

*Canada in Galicia? Or Galicia in Canada? Translating Erín Moure*

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Always between two languages there is a river to cross  
Erín Moure, *My Beloved Wager*, 245

This essay considers existing cultural transfers between Canada and Galicia, in order to investigate the actors and the interests at stake in such interactions. Though Lawrence Venuti insists, overall, that current copyright law ensures that translation projects will be driven by publishers, not by translators (1998: 48), a main thesis of this essay is that the literary systems of non-hegemonic languages such as the Galician in Spain or the French in Canada—struggling in unbalanced competition with the globalized hegemonic systems of the Spanish and English languages respectively—, give more room to the influence of what Sandra Ponzanesi defined as “relatively neglected agents of literature-making”. Among these, Ponzanesi enumerated “editors and publishing houses; literary agents and their firms; film producers and their backers; booksellers and book clubs; university professors and the academy; prizes and their judges, administrators and sponsors; book reviewers, fiction editors, and the journals that employ them; and, very importantly, other authors” (Ponzanesi 2006:112). In our consideration here of the cultural transfers between Galicia and Canada, translators will be added as crucial, though albeit neglected, agents.

Our essay examines the confluence of interests operating in the circulation of Erín Moure’s poetry and essays in Galician, her incorporation of Galician culture and language in her own poetic production published in Canada, and her role as translator of Galician poetry into English. As a literary figure, Moure constitutes a paradigmatic case

of cultural transfer involving those agents of “literature-making” that successfully resist the homogenizing forces of global cultural markets. We understand that the bidirectional interaction at play in the work of Erín Moure between Galicia and Canada—and beyond, as her work is ever expanding into other languages and cultural landscapes—participates both in a transnational Galician culture that has recognized Erín Moure as a diasporic Galician in Canada, and in a transnational Canadian culture in which anglophone critics and readers treasure Moure’s contribution. This essay is also the product of transnational feminist cooperation and creativity that interweaves women from diverse contexts and across languages. As individuals who actively participate, in different ways, in the cultural relations between Galicia and Canada, we feel our shared perspective may help provide some answers to the editors’ open questions.

Ours is a dialogue with three implicated voices. Although at first sight we could roughly reduce our roles to those of poet (Erín Moure), translator (María Reimóndez), and critic (Belén Martín-Lucas), this division would be misleading, as Erín Moure is also a translator (and her work is of the highest relevance to our case study), and María Reimóndez is also a poet (and more: fiction writer, essayist, literary critic and translation studies scholar). Belén Martín-Lucas, who has studied the circulation and reception of Canadian literature in Spain and who has had a critical role as conference organizer and teacher, first introduced these two poet-translators to each other and created more opportunities for collaboration by later providing them public opportunities to lecture and interact.<sup>1</sup>

With Ponzanesi’s list in mind, we will pay attention here to a number of agents intervening in the process of cultural transfers between Canada and Galicia. These include the academic context provided by the conferences and seminars organized at the

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<sup>1</sup> All three of us are members of the research unit *Feminario de Investigación Feminismos e Resistencias: Teorías e Prácticas* at U. de Vigo.

U. de Vigo that propitiated the encounters of Moure with the Galician poet Chus Pato; the literary context provided by Pato's determination to have Moure's poetry translated into her own language so that she could read her; Reimóndez's negotiations over her work and choices as translator of *Teatriños ou aturuxos calados* (Galician translation of Moure's *Little Theatres*, 2007); and the ongoing creative process of collaboration, influence and interest that has led Moure to translate Pato for the English-speaking world.

1. Galician and the Spanish literary market

Whenever relationships between peoples, countries, nations, cultures or languages are examined, translation is involved. Yet, curiously, most of the time, in line with the "translator's invisibility" (Venuti 1997), translation itself is left outside the framework of analysis. Translation Studies, however, insist that reflecting upon translation is the first key to understanding how these relationships—in our case that of Canada and Galicia—work. As Sandra Bermann claims:

closely considered, language and translation in fact open up the unavoidable complexities, the historically ingrained problems and prejudices, and the intense day-to-day negotiations that occupy our interwoven global communities, setting into stark relief the difficult suturing of global networks and the over-stressed joints of the international body politic. They tend to raise questions about linguistic power and the dissemination of texts in various media; they bring to the fore issues of human rights as well as intellectual property; they also illuminate disparities amongst states, nations and local traditions, and the often tragic problems of linguistic and cultural diasporas; they reveal complex multiplicities in the shadow of apparent unity. (2005:2)

At first sight and for too many centuries, Galicia and Canada did not have much in common. Maybe a war over turbot here<sup>2</sup> and rumours of immigrants gone North

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<sup>2</sup> The 'Turbot War' of 1995 marks the strongest point of friction between Galicia and Canada. However, by way of compensation for the hostilities, strong joint programmes of research collaboration were signed between the three universities in Galicia and those in Newfoundland.

there, but nothing on the literary or cultural horizon.<sup>3</sup> On both sides of the Atlantic, people lived with their eyes facing another direction. Until the end of the 1990s, not even a single Canadian author had been translated into Galician, and Galician authors had, as usual, been left out of English—and French—speaking markets, with the few exceptions being marketed in the United Kingdom and France.<sup>4</sup> There was no cultural bridge crossing the Atlantic, but why?

