The Long Desire: translating Ananda Devi's poetics of intuition

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THE LONG DESIRE:
TRANSLATING ANANDA DEVI’S POETICS OF INTUITION

by
Rachel Joan Wysocki

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Comparative Literature-Translation in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

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Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Maureen Robertson
This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Comparative Literature-Translation at the December 2014 graduation.

Thesis Committee:  

Maureen Robertson, Thesis Supervisor

Aron Aji

Anny Dominique Curtius
For Kopel,
who introduced me to the real struggle that is writing,
and showed me the beauty of our suffering.

Soft and savage is our molting, indeed
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe a tremendous debt to Kazim Ali for his insight in proposing *Le long désir* as a text I would love to translate. I also can’t express enough my gratitude to Maureen Robertson, Aron Aji, and Anny Curtius for their unending support during all aspects of this thesis. And I couldn’t have stayed the course, and laughed while doing it, without Ryan.
Ananda Devi [1957 Ė], a French-language author and poet from Mauritius, adds depth to the lyricism already inherent in her writing by drawing upon that country's multicultural heritage, which includes African, Hindu, and French, and its Creole language. *Le long désir* (2003) defies genre, being neither strictly poetry nor prose, and presents more a collection of prose poems than a structured story with a tangible plot. The poetic aspect of her text, accomplished through this Creole as well as experimentation with grammatical structures and the display of the text on the page, inclines me as a translator to prioritize the lyricism of her text over its content, though certainly I have endeavored to bring both into my English translation of selected sections of the book. Its unifying theme of the struggle of women with violence, anguish and self-definition is brought to the fore by running motifs of animalistic behavior, putrefaction, and darkness, which are accompanied by equally vivid instances of fragility and beauty, signaling the plurality of the situation of women. The challenges of translating the Creole, of preserving her imagery's freshness as well as the content's poignancy, and other myriad deliberations make the labor of producing *The Long Desire*, the English translation, that much more rewarding; for it is well worth bringing a glimpse of life as a Mauritiennne to an English-speaking audience, if not for the noble purpose of increasing our awareness of the world, then at least to taste the enchanting complexity of the text itself.
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INTRODUCTION:

Devi’s poetics of intuition and the process of translating selections of *Le long désir*

Ananda Devi was born Ananda Nirsimloo-Anenden in 1957 on Mauritius, an island in the Indian Ocean, which, due to a multicultural heritage, including African, Hindu, and French, fosters a Creole language.\(^1\) Classified by Françoise Lionnet as a postcolonial writer (*Écritures féminines* 306),\(^2\) she enriches her primarily French language texts through the use of this Creole, both directly and indirectly, adding depth to the lyricism already inherent in her writing. She earned her doctoral thesis in anthropology from the University of London in 1990, and embraces with equal fervor French, British,\(^3\) American, Indian and other traditions; by putting these western and eastern traditions in conversation and sometimes opposition, she gives herself the means to go beyond narrow social or aesthetic conventions and traditional comfort zones\(^4\) (Lionnet, *Écritures féminines* 246).

As of 2012, along with translations and other publications, Devi has written eleven novels, three collections of short stories, and three volumes of poetry, many of which explore the self-destruction brought about by different kinds of seclusion, such as those created by socioeconomic conditions or gender roles (Lionnet, *Écritures féminines* 241, Sultan 1, my translation). To date, four translations of her work have been produced: two into Spanish (Manuel Serrat Crespo, *Pagli*, 2002, Isabel Olid, *Suspiro*, 2004), one into Hindi (Asha Pande, *Moi, L’Interdite* [*Mai Nirvasit ek Kahani*], 2006), and one into English (Jean Anderson, *Indian Tango*, 2011). To my knowledge, mine is the only translation of *Le long désir*.

Although she has been living in France for the past two decades, Devi has come to be considered a central figure among the authors hailing from the Indian Ocean and one of the most prolific. This is perhaps due to her distinctiveness from her literary predecessors, such as Robert
Edward Hart and Malcolm de Chazal, who fostered a sense of nationalist identity in their writings, which helped the Mauritians work for independence against colonial influences while at the same time "downplay[ing] the hybridity that marks the Mauritian population" (Tyagi 14); Devi herself asserts that she is among the first authors to provide a look at Mauritian life from an interior perspective in an effort to bring back into the conversation this hybridity of identity, not only of the culture and community, but most importantly of the individual (14-6). In particular, Devi has brought to the fore the difficult situation of Hindu women in Mauritian society, especially in her novels L’arbre fouet, Pagli, and Le sari vert (18).

Although the impact of Devi’s thematic and stylistic approach went largely unremarked during her early career, the degree of interest in her work has been increasing over the last few years as respected critics such as Françoise Lionnet and Véronique Bragard have begun to take note. Nonetheless, scholarship centering specifically on Le long désir remains sparse, and any analysis to be found often appears in tandem with Devi’s better-known texts such as Ève de ses décombres which received the Prix des Cinq Continents de la Francophonie (2006), the Prix RFO du livre (2006), and the Prix TSR du Roman (2007). Also in 2007, the Conseil International d’Études Francophones bestowed upon her the Certificat d’Honneur Maurice Cagnon, and in 2010 she earned the Prix Guilloux for Le sari vert.

Devi’s contact with various cultures is not entirely derived from academic experience, but is founded in the multicultural cross-section of her upbringing. Since the eighteenth century, the Mascarene islands, which include Mauritius, have become "cosmopolitan Creole sites of interactions [where] the power dynamics of European colonial nations, their traffic in slaves and indentured laborers of diverse backgrounds, the market forces of competitive commerce, and the local hierarchies of race, class, gender, and language generated a dialectic of inclusion and ex-
clusion that was never simply binary (Lionnet, *Écritures féminines* 308).\(^5\) It seems that many of these issues, in one form or another, continue today, and the fact that [Devi\(\hat{\text{c}}\)] name has been associated with the narrative denunciation of gendered violence and of social and political exclusions\(\hat{\text{c}}\) (272)\(^6\) is, among other things, a recognition of her response to the prevalence of human trafficking in Mauritius.\(^7\)

*Le long désir*, published in 2003, defies genre, being neither strictly poetry nor prose, and presents more a collection of prose poems than a structured story with a tangible plot. The poetic aspect of her text, accomplished through this Creole as well as experimentation with grammatical structures and the display of the text on the page, inclines me as a translator to prioritize the lyricism of her text over its content, though certainly I have endeavored to bring both into English. Its unifying theme of the struggle of Mauritian women with violence, anguish and self-definition is brought to the fore by running motifs of animalistic behavior, putrefaction, and darkness, which are accompanied by equally vivid instances of fragility, grace, and beauty, signaling the plurality of the situation of women and the different seclusions they experience. The theme of clouded memory is also prevalent in this volume, and harkens to cultural as much as to personal memory. The challenges of translating the Creole, of preserving her imagery\(\hat{\text{c}}\) freshness as well as the content\(\hat{\text{c}}\) poignancy, and other myriad deliberations make the labor of producing an English text that much more rewarding; for it is well worth bringing a glimpse of life as a Mauri-tienne \(\hat{\text{c}}\) or more generally that of a woman in a postcolonial setting \(\hat{\text{c}}\) to an English-speaking audience, if not for the noble purpose of increasing our awareness of the world, then at least in order to taste her \(\hat{\text{c}}\) jubilant use of the French language\(\hat{\text{c}}\) (Lionnet, *Écritures féminines* 290).

Although *Le long désir* maintains a continuity of theme and voice from beginning to end, the nonlinear nature of the narrative line made it possible to excerpt the original text in order to
showcase the variety of form (prose poetry, free verse, and at times straight-forward prose) that sets this text apart from the rest of Devi’s oeuvre, which consists largely of novels and short stories. This thesis analyzes my translation of particular selections from *Le long désir* in order to address and explore Devi’s intuitive poetics.

*Le long désir*, a revised edition of *Les chemins du long désir* published in 2001, was written in a period of Devi’s development when her style and manner were still fueled by instinct more than conscious deliberation. However, as late as 2011, Devi refused to analyze the how of her creative impulses or to theorize about her process expressing in an interview with Patrick Sultan for *Orées* that she is and remains an intuitive (Orées 2, cited in Lionnet, *Écritures féminines* 248-9). She describes moments during her writing when the sentences "passent directement de l’esprit à la page sans être préalablement formulées" (Orées 3, cited in Lionnet, *Écritures féminines* 249); Lionnet’s analysis that "[f]or Ananda Devi, aesthetic performance is paramount" (311) confirms my perception that it is Devi’s approach of tapping her deepest, unconscious relation to the French language that drives her work, and that she has an intimate relationship to words and language generally, but not to form and structure.

