

SOUP

translation in process



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 MORE INSIDE

TRANSLATING FROM ONE LANGUAGE TO ANOTHER IS A MATHEMATICAL TASK, AND THE TRANSLATION OF A LYRICAL POEM...IS QUITE ANALOGOUS TO A MATHEMATICAL PROBLEM. ONE MAY FRAME THE PROBLEM "HOW IS THIS JOKE TO BE TRANSLATED (I.E. REPLACED) BY A JOKE IN THE OTHER LANGUAGE?" AND THIS PROBLEM CAN BE SOLVED; BUT THERE IS NO SYSTEMATIC METHOD OF SOLVING IT.

--LUDWIG WITTGENSTIEN, *Zettle*, 698

Traditional theories of translation, like Modernist architecture, attempted well designed, systematic plans for the future. Thus, Cicero and Horace had to counter St. Jerome's *verbum et verbo* dictum since the future of "literature", after all, was at stake. Now we strain under the burden of our classics. Is any literary establishment's authoritarianism really worth it?

Walter Benjamin goes further than Cicero. "No translation would be possible," he writes, "if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original. For in its afterlife--which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living--the original undergoes a change." Benjamin felt translators have a dual mission: "watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own." The point, then, isn't whether translation alters a work, but to what purpose.

Situationists such as Guy Debord argue that *detournement* (e.g. altering elements of an original such as words on billboards, in cartoon strips or even in street graffiti) is the beginning of Postmodern politics as well as art. Echoing Breton, he writes "It is the most distant detournement element which contributes most sharply to the overall impression...."

In the United States, Jack Spicer and Frank O'Hara pioneered detournement in their "translations" of Lorca and Rilke respectively. Bob Perelman's *Primer* and Kathy Acker's *Great Expectations* detourne classics in English. Here, Michael McClure's *Coyote* and Bruce Boone and Robert Gluck's *La Fontaine* detourne older classics in exciting new ways. Each employ mythical language, for instance, without being pompous or cloying. In another sense, Alfonsina Storni's feminism can be seen to detourne the Surrealist hegemony of Latin American literary discourse.

Texts which "official literature" has excluded--particularly if their sexual, ethnic or political foregrounding made them anathema--may also be profitably revived. Acker's *Laure*, Rattray's *Crevel* and

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Winks' Musham all fall into this category as earlier, Sappho and Catullus did. Kinship systems are analogous with syntax, George Steiner notes in *After Babel* (38-40). "Forbidden" sexual orientations may thus usher in a new grammar of writing as well as of being, and connections between the personal and the political are revealed.

Wanting to avoid the usual, hidden "cultural imperialism" of much translation work, I asked translators to remark briefly on their theory and methodology. Many did. I also hoped someone would be willing to show different versions leading to their final one but no one wished to "hang out their dirty laundry" as one put it. The three different Catullus translators, however, show not only how variously different translators approach their task but also how each new translation can illumine and inform others, as well as the original.

Finally, I wish to thank all who helped on this issue and, in particular, Francisco X. Alarcon who so admirably guest edited the section on new Mexican, Cuban and Latin American writing. Alarcon's concern to bring forward writing academic establishments often ignore mirrors my own. I also share, as I'm certain all translators in this issue do, his urgent concern that the United States government end its illegal and unjust interference in Central and South American affairs. All writing, all translating and all editing are ultimately political acts even, and perhaps *especially*, when on the surface they pretend or appear not to be so.

Soup 4, focusing on New Directions in Criticism, will be guest edited by Bruce Boone. Unsolicited manuscripts are discouraged for this issues.

STEVE ABBOTT
MAY 27, 1983

Translations of the Diaries of

LAURE

1. What I See

It is a very Parisian garden in which I'm going to hide myself. Me, the schoolgirl. Me, with my whips. Hide myself from the outside world because I've been hurt.

