



2025 French-American Foundation Translation Prize

Finalist Interview with Lazer Lederhendler, translator of *The Hollow Beast* by Christophe Bernard (Biblioasis)

Q: What did you enjoy most about translating *The Hollow Beast* by Christophe Bernard?

Lazer: Problem solving is one of the things I love most about translating good fiction, and I was well served in that department by Christophe's fabulous beast of a novel. I did a good amount of research on English dialects of Eastern Canada that are comparable to the French spoken on the Gaspé Peninsula, where most of the action is located. This proved to be not the most fruitful avenue, as the linguistic idiosyncrasies of the book are mainly due to Christophe's unique and highly evocative visual style. In fact, it occurred to me that *The Hollow Beast* has all the makings of a wonderful graphic novel. So rather than focusing primarily on language equivalencies or approximations, I would picture the characters and scenes in detail and render those images into English (and afterwards, of course, make sure I hadn't strayed from the original). On the other hand, however, there was the challenge of depicting the evolving speech patterns of the story's hero, Monty, who starts out quasi-illiterate but through self-education (he carries around a copy of Homer's *Odyssey*) progressively acquires a more sophisticated level of French.

Q: You specialize in translating contemporary Québécois literature. What are some differences you've noticed between contemporary French literature in Canada and French literature in France?

Lazer: That's a huge question, perhaps best left to academics. But one clear difference that does immediately come to mind is this: today, more than ever before, Québécois literature and Québécois culture and language in general are very much creatures of North America, whose references and influences point increasingly south and west rather than to Europe. This is true, at any rate, for most of the writers I've translated since the early 2000s – Nicolas Dickner, Catherine Leroux, Perrine Leblanc, et al – who are assuredly representative of contemporary Québécois fiction. Another basic difference worth mentioning is that the literature of France by and large takes the language for granted – *ça va de soi*. The same can't be said of Quebec, where the French language has always been a battle field that, as a friend of mine put it, is foregrounded as a constituent part of the landscape.



Q: The French-American Foundation Translation Prize seeks to honor translators and their craft, and recognize the important work they do bringing works of French literature to Anglophone audiences. What does being named a winner for this prize mean to you, and, in your own words, why does a Prize like this matter?

Lazer: Translators are among the unsung artisans of literature endeavouring to carry the words and artistry of writers across the barriers of language and culture. We for the most part labour in the shadows in order to extend the reach and longevity of an author's works. So it's always encouraging and gratifying to have one's efforts as a translator acknowledged and celebrated. What's more, awards like the French-American Foundation's Translation Prize, spotlight books and writers that otherwise might not get the attention and readership they deserve.