Devi claims in a 1999 interview that she approaches her novel writing the way she does her poetry: "j’écris dans une confusion volontaire des poèmes en prose et de la prose poétique" (cited in Lionnet, *Écritures féminines* 249). Though this confusion, which at times appears on the page in a style akin to stream-of-consciousness, speaks to my own creative process as a writer, it also makes certain passages of *Le long désir* very difficult to translate; her meaning already embedded in flowing metaphors and masked by imagery becomes all the more obscure for lack of punctuation and the distortion of traditional grammatical structures.
Grappling with Devi’s non-standard use of language was the main challenge presented in translating *Le long désir*. By non-standard, not only do I mean her formatting of text upon the page and poetic license (i.e., inversion of the placement of a noun’s adjective, omitting punctuation), but also her use of Creole (usually in the form of compound words and verbs based on nouns).¹¹

Surely aware that “[f]ormal generic categories can enable reading, but impede meaning” and that when poetry “breaks rules of genre and prosody, its impact can be unexpected and far-reaching” (Lionnet, *Écritures féminines* 286), Devi chose to produce *Le long désir* in a generically hybrid style (290).¹² In Lionnet’s estimation, Devi’s resistance to “easy labeling” in her work not only assists in her goal of “communicating a raw sense of exile from both history and memory” but also “provides useful and interesting points of friction for an understanding of a general poetics of postcolonial engagement with questions of power and discourse, experimentation and subversion” (286). Lionnet bases this analysis mainly on the section “Absence”, which does indeed contain the most direct references to the struggle to reconcile Mauritius’ past with its present, and although “Absence” is only one discrete unit within the text, it is just to use her interpretation of Devi’s goal as a tool to understand *Le long désir* as a whole. Nevertheless, I chose to omit this section in my translation in favor of translating the first section, “Vous”, because though both sections make significant use of prose poems, “Vous” is both longer and more varied in its style, employing free verse as well as prose poems. Recognizing that her generic and poetic experimentation is not for its own sake, and that her break from traditional forms symbolizes the struggle to break free from traditional cultural standards, it was my intention as a translator to preserve this active resistance.
One way of articulating the process of translation is by referring to the concept of equivalency. As Eugene Nida and Charles R. Taber stated in 1969, translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message (cited in Pym 27). At its most basic, formal equivalence seeks to translate the form of the original, that is, word-for-word, sentence-for-sentence; the goal of dynamic equivalence, on the other hand, is to translate the function, that is, not word-for-word, but sense-for-sense or intent-for-intent (8).

Of the theorists who have developed this concept, I find the most accessible to be Vinay and Darbelnet (1958, cited in Pym 13), whose different points of their equivalency continuum I will refer to as pertinent in my analysis. Every translator must identify which aspects of an original text they will prioritize, and these priorities can change depending on the context. For my work with *Le long désir*, the nonnegotiable aspects I prioritize are its phonetic qualities, its syntax and form, and what I perceive to be Devi’s intentions; it is not my goal to find the clearest, most straight-forward English equivalent to the French, and I made my choices accordingly. As is the case for most translators, I do not actively hold these priorities in my mind, instead allowing my intuition, which has developed over many years of study, to guide me.

Arguably, there is no universal measure for determining what sounds normal in English or in any language, and so such considerations are pointless in translation. Nevertheless, the argument in reverse has frequently aided me in determining an equivalence from my source text into English. As we gain experience with a language, especially with our mother tongue, we develop a learned intuition for whether a word or phrasing “sounds right”; this can present a challenge for translators who are not completely fluent in their target language, such as myself, and lack such fully developed intuition. When choosing which word to use in any given poetic line
of which Devi’s text is entirely composed—this intuition extends to a perception of the word’s sound value (how it hits your ear), and tone value (how it hits your heart, your emotions).

Even within the first section, Vous, it was clear that Devi’s style in this text favors repetition of words and imagery. For instance, the word éclat. It makes its first appearance on the second page of Vous (le cœur éclaté d’une tourterelle [Devi 12:39]), and then again three pages later (j’étais ton fruit éclaté [15:42]). I narrowed my choices down to two, burst and split, but the question remained whether to preserve the repetition of the exact word in French with a repetition of the exact word in English, or to allow myself to choose different words for different contexts, trusting the synonymy would suffice to preserve the repetition. In its various forms, éclat appears eight times in the excerpts I’ve translated, and with each subsequent repetition, it became clearer that maintaining the repetition would be a challenge. After all, adherence to her poetic style is not limited to reproducing her repetitions, but also includes other aesthetic elements, such as cadence and rhyme within the surrounding passage. To further complicate my decision, in addition to éclat there are other instances when I used split as a translation of fendue (35:62, 83:89), and burst to translate jaillir (28:55). This encouraged me to reevaluate the semantic differences between the original words, and I rediscovered that although each describes a similar motion or movement, they differentiate themselves in the exact nature of that movement. Éclater is to explode, burst, split; fendre is to split, cleave, cut open; jaillir is to spring out, shoot out, spurt, gush, burst out.

In the mindset that I would find one literal translation, or one word-for-word formal equivalent, for each appearance of éclat I originally translated le cœur éclaté d’une tourterelle (Devi 12:38) as the bursting heart of a turtledove, since burst has an almost onomatopoetic sound, and paired with heart evokes the emotional connotations of a phrase such as
my heart was bursting while avoiding that clichéd formulation. When it came to ëtais ton fruit éclaté (15:41), however, I started to doubt ëburst as the best choice. I briefly considered ëfragmented in order to create some alliteration with ëfruit but not only would that alliteration have been heavy-handed, the image was more scientific than the original; given that Devi does occasionally use technical jargon, it would have been inappropriate to compromise her balance between erudite terms and earthy imagery. The line worked better with ëburst but its sound was labored with the repetition of the ëu and ët (ëburst fruit), and ëburst is unusual enough in English that I felt in danger of drawing too much attention to the word rather than the image. In this case, ësplit brings more immediacy to the image than ëburst. Although I wasn’t quite as satisfied with the line, in the spirit of using the same word for ëclat in English, I gave the turtledove a ësplitting heart.

I was more at ease using ësplitting in the next appearances of ëclat. ëMarionnettes démembres par des éclats de nuits (Devi 17:43). Even when I had mistranslated ëclats de nuits as îthe splittings of nights, ësplitting seemed the best choice for its assonants. When I corrected the line to înightly splittings my choice seemed even better, for the image of splitting wood comes to mind more easily than that of exploding or bursting wood; in addition, înightly splittings is a reduction of the original text, which used four words to convey the same idea, and the cadence of my translation became more fluid.

The next example, îclat d’écume et de braise (Devi 23:49) presented a challenge after I had revisited the issue of îburst versus îsplit. Familiar with îclat by the time I came to this phrase in my first draft, I used my dictionary to verify the meaning of îécume and îbraise, which lead me to the translation îburst of dross and embers. As should have been obvious to me at the time, îdross is a complete misinterpretation of îécume in this context; though îdross is
correct in the figurative sense of récumè or the bottom of the societal barrel, coupled with braisè that interpretation simply does not make sense. Because I liked the word I overlooked this nuance, both for its sound and its relative rareness, which in fact would have no equivalency to the quality of récume, which is not especially rare. I had been as far off the mark with braisè but upon a second look I found the fairly commonly used phrase: le regard de braisè, which means à smoldering look rather than the quite literal translation à look of embers. I realized that, whether the construction [noun] de braisè always leads to a meaning of à smoldering [noun] or Devi used this idiomatic phrase with poetic license, I would do better to apply the construction to récume as well, putting both words into their adjectival state rather than their noun state, as I had originally thought. I replaced àross with spumy, not only because foamy and frothy lack overly negative connotations, but because using one of those words would create what I saw as an unintended juxtaposition with embers. Fire, after all, does not typically foam or froth, and as much as Devi favors vibrant imagery and is, in this case, using a word most commonly associated with the sea, I felt frothy and smoldering was too fanciful for what she intended here. Perhaps because it has similar sounds to spew, spumy, on the other hand, evokes fire and brimstone shooting from the mouth of a volcano, even if that is not strictly its meaning.

Having identified the surrounding equivalencies, I had to make a decision about éclat. In the preceding examples of éclat, 1 avoided explode or explosion simply because its connotations are rather obvious and unnuanced. In this case, however, neither burst nor split fit with the line; éclat had no article in front of it, which is unusual enough to be noteworthy and so, while I may choose a reductive translation by omitting the article in English from time to time in order to improve the rhythm of
a line, in the case of an omission of Œheô or Œnô in the original I am unwilling to use an amplification by adding one in the English. Given the nature of conjugation in French, there is no question of Œclatô being a noun in this case, and had Devi included an article in the original, Œn burst spumy and smolderingô would have been fine; without the article, it is not as clear that Œburstô is a noun instead of a verb. Œsplittingô, cadence aside, presents the same problem. Of course, one of the joys of language is its ability to provide different readings of the same sentence, even if there is only one grammatically correct interpretation available. As a translator of this text, however, wherein the meaning of a sentence is often intentionally opaque, I have to make the choices that reduce the multiplicity of interpretation rather than encourage it when the original image is relatively transparent. There is a fine line between what will challenge the reader and what will drive her away. In light of all this, I decided on Œexplosion spumy and smolderingô, the repetition of the Œô is not overdone but is still present, the meaning of the original is maintained, and there is no ambiguity with the part of speech.