We can briefly use the tools of Translation Studies to explain this situation, looking first at the Galician side of the Atlantic. If one aspect has been made clear in Translation Studies in recent decades, it is that translation is about power—the power of languages, the power of mainstream discourses, the power of some people and sites over others. In this power game that is translation, the Galician language can only be described as a low profile player. It is not one of the languages “out there,” and even Galician speakers have learned to internalize a prejudice against their language through centuries of imposition of Spanish by the central authorities of Spain.

Yet the Galician language does have a powerful literary history and, as Bermann claims, it may be read through translation. We can read the splendour of Galician in the Iberian peninsula poetry of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, which was, alas, followed by four centuries of prohibition and imposition of Spanish with very few surviving written texts (the *Séculos Escuros*, or Dark Ages) and, finally, in keeping with the Romanticism then raging across Europe, there was the *Rexurdimento*, the ‘resurgence’ of Galician in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For the first time, then, translations into Galician started to appear, as a

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<sup>3</sup> An exception to this is the novel by Búa González *The Bitter Taste of Time* (1998), set in a small Galician town from 1920 to 1997. Her essay “On the Edge of Earth” was the first to look at Galicia from the diaspora in Canada and was short listed for the CBC Literary Competition in 1994 (published in *Brick Literary Magazine* in 1995).

<sup>4</sup> For a complete list of Galician texts translated into English visit Jonathan Dunne’s website “Galician Literature in English Translation/ Literatura galega en tradución inglesa” at <http://www.smallstations.com/galician.htm>.

linguistic exercise more than anything else, looking first at Latin and Greek sources and only later moving, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to other models such as the Irish one (see Dasilva 2003 for a more detailed account). Then, again, the Spanish Civil War and forty years of dictatorship put an end to translation endeavours until the return to democracy in 1975.

Galician is now under the protection of the Statute of Autonomy and the Law for Language Promotion (Lei de Normalización Lingüística), promulgated in 1982. However, the panorama is not as “autonomous” as it appears. First, Galician does not enjoy the same status as Spanish in Galicia, as the latter is understood as a constitutional obligation, the former only as a right. Secondly, recurrent conservative governments at the regional level in Galicia have moved from a passive attitude toward preservation and promotion of the language to an active attack against it. In recent elections, Galician was linked to radicalism, backwardness, imposition and even terrorism. While in 2008, the law held that 50% of school subjects were to be taught in Galician, the regional government has since reduced the percentage to 33% and has actively forbidden the use of Galician in the teaching of all science-related subjects. Though a large segment of society is unhappy with this situation, many Galician speakers themselves have internalized the value of the monolingual paradise first predicated during Franco’s dictatorship and now taken up by the right wing parties in Galicia in a neoliberal pro-Spanish/English guise. The result of all their “Galician is good for nothing” propaganda is an actual loss of speakers, the reduction of prestige of the language and an increase in class, rural/urban and even gender divides in Galicia: the Galician language is rural, low class and male (“bruto”, as men are supposed to be) and Spanish is urban, high class and female (refined). Another perception of Galician speakers is that they all necessarily belong to the nationalist party. All these socio-political aspects have an impact on expectations regarding the value of translating into Galician, which is often understood

as some kind of activism, instead of as a natural cultural movement that is normal.

The main premises and expectations of translation in Galicia were and still are that its main purpose is to enrich, strengthen and complement the somehow deficient local literary system. This was the approach of 20<sup>th</sup> century Galician translators (Dasilva 2003:11) and also of the first translators of children's literature in the 1980s, when the educational system needed texts for children and there were hardly any texts originally written in Galician. The phrase “anovar/anosar”<sup>5</sup>—to make new/make ours—would be a good summary of the expectations regarding literary translation in Galicia. Translation was conceived as a key strategy for nation building, especially apt in a nation that based its identity on its language rather than on other attributes. Many of these expectations are still in vogue, although translation is now also seen as a way to contact “the other” (see for example Arias 2008). Even so, there is still the overriding idea that the nation has to look for references elsewhere and must be measured in terms of such contacts. It is no wonder, then, that most translations into Galician are from hegemonic languages or from hegemonic non-Western cultures; even publishers specializing in translation and claiming to look for “new voices”, such as Rinoceronte Editora, translate mainly from hegemonic languages such as Hebrew or Japanese—considered “peripheral” in the West, perhaps, but not elsewhere. Another interesting aspect is that most translations are of works by men, as Neil Baxter (2010) analyzes in detail. Further, translations are usually judged by their language accuracy or by the way in which they bring new words or concepts into Galician, something visible in any review of translated works in the Galician press.

