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## marE2002

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## TRANSLATING A POEM

Translating a poem a translator should live with his translation all his life and review it time and again, till all the things the sounds and resonances and mirrors in the original text have had a chance to work in him and his text, and given them a chance to explore *those resonances* in the new language. Let the translation be *Nachlaß* then, a bequest of the translator's life, these few poems in the new language the translator's whole life has translated.

On the other hand, a poem too is a momentary distillation of all its sources and come-uppances, cast into the moment, and true only to it. Only what sticks to the words, stays. Of all that had been felt or meant or known, all the unintended references, the half-conscious allusions, resemblances, the enamel figures on the patterned lute, all those — only what sticks to the words comes through. Grace abounds in any text.

So maybe the translator, doing what he always does anyhow, no time, no time, tries to operate outside of time. The translator cobbles something together quick as can be, gets what he can get and says so, and moves on. In the resultant text, however flawed, Grace must operate all over again, to build a background, a vast building full of echoes and shadows. Of course it's supposed to be the same size and shape as the basilica behind the original poem, but it won't be. The mosaics will be a little different, the saints in their niches may not be the ones in the original author's parish church, but something will be there. Some structure transcends its instance. You can walk in it and listen.

18 March 2002

## RELIGION

what can they swear to when they know  
or when nothing strikes them  
then their fancy cracks open like the fesse  
of an old marble Venus  
defined but impenetrable gap

so the imagination looks like an idea  
but nothing moves in our out of it  
a shapely futility swollen in the life of things

most people's idea of deity  
and I would love that too if I could touch  
Thomas-wise the fissures of the real.

18 March 2002

## FESTA DI SAN GIUSEPPE

Because you did the thing I dare not do,  
tool-wielder, shaper  
of common properties, acoustic  
engineer for what the heart  
of wood will hear, can bear,

that tall pine on the Apennines  
you never saw, that stem  
that was a ship that came  
and killed your son tree after  
tree, because you could  
still take wood in your hands,

the carpenter's son is nailed to wood

we have to be replacements here  
everyone must be his son  
lacking one, how can a father be?

because I must be all things to all men  
and inherit every absence, taste every death  
(why do I think the crow out there  
knows what I'm writing down?)

and where is the woman in all this,  
sprawled on her belly in the sand  
head raised cupped in her palms

reading a magazine, this one,  
while the light walks up and down her back

she finds distraction in the language written,  
this one, the one you're reading too,  
the words are soaking up into it  
from wet sand, be there,  
impersonate her, read your way  
out of this agony, we all do,  
reading or hearing or some such thing  
and then the spasm's past but he  
still has the rough wood in his hands.

19 March 2002

## POEM IN FOUR LINES

At least he was an angel once  
my fingernails are weird today  
new maps of old city and I'm lost  
this is where I happened and what then  
the girl on the bus the gull on the fence  
everything was a different color then  
and there used to be rain. What is this now,  
this delicate grease from heaven  
that gives a sheen but no answers  
who is she now, every object of desire  
remorselessly eroded into common names.

If each of these lines were worth one syllable  
eleven of them together might lift a real line  
such as the poets of old could wield  
easy on the out of one breath and here we are  
packing our trunks for Disneyland as if the sea  
had finished its business with us whereas  
Coltrane's still in ambush past the cypresses  
somebody's sure to make sense of us someday  
and offer fire to the right god and learn how to live  
with a lady and touch the night scales gently  
so all the glitter of our desire makes us beautiful.

I'm sorry for all my rodent humility  
I meant to be a policeman and arrest you  
for being so unfathomably other, I'd drag you  
to my jail and question you all night  
and by dawn I too would know the mortal answer.  
But I was meek and let you get away with it,  
what, that aluminum behavior, that earth-  
to-earth messaging, your sleek piracy of my craft  
that soaked up everything I thought was me  
and left me lawless in an empty book  
with plenty of friends and none of them have sense.

How breathless these inscriptions run  
just like the old days silver marching band  
with wopperjawed trombones would trot  
fast down Crescent Street in purple  
autumn for festa, even the oldest sexton  
was young as his cigar, nothing hurts  
when the music's right, *Va pensiero*  
mostly, and movie music from Mussolini's  
golden noontime when he ate Africa  
it was the beginning of my life how dare I question  
the girl in the white silk blouse, the cauldron of oil?

