
H-France Review Vol. 21 (June 2021), No. 91

Richard Scholar, *Émigrés. French Words that Turned English*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2020, vii + 253 pp. Acknowledgements, notes, references, and index. \$29.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-691-19032-7.

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How can you not applaud a learned book from a major university press that has the self-confidence and wit to begin and end its introduction with Eeyore, Pooh Bear and the term “bon-hommy”? It turns out that *Winnie the Pooh*'s honored place in many English-speaking children's earliest reading experiences illustrates one of the central claims of this lively and always entertaining book. The many French words and expressions that have come into English over the centuries have been absorbed in different ways—sometimes completely, as in “intrigue” and “conversation,” where we may scarcely be aware of their French derivation, at other times partially, as in “bon-hommy,” which Eeyore misspells but nonetheless knows to be French, and elsewhere as deliberate “foreignisms” introduced to indicate social sophistication and a cosmopolitan education.

The author of *Émigrés*, Richard Scholar, is well known for his studies of Montaigne, Thomas More, and Shakespeare. His 2005 *The Je-Ne-Sais-Quoi in Early Modern Europe* paved the way for *Émigrés* but analyzed only one example of French permeating English. The new study's subtitle, *French Words that Turned English*, highlights one of the work's central concerns, the notion of “turning.” More words and expressions have come into English from French than from any other modern foreign language, but in so doing they sometimes “turned” and modified the language into which they were imported. While English may currently be the world's *lingua franca*, due to the global dominance of the USA, American use of French words may no longer be conscious: George W. Bush wondered why the French had no word for *entrepreneur*, and *à la mode* on American menus indicates a dessert with ice cream on top.

Physically, this is a handsome book, printed with Princeton's customary attention to detail. The black-and-white jacket illustration by John Barnett shows a Mayflower-like sailing ship moving past white cliffs that, appropriately, could be those near Dover or Calais. The ornament used throughout the book is one designed by the French typographer Pierre-Simon Fournier (1712-1768), and the illustrations and vignettes reinforce the themes of the text in subtle but effective ways, as when the illustration on page 62, part of the discussion of Dryden's *Marriage À-la-Mode*, shows a French adaptation (by Louis Gérard Scotin) of a famous Hogarth engraving. In chapter five, Jacques Callot's engraving “The Fan” (p. 176) perfectly illustrates the multiple perspectives, visual *mises en abyme*, involved in the notion of “caprice”.

Émigrés consists of two main parts, “Mixings” and “Migrations,” each containing three chapters. These are framed by a twelve-page introduction, “Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush,” and a concluding eight-page section entitled simply “Migrants in Our Midst”—a provocative title in this era of Brexit-inspired xenophobia. “Mixings” traces the start of French terms being imported into English during the 1066 Norman invasion, a process that reached its “high-water mark” (p. 19) beginning in 1660, when Charles II and his “Frenchified” court returned to power. “The Restoration Moment” (p. 18) was dominated by authors such as Dryden, Evelyn and Etherege, whose plays and essays (many of the latter inspired by Montaigne) portrayed and often mocked socially ambitious Francophiles in London and throughout the kingdoms. The thousands of French Protestants fleeing to England after Louis XIV’s Revocation of the Treaty of Nantes in 1685 also helped spread an appreciation for French books, cuisine and fashion. Because Charles II, having a French mother, was often suspected of being a secret Catholic, religious differences became an integral part of discussions of French influence on English.

“Mixings” also explains two major theoretical concepts underpinning *Émigrés*. First is the notion of “creolization,” as articulated by twentieth-century Caribbean intellectuals such as Édouard Glissant, Stuart Hall, and others. Since creolization relates to transcultural entanglements involving inequality and domination, it is frequently associated with slavery. Scholar unexpectedly but convincingly applies the term to the English who, conquered by the Norman invaders, were forced to absorb an alien ruling culture, social organization—and language. This “Norman yoke” notion of being dominated from across the Channel persists in pro-Brexit rhetoric, as when Boris Johnson spoke of the UK as heading for the “status of colony” (p. 83).^[1] The second premise underlying Scholar’s work, that of key words revealing crucial truths about a given society, is derived from *Keywords* (1976), the influential study by Stuart Hall’s colleague Raymond Williams of the hundred or so words Williams deemed essential to understanding English culture. A political radical, he argued that our use of language is determined primarily by factors such as social class and level of education. Scholar proposes adding to Williams’ list a new category, words of “conspicuously foreign derivation” (p. 9).

The book’s first two chapters, however, deal not with religion or politics but with the ramifications of the phrase *à la mode*, because it conveys English-speakers’ mingled attraction to and rejection of words known to be foreign. Dryden’s Melantha, a rich woman-about-town and heroine of his *Marriage À-la-Mode*, and Sir Fopling Flutter, protagonist of George Etherege’s *Man of Mode*, serve as revealing examples of the phenomenon. Melantha learned her French terms from her serving woman, Philotis, while Sir Fopling acquired his, together with his taste in dress, in France. The term *à la mode* appears not only in many stage and literary titles of the Restoration period but throughout London society, where behavior and courtship rituals gradually adopted French terms, many of them related to gallantry (*galanterie*) and sexual intrigue.