Another interesting feature of the Galician literary system and its translations is its anarchy, otherwise known as “lack of planning”, in contrast to the market-driven

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<sup>5</sup> This is the title of a three-volume collection of essays on translation edited by Alberto Álvarez Lugo and Anxo Fernández Ocampo (1999), collecting papers presented at a conference with the same title held at the University of Vigo in 1998.

agendas of larger publishers in Spain who take specific actions to reach the huge Latin American marketplace (see Martínez-Zalce 2001). In her recent studies on the translation of Canadian texts in Spain, Martín-Lucas observes that most Canadian titles translated into Spanish (and Catalan) closely follow trends established internationally by the big publishing groups: fiction by well-known canonized white (mostly anglophone) authors, like Margaret Atwood or Alice Munro, and award-winning novels by South Asian Canadians like Michael Ondaatje or Rohinton Mistry. As Martínez-Zalce has pointed out, “[t]he multimedia conglomerates based in Spain, then, are choosing titles from a dominant culture: we should remember that English has been the language favoured by globalization” (67). Interestingly, none of those bestselling authors have been translated into Galician nor, to our knowledge, into Basque, and the only South Asian Canadian text translated into Galician is Rachna Mara’s short story cycle *Of Customs and Excise* (1991), translated by María Reimóndez as *Entre o costume e a ruptura* (1998).

Non-hegemonic language systems such as the Galician one—where there are no agents or multimillion dollar contracts for writers—open up the field of translation to other kinds of writing. Quite often, this is shown in a negative light, as Dasilva points out when he claims that there is no “selección rigorosa dos textos destinados á traducción” (2003: 15). However, this lack of “rigour” (and what, one may ask, *is* “rigour”? Rigorous to *whom*, exactly?) may also provide an opportunity for the introduction of voices that, despite their relevance within the Canadian literary system, are far from the hegemonic, such as Erín Moure’s. From its peripheral position, as Moure so nicely captures in her own original writing, Galician has many lessons to offer to hegemonic languages such as English and to Translation Studies as well. Speakers, writers and friends of the Galician language can rarely forget Harish Trivedi’s warning

regarding some translation in the West from hegemonic languages:

there is an urgent need perhaps to protect and preserve some little space in this postcolonial-postmodernist world, where newness constantly enters through cultural translation, for some old and old-fashioned literary translation. For, if literary translation is allowed to wither away in the age of cultural translation, we shall sooner than later end up with a wholly translated, monolingual, monocultural, monolithic world. And then those of us who are still bilingual and who are still untranslated from our own native ground to an alien shore, will nevertheless have been translated against our will and against our grain. (2005:259)

## 2. Québec and Anglophone Canada

Canada is a nation of huge geographic and cultural spaces—a largely anglophone space outside Québec where all languages including French recede before the dominance of English, and a francophone space in Québec, with its concomitant “francomixophone” space in Montréal where other languages, such as English and Spanish in particular, have played large, if not dominant roles. The five main languages used in Québec are all hegemonic: French, English, Arabic, Spanish and Italian. Somehow—in a kind of perverse way to those who only see the 1976 Charter of the French Language, or *Loi 101* (Bill 101),<sup>6</sup> in terms of its effect on the dominance of the English language—the measures undertaken since Bill 101 to provide education to all in French and strengthen use of the French language in the workplace have brought a social recognition of the fragility of *all* languages, at least in the francophone sphere. In Québec, all languages of origin are seen as useful and, as a result, young people from immigrant communities retain their languages of origin (other than English or French) through more generations in Québec than elsewhere in Canada. Teaching of “heritage languages” and culture is seen as an aspect of integration of new Quebecers into

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<sup>6</sup> The Québec *Charter of the French Language* (*La charte de la langue française*) passed into law on August 26, 1977. Known informally as *Bill 101* or *Loi 101*, the Charter designates French, the mother tongue of the majority of Quebecers, the only official language of Québec and frames language rights accordingly.