Behind skeletal trees of tiny leaves a man leaves, he is totally white, shakes a fist at nothing, pisses on the tiny white garden stones, oh I am lonely, again departs, precautionarily walking around this lawn . . . another man rises, totally red-faced, his lips are rosy and soft as a baby's, he had me when I was encased in prison. I am not. Thousands of fuschias surrounded me: ivy, soot, gook made out of begonia petals by her nervous fingers because they know they're almost out-of-existence like the marks of hopscotch on a bombed-out city street. The man I know is getting near me but now there are detours, this is a miniature golf course, . . . and another man sticks his leg through the window, bewildered face like a lunatic's, palms vertically flat beat the air, froth comes from his mouth. "Bastards. They've stolen me."

I think to myself, "I understand what you're saying."

A woman is passing by this garden. Her hands are clasped under her chin. She is a nun. She is a penguin. They aren't women because they don't have anything between their legs. They run with bodies waddling, these Catholics, flaccid flabby and dumb. Dumb nun.

High-up a small sallow face sticks itself into small window bars then sticks

its back hair into small window bars. I see white arms that are as thin and even as sticks.

The arm is cut-off.
The one who sees is cut-off.

BY KATHY ACKER

Photo Credit: Stefano Paolillo

Dear Georges,

It seems that everything that happens to me is all chance.

I don't like saying anything important.

But I want to tell you, only you, that I am so desperate I no longer have any fantasies.

Of course it's not necessary to say anything to you:

(1) because you always know everything.

(2) because *you don't care at all for me meaning I don't care for you: meaning: I don't want anyone in my life.*

I can't remain this frigid.

When we first met I thought you didn't notice me because I'm invisible so I said whatever I wanted to—your saying "I'll never love you" was what I wanted cause I'd remain invisible.

This is all sentimentality. I'm just surprised that given my ridiculous sentimentality, we're friends. Sometimes I want to break off everything with you because I hate you so much because you don't give me anything I want everything is your way: you don't have money you don't have time you don't love me

I'd rather be frigid.

Laure

a b c d e

I can no longer speak.

a

I'm no longer apart from the world.

1 2 3 4

I don't know how to count yet.

Dear Georges,

If you want to keep knowing me, you can telephone me now and then,

Since I have to keep myself from everyone, I have to keep the control.

I'm sure you're going to get to fuck lots of women.

Is anything ever understood between people? It wasn't between me and Peter.

Please don't think I'm totally malicious especially about what a whore you are.

A side of me has sincere friendship and true solidarity.

Laure.

2. I Begin to Feel.

I remember the corpses stood up before me. There's a creep on T.V., asking me to call him about my grandparents, but my grandparents are dead.

The corpses say: "You were born beautiful rich and smart you little creep

1. On Laure

I first encountered Laure's writing when I was in Paris about 2 years ago. Friends of mine who are writers there said they consider her writing more important than those of her (final) boyfriend, George Bataille. "Laure influenced Bataille more than Bataille influenced Laure."

Laure wrote an autobiographical work Histoire D'une Petite Fille that is simultaneously "realistic" and visionary (a logical impossibility that explodes) poems, political essays, in short, the writing of fluctuating genres female. The only volume of her work I've seen came out under the Christian Bourgois' imprint in 1978. I think Gallimard had a larger edition of her work.

Laure was born in 1903 and died in 1938. In her early 20's she hung out with Crevel, Argon, Picasso and Bunuel. She broke violently with her rich family and moved to Berlin. She flirted with militant radical politics. She went to Russia. She returned to Paris. There she lived and worked with Leon Bourenine, one of the founders of parti Communiste Francais. My writer friends said Laure was one of the main

and beauty wealth and intelligence just brought you down to deterrence, secretion, to reject you. . . . You came from a good family even though your real father was a murderer and your mother was crazy. Even being a creep won't save you. Tonight you're going to be ours."

They're babbling tenderly to me:

This is the corpses' song:

This is Christ the eternal humiliate, the insane tyrant. He and the corpses are holding me in their arms.