The next Œclatô also brought with it this question of giving the reader more to contend with than necessary. ŒEn attente de la plongée [É ] dans la flaque de sang sur le bitume éclatéeô (Devi 26:52) is rather straightforward, though I will admit that I missed the placement of the adjective in my first draft. I neglected to note that Œclatéeô is the feminine conjugation of the adjective, meaning that it did not correspond with the masculine Œle bitumeô and my original thought that it was the asphalt that had exploded was incorrect. A few options presented themselves: A) Œ[waiting for the dive] into the pool of blood split/exploded/burst on the bitumenô B) Œ[waiting for the dive] into the split/exploded/burst pool of blood on the bitumenô and C) Œ[waiting for the dive] into the pool of blood on the bitumen split/exploded/burstô.
For all options, the word ŒsplitŒ presented a problem for me, and not just because pools of liquid donŒ usually split (on the other hand, nor do they explode). As much as Œthe pool of blood on the split bitumenŒ makes a certain sense, ŒsplitŒ in association with liquid Œ as Devi intended Œ transposes in the mind to ŒspiltŒ given the surrounding context, and easily appears to be a typographic error. That sort of cognitive dissonance serves more as a distraction than as a poetic device meant to create multiple meanings or images by calling other interpretations to mind with the use of only one word, which is what Devi achieved with her placement of ŒéclatéeŒ. ŒBurstŒ has its issues as well, given that Œbœ appears in the sentence twice already, and adding a third could make the alliteration overwhelming. On the other hand, with regard to option C, this alliteration may be the only element to make that phrase work; Œbitumen burstŒ would retain the poetic license employed by Devi, but I am doubtful it would be as successful as in the original. I began to think I may have to employ a comma to fit ŒéclatŒ into the English properly, but I eschewed this option, given that I see DeviŒ general omission of punctuation throughout most of the text as one of its nonnegotiable aspects, since such omissions serve to symbolize the theme of independence from tradition.

With the learned intuition for how English sounds in my ear, for I will grant that there is an English normal to the individual who speaks it, even if that falls outside of the range of someone elseŒ perception of ŒnormalŒ I went to reject option B in its entirety; the placement of an adjective in front of ŒpoolŒ makes a unit of Œexploded poolŒ rather than keeping the emphasis on the smooth rhythm of Œpool of bloodŒ which parallels the pool of water earlier in the sentence. Only, I noticed that I had not reflected the parallelism of the French in my translation. I have difficulty not translating my original texts word-for-word, and since this can create a stiltedness in the English that was not intended by the original, I sometimes overcompensate by overlooking
nuances in the text. That is, there is an argument I use while translating: What was the intended effect of the original? Was it meant to be smooth, elegant, awkward, jarring, noticeable? If the original sentence produces no discernable pause to the reader, meaning the author has employed no tactics, poetic or literary or otherwise, that would catch the reader’s attention, then the translation should strive to maintain that evenness. In this particular case, Devi may surprise us with her imagery, but not with awkward syntax or diction that stands out from the page. I had chosen to forgo replicating the parallelism of the line in favor of producing a line whose content was displayed on more lyric terms. Waiting for the dive into the upended puddle or into the pool of blood split on the bitumen contains the rather nice pairing upended puddle and preserves a quotidian quality, especially since puddle harkens back to the mud from the beginning of the passage more readily than pool of water does; after all, Devi’s language is not stilted, and what an English speakers calls a puddle, a French speakers calls a flaque. There is a danger that the repetition of pool of will be too obvious and make the line too wordy, but on the other hand, when the reader gets to pool of blood the parallelism links back to the pool of water, creating a nice cohesion in the line.

However, in order to place éclat in suitable English, it now seems necessary to look further than the surrounding words and clauses, and to include the sentence as a whole. With option B taken back into consideration, these were my options for the translation of En attente de la plongée dans la flaque renversée ou dans la flaque de sang sur le bitume éclatée: A) Waiting for the dive into the upended pool of water or into the pool of blood split/exploded/burst on the bitumen B) Waiting for the dive into the upended pool of water or into the split/exploded/burst pool of blood upon the bitumen C) Waiting for the dive into the upended pool of water or into the pool of blood on the bitumen split/exploded/burst.
A² gives the impression that both pools were on the bitumen, when the syntax of the original does not indicate that, based on the placement of Œclatée after Œle bitume and the lack of an Œs to make it plural. This isn’t terribly grave as a transgression against the original, but worth bearing in mind. B² maintains the parallelism of the original, and C², though it tries to replicate the slight ambiguity of the placement of Œclatée, where someone listening might think it referred to either the bitumen or to the pool of blood, is overly complicated in the English syntax. Devi accomplished her poetic sleight of hand elegantly, yet it does not come across the same in English. And so, the parallelism of syntax I had originally foregone in my early drafts has instead helped me to craft a better translation than I saw before: ŒWaiting for the dive into the upended pool of water or into the exploded pool of blood upon the bitumen. While I do keep an eye out for opportunities to exercise my own poetic license with neologisms in order to do justice to Devi’s choices, another reason I chose to keep Œpool of water in lieu of Œpuddle is because any nonstandard rendering I might make of Œpool of blood, such as Œblood puddle or Œbloodpool, sounded overdone as though I were trying too hard to be poetic, thus detracting from the intended register of the passage and indeed the text as a whole. As for Œclatée I chose Œexploded for its symmetry with Œupended; Œsplit was already decided against for its similarity to Œspilt and Œburst created a lilting, songlike rhythm that I didn’t like.

The next Œclat does not appear in my excerpts until the section ŒGoémon (ŒWrack): ŒRoses éclatées sur le tard sur le miroir de l’asphalte (Devi 82:87). There were small choices to be made here; as before, the issue of the adjective reading as a noun instead was present, and I found myself wondering if such modulation could be acceptable. In this case, however, the preceding fragment sets the stage for Œburst/split to function as the adjective it is, and it’s safe to forgo gerunds like Œbursting and proceed: ŒPassages inexplorés. Roses éclatées sur le tardé
(Passages unexplored. Roses burst/split late in life’s mirror. Another poetic turn surfaced as well, with the mirroring of ñur leòī and in a sentence mentioning mirrors, no less ī and this was something I wanted to preserve if possible. But this repetition created a staccato rhythm in the sentence, the space between ñardò and the second ñurò reading almost as an unpunctuated comma. ñRoses split in the lateness of life in the mirror of the asphalt does carry a certain breathlessness between ñlifeò and ñnò, but the danger of wordiness and sluggish cadence remained. Conscious once again of my compulsion to mimic the syntax of the French, which does not use apostrophes, I considered making ñasphaltò possessive, but the unpunctuated comma is not as present: ñPassages unexplored. Roses split in the lateness of life in the asphalt’s mirror.ò However, if I were to make another possessive as well: ñPassages unexplored. Roses split in life’s lateness in the asphalt’s mirror.ò

But I cannot decide on the syntax without settling the debate over ñéclatò as split, burst, or exploded. The transposition ñsplit/spiltò does not make me hesitate as it did in the previous example, because roses are not liquid and, to my knowledge, there is no cliché in English regarding ñspilt roses besides, the image called up by that transposition is rather like an explosion of color, which would fall in line with ñéclatò. I wonder, though, if ñsplitò does not convey the right connotation in this context, whether it might need to become ñsplit openò for it seems that the intended image is that of roses in bloom, a violent blooming, seen in the asphalt as the true reflection of the flowers standing above it; the reflection of the prostitutes standing on the bitumen.