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French Québec culture, for the more languages people can learn, the better they are at integrating in French (see Ryan 2003). School programs such as PELO (Programme d'étude des langues d'origine) nurture other languages among the young, particularly those from non-francophone families of origin, as part of the multi-ethnic cultural space of Québec. This program's main goal was "to reconcile learning of the immigrant's language and the normal operation of school classes" (Ryan 2003: 132). Together with the publication in 1998 of the *Politique d'intégration scolaire et d'éducation interculturelle* by the Québec education ministry (see Ryan 133), these have been effective tools in the creation of a more multilingual society, though it is not always recognized as such outside Québec, or even in Québec (many anglophones see Québec as bilingual and not as francophone and multilingual). As a result of these laws and initiatives over the years, there is also more public presence in Québec—in the original and in French—of literary work from other languages. The Québec government signs and maintains cultural agreements with other locales independent of the central Canadian state systems, with Mexico and Catalonia being notable examples. As well, Francophones benefit from the availability in French of translations from other languages. Translation, works in translation, and the simultaneous presence of other languages and literatures, is part of the cultural fabric of French Québec. As the *Politique d'intégration* states, what is taught in school emanates elsewhere in society: "The heritage and common values of Québec, notably an openness to ethnocultural, linguistic and religious diversity, must be present throughout the curriculum and school life" (in Ryan 2003:133).

In English Canada (and in anglophone Québec insofar as the central Canadian government offers subsidies for programs of publishing in English), the situation with translations into and out of (but especially into) English has more parallels with the

situation in the USA or England. While English language publishers produce approximately 40% of the books in the world each year, only 3% of these are translations from other languages.<sup>7</sup> In anglophone Canada, where you would think that books translated from Québec would play a significant role, the percentage of translated books has been scarcely higher. While books with content from communities of immigration depicting new Canadians from other cultures are very common and even lauded, actual translations of books from other languages by writers who are not Canadian are rarely produced in Canada. It is partly due to narrowness of vision, and partly fuelled by the disappointing economics of translation publishing. As a result, Canadians who read in English obtain their literary vision of the world, as seen through literary translation, from choices made predominantly in the United States and in England. In a similar line to that expressed by Gabriela Martínez-Zalce (2001) regarding the intense feelings of alienation in Mexican readers when confronting Canadian texts translated into Iberian Spanish, Moure has argued elsewhere (2009: 198) that this paucity of local Canadian translation means an importation or tacit acceptance of values from the dominant countries of the US and England, as what is selected for translation belies the ideological and value positions in the culture in which the act of translation originates. If this premise is accepted, the current situation can only be seen as a negative one for Canada and for Canadian literature and the Canadian polity. It is not that Canadians need translation from outside to validate Canadian culture but that Canadians, like all cultures, need translation of works from outside the country to

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<sup>7</sup> British translator and publisher Andrew Winnard, in an article called “Books Translated into English: Why so few?”, wrote that “[o]f the 70–80,000 books published in the UK each year, only 3 percent are translations. The figure for the US is even lower: 2.5 percent” (1996: 232). Later, he says: “In France, translated books as a percentage of total books published have remained steady at approximately 22 percent during the last few years, up from 18 percent in 1991” (1996: 232). The figures in Canada are probably slightly higher than American and UK figures, but it is doubtful that they reach 5 percent, and of course most translations published in Canada are from Canadian French to English or vice versa, not translations of books written outside the country. See also the report *To Be Translated or Not to Be: pen/irl Report on the International Situation of Literary Translation*, edited by Esther Allen (2007). The whole report is sobering and essential reading.

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vitalize local culture and act to foster exchanges and respect between cultures, to share values, to (dare we say it) help prevent the conditions arising in Canada or elsewhere that feed genocide and war.

What lies at the root of the problem of lack of translation in Canada, an officially bilingual country also rich in indigenous cultures? Is it that the literary administrative system in anglophone Canada, the federal system primarily, does not offer institutional support to Canadian publishers and to Canadian translators to translate from the literatures of the world? Is it that the system of institutional honours excludes such work as Canadian? Or does the paucity of institutional support at a federal or “Canadian” level merely reflect a lack of understanding of the role of literatures in translation in nurturing one’s own, local, culture? Québec understands this better. Yet, all in all, Canadian translators are largely seen as technicians and not as active participants in the literary system, despite the efforts of the Literary Translators’ Association and others. This gives rise to absurdities on many levels, many fronts, which these few examples highlight:

1) Acclaimed Bosnian poet Goran Simic, who was settled in Canada with the help of a PEN program for Writers In Exile, had difficulties publishing his first Canadian books in English translation as his translator was not Canadian, and his publishers thus could not use their publishing funding to produce his books. Given the tenuous economics of literary publishing in Canada’s small market, this meant that the now Canadian poet had to struggle to translate himself in order to publish his work in his new home country and be visible among its writers.

