

ABSTRACT

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Present

(Under the Direction of ANDREW ZAWACKI)

While the field of translation comes with a vast amount of theory, no amount of theory can compare to the experience of first-hand practice. This thesis is a translation of French poet Nolwenn Euzen's book *Présente* complete with a critical introduction that addresses aspects of translation theory. In the introduction, I look at how theorists seem to look down on translation as a lower, inadequate form of literature and contrast this with Walter Benjamin's elevation of translation as an avenue to pure language. I also give a brief biography of Euzen. *Présente* is her first book, and it is an experiment in observation through saying I. The 'I' in the poems develops into a quirky character through interactions with her mother, travels to Ireland, and meditations on seduction through fish-metaphor. The poems presented many difficulties in their rendering into English, and the issues that I discuss in my introduction include homonyms, lack of gendered articles in English, and the retention of foreign words in the English version.

INDEX WORDS: Translation, French Poetry, Nolwenn Euzen, Present, Walter Benjamin, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Roman Jakobson, Theory of Subject, Foreignness

PRESENT

by

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my mother, without whom I might never have fallen in love with words.

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INTRODUCTION TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Translation, traditionally, even by many translators themselves, has been viewed as a lesser creation, an approximation, a “thankless task,”¹ a pat-on-the-back-better-luck-next-time endeavor. Indeed many translation theorists refer to translation as almost a necessary evil; we find ourselves situated on this earth with 6,909 living languages,² and if we want to be able to read works written in those languages without doing the grunt work of learning all of them, we must read works in translation. The translation can never say exactly what the original says as the original says it, and thus, to most, it can never be as good as the original, in the way that a movie based on a book, so they say, is rarely as good as the book itself. Friedrich Schleiermacher, in his essay *On the Different Methods of Translating* explains:

certain passages will prove more successful in one version, and other passages in another version, and only the sum of all these taken together and in relation to each other—the way one places particular value on approximating the original language, while the other rather insists that no violence be done to its own—will fulfill the task completely, and each in its own right will always have only relative and subjective value.³

No single translation is quite good enough. The expressed need for multiple translations in order to approach asymptotically the full quality of the original brings down the power and magnitude of any one translation. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe argues in

¹ Lewis, Philip. "The Measure of Translation Effects." *The Translation Studies Reader*. Ed. Lawrence Venuti. New York: Routledge, 2004 (275).

² Lewis, M. Paul (ed.), 2009. Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Sixteenth edition. Dallas, Tex.: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com/>.

³ Schleiermacher, Friedrich. "On the Different Methods of Translating." *The Translation Studies Reader*. Ed. Lawrence Venuti. New York: Routledge, 2004 (55).

Translations for such “epochs” of translation, stages made up of first a plain prose translation that “surprises us with foreign splendors,” followed by a paraphrastic adaptation for the second “epoch,” and finally a version that “achieve[s] perfect identity with the original.”⁴ Vladimir Nabokov demands “translations with copious footnotes”⁵ in his quest for academic understanding of any work read in translation. He does not trust the mere chosen words of the translator—he wants explanations of every difference, every scruple, every troublesome word that knit another wrinkle into the translator’s forehead. If every translated word causes suspicion in its reader, if “poetry by definition is untranslatable,”⁶ if translation is such an impossibility that as translators we can never rest easy because we can never really reach our goal, why do we bother translating at all?

My answer to this question in some ways mirrors my answer to the other big question: why do we read and write literature? Literature allows us to encounter something other than ourselves, and this otherness in turn flings us back to ourselves in a way that leads to questions. Those questions reflect the “murmur of the indiscernible”⁷ that Alain Badiou, in his book of essays *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, discusses in his search for truth in literature. That “murmur” is more real, more true, than anything found in a biology textbook. Translations challenge us to approach that truth. To translate is to hear this “murmur” as Odysseus, strapped to the mast of his ship, hears the sirens singing. Translations raise questions, questions about questions, questions about language, and those questions are in a sense the truth that surrounds translation. This truth-potential

⁴ Von Goethe, Johann Wolfgang. "Translations." *The Translation Studies Reader*. Ed. Lawrence Venuti. New York: Routledge, 2004 (64).

⁵ Nabokov, Vladimir. "Problems of Translatoin: *Onegin* in English." *The Translation Studies Reader*. Ed. Lawrence Venuti. New York: Routledge, 2004 (127).

⁶ Jakobson, Roman. "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation." *The Translation Studies Reader*. Ed. Lawrence Venuti. New York: Routledge, 2004 (143).

⁷ Badiou, Alain. *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. Trans. Alberto Toscano. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005 (34).

allots a much grander role to translation. Rather than necessary evil, it is the elusive beauty that we can achieve only on the minutest scale.

Walter Benjamin, in his essay *The Task of the Translator*, recognizes translation's power, and his famously positive outlook on translation bolsters translation to a much more illustrious position than where many of his fellow theorists would place it. For him, "translation is a mode" of a piece of literature, a mode that gives the work an "afterlife,"⁸ something which the original could not attain on its own. A translation also "express[es] the central reciprocal relationship between languages" because languages are "interrelated in what they want to express."⁹ This reciprocity of possible intention reflects what Benjamin refers to as "pure language,"¹⁰ and the power of translation to highlight aspects of that "pure language" is part of what makes it so worthy of the original in Benjamin's eyes. He even gives translation "the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own."¹¹ Translation reveals the temporality and on-going change within a language, and it allows the developing languages to influence each other in a way that makes "both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language."¹² Thus, the goal of translation, rather than futilely attempting to reproduce the original exactly in the target language, becomes "finding that intended effect upon the language [...] which produces in it the echo of the original."¹³

⁸ Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's *Tableaux Parisiens*." *The Translation Studies Reader*. Ed. Lawrence Venuti. New York: Routledge, 2004 (76).