Therefore a word evoking violence seems called for. The ñburstingò of a flower is the image of a beautiful joy unable to be contained any longer. For roses to be ñsplitò is more insidious. ñExplodedò might work better without the possessives, lengthening the line to allow for the word’s three syllables. The rhythmic pause occurs to my ear when translated with both posses-
sives, or when done without either possessive. Though the assonance is not to be denied with \(\textit{\text{Roses exploded}}\), I can't help but think it too pronounced; a bit less assonance is achieved with \(\textit{\text{Roses split open}}\) and the sharp separation of the \(\textit{\text{o}}\) repetition caused by the \(\textit{\text{o}}\) ending of \(\textit{\text{split}}\) is symbolic of the violence done to the roses. My decision whether or not to employ possessives falls to the length of the line desired. Given that the opening sentences of the paragraphs are brief fragments without articles, I think the shorter length more suitable in this context. Therefore I decide to translate the line as \(\textit{\text{Passages unexplored. Roses split open in life's lateness in the asphalt's mirror.}}\)

Brevity is again a consideration when \(\textit{\text{éclat}}\) reappears in \(\textit{\text{Safiya}}\), a cohesive piece of six pages within the section \(\textit{\text{Matière}}\) (\(\textit{\text{Material}}\)): \(\textit{\text{Il éclaté, bouche torve}}\) (Devi 117:101). My understanding is that \(\textit{\text{torve}}\) is almost always coupled with the eyes (as in, to look askance at something); here, Devi couples it with the mouth instead. Not wanting to go so far with the connotations of \(\textit{\text{torve}}\) to translate it as \(\textit{\text{murderous}}\), I found that \(\textit{\text{askance}}\) carries the same sideways connotation as well as that of suspicion; in addition, \(\textit{\text{askance}}\) has an equivalent level in its diction to \(\textit{\text{torve}}\) and so I am also able to maintain as nearly the same register as the original as possible. However, \(\textit{\text{askance mouth}}\) doesn't ring as true as \(\textit{\text{mouth askance}}\), and so I chose to find the \(\textit{\text{éclat}}\) suitable to following its noun here. \(\textit{\text{Eye burst}}\) sounds like one compound word, and due to its three syllables \(\textit{\text{exploded}}\) was not an option, so I chose to go with \(\textit{\text{split}}\) once again: \(\textit{\text{Eye split, mouth askance.}}\)

The last appearance of \(\textit{\text{éclat}}\) in my excerpt appears in \(\textit{\text{Matière}}\), another more or less cohesive piece in the last section of the same name: \(\textit{\text{Dans la bouche ils éclatent comme le rire ventral des grains de balsamine}}\) (Devi 127:106). Though Devi does not employ alliteration or assonance to any great measure in this phrase, I decided to take the opportunity to substitute
some in of my own, since it was not always possible to replicate her soundplay exactly where she
did. Happily for me, then, éclaté in the company of rires translates as bursting out laughing and so bursté was an appropriate choice here. Balsamine naturally involves another ù (bal-

sams), and a rire ventral is a laugh from the stomach a belly laugh. And so the English fell rather easily into place: ù in the mouth they burst like the belly laugh of balsam seeds

Clearly, it was necessary to abandon the urge to translate all forms of éclaté with one

English word; to maintain the text’s lyricism as well as the accessibility of the imagery and con-
tent, it was necessary to use different words. In light of this, owing to the sonic similarities of bursté and turtle, I changed ùsplitting heart of a turtledove back to one that bursts.

To recap the journey of éclaté in my translation:

• ù le cœur éclaté d’une tourterelle
  ù the bursting heart of a turtledove

• ù t’étais ton fruit éclaté
  ù ù was your split fruit

• ù Marionnettes démembrées par des éclats de nuits
  ù ù Marionnettes dismembered by nightly splittings

• ù clat d’écume et de braise
  ù ù explosion spumy and smoldering

• ù En attente de la plongée dans la flaque d’eau renversée ou dans la flaque de sang sur le bitume éclatée
  ù ù Waiting for the dive into the upended pool of water or into the exploded pool of blood upon the bitumen

• ù Roses éclatées sur le tard sur le miroir de l’asphalte
  ù ù Passages unexplored. Roses split open in life’s lateness in the asphalt’s mirror.

• ù il éclaté, bouche torve
  ù ù Eye split, mouth askance

• ù Dans la bouche ils éclatent comme le rire ventral des grains de balsamine
  ù ù ù in the mouth they burst like the belly laugh of balsam seeds
As can be seen, my choice for the translation of "éclat" includes all three words taken under consideration. I used "split" four times, "burst" twice, and "explode" twice. The use of "explode" at all was surprising to me, but I have shown the paths that brought me to it.

When it comes to Devi's use of "jaillir" and "fendre" which have near meanings to "éclater", I was interested to see if I could not form a better distinction between the three words in my translation. In my estimation, "jaillir" is used here as a further indication of lovemaking: "Puis, ensemble, nous avons jailli en lave en boue et en combustion" (Devi 28:54). Remembering that "jaillir" is associated with liquid elements more than any other, it seems necessary to tweak my original translation just a bit. "Then, together, we burst in lava in mud and in combustion" becomes "we burst forth in lava in order to evoke more of a gushing movement than an explosion. As an aside, I had considered omitting the "and" before "combustion" thinking that it might quicken the rhythm and thus add a sense of urgency; upon revisiting the original, however, it seems that Devi could easily have made such a crescendo clear in her own text. She could have omitted the commas enclosing "ensemble" as well as the "et", thus giving the line momentum to the finish and making the imagery more symbolic of the climax of lovemaking. She chose to deliberately slow the cadence by capping the phrase with a three syllable word and the extra syllable from "et", and so I chose to reflect that as nearly as possible in my text.

"Jaillir" also appears in another prose poem earlier in the same section: "Il est de ces miracles inopinés qui jailissent de l'instant" (Devi 19:45). "Il est de ces" is a more elegant formulation of the common "Il y a" ("there is/are"). Balancing the higher register against the generally lower register of the text as a whole gave me some pause, but in consideration of the fact that Devi chose to use this higher register, I felt compelled to do the same. In order to do so, I had to compromise my stance on punctuation. Such compromises are necessary in translation, and de-
spite my conclusion that Devi demonstrates this freedom from grammatical standards and expectations as a way of symbolizing the freedom she desires for women from societal standards and expectations, she does sometimes use commas. Therefore, in passages where I do not feel she is placing any great emphasis on this freedom from the expected, I think it justified to use commas in the English in order to help the content be better understood. Higher diction is so rare in *Le long désir*, that in this case I prioritized reflecting that in the English over her nonstandard use of punctuation. Amongst miracles, there are those that burst forth unforeseen from the moment, whose shuddering resembles a wrinkled surface. In an earlier draft, I had translated *jaillissent* as *spring*; however, since *burst forth* is the same choice I made for *jaillir* in the other case and not only conveys the same meaning, but elevates the diction as well, I changed it.

As for the two instances of *fendu*, I changed my translation from *split* to *cleaved*:

*et que la cosse ainsi fendue fasse naître* (35:61) I *and let the husk thus cleaved give birth*; *eau fendue entre deux falaises* (83:88) I *cleaved water between two cliffs*. Rather than opt for a translation that demands two words, such as *cut open* or *split open* or other wordy formulations, I chose *cleaved* to convey the meaning of *cut* more than *split*. I admit I was a little taken aback that in this last example the water is cleaved between two cliffs, rather than that the water cleaves between two cliffs, separates them, but I must defer to an interpretation that Devi desires to subvert our expectations.

*Éclat*, of course, is but one of many repetitions in *Le long désir*, and I will leave the others for the reader to discover and enjoy. There is, however, one more worth mentioning. *Le bitume* or *bitumen* caught my eye from the beginning due to its unfamiliarity, at least to my American ears. Bitumen is akin to asphalt and other road-paving surfaces. It appears five times in my excerpts (Devi 22, 26, 38, 63, 70), asphalt twice (15, 82), and pavement once (22). With
some interpretation, its first appearance tells all of why Devi chose to use and repeat such a particular word and concept.

Her choice of words in this prose poem are particularly dark: écrasée, violence, scalpel, râcher, sanglots, vide, étranglé, déchirée and so on, and le bitume appears on the first line: Renversée d’impatience sur le bitume la tête sur la chaussée prête à être écrasée par l’enclume d’un camion solitaire (Devi 22:48) — Knocked by impatience to the bitumen head on the pavement ready to be flattened by the anvil of a lone truck Devi is describing what could be called l’espace de la déchéance (the space of degradation, the space where the body is exposed), and takes the bitumen as a symbol of this space, since it is upon the bitumen that the prostitutes walk. This poem is from the point of view of a prostitute, and every time pavement is involved, Devi means to evoke this plight. The pool of blood on the bitumen from the above example (26:52) speaks clearly to these sorrows, and the roses éclatées sur le miroir de l’asphalte (82:87) symbolize the women who find themselves in this space of degradation, and the other appearances of bitumen speak to the same issues. As has been the case across her career as a writer, Devi employs her considerable poetic talents to vivify the horror of such practices.

As a translator, from an interpretive standpoint it is invaluable to know that bitumen is a recurring symbol for the plight of prostitutes, and more generally for the societal problems that must exist given that the degradation continues as it does. Understanding the message helps me to make sure I’ve not only understood the content, but that I have rendered it into English effectively.