The only thing that matters to me is waking up.

I begin walking to look for that moment that will wake me up.

The only thing that is satisfactory is this moment.

Soon money isn't enough for me whether American or Arabian, I float, suspended between the sky and the earth, suspended between the sky and the earth, between floor and ceiling. My dumbly sad eyes which always see things opposite to the ways they are are showing their stringy lobes to the world, my mutilated hooks reveal my mother's madness reveal my mother's madness.

My mother tells me why I was born: she had a pain in her stomach, it was during the war, she went to some quack doctor (she had just married this guy because it was the war and she loved his parents); the doctor tells her she should

forces in the founding of this movement.

A woman's life isn't only who she lives with and fucks. The details of the life of a woman who writes concern her writing as much as the details of the life of a man who writes. I prefer silence.

2. On Translation

My interest in writing no matter what kind of writing (translation, etc.) is primary language, not language that exists only for the sake of some other event (to explain, to express, to translate). I wish merely to put on record my utter disgust with the belief in literalism. Texts written by other people (as do languages I know poorly) provide me with limits or useable perceivers. Why limits? Language obviously isn't form, but breath: the tensions of denotation/self-referentiality, making/-mirroring, will/trust are possibility; my only perceiving. By primary language I mean breath breadth bread. To destroy, to dig deeply & you've dug enough.

—Kathy Acker

get pregnant to cure the pain. Since she's married, she gets pregnant, but the pain stays. She won't get an abortion because she's too scared. She runs to the toilet because she thinks she has to shit; I come out. The next day she has appendicitis.

At night in every city I live in I walk down the streets to look for something that will mean something to me.

The city I dreamt of: It was here that I heard the voice of Mary the Whore Who Gave Her All For Love, here I stared at the beautiful look of Violette injected by the blackest ink, here finally Justus and Betelgeuse, Verax and Hair and all the girls with the names of stars the openings of doors magnetized the young girls. They no longer know what they're doing. Invisible rays make this nothingness where everything is possible, possible.

Anonymity by imposing no image reveals space.

This is the beginning of love. For you it's of no importance but for me it has every importance.

You also said: "You don't understand why I'm bothering with you because I have so much to give and you have nothing to give."

I'm not bothering with you now.

I hate you you took me. "I don't understand why you're bothering with

me" meant *I'm not going to give anything to you.*

I'm being a bitch now saying all this. Chauffeur. It doesn't matter where you're taking me: to the furnace, to the toilet, to the brothel you're working in, now you won't see me. The only thing I need is to burn; myself torn into pieces scattered each bit away from every other; covered in your shit; and I feel every fuck that happens, every fuck frightens me. Past your taking me,

To sleep inside your left shoulder.

My real being alive will never occur where there is rigidity of mentality—too bad for my mind.

3. The Desperate Needs I Feel Are Now Burning

On a beach which is burning up, I discovered the sky. Immense and cloudless sky. I saw a kite. Believing I could follow this kite if I kept my eyes on it, I kept on running. I was out of breath. I threw myself on the sand. The sands slunk between my fingers like a hot caress on my cunt lips making laughter.

The penguins dragged me back through the streets while they threw icy looks at a house of sin whose windows reflected the purple sun.

This was the first day of life, love Christ, in which I really saw.

This technique of erasure.

(from now on, disintegrate the language),

I usually spent every afternoon alone and never let anyone into my house. One afternoon, two close friends with a man I didn't know came into the house. Since the situation was unexpected and my nerves are sharp, I decided we should drink as much and take as many drugs as we could lay our hands on.

About two hours later I thought it wise to put some clothes on. Somewhere around dinner-time, G (the stranger) and I kissed. By 11:00 we couldn't keep our hands off each other.

G explained in no way would he ever jeopardize the situation between the woman he was living with and himself. I said I didn't interfere with marriages I was interested in them. Even though it was the first time, our bodies worked well together. I made sure he knew I wanted him to return to his lover.