⁹ *Ibid.* 77.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 78.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 78.

¹² *Ibid.* 81.

¹³ *Ibid.* 79.

In my own experience translating, I have found that Eliot Weinberger, as quoted in Forrest Gander's introduction to his translation of Pura López-Colomé's *No Shelter*, makes a good point when he says, "Translation theory, however beautiful, is useless for translating. There are the laws of thermodynamics, and there is cooking."¹⁴ While I did hold in my consciousness the theories that I have studied as I began my translation, I quickly discovered that most of the problems that arose required practical decisions not accounted for in translation theory, and that one way or another, some word or phrase would have to be good enough.

I chose to translate *Présente*, the first book of poetry by Nolwenn Euzen. At thirty-three, Euzen is an up-and-coming French poet with most of her literary life still ahead of her. While she always had an interest in literature and writing, and even kept a list of every book she ever read, it was only in her late twenties at the time of composing this book that she realized where her interests lay. She returned to school to study literature, and she credits the people and books encountered there as the main inspiration for these poems. She has also released two anthologies, one titled *La Fonction Minuscule* and the other *L'Année Poétique 2009*. Several French publications have featured her work, and she plans to publish another book of poetry in the near future. She also keeps a poetry blog and admits that her poetry varies greatly from work to work, so it is perhaps too early to say how she will be categorized in the French literary scene. However, her book *Présente*, with its quirky sense of humor, first grabbed my attention at a Paris FNAC, and I expect great things from her as her poetry continues to grow and develop.

¹⁴ Quoted in López-Colomé, Pura. *No Shelter: Selected Poems of Pura López-Colomé*. Trans. Forrest Gander. Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 2002 (ix).

Euzen describes her book as an “experiment/experience”¹⁵ in “saying I.”¹⁶ This saying I, according to Euzen, thrusts the poet into a position where she must relate herself, her body, and her environment in and to the present moment. Euzen explains, “To be present here is a step gained on a more chaotic state of experience.”¹⁷ This advantage gives Euzen a feeling of “an emancipated relationship.”¹⁸ Euzen pairs this thrusting into the present with reflections on the past, such as visits to cemeteries and memories of a little girl at her grandmother’s house, a pairing that illuminates a young woman still working to find her way present. Within these experiences, the speaker reveals a complex relationship with her mother, looking at both her mother’s and her own freedom and growth amid the changes in women’s status over the last century. Euzen also claims influence from classical Chinese poets. While her poems are in many ways very different from classical Chinese poetry, she does take the position of an observer looking at what is going on around her. She alludes to the past more than a classical Chinese poet would, but she tries to ground herself in the present in her observations of the world as it is experienced.

I would like to note a few of the choices I made in translating Euzen’s book here. Poem 17, “I SHADOW HER EVERYWHERE,” presented a special problem involving the first person present tense form of two French verbs: *être* (*to be*) and *suivre* (*to follow*). The phrase “je la suis,” which appears in almost every line of the poem, including the title, can translate literally as either *I am her* or *I follow her*. I chose to translate this as *I shadow her* because shadowing implies both a following and an interest in becoming

¹⁵ “expérience” (Correspondence, see Appendix).

¹⁶ “dire je” (Correspondence, see Appendix).

¹⁷ “Etre présent ici, c’est un pas gagné sur un état plus chaotique de l’expérience” (Correspondence, see Appendix).

¹⁸ “un rapport émancipé” (Correspondence, see Appendix).

something, and becoming in turn can relate to being. In high school, we shadow college students, and, in college, we shadow working professionals in order to know where we ourselves are headed. In Euzen's poem, a little girl shadows her grandmother around the house, a little girl who will one day grow older, become a mother, and become a grandmother. *Shadow* can also imply something very intimate between the person shadowing and the person shadowed. There is nothing in the world that follows us so diligently as a shadow, not even a dog. After I had finished a draft of the poem, Euzen informed me that she meant *suis* in the sense of *suivre*, so I could have changed my translation to *I follow her*. However, Euzen also emphasized the affectionate intimacy of the act of following, a little girl lovingly following her grandmother around the house, so I decided to keep *shadow* because I think it still captures more of the feeling in the poem. Furthermore, the ambiguity exists in the poem, even though it might be unintended by the poet, and it creates an interesting moment in the relationship between the girl and her grandmother.

The other point that I feel deserves some explanation is in the third section, "FISHERMAN ON THE BANK FISH IN THE RIVER." At first, I was unsure whether the different kinds of fish were better served with gendered or ungendered pronouns. Roman Jakobson points out that "languages differ essentially in what they *must* convey and not in what they *may* convey."¹⁹ In English, the names of fish have no gender. We generally refer to a fish as 'it' rather than as he or she (who can tell whether a fish is male or female while it's wriggling in the water?), but in French certain fish names are masculine and others feminine. After reading Euzen's explanation of this section as a metaphor to seduction, I decided that the genders of the fish needed to remain from the

¹⁹ Jakobson (141).

French. Euzen herself was not very concerned about the carry-over of the fishes' genders, but I think that they are necessary in order to relay the seduction motif in the English. The genders of the fish play around with the seducer/seduced roles in these poems, so I have kept them as they appear in the original French, with one exception. In Poem 45 "I SHOW MY PRETTIEST SCALES," I have changed all of the pronouns referring to the fish to the feminine gender even though the arctic char and the grayling are masculine-gendered fish names in French. The poem aligns more strongly with the seduction motif if all of the fish are female, and had the poem been written in English to begin with, the poet would not have been limited by the gendered names.