The same is certainly true of Devi’s use of Creole. As a general rule, the Creole in Le long désir manifests when the combination of two verbs are used to make one concept, or when a
noun’s structure is altered to conjugate as a verb.\textsuperscript{15} The most prominent example of the first is \textit{Le songer dire} the title of the third section of the book and the second section of my translation. Until I understood that this was an example of Creole, I translated this as \textit{he dreamt-of-saying} After finding that in such compounds, the unrealized action is represented by the second verb, and the first verb is accomplished, I retranslated the phrase as \textit{Almost-Spoken Memory}. As for the second case, that of a noun functioning as a verb, I found that though parsing the passages in which they appeared sometimes proved the most challenging to translate, in the end they yield lovely language. For example, \textit{Veux alunir tes envies} (Devi 12:39) employs not the relatively recent (since the 1960s or so) addition to the language of \textit{unlunir} as in \textit{moonlanding} or, as I had thought: \textit{I want to moonland your yearnings}; rather, the prefix \textit{un} which means absence or \textit{un} coupled with \textit{lunir} which does not exist in standard French but can be intuited to mean \textit{unmoons} creates \textit{unmoon}: \textit{I want to unmoon your yearnings}. Another instance of Creole is \textit{Laisse tomber ces tissus qui te mensongent} (Devi 18:44). \textit{Laissez tomber ces tissus qui te mensongent} employs not the relatively recent (since the 1960s or so) addition to the language of \textit{mensonge} as in \textit{lie} or, as I had thought: \textit{I want to lie to you}. I have tried to emulate the Creole in this text by transposing the grammatical structures, which is what Creole has the appearance of doing, though of course Creole is influenced by generations of contact between cultures and languages. Therefore, I translated \textit{mensonge} as \textit{truth you} \textit{untruth} \textit{untruth} is indeed a word in standard English, but like \textit{mensonge} it is a noun with no standard verb related directly to it, so it seemed like the appropriate choice.

The use of Creole is quite particular and requires not only a grasp of its underlying structures, but also the experience of the Creole culture in question. By definition, English cannot
replicate those experiences, so the only equivalent to be achieved is in the attempt to replicate the grammatical structure in tandem with the lexical meaning.

Instead of attempting to duplicate every small thing Devi accomplishes exactly where she accomplished it, I chose the approach of substitution; that is, I attempted to translate the rhetorical devices whenever they were used by Devi, but I did not insist upon duplicating the alliteration or assonance, etc., when it made the English unpoetic, and instead found other lines to employ these rhetorical devices. For example, I translated ŒLes banderoles en sept mots ont dit leur histoireŒ (Devi 75:82) as ŒThe banderoles in seven words told their story.Œ Though standard English might have me write instead ŒThe banderoles told their story in seven wordsŒ I saw this line as an opportunity to use my own poetic inversion, though the original French syntax is not non-standard. Another example of my use of poetic license when Devi doesnŒt is seen when I make one word out of three: ŒCe pas de plume qui danseŒ (82:87) becomes ŒThis featherstep that dancesŒ. It wasnŒt entirely necessary to make a neologism, but not only was this another opportunity to employ a modulation, it sounds better than ŒThis featherŒs footstepŒ or any other such awkward formulation.

I will not detail every grapple IŒve had in my translation between content and poetic line, for there have been many, but discuss only a few more. Such grapplings are especially important on the first page of text, as those words set the tone for the whole book and teach the reader what to expect. Devi begins ŒLe long désirŒ with a sparse page, full of emptiness. ŒAux moments troublés de lŒoffrande dans la glauque lumière des secrets / je sors de mon étrange pelage / douce et sauvage est la mueŒ (Devi 11:37): ŒIn the clouded moments of the offering in the brined light of secrets / I step out from my strange skin / soft and savage is the moltingŒ.
In my first draft, I had translated ōtroublesō as ōcloudedō, and then in the second draft changed it to ōfilmyō. I did this because ōfilmyō was a more evocative image than clouded. As I moved into my third draft, however, I compared repetitions across the whole translation; ōtroubleō is used more than once, and most prominently five pages later as ōBoue troubléeō (16:42). This line made me pay more attention to the sound quality of ōtroubleō with its deep ōouō sound. On the first page, this ōouō accentuates the heavy syllables of the first line (ōmomentsō, ōoffrandeō, ōglauqueō), and it was clear that ōfilmyō with its ōōō and ōyōō highlights the ōōō sounds of ōbrined lightō thus elevating the pitch of the line when it should lower it. Furthermore, ōfilmyō is not as heavy or grounded a word as ōtroublesō and, now familiar with the text as a whole, I realized that the ethereal and almost intangible quality to ōfilmyō is not reflective of Deviōs imagery in general.

I saw the near-rhyme of ōétrange pelageō as my first opportunity to play with alliteration and assonance. I was unsuccessful, of course, finding English words that corresponded with the French that also rhymed, so, given that ōétrangeō is most commonly interpreted as ōstrangeō, I chose to stretch the meaning of ōpelageō just a little. ōPelageō means coat or fur, but neither of those words plays off of ōstrangeō to any great effect, so I chose ōskinō. With ōa mueō (ōthe moltingō) on the next line, I thought that the relation of ōpelageō to animals would be clear enough to allow me to use ōskinō.

To continue the ōsō alliteration ōsō step out from my strange skinō, I translated ōdouce et sauvageō as ōsoft and savageō; ōsavageō, of course, is the natural and accurate translation of ōsauvageō and so my ōsō was already carried on. As for ōdouceō, Devi uses this word fairly often, but the connotation of it changes depending on context: ōgentleō, ōsweetō, ōsoftō, ōsmoothō, ōmildō. Similarly to ōfilmyō, the ōēō sound of ōsweetō was too piercing, and ōsmoothō didnō
quite make sense with molting; "soft" seemed to be the best counterpoint to "savage", while carrying forward the "s"

With "strange skin" and "soft" and "savage" in place, I saw another opportunity to play with sound for my translation of "je sors de". "Step out of" is not nearly as evocative an image as "step out from"; in the latter, I see her shrugging off this skin, leaving it crumpling to the ground behind her as she emerges, anew. The former in comparison seems like a pedestrian formulation to me. It is true that Devi has achieved a stable mix of the everyday and the poetic, and that perhaps in this case I overstep the bounds a little from what she may have intended, but since it's the first page of text, I see an argument to choose the more arresting image over the perhaps slightly more accessible or common formulation. The reader will be pausing frequently as they get deeper into the text; choosing "from" over "of" is a first, small signal of the lyricism and neologisms to come.

Devi did some signaling herself of her break with the standard and expected, with the extended space in her first line of text. As Lionnet has observed, "Devi challenges the reader to look beyond categories, to listen for silence, for that empty yet eloquent and revelatory emptiness that speaks beyond distorting and reductive categories. Silence opens onto another worldly reality that is the thematic equivalent of blank spaces on the page" (Lionnet, Écritures féminines 293). Devi does not employ these blank spaces very often, not even half the time, but when she does, they function in place of other punctuation in order to do just as Lionnet suggests: symbolize the silence and emptiness within oneself or in society, saying as much or more as the ink on a page. These blank spaces are not confined to appearing between words; the fact that Devi expresses herself here in mostly prose poems is a further reinforcement of the symbolism of si-
lence. In order to respect this, I have opted to maintain, as closely as possible, the margins of the original text.

The last, and perhaps most difficult, point of contention I will discuss is țiyouò. Though only țijeò appears on the first page of text, thus preparing the reader for a first-person point of view, it is somewhat surprising when the second person, in the form of țituò is addressed in the second prose poem (țiComme une lune décapitée je te regardè[Devi 12:38]), surprising because of the title of the section, țiVousò. In French, țituò is used to address one person who is familiar, and țivousò is used when speaking either to one person formally, or to a group of people no matter what the register. Had Devi used only țituò there wouldnòt be much difficulty in that translation because I would always use țiyouò, but she uses țituò and țivousò at different moments, sometimes within the same section.

Lionnet takes as a given that the first-person narrator of the book is Devi herself, and states that the țiyouò so often addressed í the intended audience for the first-person narrator í is comprised of Deviòs forebears (290).16 Both of these assertions make sense; in fact, given that no defining characteristics, outside of the occasional adjective, are assigned to the țijeò (or to the țituò or țivousò except in rare cases), it becomes almost impossible to imagine the narrator as anyone other than Devi, or perhaps an analog of a Mauritian woman, or more generally a woman raised in a post-colonial context.

The narrator is established on page 12 as being female: țiJe suis écarquilléeò, though there is every possibility the narrator might not be the same woman throughout the entire text, it is more likely that Devi allowed this indication of sex so early in the book in order to establish the voice of her narrator. This is reinforced on the first line of page 31 by the feminine adjective (țiTransparente je reflète la couleurèò, and there is no question that the narrator is female, if not
always the same female, when the narrator asks ŒEst-ce moi ce nî est pas moi pourtant il y a bien une autre (36:62). The key is in Œune, for had the narrator been masculine it would have read Œun autre; for this reason, I translated it as Œun other.