2) The English-French and French-English translation program of the Canada Council, the main institutional supporter at the federal level of literary activity, only funds translations from Canadian to Canadian works, by Canadian translators. Prior to

2010, a Canadian translator of a literary work (unless it was a prize-winning fiction work), especially of poetry, from Canadian French to Canadian English, pretty much had to translate the entire work so the publisher in English could read it, before the work could be accepted for publication. At which point, a translation grant could be applied for, but illicitly, since the regulations for such grants stipulate that the work cannot be translated in advance. Needless to say, as Moure suggests: if you tie the laces on both your shoes together in one knot in this fashion, you trip and fall flat when you try to start walking. Thus, much translation never did start walking, never got off the ground. The Canada Council program for translation of literary works was not as fully used as it could have been until 2010, when new features were added to allow publishers to hire editors and readers of works in “the other language” to aid in the translation and editorial process. As well, the Canada Council sponsored two translation rights fairs for Canadian titles, which were very well received, and have resulted in more English Canadian presses, at least, buying works to translate from their francophone counterparts.

3) The rise of an academic field in creative writing sometimes known as *Translational Poetics* has both legitimate (many) and absurdist (a few) elements. In the absence of a solid local ground for translation from foreign authors and languages into Canadian English, the idea that the work of foreigners in translation is meant to be cannibalized by local writers, i.e. used to fuel their work in their own language, looms large in many anglophone creative writing programs, without the counterbalancing narrative provided by the presence of foreign writings themselves in Canadian English. This has meant, for example, that a work by the hegemonic Portuguese author, Fernando Pessoa, widely translated into English and other languages, which in 2001 received a different translational treatment by a Canadian translator fluent in the language (*Sheep's*

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*Vigil by a Fervent Person*, 2001), has since been taught at some creative writing programs in English Canada as a generative way of writing one's own poetry, imitating a work in another language with little or no knowledge of the source language or interest in the original work. The use of Moure's word "transelation" to describe a generative process ignores what Moure was actually doing in translating the text, ignores her fluency in the language of origin and ignores what was at stake in the original Pessoa text—humour— and Moure's stated reasons (*Viceversa*, 2000; *My Beloved Wager*, 2009) for altering the text in order to translate that humour. It is a kind of purloined letter, in the plural!

4) Bringing an example pertaining to our specific case study, it is ironic that the publisher of Canadian poet Erín Moure was able to use Canada Council publishing funding support for the publication of Moure's very simple poems in Galician and in English translation in Canada (in *Little Theatres*), which were influenced by her contact with Galician culture, whereas Moure had to "emigrate" to publish her translations of a real Galician poet of considerable status, Chus Pato, in England, with just the unfunded support of a tiny but valiant Canadian press to assure minimal distribution in Canada, Moure's own country, in which she hoped to share and raise discussion of the work that had so deeply influenced her own poetics. Without the presence of work such as Pato's on the Canadian scene, Moure's own poetics risk being seen as coming out of nowhere, or out of a personalized creativity unlinked to other texts: a false notion if there ever was one.

Rather than ask after the root of the problem (a chicken and egg story emerges) the pertinent question is, rather, to ask why this is the case. In answering this question, it is essential to examine, in more detail, nationalist policies created in Canada to protect "Canadian culture" (read anglophone) against incursions of American culture, ten times

larger. These policies emerged in the 1950s (when the Canada Council was formed, at the height of post-war prosperity and hopefulness) then gained credence in the 1960s and 1970s as a dominant political trend in Canada during a period of much Canadian anxiety over the influence of the larger market and country to the south of them, the United States. Such policies, applied without subsequent re-examination of all their consequences, have on some levels resulted, 40 years later, in keeping the world out of Canada.

It should be noted that some publishers do break the mould, and in the same anarchic way that Galician publishers do: Talonbooks has published Canadian translations of Strindberg and Chekhov by David French, BuschekBooks publishes Chus Pato in conjunction with Shearsman Books in England, and BookThug has an expanding series of Danish writers in Canadian translation that includes Karen Fastrup, Katrine Marie Guldager, Niels Lingso, and others. It should be noted that all of these publishers have shown no fear in inserting, without funding, books into Canadian culture that would otherwise be “off the map”. Collectively, their translated output is impressive. But it’s anarchic, and not recognized with any institutional publishing support at the federal level, remaining ineligible for publication support and for literary prizes, putting it at a disadvantage in trying to reach readers.