I also kept in mind Schleiermacher's call for maintaining the foreignness of a work when translating *Présente*. Schleiermacher explains that a translator has two possibilities: "Either the translator leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader toward him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer toward him."²⁰ Schleiermacher then argues that moving the reader toward the author is the much better choice, and I tend to agree with him. Thus, words like *E.D.F.*, referring to the power company Électricité de France, remain in my translation as they were in the French. To change 'EDF' to 'power company' would seriously detract from the translation. These poems are, and will always be, French poems, no matter what language they are in.

²⁰ Schleiermacher (49).

PRESENT

IN THE FAMILY

1. I TRANSPORT YOUR AFFAIRS FROM THE CAR TO THE HOUSE

i carry books
plants
into the living room
i observe the desk chair
in colonial style
i transport my portraits of ancestors
paintings that came from the auction room
i refuse the ironing board
i have an ironing board

2. I COME TO LUNCH

i observe the plants
on the veranda and on the terrace
i handle jars of jelly made in Limoges this summer
i pass in front of the kitchen table many times
i squeeze the vegetables in the basket
they brown in the olive oil in the stew pot
i help fold the sheets before leaving

3. I AM HERE

i empty the dishwasher
i ask what a parsnip is
old vegetable
we eat it au gratin
i help fold the sheets
before leaving

4. I PAY ATTENTION

i don't read the newspaper
i set the table
i don't put the salad bowl on my plate
i get up from the table
i intend to serve the cheese
i wait
it is not the moment
to serve the cheese

5. I LISTEN

today
you leave for Cuba in two years
you take courses in Spanish
and drama
the duck from the market is delicious
and these mountains of plastic
for the children
in front of the houses

6. I DRINK MY COFFEE DOWNSTAIRS

at the top of the stairs
you brush your shoes
before leaving
you answer the question on the radio
trivia for a thousand francs

7. I GUESS YOU'RE GAINING WEIGHT

you exit the bathroom
you are in a bad mood while eating
before the duck you help yourself to more foie gras
you help yourself to more duck

8. I THINK YOU'RE FORGETTING YOUR SHOES AT THE COBBLER'S

you make an appointment at the gynecologist
since you're lacking hormones from menopause

9. I TIDY THE CLOSET

you think things can
still be used
this photo
Emeline costumed
in your wedding dress
your wedding dress
in the box of things to donate

10. I LISTEN TO YOU TOWARD THE END OF THE MEAL

you soon sign the bill of sale on your house
you talk about the bank
or smoke a cigarette
speaking now of my affairs

11. I AM DEFINITELY IN THE PHOTO

you hold a card with your nose
against my father's nose
your belly is round
under your dress

12. I'VE VOTED SINCE 1947

at the end of the meal i consider
abstaining from the next elections
you ask me if
i know
since
when
women
have voted

13. I DO NOT KNOW LIMOGES

i serve myself from a salad bowl
of porcelain
from Limoges
from dishes flat and hollowed
from coffee cups with assorted saucers
from Limoges
i have a teapot a milk jug two dishes
of porcelain
from Limoges
bits
to fabricate something
(mosaic)
of porcelain
from Limoges

14. I DON'T THINK ABOUT IT ANY LESS

i know your opinion
on spoiled children
insecure jobs
the status of temporary workers
intensive farming
the exploitation of nickel mines in
New Caledonia
Ceausescu's dictatorship
Chechnya
Chernobyl
Plogoff
arms dealing in Africa
Rwanda
the World Trade Center
Kanak women
Afghan women
African women
Algerian women
illegal immigrants
May 68
the election of Francois Mitterrand
society of mass consumption

15. I PUT ON MY SIZE 33 YELLOW SHOES

the bathroom in the kitchen
mom buys me size 33 yellow shoes
i climb to the fourth floor from
the courtyard
this courtyard mom it's high
grandpa four floors with no elevator
you're dead
grandma at Marissou's
on the shelves archive boxes
Denis is working on a dissertation
pink straw mats from China cleaner
clearer you are beautiful mom at my age yellow shoes
and your photo on the wall
the apartment in the kitchen
this window mom it's high
four floors with no elevator

16. I AM THINKING OF THE DEW ON THE GARLIC LEAVES

today i flower the grave of my great grandmother
i lack prayers because i don't know any
you hose thoughts evoke their lack of water
we make fun of funerary tastes
this marble plaque suffices
it measures three people
holds two places empty

at the site of an ancient grave
a bone mixes with sand
the air is dry

17. I SHADOW HER EVERYWHERE

i shadow my grandmother into the shed
she puts on her plastic clogs
i shadow my grandmother into the courtyard
she waters the flowerpots one by one
i shadow my grandmother
into the refectory
she opens the door
to the canned food cabinet
she opens the door
to the towel cabinet
to the plastic bag cabinet
to the Tupperware cabinet
to the medicine cabinet
to the shoe cabinet
she talks to me behind the door
to the cabinet
i shadow my grandmother
into the laundry
she visits the freezers
i shadow my grandmother
into the bedroom
where the children sleep
when they come
she searches the linen armoire
i shadow my grandmother into her bedroom
she opens jewelry boxes for me
i shadow my grandmother
into the geese field
she hangs the laundry
she gathers the laundry
she laughs at me i am afraid of geese
i shadow my grandmother
into the garden
she shows me the crops and
predicts the season's harvest
i shadow my grandmother
into the hen house
she encourages the chickens to lay more eggs
i shadow my grandmother
under the stairs in the storeroom for barrels
she fills a sack with potatoes
and puts aside the rotten ones
i shadow my grandmother
into the kitchen

she peels the vegetables
she washes the lettuce before noon
she rubs my clothing to remove a stain
she praises the stain remover she uses
in front of the gas range she asks me for news
of my family
i shadow my grandmother
to the grocer's
she announces my arrival and
how long i am staying
i shadow my grandmother
to the neighbor's
she announces my arrival and
how long i am staying
i shadow my grandmother to the church
she sweeps for the next mass
opens the door for airing
i shadow my grandmother to the church