In the case of the Œyou on page 18 it is established, at least in that prose poem, as female by the Œâ at the end of the adjective: ŒNue, tu es, it seems the narrator may be speaking to herself, from the inside the experience of desire. Then, on page 31 the narrator states, Œvous plus somber que le temps vous nî tes pas celui que j’attendais. Here the key is Œcelui the masculine single form of Œthe one I do not see this as proof positive that these distinctions hold throughout the book or even through the section, but it may be some small indication that not only does Devi use both the singular and plural Œvous (the Œvous of ŒSafiya [ŒVous, debout autour de moi 117:101] is distinctly plural), but that the singular Œvous a different person from Œtu.

However, the beauty of Devi’s choice to give us no explicit hints as to the identities of the Œje and Œtu/vous is that it remains possible to read the text as a chorus of voices addressing a multiplicity of others, rather than one voice addressing one other, or one group of others. Throughout my reading of the text, I saw the Œje as a woman (or a series of women) speaking to different masculine presences at different moments: men in general, her lover, or father, or child. So while it is valid to point to her ancestors as the addressees in this text, I think it may be simplistic to state that every Œtu and Œvous refer to the same person or group of people.

The only method I could see of differentiating between Œtu and Œvous was to make an attempt to bring out the more formal register of Œvous when I felt the Œyou in such cases was singular, and to try to make the plural clear. This was not always possible, and with regret there were times I simply had to leave the translation at Œyou. On page 13, to insist on the informality of Œtu I translated ŒNe t’éligne pas as ŒDon back away instead of the more formal ŒDon.
take your leave or Don't distance yourself. The vous de Qu'il vous semble bon d'ainsi laissez courir dans vos veines et dans votre bas-ventre (117:101) is singular rather than plural as it is in the passage above it (that bas-ventre is singular indicates to me that the vous here is singular), and elevated the English to reflect it: How good it seems to you to, in this way, let run through your veins and into your gut.

These specific examples of my process help to illuminate my more global perspective on translation, but it's worthwhile to clarify these views and a little on my process in general. I believe that each reading of a text is unique to the individual reader based on her own knowledge and experience, and that this uniqueness stems from the author herself, and extends to the translator. I do not believe it is possible to attain a perfect translation of the original, and not least because that original is not the ink upon the page, but inside the author. I will never know what it was to be Ananda Devi in the time she wrote this text, and I will never have her experiences; the ideal text she reaches for is not available to me. The sheer impossibility of ever doing justice to the ideal behind her text, by necessity imperfect, is enough to make my creative faculties grind to a halt. Nonetheless, this line of thinking is insulting to the author of the original, based as it is on the assumption that the author is not able to satisfactorily create her vision. It must be trusted that the ink on the page is a true, close, and worthy translation by the author of the original text.

In other respects, too, I have come to learn that, for me at least, the task of a translator is to trust. We have to trust that by gaining access to the many facets and valences of the original text by close study and knowledge of the source language, we will be doing out utmost to bring that original idea into the target language. And that trust doesn't just extend backward to the author of the original text; more importantly, we have to extend the trust to ourselves and our own abilities as writers. Otherwise, translation is an impracticable act of futility.
This argument seems like an obvious revelation; of course the translator must have confidence in her linguistic and writing abilities. For me, however, at the start of my translating career, such a realization is a necessary one. I’ve had to wrestle with my perfectionism, self-doubt, and fear of being wrong from the first page to the last of The Long Desire. These trepidations often make me hesitant to start or continue a project, but the irony is they will not dissipate unless I practice my art more.

Given that a translation is a piece of creative writing that bears the translator’s uniqueness as much as an original text and deserves to be lauded as such, it is essential that a translator practice her own writing, ideally in all the languages she speaks. This increases the ease with which she moves in those languages, both terms of grammar and syntax, which are obviously important to translation, and to the equally, if not more important aspect, of fluency, the knowledge of idioms and the nuances of common words. There are categories of fluency that go beyond the normal modifiers (fairly fluent, not at all fluent, very fluent, etc), such as fluent enough to know the first meaning of a great many words, but not fluent enough to recognize the secondary and tertiary meanings without a dictionary.

There is a trap to fluency, however, which is complacency and taking for granted that the first, most common interpretation is the correct one. I am compelled, as all translators are, to be thorough when looking up words in dictionaries, and at times the flow of my translation is interrupted until I am satisfied with my interpretation. Though I couldn’t claim to remember all the definitions I’ve read, I do know that being exposed to the multi-valences of everyday words has opened my eyes even more to the complications inherent in translating. Though it slows the translating process down, it’s worthwhile to consider such things as whether propre should be translated as proper or own, or to bear in mind that flame can mean wave, even though it
almost always means "blade." I believe such research contributes to the learning and experience that feeds intuition, for after all, even a misinterpretation is an experience. There is poetry to be found and created in a text, even if that means selecting a word that isn’t the common interpretation in favor of its phonetic qualities. There is, of course, the danger of over-translation and accidental explicitation where none is needed; there is merit in forgoing the more poetic image for a less-wordy sentence, especially when the original may be obscure in meaning or imagery but not in syntax, just as it can be advisable to pass over a more interesting interpretation for the quotidian (i.e., "birthmark" instead of "desires" for "envy" [Devi 12:38]). Mistranslations and over-translation may make for more poetry in the world, but if that poetry obstruct the transparency of the original, it’s not worth it.

Almost without fail, every step I take while translating a first draft goes back to the question of whether it reflects Devi’s intended meaning. By “intended meaning,” not only do I include the more general questions of theme and interpretation, but aspects such as tone, register, and form. I have decided to avoid making changes to Devi’s chosen formatting because in a very real sense, the original text has been entrusted to my hands; charged with this sacred duty, I strive to find solutions in my English for as many of the factors that go into a text as I can. Though such projects can be fun and fulfilling, I do not see my translation is simply an adaptation of an original text, a new text that took as a springboard the original text of another author.

As for the second draft, I try to get a little space from the original to see my translation as its own entity, though the tether to the original remains present. This is also the stage when a question oft-studied in translation theory arises, after I have some ink to work with. My own preference for translating is for what is called "foreignization" of the target text, where an active effort is made to keep traces of the original text and language within the target text. The opposite
is called *domestication* where the effort aims to make it feel as though the text were written
for the target audience, not originally written in another language for another culture.

There are arguments for both approaches. One approach a domesticating translation may
take is to change cultural and geographical references so that the idea and import behind those
references may be more readily understood by a target audience, who would probably need ex-
planation in order to understand what the original audience would know automatically. An ex-
ample would be changing out the topography of Paris or another European city, which was the
setting of the original, to a more American-friendly city such as New York for the translation to
an English-speaking audience. Leaving such references (i.e. the European city) intact can alien-
ate the target reader, preventing them from empathizing with the content and distancin from
the text in a way that was not intended by the original author.

My own opinion is that we should trust the reader – another thing the translator must trust
in – to appreciate unfamiliar ideas and places. If they don’t want to go to the effort to look up
something they don’t recognize, then that’s their choice, and not one the translator, or author in
general, needs to make for them. In a sense, this could be taken as not following the author’s
intentions, for the reader of the original did not generally have any, or as much, research to do in
order to access the original text. But since no translation can ever hope to perfectly replicate its
original, and the degree of accessibility of the original references and diction is, for me, not high
on my list of aspects important to duplicate in the translation. This is not to imply that I take no
account of the register, diction, or style of the original text – I make every effort to adhere to
those closely – but I prefer to amplify the experience of reading a new text by including exposure
to references that may not be entirely familiar to the reader in the target language. An example to
be drawn from *Le long désir* is *le bitume*. As discussed above, *le bitume* serves a symbol of
prostitution, and I chose the literal translation of “bitumēn” rather than to adapt it to a word such as “the street” which is more often associated in American English with prostitution. This was because I prioritize foreignization over domestication; “le bitume” is equivalent to “the street” in that both are equally ambiguous and require context to become clear markers for prostitution, and therefore I chose to retain the sense that the text is not written in an English-language context.