An attempt in late 2005 by writers Robert Majzels and Erín Moure to draw the attention of the Canada Council to the need for institutional change in the way translation and translators are considered, in the form of a petition (in English) with the signatures of almost 90 Canadian authors including those of luminaries such as Margaret Atwood and Michael Ondaatje, was met with scant institutional interest: an outside report commissioned by the Canada Council to review their programs and recommend priorities (using predirected questions) concluded there was insufficient

interest in the issue of international translation to focus on it further. Paradoxically, the then president of the small publishers' association, Karl Seigler of TalonBooks, argued personally against the initiative and even argued directly with its initiators,<sup>8</sup> suggesting at one point that views that diverged from his were those of "sophomoric Marxists". As such, the initiative foundered on more than one front, for with no way to insert arguments in the official survey, and with the objections of the very publishers that stood to benefit, Moure's and Majzels' initiative was doomed to fail. Though many writers still remain committed to change, and though the Canada Council has recently offered more support to Canadian-Canadian translation between English and French, it cannot yet be foreseen if and how Canadian literary institutional behaviour will alter in the future to recognize the interest of Canadian culture as a whole in supporting local Canadian translations of international works.

### 3. Translating Erín Moure

Erín Moure, the poet previously known as Erin Mouré,<sup>9</sup> is a potent hub interconnecting the cultural landscapes of Galicia, Spain, Québec and Canada. Born in Calgary in a family that spoke English at home, she has often commented on her double Galician ancestry, as her father's ancestors—giving her the Moure surname—resided in the village of Crecente, in the Iberian Galicia, while her mother's family migrated to Canada from the eastern border of the predominantly Polish-Ukrainian-Jewish province of Galizia in Austro-Hungary, which was part of Poland between the wars and is now western Ukraine. Raised and formally educated in the English-speaking province of Alberta, she moved to Montréal as an adult, in 1985, where she

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<sup>8</sup> From emails and letters retained by Erín Moure.

<sup>9</sup> The accent that migrated from Mouré to Erín graphically symbolizes her conceptualization of the self as a series of fluid embodiments, what she has described as "the idea of a productive multiplicity, of an 'I' that is not limited in a single name, a single propulsion" (Moure 2009: 253). At the same time, the accent re-inscribes her refusal to be assimilated into uniforming English.

soon felt French started to “infiltrate” her work. She has written extensively on her use of diverse languages in her poetry, claiming that English is nothing natural to her, and noting the incongruity of annihilating the many lived languages of Canada and those in her life:

I never saw the sense of in writing in only one language. When my body expresses itself in more languages, why present a thought in only one? Why shut down the forces that are at work in the poems? Why restrict thought’s possibilities in the poem, sound’s possibilities? (Moure 2009:217)

The number of languages in her poems increases every year as she discovers new poets and with them new histories and territories. Her multilingual poetry thus breaks the hegemony of English in the Canadian literary context.

It was after discovering the Galician origin of her name in 1993 that Moure first contacted Belén Martín-Lucas at Universidade de Vigo to express her interest in visiting the university, after a private visit in 1994 to her ancestors’ village. The occasion arose in October 1998, when Moure participated as guest poet and speaker at the First International Conference on Postcolonial Studies held at the university in Vigo, co-organized by Martín-Lucas. From that moment, regular travels to Galicia helped Moure to gradually integrate in the Galician cultural sphere, and María Reimóndez (at the time a student of Martín-Lucas in the Translation Studies Program and a successful Galician author herself), upon Martín-Lucas’s introduction, acted as Moure’s Galician language teacher. Personal intellectual collaboration and friendship thus constitute the basic foundation of this very fruitful intercultural exchange, very different from the usual contract discussions between agents and publishers involving translators as mere intermediary agents of (re)production, as we will try to illustrate here. Additionally, a common feminist understanding of cultural production and of the assumption of responsibility as women with some, albeit small, influence in the public sphere further strengthen this transnational cooperation, which has had

some impact in both literary systems (Galician and Canadian) and even beyond. In contrast to the isolating and alienating forces of transnational capitalism, this cooperation among women from different cultural backgrounds has generated synergies of creativity and mutual influence that continue to expand and multiply even as these lines are written.

In *My Beloved Wager*, Moure has narrated how she came across Chus Pato's *m-Talá* while shopping for Galician books with her teacher Reimóndez. Her drive to translate Pato's "impossible to translate" poetry into English became a major motor in Moure's writing trajectory from that moment on. As she has beautifully described it, "[a]n entire life changed right then: mine. There are books that produce a before and after in a culture. One of those books in Galician literary culture is Chus Pato's *m-Talá*. For me, too life really has a before and an after, because of this book" (2009: 249). Erín Moure and Chus Pato met first personally in Santiago de Compostela a year later, during the summer of 2001, and they read their poems together for the first time at the Second International Conference on Postcolonial Studies in Vigo in October of the same year. Moure's knowledge of the Galician language also allowed her to read her admired Fernando Pessoa in the original Portuguese, and she produced her *translation* of his *O Guardador de Rebanhos*, called *Sheep's Vigil by a Fervent Person* (2001), an itinerary following the secret waterways of the creeks and ravines of Toronto. The Galician language appeared first and most visibly in her work in the title of *O Cidadán* (2002), where Moure used the Galician word for citizen, playing with a recognizable though not exactly identifiable Latin root that would surely seem familiar to, but also puzzle, her Canadian audience, in order to interrogate and disturb common ideas of exclusion and inclusion in the concept of