18. I SEE YOUR GESTURE IN THE ENTRYWAY

i step off the curb
i cross the street
i get in my car
i start the motor
i adjust the rearview mirror

19. I CROSS PATHS WITH A FULL CAR LEAVING THE HOUSE

the desk chair stays in front of the desk
the rugs are on the floor

20. I SMELL THE SCENT OF LAUREL BURNING IN THE GARDEN

before leaving
i smell the scent of laurel burning
i note it on a corner
of the newspaper
and take it with me
my father is at the back of the garden

APART

21. I WALK ALONG THE COAST

i look at the dead rabbit in the path
the rock pipit comes out of the hedge
the colony of seagulls eats from a deposit of seaweed
from the last tide

i don't know if the black skin on the ground
is a bird's

the red and blue sail at sea advances at the speed of my step
on the bank a standing man is wearing a yellow wetsuit
he watches the sea

i pass in front of the
yellow umbrella
the red and blue sail swells to my height

22. I SMELL CUT GRASS

i hear the leaves of the poplar
i see a leaf that falls gently
i see leaves carried away gently by the canal water

23. I VISIT THE CHURCH UNDER CONSTRUCTION

i read PAX under the Christ on the cross
i listen to the love song
broadcast by the worker's
portable radio

24. I THINK OF SUMMER IT'S AUTUMN

the men fish at the canal's edge
the women read magazines
the old people under the bus shelter protect themselves from the sun
the couples walk slowly
the strollers bug me

25. I WALK ON THE MOOR

the sheep carries a bird on its back
and hunts it
the bird leaves my objective
like the jackdaws on
the gable of the house
and the hooded crow

26. I CLIMB THE PATH TOWARD CLIFFBANDS

today we repair a gutter
we repaint the balustrade
we make progress – frame –
on the new house
we accompany grandmother on a shuttle
to the point of view

27. I DON'T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT IT TO ANYBODY

lemon-yellow primroses under naked apple trees
tufts of sorrel on the humid hillsides
the trail leads nowhere

28. I HUM

primroses
the length of the slopes
yellow blotches
on the descent
the air chafes

29. I SOAK UP THE SCENERY

on my left
yellow primroses
under the apple trees
the coast
steep
lichen
greens
the branches
of the apple tree

30. I LOOK AT THE WATER THE BONE IS IN MY HANDS

rocks of immovable granite
i observe the ripples on the water
an uncommon face on the stone

a sheep bone is stuck at the bottom
i take it from the water and pose it on the bank

31. I HUG THE BANK WITHOUT PICKING THE FLOWERS

i think of flowered tapestries
at my grandmother's
of Botticelli's Primavera
of young girls in dresses in meadows
in bloom of birthday cards
of regreening

32. I RID YOU

i advance with the sentiment
caused by spread out hills
by the lack of leaves on the trees
by primroses by gorses
jagged mud flats river bottoms
and reeds
upon returning
i announce
my form
number of kilometers
incidents if any

33. I ARRIVE IN THE FARM'S COURTYARD

on the surrounding moor
rusted bikes old trailers
the flock of sheep camouflages
in the earthen wall
reservoirs of water running backwards
a large stone on the seat
drivers' side of the carcass
spidered windshields

34. I CHERISH THESE FRAGRANT HEARTS THAT DO NOT OPEN EASILY

on the roads in winter
the leaves do not fall
the leaves do not fall to
guess the wind
the leaves do not move the heart
nothing more to share no leaves
no wind the flowers do not fade
the primrose was just born
i do not pick it
it is not afraid of the frost

35. I DO NOT RUN AWAY

in the corner of the garden
i make out a grave
further in the ditch
the feverish fox looks at me
and dies
a little later

36. I'M ON THE ROAD TO MOLIN MORE

i eye the roosters ducks eagles
cats of porcelain
behind the panes

i pass two large new cars
-are you lost-

the jackdaws fly away from the gable
of the abandoned house

37. I PICK THE FLOWERS ON THE HILLSIDE

vaseless i press the flowers
in my notebook
they flatten
i find them dry
or musty in the pages

38. I GO TO THE CEMETERY

the old man points me to
the rue Porsmeur after the marbbery

Jaouen Kergoat
Le Gall Le Bris Le Bihan
Le Scanff Troadec
the youth in the area
carry these family names

on the bulletin board an offer for the
Eucalyptus Module cube with one meter sides
4 compartments able to hold 4 to 8 urns
lid: exterior slab measuring
thirty five centimeters each side
engraved with the owner's name and
bearing the burial plot number

i ask the old lady
the location of the grave for Tristan Corbière
she blows her nose
it must be an old grave
at the back of the cemetery

with her back in the alley pail of flowers
faded in hand and a gardening tool
she consults the bulletin board
after me

in front of the Corbières
i slide my hand along the stems
of the bush with red berries
i uselessly harvest the leaves

Colonel Philippe Le Bon
three dried plants in plastic pots

the nearby school bell
rings

concession to perpetuity
the Puys-Corbière families
Alexis 5 years old
Jean Antoine René 82 years old
Edmond 50 years old