A less obvious way of foreignizing or domesticating a text, and one which bears on *Le long désir*, is to pay attention to syntax and word choice. I see it as domesticating to take pains to ensure that the syntax of my English translation conforms to what is called “normal” usage by English speakers and writers. The question of what is and isn’t normal is exactly the crux of my frustration with this topic. One of the chief critiques I receive on my translation is that my syntax, especially in a first draft, is too French. That is, as with French, my adjectives often follow the noun, my sentences tend to be long and winding, much of my vocabulary is Latinate, and I also adhere to reflexive verbs almost religiously. An arguable shortcoming of the English language is that it does not support nearly as many reflexive verbs as French. The argument against retaining the reflexives, Latinates, and grammatical constructions is that such things are simply built into the language itself, and that the original author was merely writing “normally” and not doing anything particularly different to language, and using it the way they speak in conversation. I know this is mostly true, but then my writing style in general has never been one to reflect contemporary English, and so it suits my style as a translator to open my arms to the foreignization of my English syntax in this arena as well. Though I understand attracting and maintaining an audience is necessary in order to be worth anything in the fiscal sense, I find it hard to agree that as regards the worthwhileness of a text to be read, a writer is nothing without an audience.¹⁷
I have no wish to add to the litany of critical writing that places the discussion of translation wholly into the sphere of questions of ‘perfection’ and ‘impossibility’, but such topics are necessary to broach in this project, for they form the umbrella over every other challenge I’ve faced in translating this text. The translation of a text does not need to be envisioned to be perfect, and nor should it be. The goal of translation should instead be to give the original text new life, to determine what qualities make it most exceptional and bring those forward. I am obligated only to recreate that original text to the best of my abilities as if the idea had come from my own head and soul. The pressure of precision is less, and the only effort is for giving the text another future. In the case of *Le long désir*, I chose to prioritize the poetry of the text, rather than attempt to make clear those passages that are not especially clear in the original or to make the English-speaking reader more at home in *The Long Desire*. The ultimate goal is to forget the impossibility of replicating Devi’s voice in English, and instead aim to harmonize her voice with my own.

I chose to translate *Le long désir* because I’m convinced this is a valuable work. Devi’s gift for language, the timeliness of her writing, and the subject she brings into the light are all elements that contribute to this valor. She is worth reading in every language because she wields this poetry as an instrument to speak for a troubled culture, to bring some light to half-spoken truths about violence and love and the sometimes confluence of the two: desire. She accomplishes this with, of course, an unquantifiable amount of effort and skill, but also with the ease of acquired intuition which has its source in her many experiences.
Owing to its colonial past, Mauritius is home to many languages and communities. A few of the dominant languages are Creole for everyday life, English for administrative matters, and French for cultural life (Stillman 23). It could be said that the Mauritius of Devi’s work is of a "climat étouffant d’une société aux multiples cloisonnements" (Sultan 1).

I have suggested elsewhere that the term postcolonial refers to more than the static periodization the “post” implies and that it is thus more useful to think of postcoloniality in terms of postcontact that is, as a condition that exists within, and thus contests and resists, the colonial moment itself with its ideology of domination (Post-colonial Representations 4)(Lionnet, Écritures féminines 307).

Devi often cites, among others, the great modernist British writers, Virginia Woolf and the US born T. S. Eliot; [she also] embraces [É ] the Indian epic of the Mahabharata (Lionnet, Écritures féminines 246).

Her entanglement in all these traditions becomes obvious once her use of exoticism is understood as a means of creating intertextual echoes that create indeterminacy and duplicity and thus undermine the apparent transparency of the message (Lionnet, Écritures féminines 311).

The Isle de France and Isle Bourbon of the Mascarene archipelago had no native population, but as crucial hubs of the nascent eighteenth-century French empire they helped control the strategic maritime route between Europe and India and became cosmopolitan Creole sites of interaction and early modern globalization. In those sites, the power dynamics of European colonial nations, their traffic in slaves and indentured laborers of diverse backgrounds, the market forces of competitive commerce, and the local hierarchies of race, class, gender, and language generated a dialectic of inclusion and exclusion that was never simply binary. The Dutch, French and British East India Trading Companies had competing interests from the Atlantic to Southern Africa and Asia, and the islands of the Mascarenes remained valuable pawns for both military and commercial purposes throughout the colonial (and neo-colonial) periods (Lionnet, Écritures féminines 308).

One cannot tax Devi for being opaque: her position on gendered inequality, for example, is especially forthright[ and] she is consistent and persistent in her focus on inequalities tied to concrete social issues (Lionnet, Écritures féminines 311).

According to the U.S. Department of State’s 2014 Trafficking in Persons Report, The Government of Mauritius does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking; however, it is making significant efforts to do so (270). This rates Mauritius as Tier 2 for 2014; in 2003, however, it was classified as a Tier 1, in full compliance with minimum standards, despite the concern of rising sex tourism (105). Though in these excerpts of Le long désir Devi does not use the word prostitution or in any other way explicitly reference this problem, her strong stance against the practice is clearly implied throughout the text. I owe thanks to Professor Anny Curtius for bringing this to my attention, especially Devi’s use of bitume (bitumen, which is a variant of asphalt and thus connotes roads and streets) as a symbol of prostitution.

Devi has at times been conflicted about the creative process, or at least about interviewers’ questions regarding her relationship to her material, by 2008 she appears to be moving steadily in a direction that acknowledges the more calculated aspects of her art. She now openly recognizes the tensions between instinct and conviction, inspiration and resolve, and their paradoxical incommensurability as well as inseparability (Lionnet, Écritures féminines 250).
For Ananda Devi, aesthetic performance is paramount and is tied to ethical concerns deployed and articulated in a way that privileges the values of semantic richness, of infinite levels of meaning, of aesthetic resonance, to echo Gallagher, but never at the expense of legibility (Lionnet, Écritures féminines 311).

Devi [claims to pursue] novel writing with conscious, willed artistry, as Lionnet puts it (249), but it is unclear to me how Lionnet fits this claim of deliberation over intuition into the trajectory of Devi’s creative evolution, when according to her such deliberation belongs not to 1999 but should appear much later, after 2008.

I am once again indebted to Professor Anny Curtius for helping me identify those moments when Devi calls upon Creole rather than poetic license.

Indeed, the last piece in the last section of the Le long désir, both titled Matière (Material), is a meditation on the writing process.

My discussion of the process of translating specific lines will be cited as follows, with the first number (XX) relating to the page in Devi’s original text and the second number (YY) referring to the corresponding page in my thesis where the translation can be found: (Devi XX:YY).

Instances where Devi employs an elevated diction, consisting of a precise word that does not fall within the vocabulary of the average speaker, include: complies (25:47), sépales (37:63), and élytras (67:74).

The exception to this is when she transcribes spoken Creole in the section Trois Boutiques, which I have no translated for this project (i.e. Ale ale bann zenfan pa res la [96]).

[Devi] examines her uncertain attachment to forebears who left an ancestral Indian land in search of a better economic future in Mirich Desh (Mauritius) (290). It is necessary to note, however, that Lionnet analyzes at length only the section Absence in this chapter, with barely any reference to the remaining hundred or so pages of Le long désir; therefore, it is possible that she did not intend to apply her assertion that the you refers to Devi’s ancestors to all of the book.

An instance when I decided not to indulge normal English can be found in Safiya. It was thought that arm-pits was too stark and ugly a word in English, and that choosing underarms or changing the syntax to avoid the word altogether was preferable. After all, aisselles (113) is a rather lovely word by itself, where armpit is certainly not. However, the piece on Safiya is not about comfort or prettiness but about a woman being stoned for adultery, and I thought that Devi would not seek to soften the blow of her content by lessening the starkness of her imagery by choosing underarms.
REFERENCES


Ananda Devi

THE LONG DESIRE

translated by
Rachel Wysocki
you
In the clouded moments of the offering in the brined light of secrets

I step out from my strange skin

soft and savage is the molting
Like a beheaded moon, I watch you.

You are an intrusion into the absence of my nights. Come closer. Hold out your yearning. That I may roll along my lips its juices, bitter and putrifiable. Your eyes consider me, struggle toward me, trace downwards with impatience. Afterward: collapse, crack, fracture, contusions, sated hematomas of our bodies, what do I care. I am she who keeps you wheeling.

The promises dissolve. It is the instant of cold bruising. You, you don’t hear it. I am wide-eyed with desires. Do you see something else?

A rain-fringed plume is torn between two pleats of air. I listen to this sound of impossible softness, but I also hear, somewhere, the voice of a woman passing. Is it my voice or the bursting heart of a turtle-dove.

You enter and you drink my humors.

Had I been able to. Curl myself into your hollows. Bend one day back on another like an origami numb from foldings or a palm finding its hand again. Shrug it off and let myself be caressed against the grain of my hunger. And leave forgetting. I could leave. I could forget. I could be. I could pass by. Beyond. Voided. Blurred. Simple.
Don’t back away. Let me surface real from your blood, from your ruin, from your sweat, from your grave. I no longer want to be absent from myself. I want to make a moon of your yearnings. Lie down on me. Lay your head on my chest.

Sleep.
I am inked as I never will be again by the life that drips from your fingers. Color me in your pale gold tones. At the end of my distraction, the line lightly draws me in then tips me over in order to bring me back to the first word—the one written in innocence.

Ink me with your truth.

Later in the black night I try to reread you but I cannot: the blackness dazzles me.
The hour was living velvet

The city had the anxious look of her storms our shadows gummed to the asphalt larger than us and more intimate your thought had fingered my flesh your silence smoothed my clumsy folds

I offered up my hands to the undeniable

I was your split fruit
Clouded mud.