The next day I wanted to see him again and wondered if I would.

Two days later he phoned me he had tried to phone me

no feelings involved. On the way out of the sauna he met two old tricks.

I don't remember when he phoned me again. I had bought him some opium. He came to my house to pick it up. This was so early in the morning I. When I explained to him I now felt about him, he was saying he no longer wanted to fuck me because he wanted

to be friends with me. When he said this same thing a few hours later over the phone, I hung up on him.

Today I don't love you.

Sometimes I have to make up you leaving me. They are not speaking to each other. They are standing apart. G is looking at the young woman. She continues to stare at the ground. Finally he says, still with the same smile, "All right. It'll be just the way you want it."

But, after a silence and while the man bows in a respectful salute, which can only be a mockery for he loves someone else, by which he appears to be taking his leave, I suddenly raise my head and hold out one hand in the uncertain gesture of a person asking for another moment of attention, or pleading for a last reprieve, or trying to interrupt an irrevocable action already performed or trying to interrupt an irrevocable action already performed you are going to leave me, saying slowly, in a low voice: "No. Don't go . . . Please . . . Don't leave me right away."

Of course you leave me.

It is at this moment that my heart breaks open.

2.

Here you are under all sorts of signs, mad Holiness! Not very long ago Veronique smiled at me in the greasy linen of Christ, the Virgin and her halo trembles in frankincense like her Son's hands with huge nails stuck in them and the drops of blood, Saint Face is crying oily tears behind a red lamp. The red lamp is the only illumination in THE CHAPEL OF SEVEN PAINS. It was the retreat, the hour of meditation. I am seven years old, I am seven years old. I am spitting on the blood of my dead father, suicided mother, and separated husband.

One more time Christ lodged himself in my attic.

This attic is falling-down-all-over-the-placae closed by its walls to the outside and so full of bits of un- or half-recognizable materials you feel happily enclosed full of things which should travel everywhere and go nowhere and pieces of once-luxurious china now so cracked good-for-nothing. The window is always shut.

My grandmother is a member of royalty. Her hair is pale, her nose is thin, and her cheekbones are high. One day she phoned me to ask for help. When I reached her hotel room, I found her crawling across the floor. Peter took one look at her, said "Excuse me," and left. My sister, the good member of the family, refused to help her so I, the bad member, was the only one who cared for her in the hospital. The hospital sen-



Stefano Paolillo

sory intellectual and dietetic deprivation gave her a kidney infection, then senility. She said, "I'm going blind" and the doctors said, "She's not going blind." The kidney infection was under control so I went to Europe as I had planned to. I wrote her every other day. In Paris, when my master gave me his apartment, for the first time I was alone, for no reason for the first time I phoned my grandmother. She asked me to come home. I didn't understand her words. The nurse said she would phone me back. Two hours later, the nurse said I had phoned my grandmother in the last hour I had been able to.

I would remain here for hours, escaping the horrible outside world, plunging through mine to the non-material. One day the jumble of hodge-podge and rat-trap bits were gone. I reached the one window and opened it. This was the only place where you could see a balloon fallen into a neighboring garden. It was twenty feet from a boat held between two walls. The orange plastic, as the air slowly leaks out of it, snakes, no longer bound in strings, slithers across the roofs and branches. Finally it is disentangling itself from the jumble of THINGS:

What my mother says is true: I am born of and by nothing.

The little shit by being insolent and deceptive is making its way toward freedom.

I am what wakes me up.

I'm being woken up when I'm feeling a combination of fear and pleasure.

This combination is called CURIOSITY.

What makes me feel fear?

MAID: Why do you keep me?

HAMM: There's no one else.

MAID: There's nowhere else.

HAMM: You're leaving me all the same.

MAID: I'm trying.

HAMM: You don't love me.

MAID: Once!

HAMM: I've made you suffer too much.

(pause.)

Haven't I?

MAID: It's not that.