Aspasie Marie Angèle 65 years old
2 pots of plastic plants
the funerary plaque from the association
of writers from the west
the chamber of commerce and industry to its president

i leave
i observe the watering cans
of green plastic at visitors' disposal
the pails
the white plastic bench facing the graves
between the trash cans and the WC
near the pile of sand
and the pile of floral scraps

39. I DRINK A BEER ON THE PUB TERRACE

the young boy wearing the green and yellow jersey
to support the gaelic football team
from Donegal moves farther away
on the path between two low walls
fishing pole over his left shoulder
ice cream in his right hand

the magpie pecks fries in the parking lot
and hops onto the picket fence

FISHERMAN ON THE BANK
FISH IN THE RIVER

40. I FOLLOW THE CAROUSEL

he presents himself as no particular bug
carried by the current
reads the river
observes the water's surface
the carousel of fish
numerous surfacings in sight

he identifies the insect
that captures the fishes' attention
whether it be a midge or a sedge

he entrusts his bait to the good vein of water
casts into the wave letting it drift
no activity is really visible
on the surface

during summer he reserves the technique particularly
for the stroke of dusk
there
the most beautiful hatches happen

but he does not neglect
the stroke of day
the middle of the day

the act of fishing requires attention
to every instant

41. I HAVE AN EYE ON THE PLAYER OF STREAMS

pole
in hand
permits the use of a few centimeters
of free water
in which the little silver paddle
flutters

he lets out fifty meters of line a convenient length
of each
cocks the spring
of the top piece
imitates a movement
of the pendulum
that propels
toward the back

the top piece adopts a certain arc
if he lets go
your spoon bait flies away in the airs

42. I BITE OR DON'T BITE

undulating spoons
excellent bait in the currents
powerful large and deep

streamer
if the fish
appear sullen

cricket
very effective in the summer

grasshopper
at all times of day

crane fly
bouquet of compost of worms
off-color

the larva of the big ephemera
never leaves a trout
indifferent

scud periwinkle
moth
bee larva lethal weapon
of old fishermen
on the isle of Beauty

dry fly the queen of fish
for a quick pull-out

dead minnow
with its appearance the salmonids abandon
all mistrust

Bresson peute
veritable save-face

43. I AM A FISH

in the wooded brook
congested nook
apparition of innumerable surfacings

the fisherman transforms
into hunter stalking closer

he manages to surprise his prey in
the most secret retreats

the collision the breakage
the black empty-handedness
are everyday lot of the neophyte

44. I AVOID A LURE

the gudgeon
benthic
emits sounds
short screechings
which constitute
a means
of communication

he wears for the occasion
nuptial buttons
on his head

45. I SHOW MY PRETTIEST SCALES

sea trout
she fascinates sport fishermen

arctic char
her stomach her flanks
she illuminates the penumbra
of the lacustrine expanses

shad
arouses lust

grayling
superb livery
with bronze highlights

rainbow trout
a superb dress
runs the length of her flanks

46. I MOCK THE FISHERMAN

he animates lures and bait near
the pools
the sea trout is very distrustful

he performs the progression in the riverbed
with maximal precaution

thanks to an appropriated knitting
he imprints an irregular stroke
shrimp
imitation of the prawn
excites the lust of the trout

fat sedge dredged sedge
is excellent on certain strokes of dusk
when the fish chase
in the superficial film

47. I AM A TARGET

the nymph in sight
secret weapon of the fly fisher
requires eagle eyes

he spots the fish
he recognizes them in bluish fragments
reflected by their fins

when they scull
light movement
the fish turns back

touches

48. I OBSERVE THE BARBELL (BARBUS BARBUS)

powerful and cylindrical
of slender form with an elongated core
equipped with a mouth with thick lips
garnished with two pairs of barbs
he frequents rapid currents
and lives in shoals

he detects his food
thanks to the barbs that dig the bottom
he inhales his food
thanks to his mouth
shaped like a
sucker

49. I DETERMINE A STIZOSTEDION LUCIOPERCA²¹

slender body
protruding eye with a glassy look
he possesses a jaw
with numerous teeth

he flees brightness and often hunts
at twilight
frequents calm and deep waters
flowing and clear waters
waters without silt

gregarious he lives in a school of individuals
of the same age
in the string of years
the biggest subjects remain
solitary and sedentary

²¹ zander

50. I WADDLE VOILÀ A PERCH

the maneuvers of enticement
are important for awakening
the curiosity
of the perches

natural baits
or a pewter fish
lure the perch

the animation work must simulate
the stroke of a small fish
or a bug in agony

the good spots for flushing her out
are often near
obstacles
mud-banks invaded with roots
remote

the touch manifests itself by
a diffuse sensation
of a coupling

51. I RECOGNIZE THE ESOX LUCIUS²²

it is impossible to confuse him with another
elongated body and very tapered
prominent jaw and armed gullet

he frequents tranquil waters
flowing but slow or stagnant
seeks spaces
where he can lie in ambush

sedentary and solitary
he lives camouflaged and
throws himself
on his prey
with a rapidity
surprising

²² pike

52. I BRUSH AGAINST A BLEAK

elegant
in body
elongated
finely
stream-
lin-
ed
and
very
compr-
essed
latera-
ly
which
gives
her
a
great
rapid-
ity
of
move-
ment