citizenship. In her bilingual collection *Little Theatres or aturuxos calados*,<sup>10</sup> the Latin roots common to the Romance languages that flow in Moure's English poems become a tool for linguistic play and further poking at the idea of English as a "universal common" language. This is her most Galician volume, with poems written in Galician and translated into English, Galician and English intermingling also with some drops of Latin and French. It was written during her stay in a village near the city where Chus Pato lives, during the tragic winter of 2002 when the spill of heavy oil from the rotting oil tanker *Prestige* produced the most severe ecological disaster ever experienced along the coast of Europe, blackening the waters and beaches of Galicia, and destroying the coastal fishing industry, pitting Galicians in a furious battle with only their hands and creativity for weapons in the face of the inefficiency of the Spanish central government which at first stubbornly denied the extent of the catastrophe. This episode, crucial in the recent history of Galicia, joins the list of human-produced disasters on the stage of the war against the "axis of evil" that is confronted in Moure's *Little Theatres*. This is the volume of her poetry that María Reimóndez translated for Galician readers, in a bilingual edition that reproduces its original dialogue between these languages.

María Reimóndez has offered her own reflections on the translation process of this multilingual poetical text in an essay published in the Galician Journal of Translation Studies *Viceversa* (Reimóndez 2008), acknowledging how it was the poet Chus Pato who initiated the process by insisting that her publisher, Carlos Lema (Edicións Galaxia), include Erín Moure in their catalogue. Pato's relevance in the

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<sup>10</sup> The common roots of the Galaico-Portuguese culture emerge as well in her poetry volume *O Cadoiro*, where she plays with the genre of the medieval *Cantigas*. It was followed by *O Resplandor* (2010), where translation features once more as a key reading/writing practice, and where her Galician heteronym Elisa Sampedrín, with her linguistic view *through* Galician, actually affects the 'translation' of works from Romanian into English.

Galician cultural realm thus served as a greater impulse towards the production of this book than any professional literary agent in search of international markets would have done. The selection of María Reimóndez, who had never before worked for Edicións Galaxia (she had regularly translated for their main competitor in the Galician system, Xerais) as translator, came directly from the poets Pato and Moure, with the agreement of Lema. Reimóndez's own reputation as both awarded author and translator provided extra symbolic value to the enterprise, constituting an additional agent of legitimation conferring prestige on the final product, which was warmly welcomed in Galicia and received excellent reviews in newspapers, cultural magazines and academic journals. Despite the close relationship between the two poet-translators, or precisely because of their mutual respect and common understanding of the concept of translation as a personal reading of a given text, Moure did not "intrude"—despite her knowledge of the target language—in order to supervise Reimóndez's translational choices; on the contrary, Reimóndez has commented how she felt at all times "in charge" of the production of a new text that was truly hers (see Reimóndez 2008: 97).<sup>11</sup>

The book was launched in the capital of Galicia, Santiago de Compostela, at an event that gathered all relevant cultural media and the main Spanish newspapers (see Salgado's article in *El País* or Manuel Rivas's review in the same journal). All the agents involved in the production of the text were present: Erín Moure, Chus Pato, Carlos Lama and María Reimóndez, thus making visible the collaborative effort behind this (and any) translation. The impact of this translated text in the Galician cultural sphere, together with Moure's work as the translator of Chus Pato's

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<sup>11</sup> Moure and Reimóndez dialogued about the creative process in translation in a session titled "Teatriños' e Elisa Sampedrín: Inventando unha persoeira galega?" that was part of a seminar on "Translation and the Construction of Poetical Identities" held at U of Vigo in May 2007. Their session is accessible online (Moure and Reimóndez 2007).

poetry into English, are important factors in understanding Moure's own current status as a public figure in Galicia whose opinion is regularly consulted in cultural debates.<sup>12</sup>

Chus Pato is a writer essential in any study of contemporary Galician writing. Pato's frustration at her inability to read the original Moure books provoked the translation of Moure's poetry into Galician; in turn, it was her own readers' and co-citizens' inability to read Pato's poetry that moved Moure to translate this work—essential in inspiring her own practice—into English: “Pato's poetry opens my own literature. And it changes my mouth. It makes of me a Canadian who is different than I was before picking up the book, and I translate to share this” (Moure 2009: 257).