HAMM (shocked): I haven't made you suffer too much?

MAID: Yes!

HAMM: (relieved) Ah you gave me a fright!

(pause. coldly.)

Forgive me.

(pause. louder.)

I said, Forgive me.

MAID: I heard you.

(pause.)

Have you bled?

HAMM: Less.

(pause.)

Isn't it time for my pain-killer?

MAID: No.

(pause.)

HAMM: How are your eyes?

MAID: Bad.

HAMM: How are your legs?

MAID: Bad.

HAMM: But you can move.

MAID: Yes.

HAMM (violently): Then move!

(The maid goes to the back wall, leans against it with her forehead and hands.)

Where are you?

MAID: Here.

HAMM: Come back!

(The maid returns to her place beside the chair.)

Where are you?

MAID: Here.

HAMM: Why don't you kill me?

MAID: I don't know the combination of the cupboard.

Going Against the World

Christine, the maid's daughter, was simple and sweet. One night her mother didn't come home at the expected time. She went to look for her. At the police-station the police told her, "Your mother's a thief and we're going to put her in prison." Christine returned home. She sat alone all night in her room. At 6:00 A.M., no one appearing no one in her life, she threw herself out the window.

I'm not going to throw myself out the window for you though I prefer cutting my wrists.

I asked my mother why she should do such a ridiculous thing. "Don't talk about disgusting things at the dinner table, Laure." We got a new maid. I want to know reality. My mother kept screaming to me it was all the maid service's fault, the most disgusting act in the world is suicide. This is how I came to love suicide.



Stefano Paolillo

2.

I decided to take G away for two days so I could spend my first night with him. We had dinner together the night before he kept talking about what he did with his girlfriend. I said to myself, "What do I keep paying for this guy for when he keeps talking about his girlfriend?" The next morning in the car and I AM NEVER awake in the morn-

ings I said, "I love you and you don't love me." He said, "If you wanted a boyfriend I'm not it." I said, "OK. That's that." He said, "Maybe I shouldn't come this weekend." I said, "Yes." He said, "Can I call you when you get back?" I said, "No." The other guy got out of the car. We started to make out. I will fuck you anytime anywhere. He said, "I don't want you to keep me." I said, "I don't support any man." I had made up this whole incident so I could do what I wanted: fuck up the one thing that matters to me in my life.

If only someone loved me . . . I'd do anything to live with someone with no one . . . I bought a dog and cut open my stomach with a knife . . . I've lost control again . . . I see this white curly fur like it has babies inside it I want your baby and something in me turns over and dies. At eight years old I'm no longer a human being.

Now I have to stop lying:

Mommy says over and over again I don't love her.

I have decided she's right. I don't love her.

"When I think of all I've done for you and now, look at how you're talking to me, you're ice-cold."

"No, not ice-cold. Just cold."

The shit hits the fan. Mommy claims her right to my being a slave to her (this is what love is).

I am never going to love.

She who opened up and mutilated her body to give me wonderful life. I gave a black laugh and replied she hadn't wanted to have me, she would have had an abortion killed me off fast if she hadn't been so scared, "As for me, I don't know if I want to be alive or dead." She threw herself into the chair, screamed that I had no idea what I was saying I was crazy she was going to put me in the asylum, and fainted. A woman's tactic. I went away. I no longer felt. I had said the truth. "As for me, I don't know if I want to be alive or dead."

So being without love, am I no longer going to live?

For one time, all became as clear and transparent as blazing noon. In the blazing noon of the full of this summer I went to the garden: white butterflies flew above the canal bank, a swarm of mosquitoes came into my face, so much disappeared that now things were simple. Bloodstones and St. John's cross, waterlilies, every kind of red rose. I have learned that there are birds of the evening and of the night: bats, owls, screechers, babies fallen out of their nests and drowned in a bucket. They haunt my dreams. I remained for a long time by this water edge and I saw this life is as I imagine it. There's nothing more to trespass.