Among the most influential Francophiles was the royalist John Evelyn, who, with his French-speaking wife Mary, translated several French works into English. They believed that appropriate foreign words expressing nuances less accurately conveyed by an equivalent English phrase should be welcomed into the language in the same way that ancient Romans welcomed Greek settlers, namely, if they are “like to prove good citizens” (p. 31).^[2] The key here of course was “appropriate,” and the English had to learn to distinguish tasteful adoption from servile, sometimes unintentionally comic imitation: the English gentleman needed to cultivate judgment and taste. Dryden too, for all his mockery, believed that the goal should be “a middle way between

a foppish mimicry of French culture he viewed as servile and an insular rejection of it he viewed as barbarous” (p. 27). Being successfully *à la mode* thus depended on the manner in which linguistic borrowing was practiced.

In the final section of part one, “Transits and Transitions,” Scholar considers the compilers of early French and English dictionaries, Randle Cotgrave and Robert Sherwood, and, most famous of all compilers, Samuel Johnson, whose 1755 English dictionary was based on examples of usage he had compiled over many years. “Words must be sought where they are used,” as he succinctly put it. Also discussed here are dictionaries emanating from the former colonies that explain words which in the process of creolization may have taken on slightly different meanings.

Having set the theoretical and historical background for his study, Scholar devotes Part Two of *Émigrés* to what he calls “an experiment in a form of cosmopolitan criticism that focusses on languages in migration and the specificities of their cultural entanglements” (p. 10). He takes three words that “turned” English without losing their alluring touch of foreignness – *naïveté*, *ennui*, and *caprice*. Using multiple examples from art, music, theatre and literature, he argues that these words met John Evelyn’s “good citizens” recommendation. Since equivalent English words such as *innocence*, *boredom* or *whim* do not convey quite the same meaning, we should absorb the émigrés as “spoils of war,” to quote the academician François de Callières’s suggestion for how his countrymen should treat such imports (p. 93)—a distinctly less agreeable image than that of Evelyn.

Chapter four, “Naïveté,” shows that the term naïf, also the name for an uncut diamond, had both positive and negative meanings, ranging from pure and unsullied to simple-minded and gullible. Adam and Eve before the Fall were pure and naïve, causing the word to remain linked in Christian doctrine with notions of innocence versus original sin. For Montaigne, however, whose essays were hugely influential in England, the word described his attempt to capture his inner being, “ma forme naïfve” (p. 107), even while admitting that he could not be fully “naked” like the Tupinambà cannibals of his famous essay. After a section explaining Schiller’s complicated distinction between the sentimental and the naïve, and classification of writers as either naïve (e.g. Homer and Aeschylus), or sentimental, (e.g. Milton and Klopstock), Scholar provides an adroit analysis of John Le Carré’s deliberate use of Schiller in his 2011 novel, *The Naïve and Sentimental Lover*. The novel’s three protagonists, Helen, Cassidy, and Shamus, are each in turn the naïve and sentimental lover of the title. Even Le Carré’s *nom de plume* is a kind of émigré, mixing a simple English first name with an invented, “floridly European surname” (p. 124).

“Ennui,” the subject of chapter five, does not have the same possibilities for positive versus negative meaning that Scholar detected in *naïveté*. It denoted anything from simple boredom to deep world-weariness and bitterness of soul but remained within the negative spectrum. As John Evelyn pointed out (followed by the *OED*), it was one of those French words whose meaning English could not fully express. Scholar uses Pascal, Maria Edgeworth, Germaine de Staël, and Baudelaire to explain the history of ennui. He also analyses the fascinating cluster of works inspired by Walter Sickert’s painting *Ennui*, from an essay by Virginia Woolf to a poem by A. L. Hendriks.

For Pascal, ennui as world-weariness and disillusion may be the impetus for us to turn to God. For the young Earl of Glenthorn, protagonist of Maria Edgeworth’s 1809 novel *Ennui*, the condition is a “mental malady” (p. 145), an existential crisis from which he is eventually saved by

relinquishing his title, taking an Irish name and moving to Dublin to train in the law. Germaine de Staël's *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1807) showed her heroine finally escaping the ennui of chilly provincial life in Northumberland by escaping to Italy, the warm heart of Europe that Corinne symbolizes. In one of his book's funniest moments, Scholar refuses to condemn *Corinne's* author: "No novel should have to endure the ennui to which that woman was subjected in a small English town on the edge of the *monde*" (p. 143). Later in the nineteenth century, Baudelaire, one of the most famous sufferers from ennui, used the term spleen, thereby conferring on the condition a medical dimension.[3] Indeed, ennui/spleen inspired one of the poet's most famous images, that of the low, heavy sky weighing the sufferer down like a "couvercle" beneath which hope struggles in vain and Pascal's turn to religion becomes impossible.