20 March 2002

## EMERGENCY TEXT

If you can read this  
your chair (the one  
you're sitting on)  
will take off  
and sail past Samarkand  
to a secret landing strip  
on the backside of the Moon.  
(If you're standing up  
this is the time to sit  
down fast or the effect  
described will be lost  
and you'll be here forever  
staring out a lifeless window  
thinking you're in Illinois.)  
On the moon a patinage  
in dust is planned, the skaters  
fall and are not bruised  
even the shape their bodies  
give the dust is not permanent,  
the least word breath sweeps it clear.  
The sun is bright all night  
your mother doesn't know where you are.  
You're a special person,  
yes, you are,  
ten thousand years ago the woolly  
mammoths were dreaming of you.

20 March 2002



## ASTROLOGY

Do my chart, will you?

— But you're not short, or not very short.

Who said I was?

— And besides, I care about the way you think about yourself, your self-image is part of me, somehow.

What are you talking about? I just asked you to do my chart.

— Do it?

I don't know how you do it, you look it up, or you figure it out, where my moon is, that kind of thing, Mercury, Venus.

— Your horoscope.

That's what I mean, will you?

— It's easy, actually, I have software that computes it, what's hard though...

What's hard? Is it something about me?

— No, I mean it's hard if you want me to interpret it.

Isn't the interpretation sort of given, I mean this means that, Scorpio means sex, Leo means show-off, that kind of thing?

— No, it's all just numbers, numbers and thinking and feeling and remembering. That's what's hard.

## NOVENAS

Suppose this were the very place  
and no more bitterness. The  
sun balanced on the world  
like that sponge on a stick they gave him  
to suck verjuice from  
there is so much detail in dying  
and causeless blossoming all around  
thank god my father was no farmer  
so I get to thank everyone for everyone else.

Exciting when a day comes to talk —  
I never really listen till it speaks —  
and there you are, dressed in ice cream  
and key lime pie, wearing the hard words  
critical theory gives us to soften  
into the easy practice of our daily sin,  
that violin, all night the hallways sobbed  
with pennywhistle tunes from heaven  
that green saloon across the wordless sea.

21 March 2002

## AFTER THE TEMPEST OF THE TRANSFERENCE

If the Subject outlives the object-status of the object of desire,  
is there still speaking?

Do words have a music of their own still  
that carries?

Language *conveys*. But does it carry by itself,  
can it carry a whole person  
somewhere, *praeter necessitatem*,  
beyond the strictest sense of need,

out where nothing is needed and perhaps nothing *is*,  
but if there is, it is there  
that the *unimagined* stretches, the most distant of all possible others,

the Other's Other

in other words  
the words carry him to

that needless speaker  
falling water echoing in a rock cleft

where the actual desire itself exists.

21 March 2002

Kingston

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What I remember from those years.  
What goes up and disappears inside  
But leaves unquenchable desire behind.  
Desire for desire. I want your wanting,  
I deposit everything thickly deep  
Into your treasury, lucre house, afterthought.

Some people will always be younger,  
Some people will do it on the telephone  
Some people stay in the mind no matter.  
Whereas there is a seawind that I know  
Clears the streets of such newspaper,  
Newspaper's what it is, old info  
Cluttering my fragile actual.

Of course this doesn't say clearly  
What bothers me in all this insertion.  
I don't want it to be clear  
I want it to be gone  
This is exorcism not translation.  
Nail up the door and paint the window blue.

22 March 2002

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You who have been silence all the music  
now wake in words

a city's waiting

past that gaudy Alpine absence  
they sell blue in the sky  
nobody there to bother you

snow on granite snow on grass  
no pronouns just F major

the unrelieved anxiety of Brahms

shirt of Nessus shirt of pain you can't take off  
and you are Hercules and brave and perish

vengeance for the snake you skew

anxiety never ceases, only shifts to another tempo,  
another register of its loquacious despair

the work of music is to *earn* [a] silence

will never get there will sleep in fire.

22 March 2002

listening to two Brahms cello sonatas

## PRESTER JOHN

Prester John sent out his legates  
to test the metal of the world.  
Bronze they found, and silver  
but nowhere gold. Back they went  
through his secret mountains  
to make their report: when it gets  
to be gold it has no uniform,  
no name. Just weight, and gleam.  
It is the same as we have here,  
relax in the simple doubt called  
Being. The king said: next time  
bring back a glass of water  
from a town where no one ever  
saw the moon. Then I'll believe you.  
Till then I trust the far side of the hill.