53. I AM THE CATFISH BAIT

voracious
ready to bite any bait presented to him
even if it's not meant for him
massive cylindrical
bare skin rich
in sensory cells
he leads a very dense social life
and frequents warm waters invaded
by aquatic vegetation

fearsome predator
at nightfall

54. I DRIFT

the fly passes through his cone of vision

he observes

he leaves the bottom

he seizes the fly
in a rocking motion
downstream from his position

A WEEK DAY

55. I AM A BITCH

bicycling around the traffic circle
i thank
the driver
for yielding to me

56. I AM CUTE

he walks his dog along the platform
i ask him
if the trains are running
the next one at eight thirty-six
i can wait
if i want

57. I AM CERTAIN OF IT

two adolescent girls ages thirteen and fourteen
brought to justice for the homicide
of one of their peers

two adolescent girls ages thirteen and fourteen
engage in barbarous activity
against their peer mangled for five hours
in the courtyard of an apartment

the two adolescent girlss ages thirteen and fourteen
retained for the voluntary homicide
of one of their peers
are submitted to a psychiatric expert

58. I DO NOT FORGET THESE VARIOUS FACTS

two gendarmes
are victims of contusions
in an accident
that cost two cows
their lives

a hunter
kills a florist
that he takes for
a wild boar

59. I WAIT FOR THE READING IN A TOWN I DON'T KNOW

i wait in the parking lot of the cultural center
the sun is still warming up
i lean against a wall
between two lilacs in the neighborhood garden

60. I LISTEN TO THE AIRPLANES

i hold my book in my hands
i don't read
i don't close the window

61. I AM PRESENT

i hang the laundry
i peel the vegetables

all for today

62. I DONT WANT ANYONE TO HEAR ME

i breathe

i breathe
you hear me

63. I CROSS THE CEMETERY ON MY BIKE

i pedal
i think of the families who built
the vaults on the main path
i respond to the caretaker
it is not
forbidden
to be
amiable

64. I HAVE IN MY EYES

the magnolia
the façade
a crow passes
five white flowers on the magnolia
the pink façade
two swallows and the crow

65. I ENVY YOU YOUR WINE UNDER THE FLOWERS

i cross the young woman on a last day
of the month of wind in the trees
when the lover stumbles over the keyboard of the accordion
and some voicings *sweet words of love said with the eyes*
and a few roses
my prayerless silence in front of the grave
gestureless flowerless

66. I CONFER MY ARMFUL TO THE WIND THAT FLIES

after the storm
the freezer doesn't work for more than 24 hours
wait for E.D.F.
repair the tiles
the branch of the chestnut tree
on the ground
I gather the roses of althea
the leaves turn in the courtyard

67. I IMAGINE EXHAUSTED PLEASURES

by the hallway window of the boarding school i watch
the leaves that fall
on the road migrating hordes
and the immobile airplane in the windshield
i hear one two three
three boys amusing themselves
by pissing together

68. I CLEAR THE SOIL IT'S THE SAME THING

i unfold the old wooden ladder
on the ground
i cut bramble bindweed
nettles thistle
i assemble my cuttings in a heap
in the middle of the field

APPENDIX A CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE POET

Réponses à Kate pour la traduction de « Présente »

1. Dans les poèmes numéro 2 et 3, le mot « draps » désigne les draps du lit. Le terme « linge » est plus général et produit un effet différent. Le mot le plus concret, le plus près de l'objet tel qu'il est expérimenté convient le mieux.
2. « les montagnes de plastique » : vous avez raison de me poser la question car cela désigne des objets précis. « Montagnes » est une expression du langage familier pour dire « beaucoup ». « elle en a fait une montagne » par exemple, veut dire « elle a exagéré ». Les montagnes de plastique désignent dans le poème des jouets en plastique pour enfants (ceux qui servent à jouer dehors : un toboggan, un coquillage géant, une maisonnette). L'expression n'est pas choisie pour produire un effet métaphorique mais correspond à une parole rapportée, dite par la personne qui est écoutée. Celle-ci raconte d'abord ses projets, commente ce qu'elle mange, puis regarde par la fenêtre et commente ce qu'elle voit à l'extérieur, dans le jardin des voisins, ces jouets d'enfants sur lesquels elle porte un jugement critique (il y a trop de plastique pour des enfants qui pourraient jouer avec des choses simples en matériaux naturels).
3. « tu manques d'hormones pour la ménopause » : il ne s'agit pas des hormones de la personne elle-même mais de médicaments qui sont délivrés par le gynécologue pour traiter les conséquences de la baisse d'hormones de la femme. C'est vrai qu'on peut comprendre la phrase comme vous l'évoquez. Le manque de précision grammaticale vient du fait qu'il s'agit à nouveau d'une parole rapportée qui vise ici un effet ironique. La personne parle de son rendez-vous chez le cordonnier, de son rendez-vous chez le médecin et du traitement de sa ménopause exactement sur le même plan, comme s'il n'y avait pas une chose plus intime, plus personnelle que l'autre.
4. Poème « je la suis partout » : il s'agit plus précisément du verbe « suivre ». Le double sens n'est pas prioritaire ici, ou vraiment de façon lointaine pour suggérer des racines paysannes, une enfance avec les grands parents paysans et aussi la place manquante de la mère que vient compenser la grand-mère. Mais ce qui compte davantage, c'est vraiment le sens premier, l'action de la petite fille qui suit sa grand-mère partout. Je ne connais pas bien l'anglais et ne peut pas vous dire mon point de vue sur le verbe « to shadow ». L'image à retrouver est celle, forte et commune, de la petite fille discrète, attentive et curieuse qui est avec sa grand-mère affectueusement, sans déranger, sans parler beaucoup, partageant des gestes familiers. Chez l'adulte, « je la suis partout », c'est le fait de suivre cette relation de l'enfant à la grand-mère qui cette fois-ci n'existe plus, ou plus avec la qualité de l'époque, c'est l'enfance qu'on vit entrée en soi. Mais il y a

aussi dans le poème, dans la façon dont il émerge du reste, l'évocation implicite du fait que la petite fille suivait partout dans une certaine détresse affective.

