenous people’s languages in order to better preach to them.’

Sometimes, the two styles are present in a single collocation, and require shifting from formal to less formal levels of language and style in the same paragraph, as illustrated by the following representative example in 5):

(5) ‘...Nous pourrons alors chanter:
Mon vignoble à l’abri du vent/Se réchauffe au soleil levant/Où je suis comme un lézard vert.../Du beau raisin j’ai découvert.’

Pandosy se croit presque en Provence. Il n’a pas tout à fait tort même dans cette lointaine Amérique.

‘...We will then be able to sing:
My vineyard sheltered from the gale/Is warmed by the rising sun in this vale/Where I am like the lizard green.../With the loveliest grapes I have ever seen.”

Pandosy almost believed he was back in Provence. He was not far off, even in distant America.’

The challenge with both the synchronic and diachronic translations, as with the historical present and futur antérieur verb tenses, lies in making the translation come alive without losing its formal style, while also conserving its vibrancy as a text. Only time will tell if my attempt will meet with success.

3. THE METATEXTUAL. A further challenge arises in dealing with the metatextual material, the context or situation, or flora and fauna. For example, Pandosy uses a metaphor to describe a discerning mind that can tell the difference between a *porc épic* ‘a porcupine’ and an *hérisson* ‘a hedgehog’. Some identical animals have different names in Canada and in France, such as the French Canadien *carcajou*, ‘the wolverine’, which in France is called a *glouton*. In addition, there are animals that look very different but whose functions are actually quite similar in France and Canada; an example of such is France’s *putois*, which is ‘a pole cat’, and Canada’s *mouffette*, or *bête puante*, ‘a skunk’. In Rivère’s book, we find that Pandosy also discovered that Canada’s plants are very different than those in France, and if they actually were the same their names were different in the standard French of France.

Place names are also liberally translated into French in Rivère’s book, and it is necessary to decide the grounds on which a particular example can remain in French or should be
repatriated, or translated back into English, in an English translation. Some names, such as *Anse au sable* ‘Sandy Cove’, had readily available English names. Yet, other names, such as Peace River, in Northern B.C., have no readily available French name. Also, Pandosy frequently refers to himself as *le Grec*, due to his darker, Mediterranean skin, although in English, a Greek writing Latin, as Pandosy often does in his letters, sounds quite strange. The following, (6) and (7), are two representative examples of place names in my translations:

(6) *Le missionnaire quitte l’Anse au Sable non sans un pincement au cœur.* (175)
‘The missionary left Sandy Cove, but not without feeling a tug on his heartstrings.’

(7) *Dans deux jours, je pars à la Mission des Cœurs d’Alène.* (73)
‘In two days, I am leaving for the Mission of the Coeurs d’Alene.’

In the first example, the English translation of *Anse au Sable* is readily available, yet Pandosy’s experience of the place with that name was in French, not in English. However, in order to facilitate the target text reader’s experience, it is my intent to present the readily available English translations, mainly to free the reader from too much foreignness. In the second example, however, *Cœur d’Alene* is the name of a small city in Idaho (although in spelling it drops the accent grave over the *e*, and the *oe* ligature and its pronunciation is Anglicised), and it should be represented in English as it is a well-known English place name.

4. A significant idiomatic expression. There is also at least one idiomatic expression that requires a free translation in English, and that is the expression: *Chante, beau merle!* ‘Sing out, oh beautiful starling’ which Pandosy used in referring, and not kindly, to one of his Superiors. That remark earned him a harsh evaluation from his Superiors: “*Vous critiquez vos supérieurs.*” (‘You criticize your superiors’), yet he had felt he had to speak up as he and his compatriots had not been receiving sufficient provisions and material support from their local Superiors. A Google search reveals that this expression is used currently today, and there are even some references to Sarkozy, the President of France, whose words were denigrated with the use of the expression. It also appears in several different forms, such as: *Chante, beau merle, chante!* *Ta cage brûle!* (‘…Your cage is burning!’) or *…car ce soir, tu auras une belle cage!* (‘…for tonight you will be put in a beautiful cage’) or *…tu seras en brochette* (‘…you will be put on a spit’) and even *Chante, beau merle! Tu m’intéresses!* (‘… I find you interesting!’) which is a parody of *Cause toujours tu m’intéresses* (‘Keep talking; I find you interesting!’). Even Wikipedia contains an explanation of the meaning of the expression: *Tu peux toujours parler, je ne t’écouterai pas.* (‘Talk all you want, I’m not listening.’) Yet this expression has no fixed or received translation, so what might be its English equivalent? One might think of ‘Sing out, lovely starling!’ yet does such a literal a translation convey the negative connotations of the original expression? An expression in English which refers to the “cawing of an old crow!” seems closer to the meaning of the original. In other words,

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2 Although it does have a French name, *la Rivière de la Paix*, when the same river runs through Northern Alberta.
Pandosy was telling his Superiors that one of them was uttering hollow words, which fell on (his) deaf ears, but an expression as modern as “Yadda, yadda, yadda! Blah! Blah! Blah!” would be anachronistic in the last half of the nineteenth century. The search for an equivalent effect from an equivalent expression is one of the little joys of literary translation! I settled upon, “Your song, you old crow, is such nice music to my ears!”

5. Conclusion. My goal was to present an equivalent, multi-layered text, including in the translation an equivalence of the levels of language, cultural experience, and the idiomatic expressions of the original text. Regarding the notion of representing the book as a diary from the Far West, when the audience changes from French readers living in France (who have a view of the Far West as exotic and bordering on the fantastic) to the Okanagan population, it might possibly then become a coloured historical storybook to present the founding of la Mission to those who live in and around the area, but who might not be familiar with its history, or with the man who became a street name “Pandosy”—and in some circles, a legend. The text is challenging and not for beginners. One must bear in mind the fact that all translations are incomplete from a number of perspectives. First, a translation is always en devenir, evolving or becoming, as highlighted by Umberto Eco’s book, La Struttura asente (The Absent Structure) on the sign and semiotics (1968). Second, the equivalences presented by a given translation are not complete reproductions of the words presented in the original text, as there is usually not complete “semantic coverage” of the original words by their translations. Indeed, it is not always possible to fully render in the target text the connotations and nuances in such expressions as Chante, beau merle! Last, the translation, even once published, can still be improved by other, more skilled translators.

When the text in French is more or less opaque, partly due to a telegraphic, yet elevated, style, it seems that an acceptable equivalent in English would be an elevated style which is slightly more explicit, and is literary without being too formal. Thus, in order to execute such a translation as I propose, the translator must assume the role of a (re)writer/author, to quite a considerable degree. As the translator, I will also have to make certain decisions regarding politically correct terms such as ‘Natives’ for Indiens, and regarding which explicitations (i.e., ‘yet, he would not be alone’ and ‘watched over him’) must be added to the translation, and which expressions can be left implicit. In a way, if plotting the original text could be likened to mapping an undiscovered area, creating a translation could be likened to establishing a new settlement, which resembles the old “camp” of the original text, but which has new elements and a life of its own. Finally, establishing literary translation prowess through the creation of a good translation could be likened to Pandosy establishing his knife-throwing prowess by hitting the bull’s eye carved on the tree. The final judges in the knife throwing legend were the onlookers, the “readers” of that situation, just as the final judge of the translation will be the onlookers, or more precisely, the readers of the target text.
REFERENCES