23 March 2002

*[on Psychogeography]*

“ The word psychogeography was coined by the situationist poet Guy Debord around 1950. It describes the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals.

The sudden change of ambience in a street within the space of a few meters; the evident division of a city into zones of distinct psychic atmospheres; the path of least resistance which is automatically followed in aimless strolls (and which has no relation to the physical contour of the ground); the appealing or repelling character of certain places - these phenomena all fall into the field of psychogeography.

One of the basic situationist practices is the *dérive* [literally: “drifting”], a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects, and are thus quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll.”

To which we have to add the other side, the who, the one who walks there, the ones.

Driven by fate was Aeneas (fato profugus) into Italy to find, to found, the city of Rome. To find is to found. Each of us is driven by personal, familial, societal, karma, and driven so much so that we can't walk free along the streets or roads. The streets compel, as Debord suggested at the start of the radical age, but we provide resistance. The streets that cast their spell for me, opening, closing, will do otherwise for you. Hence we go as teams as we walk (in dream or waking) through known cities.

23 March 2002, continues

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Maybe I fell  
out of some world  
into this one

second crop  
of what I was  
a desire

redistributed  
over the flame fields  
old monks

burning heretics  
the lovers the faithful  
ones of the star.

23 March 2002

Poughkeepsie



*ad altare Veneris*

You bet on birds. But civilization  
means repetition, to be able  
to do it and do it again  
just like the first time, dependable,  
true. Itself, in other words, and not  
just you. But you bet on birds.  
Birds come and go, are winds,  
dragons, airs, leaves,  
shadows. You built on shadows.  
We tried to build a culture  
on desire, desire is a bird  
that comes and goes, whereas of old  
China and India and Africa  
built on order, on what they could hold  
in place, in mind, the end  
of oracles. When the cracks on a  
turtle's shell in fire, beast scat  
on the lime cliff, bird flight  
through the rooms of heaven  
stopped being how society  
understood itself. Obsolescence  
of oracles. Old Rome had them,  
old China, but the risks of sky  
turned into system, tamed chance  
to *I Ching* and the birds were gone.  
Or they had brought the birds  
deep inside the system. Empty sky.

But you bet on birds  
where they come and go  
you believed in the deepest  
order of the world,  
the one that rises in you  
or falls, you  
are the bird you believed in,  
you are the desire  
and the desired all at once,  
the three of you in one  
all walking with me  
to the altar of Venus  
the god before the world  
who waited for us  
and we are.

24 March 2002

## THE ASSASSINATION OF RENÉ DESCARTES

Men are infinitely subtler than the great ideas  
they're famous for, with dirty feet and day dreams  
and warm fusty mornings under blankets when they wake  
and for a moment know not who they are,  
no more than you do at that moment  
when the day itself might be one more trick of dream.  
So when the fusiliers came and took him prisoner,  
stood him on the church steps and shot him down  
Descartes hardly noticed, in a sense, that he  
no longer was happening. At least in any way  
he could evaluate or explain. He fell  
and rolled down the steps, just as I do when  
I am shot down on the steps of the Stock Exchange  
in shadow on a windy day, just as you fall  
when they knife you in the Russian baths.  
Gunshots reverberate through the portico  
startling the pigeons as in every movie  
and the sky said rain. His notions groveled  
while the government assassins marched away  
and the government garbagemen took their time  
coming to fetch his corpse. In between  
these historical events, outside of history  
a man was bleeding, not quite dead yet,  
stuff going on in the head, images, words,  
prayers, reminiscences, the firm resolutions  
of a dying man, the holy baptism each thing  
in the world had given him, even the off-blue  
paving stone an inch before his eyes  
was waking him now to some new meaning,  
a gift of presence, a comfort to the mind

that there is something there, this insoluble  
mystery of anything at all happening to exist  
and we also are. At the intersection  
of desire and understanding a man lies dying,  
that crossing point the Jews called *Binah*,  
Understanding, sad sphere from which we come,  
whose number is 67 and that tastes  
like sugar and ginger and burnt things. Descartes  
is there, I am left with the numbers  
of his expedition, his slowly opening absence.  
I think he wakes and thinks he dreamed it  
but then I think I woke and wrote this down  
imagining I'm not actually at this moment  
dying on the steps of the Church of Saint Sulpice.

24 March 2002