Poème 40 « Je suis le manège » : il s'agit aussi du verbe « suivre » pour dire « regarder le mouvement des poissons qui nagent ». La suite « Poissons sur la rive pêcheurs dans la rivière » a été la plus difficilement comprise du livre. Il y a en effet une clé qui n'est pas évidente : la description des poissons correspond à l'évocation de la séduction. Le texte est composé par prélèvement et déplacement de renseignements sur les techniques de pêche. Les manœuvres d'aguichage correspondent aux comportements de séduction. Il y a une visée ironique dans le rapprochement poissons/séduction mais elle tient plus de l'amusement, de l'étonnement que d'une caricature. Ce n'est pas une moquerie, simplement notation sans jugement de choses instinctives.

Poème 43 « Je suis poisson » : il s'agit là du verbe « être ». Il y a un pêcheur dans le poème et le titre « je suis poisson » évoque le fait d'être sa proie. « je suis le manège » évoque le fait de regarder les mouvements de séduction comme le manège des poissons. « j'ai l'œil sur le coureur de ruisseau » : le coureur de ruisseau est une expression du registre des techniques de pêche pour qualifier les poissons qui vivent dans les ruisseaux . Et dans le vocabulaire familier, un coureur c'est un garçon qui cherche à séduire les filles. « je mords ou ne mords pas » : comme je le disais il ne s'agit pas d'une moquerie sur la séduction, le je est impliqué dans l'action, il est poisson devant les appâts, dans le mouvement. 47 « je suis une cible » : il s'agit du verbe « être », le sujet est visé par le pêcheur chasseur. 53 « je suis l'appât du poisson chat » : il s'agit du verbe « être ».

5. « porte-bois » : il s'agit d'une « larve de trichoptère » qui vit à l'intérieur d'un étui en bois qui la protège (d'où son nom en français « porte-bois »). Cette larve est appelé sedge à l'âge adulte. Les porte-bois sont une part importante dans l'alimentation des truites et servent d'appât.

« vaison » : c'est une erreur (une « coquille » on dit en français) il s'agit de « vairon » qui est un petit poisson apprécié par les truites.

A ce propos, il y a une autre coquille dans le livre : « tu te ressers de fois gras » il s'agit de « **foie** gras ». Et aussi, pour ce qui est des aléas de fabrication du livre, avez-vous remarqué que certains titres évoqués dans la quatrième de couverture ne sont pas dans le livre : « je pars », « je nage », « je prends un risque », « je ne suis pas perdue ». La raison est la suivante, j'ai enlevé certains poèmes après l'écriture de la présentation par Roger Lahu ! C'est une trace (non prémeditée, certes) du processus de composition et un secret de fabrication.

6. Vous en dire davantage sur la motivation de ce livre :

Ce livre est une expérience autant qu'une construction. La structure des poèmes, simple et systématique, a émergé naturellement, advenant sans que le souci formel soit une contrainte mais au contraire un facteur qui descelle. Cette forme répétitive n'est pas un calcul, une opération cérébrale qui demande un effort de planification. Aussitôt initiée, je

l'ai sentie libératrice et respectant au plus près le contenu des événements que je venais toucher grâce à elle. La construction est une ossature jusque dans la vie. Dire *je* ne m'importait pas au titre proprement biographique, ou rhétorique. C'est l'expérience constitutive « dire *je* » qui a compté. Soit : Articuler. Prendre position. Faire relation avec soi dans le corps de son environnement. Valider. Donner du crédit à un rapport aux situations.

Oui, *Présente* se lit comme un tout. Un tout organisé ou plutôt, dans le mouvement de production d'une cohérence. Etre présent ici, c'est un pas gagné sur un état plus chaotique de l'expérience. Et s'il y a un retrait du *je* vis-à-vis de nombreuses situations des poèmes, c'est en tendant vers une reprise des événements pour les rendre valides. Il s'agit de dire à l'endroit exact où une inflexion dans notre rapport aux choses nous les renvoie. Cela ne produit pas de jugement, de sauvetage, mais produit un rapport émancipé. Quand je dis émancipé, de la manière assez théorique dont je viens de le faire, cela me renvoie aussi au substrat biographique qui sous-tend le livre, et il s'agit comme on le devine, de mes rapports à ma mère. Une femme émancipée elle aussi, marquée par mai 68, et conciliant difficilement le rôle de mère et son propre épanouissement.

Je dis que je n'ai pas proprement fourni d'effort de construction pour la charpente de ce livre, mais je dois préciser que j'ai beaucoup cherché les sources d'ossature dans ma vie. Je possède notamment la liste de tous les livres que j'ai lu depuis l'âge de 11 ans. Aujourd'hui je commence seulement à comprendre pourquoi ! J'ai donc beaucoup lu les autres poètes. Certains sont entrés très intimement dans ce drôle de geste conjonctif où la lecture des autres vous ouvre la vôtre, votre expérience. Il y a eu Sabine Macher, Roger Lahu, Richard Brautigan, les poètes classiques chinois, plus loin Nathalie Sarraute. Et aujourd'hui, c'est encore avec d'autres lectures vives, le philosophe américain William James par exemple, que je me rends le monde ouvert et présent.