The third émigré term, *caprice*, is analyzed in a wide-ranging chapter full of different art forms, paintings, essays and opera—that most mixed, even capricious of forms. Linked to *capriccio* in Italian, the word had long been associated with the leaps and sudden turns of goats (*capra* in Latin) but came to be used for many types of genre-bending or transgressive artistic endeavor. Once again, Dryden was the first English writer to use the term, putting it into the mouth of the Francophile Melantha in *Marriage A-la-Mode*. The unpredictability of the capricious is certainly matched by that of Scholar's chosen examples. In literature we find references to Sterne and Diderot, as well as to the Normandy poet Saint-Amant, who composed poems on everything from melons and Cantal cheese to sleepless nights in "grotty lodgings" (p. 178). Relevant here would have been a mention of the group of sixteenth-century Italian poets known as "Bernesque", after the most famous of their number, Francesco Berni (1497-1535). Many of their mock-encomiastic *capitoli* could readily be renamed *capricci*, as they cover everything from the sleep-destroying clang of church bells to the usefulness of lying, plus many of the foodstuffs and disagreeable travel experiences satirized by Saint-Amant.

The final section of *Émigrés* provides important clues to Scholar's underlying goals. He turns back to some of Williams' ideas, but by way of Theodor Adorno's 1959 essay on words from abroad. These, Adorno claimed, should give elegance and refinement to the language but instead serve more often to emphasize social and educational superiority. The English, Scholar believes, have never learned to "celebrate" their émigrés as enriching their language and culture (p. 209). And he concludes in rousing fashion by citing a speech almost certainly written by Shakespeare for the co-authored play *Sir Thomas More*, in which More, confronting an uprising against immigrants, reproaches his countrymen and begs for tolerance: "What would you think / To be thus used?" (p. 214). In short, we should follow the Bard and be open to the modern equivalent of the long-ago Norman creolization.

Despite its multilingual content (German, French, Italian and even Spanish words feature in the analyses), the text of *Émigrés* is remarkably free from typos and other errors. I found one missing word, on p. 83, where "that England" should read "that in England" and one minor typo, "ouput" for "output" on p. 35.

Although Professor Scholar clearly has a wealth of learning at his fingertips, enjoyment of *Émigrés* need not be limited to academic readers. The book will be readily understood by academic and non-specialist readers alike. Many examples, often films, are contemporary best-sellers, and, in a further helpful gesture to readers, the dates of people, events, and works mentioned are provided in the text. With Anglo-French relations constantly in the news as the ramifications of Brexit and the shifting complexities of the Covid pandemic play out, *Émigrés* has appeared at a

very timely moment. Despite the segment of the British population that still thinks the best way to function once you drive off the shuttle train at Calais is simply to speak slowly and loudly, we must also recognize the thousands of British who love France, struggle to speak the language correctly, retire or own houses there, and happily continue the love-hate duality so wittily outlined by Richard Scholar. In a recent online discussion, he was asked about a future project and about his own favorite émigré expression. [4] He cited *esprit d'escalier* (“elevator moment” in US English and, apparently, “Sainsbury’s moment” in the UK) as a favorite, and mused on the possibility of writing a book on *faux amis*, those dreaded French expressions that seem to mean something similar in English but don’t—*actuellement, éventuellement, habit*, and many others.

The habit of using émigré words is infectious: for his sang-froid, savoir faire, and bonhomie in guiding us on this voyage through the complexities of our national love-hate relationship with French—and the French—we are all indebted to Richard Scholar. An encore, whether on *faux amis* or another aspect of the history of French in the wider world would surely be welcomed by readers of *Émigrés*.

NOTES

[1] Samuel Johnson, much quoted by Scholar, took a very different view of immigrant words: he mentioned them in his *Dictionary*, he said, only to “censure them, and warn others against the folly of naturalizing useless foreigners to the injury of the natives.” See <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/5430/pg5430.html>.

[2] Johnson commented on a process reminiscent of creolization in countries where coastal trade made a shared language essential: “Total and sudden transformations of a language seldom happen; conquests and migrations are now very rare: but there are other causes of change, which, though slow in their operation, and invisible in their progress, are perhaps as much superior to human resistance, as the revolutions of the sky, or intumescence of the tide. Commerce, however necessary, however lucrative, as it depraves the manners, corrupts the language; they that have frequent intercourse with strangers, to whom they endeavor to accommodate themselves, must in time learn a mingled dialect, like the jargon which serves the traffickers on the *Mediterranean* and *Indian* coasts. This will not always be confined to the exchange, the warehouse, or the port, but will be communicated by degrees to other ranks of the people and be at last incorporated with the current speech.” See <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/5430/pg5430.html>.

[3] The term “spleen” also conjures up the “Cave of Spleen” dwelt in by Belinda, the distraught and angry heroine of Pope’s “The Rape of the Lock” after her curl is cut. For Baudelaire, however, melancholy rather than anger predominates.

[4] Kathleen Cain interviews Richard Scholar, Town-Hall Seattle livestream, August 22, 2020 (<https://townhallseattle.org/event/richard-scholar-with-kathleen-cain-livestream/>).

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ISSN 1553-9172