As has been previously mentioned, Moure could not find a Canadian publisher for her first three translations of Pato, and all of them appeared with the English company Shearsman Books (though also with the unfunded and faithful collaboration of the very small press BuschekBooks in Ottawa who distribute in Canada where Shearsman does not distribute): *Charenton* (2007), *M-talá* (2009) and *Hordes of Writing* (2011), (which won the prestigious Spanish National Critics' Prize in 2009 in its Galician original). The situation attests to the rigidity of English language literary systems, including the Canadian one, and to the barriers that prevent the inclusion of texts from non-hegemonic languages in an anglophone market ruled principally by international awards as the major, or only, reason for the translation of new authors.

Increasingly frustrated by this rigidity and by the barriers, Moure first published her fourth translation of Chus Pato, *Secession*, in a small private edition in

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<sup>12</sup> She has been often interviewed in Galician and Spanish newspapers on the situation of the Galician language, on poetry, on Galician culture, but also as a translator, intervening, for example, in the debate in 2008 on Reimóndez's translation of Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* and her publisher's breach of contract over Reimóndez's use of non-sexist language in the Galician version (for more information on this case see Reimóndez 2009).

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the spring of 2012 for sale at the Rotterdam International Poetry Festival, where Chus Pato appeared as a featured author, to allow the work to reach readers at an important European event. American language poet Ron Silliman, present as a guest writer at the same festival, later lauded the works of Pato as one of his discoveries for 2012 (“Attention Span”), and Moure has since made the limited edition available through social media only to those who wish to read it. To bring *Secession* to Canadian readers more effectively, Moure has embarked on a doubled translation of this book of Pato’s personal history and poetics: from Pato’s life, in Moure’s English version, into Moure’s own life, in order to create a bicultural edition of the book, Galician and Canadian, in Canadian English. As Moure intends her text on her life and poetics to be one word longer than her translation of Pato’s text, the book will qualify as a Canadian book and its eventual publisher in Canada will qualify to receive the standard institutional support.

Moure’s work as translator from Galician is not limited to Pato’s texts. She has become, in recent years, a reference in the field of poetry translation in Galicia, and she has helped the internationalization of Galician key authors, both historical, like Rosalía de Castro and Luis Pimentel, and contemporary, like Manuel Antonio, Manuel Rivas, María do Cebreiro and Daniel Salgado.

## Conclusions

Moure’s commitment to the Galician language, and her transnational work in Canada and abroad, to help its survival and aid the dissemination of the work of its authors have gained her recognition in Galicia, where she is considered “a Canadian poet of Galician origin” (Baltrusch 124) or, even more emphatically, a “diasporic Galician”. Her poetry is included in literary studies of the Galician diaspora by

scholars like Kirsty Hooper, and she figures in the “Biblioteca de Fillos de Galicia”, or the blog “Diáspora Poética”, where she is mentioned among other distinguished literary names: “Así é que nos naceron sempre (Camões, Cervantes Saavedra, Juana de Ibarburu, Erin Moure, Rodolfo Alonso...) e nos se seguen a nacer aínda hoxe poetas galegos fóra de Galiza” (Diáspora poética, online). She is also an important promoter of Canadian literature in Galicia, as a regular participant in conferences and seminars on Canadian culture, and she collaborates as Advisor to the Editors in the new online journal *Canada and Beyond* ([www.canada-and-beyond.com](http://www.canada-and-beyond.com)) directed by Belén Martín-Lucas and Pilar Cuder-Domínguez and sponsored by the universities of Vigo and of Huelva, in Spain. This bidirectional cultural interaction generated by and around the figure of Erín Moure thus participates in a transnational Galician culture that recognizes her as a “diasporic Galician in Canada”; at the same time, her critics and readers continue to treasure Moure’s contribution to a transnational Canada, as the many awards and nominations she has received in Canada testify.

Translation, *transelation*, and literary translation’s influence upon and through the predominant Canadian cultures, both French and English, and upon Galician culture in Spain, provide an intriguing case in the study of the circulation of texts across borders and languages, and between cultures that are far from hegemonic and central, and far from being supported by the traditionally powerful agents in literary systems. Examination, in particular, of the case of Erín Moure and her role in both Galician and Canadian cultures, offers a stellar example of alternative ways in which texts circulate. Concurrently—as in the turbot wars when two states fought diplomatic and sea battles over nets of smaller and smaller fish—two nations as small as fishes, Canada and Galicia, by employing feminist and alternative techniques alongside personal energy and a belief in the powers of translation to

define place and nation positively, have opened the net of culture wider. It is our hope that the example may be followed by others in the future.

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