Suite Réponses à Kate pour la traduction de *Présente*

1. « A l'écart » signifie « à distance ». Les situations de cette partie correspondent à des marches, des promenades solitaires ou le « *je* » est à l'extérieur de la sphère familiale de la première partie « en famille » et aussi en dehors de la vie sociale. Le contact avec la nature et des lieux sauvages, inconnus, domine. Il permet une déprise, une respiration.

2. Poème 25

Voici les déplacements que suppose le poème : L'oiseau sur le dos du mouton, fixé par l'appareil photo, s'envole et sort de l'objectif. « *Je* » le regarde s'envoler et en levant la tête voit d'autres oiseaux, des choucas et une corneille mantelée, qui s'envolent du pignon de la maison.

3. Poème 33

« réservoirs à eau renversés » : les réservoirs ce sont des bacs en fer qui servent au bétail pour boire. Ils sont renversés, c'est-à-dire qu'ils sont tombés et ont basculé à l'envers. « conducteur de la carcasse », n'est peut-être pas évident : il s'agit d'une carcasse de voiture.

L'atmosphère de ce poème est celle d'un lieu austère, peu rassurant, abandonné : les objets métalliques sont rouillés, les moutons sont serrés près de la paroi comme s'ils avaient peur, les réservoirs sont à l'envers et donc hors service, la voiture est une carcasse. Alors que le titre indique un lieu plutôt rassurant 'j'arrive dans la cour de la ferme', le lieu traversé ne l'est pas. Le décalage entre ce que suppose la phrase du titre, la simple nomination du lieu rencontré, et son délabrement évoqué dans le contenu du poème, reste entre les lignes. C'est le « je » qui le fait sien, ou le lecteur.

4. « are you lost » est une parole rapportée. Il s'agit d'un voyage en Irlande et il vaut mieux conserver l'anglais.
5. Poème 42 : Il y a encore une coquille, il s'agit de « **Peute** de Bresson ». C'est un appât utilisé pour attirer la truite. Il s'utilise dans la technique de la pêche dite pêche à la mouche, c'est-à-dire à l'aide d'insectes artificiels qui ressemblent à la mouche. L'appât « Peute de Bresson » ressemble globalement à une mouche mais sa particularité est qu'il n'imiter pas d'insecte particulier. Il est pratique par rapport à d'autres appâts qui imitent exactement des insectes et demandent une utilisation très précise. C'est pourquoi on dit qu'il sert au « sauve-bredouille », à celui qui est désarmé, le moins préparé pour réussir. Je comprends que ce passage ne soit pas facile à traduire. Les séquences du poème se suivent avec chacune le nom d'un appât et ses caractéristiques dans le vocabulaire des techniques de pêche. Peut-être faut-il retenir un effet d'ensemble : les appâts désignent et font apparaître l'objet attrant tout comme l'œil de la personne qui regarde, du « je » qui dis « je mords ou ne mords pas », observe et voit apparaître des corps, des silhouettes avec leurs qualités.
6. Le genre des poissons n'est pas capital. Il n'y a pas de similitude entre le genre de l'animal et le genre humain. Le rapprochement poissons/séduction ne va pas jusque là. Une truite ne renvoie pas à une femme et le goujon à un homme, par exemple. Ce qui est plus important c'est la présence du déterminant ou nom. Quand il y a désignation des poissons sans déterminant le contact suggéré est plus direct, suppose plus d'étonnement.
7. « accrochage » fonctionne avec « sensation diffuse » et désigne une action plutôt douce.
8. Poème 66 : « les fleurs d'altéa ». L'altéa est un arbuste à fleurs.

Quelques éléments biographiques ?

Je suis née en 1976 et j'ai écrit ces poèmes de 28 à 29 ans. C'est le premier texte que j'écrivais qui prenait la forme d'un livre. Quoi vous dire d'autre ? Je n'avais pas de métier stable au moment de l'écriture de ce livre et ce fut même à certains moments une période de grande précarité. Je n'avais pas derrière moi de formation universitaire en littérature non plus. Je dois dire également qu'il y a toujours des rencontres déterminantes dans notre existence et que je n'aurais pas écrit ce livre sans la rencontre de mon compagnon, Jean-Pascal Dubost, qui était (je dis était car nous sommes séparés aujourd'hui) poète et avec qui j'ai découvert et partagé la poésie contemporaine.

L'écriture de ce livre allait de pair avec une grande soif de connaître la littérature. J'ai repris, alors que j'avais terminé un premier cursus qui ne m'avait pas apporté de grande ressource existentielle, des études de lettres à l'université, assurant le quotidien par un petit boulot. J'ai eu beaucoup de plaisir à cette formation suivie par choix, sans obligation. Cela a été notamment l'occasion pour moi d'étudier la poésie de façon plus savante. J'ai écrit un mémoire sur la poésie lyrique en m'intéressant à la tradition chinoise et à la poésie française contemporaine.

Aujourd'hui j'ai la chance de pouvoir gagner ma vie par une profession intellectuelle car j'ai obtenu un concours de bibliothécaire. C'est un soulagement après une période rude sans emploi où j'avais l'impression d'arriver au bout d'une forme de vie exclusivement consacrée à la poésie. J'ai publié un second texte après *Présente* intitulé *La fonction minuscule*. En 2008, j'ai bénéficié d'une bourse d'écriture du Centre National du Livre (organisme institutionnel français de soutien aux écrivains), ce qui a représenté pour moi une bonne reconnaissance de mon travail. Chacun de mes textes prend une forme très différente mais tourne autour de l'expérience de connaître. C'est encore le cas de *Cours ton calibre* que je viens juste d'envoyer à un éditeur.

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