You are a pebble thrown in a dream and lost in my pond of reveries. You disturb the silt drowsing at the bottom, and the blue water lilies suddenly snap their moorings and float, aimless and luckless between two undulations of stupor. In this mud spreads the root-system of my desires. Let your tides swell in the depths of my full waters.

Swirling, storm-astir, watery and waved silk of my flat shores. Seek and find the deafest cadences and throw yourself, o my pebble of shadow and blackness, there where I coil myself, greedy for your poisons.

Drowning at the end of the night when the moon made raw silk of my stomach. Drowning, drowning in the purple liquid of your lips. And drowning still, in the venal offering of our forbidden rocks. Water without assets and unmoored, I surge onto your reflections. I open my waves to you. Trembling pebble slipping in me.

Clouded mud.
Strange moments where life changes us. Marionettes dismembered by nightly splittings, bones scattered by the unfolding, taken by the dread of half-moons

in the palest of our sleep, words perform acts of adoration.

Eroding peel over an inner freshness, thyme and coriander breath fled from greenery, heaving flank of an animal exhausted from running, May’s door left half-open on a lovely breakaway.

Strange moments where life carries us. On her water it would seem that a dream snakes, or is it but the oiled reflection of the moon passing in the midst of silence?

A cloud cracks. Downpour of hailstones as sudden as it is brief.
Forget, forget, forget, the other side of the mirror. Its unsilvered, hidden surface that looks after the memory of your moltings. The lie of your inverted face, left side, right side, nothing of that is you.

When will you stop exhaling your porcelained cry? Face yourself, don’t turn away. Let go of these threads that untruth you. Nude, you are. Your skin is an expanse of expectations. Expectation of fingers that strain their mystery, expectation of lips that will explode with laughter.

The other is a lunar country. Joyous eruptions. The illuminated mystic and stoic take flight. Let them go, don’t give chase. Look at your sky that dreams of you. Look at the brown lava flow of this, your last sun.

And live.
Amongst miracles, there are those that burst forth unforeseen from the moment, whose shuddering resembles a wrinkled surface that smooths itself in one stroke, regaining an air of sleeping youth.

With every minute, its patience

I expect nothing of life but the shock of its moments
The shape of words and their white texture fill my mouth with sonorous rejoicings and my lips end in mouthing them over and again

the phrases pass like ancient clouds from moon to moon and my full hands have the rhythms of muffled prose

but all that isn’t enough to appease this strange hunger of silences to dispel the sounds of forgetting slipping cold from my palm

Until this instant when you brushed with a finger a thought curled up in its selfnest and with your eyes a form half obscured by the passage’s folds

And a breath like a wing, a brooding mist, unfurls itself in the low and red note night in order to touch your cheek

Or was it perhaps my blue hand seeking its star
To tell you of my nights, song of dissonance with the gray slopes of daybreak

of my nights of my hours, dizzying compline or acts of innocence — and my vertebrae travel in cadence —

of my hours of my days, the sun hands down sentence and the gravels explode

of my days of my lives in which I opened the folds of gold to better meet the miracle that sleeps illumined

in the furious silence of the roseapple trees.
Knocked by impatience to the bitumen head on the pavement ready to be flattened by the anvil of a lone truck

A heart-honest violence when the ground hangs over us like oblivion’s cloak and the heat is a scalpel ready to cut into the bloodflowing of our flesh

Loathing look black ocean dropped stitch tinted red in the middle of my head a notch emptier than the light that frisks us

Moment of degradation well beyond all pleasure after which we will recover drugged from the absolute I will pat my tattered skirt my life of holes you will smooth down your pebble-filled hair gaze staggering from too many thirsts
I will drink of your bitterness in the silence of my hands these lips that say nothing that part and close on their thirst explosion spumy and smoldering in the notch and the place of repose we'll know nothing more of these ties that consume themselves mutely and which pull themselves apart between the moment of the encounter and that of the inevitable departure into the dreams of ill-fate

when you will step back from dissatisfaction and my shadowed eyes will believe they've died
And I walked in this hour of drifting, feet soaked by your tides by your lively tears

drop by drop from your silences off the coast of my hollow stone
your lips open in punctuation my eyes closed in full stop
In the scattered eye my footprints fade the sun and the rain lived their last season my lovely island is a phantom — no longer do I live there

Here is my past transformed: my yesterdays are peopled by you man who travels towards others eternal in the laughter of certainty clear enough to break mirrors unknown to all — and there is only myself to know it — my earth my equal my harbor my commensal

I have always lived alone you should not have inhabited my gaze because what I see is your absence and your light entered in me obscured the scraps of others

What you give me is what you took from me: laughter and its twin — sobbing!
It rains on the wind. Leaves fade off. An aged autumn fills up with heavy visions, an adulterated green persists and greys. A bus ripples by. Water, water, water. Faces drawn in the pale condensation. Who are they? Where do they go? Life pours through me as though I’m a waterspout.

I no longer walk so quickly. My feet are soaked. In upended puddles, the world seems husked. I follow myself like a shadow, like a tree. A leaf frees itself. She dances. I catch her midfall and crush her between my palms. Abrupt and sudden cold. She smells like the camphor of my far-off island. But this rain has an odor of verdigris. Not like that of my island, where it smelled simply of copper.

Their gazes are limp, like flattened mud. I no longer know where to find the premeditated idea. When I walk like this, where am I going? Will there ever be a sound to my steps? Waiting for the dive into the upended pool of water or into the exploded pool of blood upon the bitumen, I will forget my death for you who haunt me. For you, I will forget the death who sings to me. Death will forget me, for you who invent me. But after a time she will bring me back like a refrain, like a hymn. Melody a life-sentence handed down on the strength of obvious truths.
Is it truly autumn or just the end of winter? It doesn’t matter, they resemble each other like twins. And me, I finally experienced the other twinning: that of the one who was waiting for me. Feet soaked and worthy

I return home.
Outside, children played. Their shouts were like the cries of birds. Their shadows on the walls had wings. Their sandals snapped against the sidewalk. A tired fountain let fall one last drop. A mud-stained traveler caught it and brought it to his lips. It had a scent of abandon. It had seemed to me to taste his satiety.

The sun at the window was blue. Never had the day been so real. Every moment of every movement contained its origin and its end. At the tip of my fingers, life was. Spangles of light played over my knees. The wait had been gentle.

The earth shuddered from its dreams like a dozing animal. From the volcano arose the question mark of a sigh. Not one threat in the gentle plumes that escaped. Behind our shades. The wait had been fruitless.

Standing, I took up the pose that awaited me. I purred and I sighed, shuddered and trembled. Then, together, we burst forth in lava in mud and in combustion.

And, always, the wait is long.
When the light is intimate with the hills’ curves the sky reddens and falls asleep.
I will never again be slave neither to another nor to myself

I will drink indeed from the source of all within you that is you then I will take my leave like a beast fallen certain that nothing awaits me other than my own face in the blackness

I am woman like all women who one day dared to love a source a light haunts me it is not life but death that I carry in my stomach
Transparent I reflect the color of souls but in my depths hidden I find the blackness again my only color

Born of blackness I will return to blackness when the whirlwind shuts

This sun of an instant animates and makes me smile but it wants only a perse eye for me to rot ask me my color and I will speak to you of blackness

It was only a fragment the hour on my watch had pointed north in reality I lost it a long time ago you possess nothing of me but what you earn my cold duties or my impetuous consents you darker than time you are not the one I waited for

I understood it one morning, looking at the rain on the wind the house had been heavy from emptiness I saw nothing but the gold filtering through from the day this gold herald of migratory imaginings it was the impossible promise the singular rush that seeded me with laughter

I understood it one morning, looking at the rain on the wind.
City or nature dismembered to go off scouting by a stone’s light to stumble over full moon parapets

right at the bottom dogs growl and water bloodies

plaques of torpor pasted on the salted mouth of the night
Noise of paper creased from a smile

tree of striations on the flat of a look

brambles hastily grown like a thick beard

disheveled grudges on the face of the obvious

Black old tune
I had forgotten all even the scent of my own leaves their veins the boughs from which they were caught the form of my limbs and the breakage of my fish bones and the demands of my sky and the fervent cloud of cemeteries and the heart of my heavy storms all of this forgotten forgotten while waiting for me a little forsaken girl with eyes sunk in her own gaze.

Presently I see her, I saw her again and she tempts me. I remember her, not as an innocent, but as a tenebrous tide waiting to break. To this day, that hasn’t come to pass. The bifurcated paths carried me far indeed toward old moons. They are not transformed into suns. These paths of submission and complaisance are in truth the gravest of betrayals.

I want to rejoin my star. I want to make it run with life and leave blood trails on the mirror of feelings because it’s for that that we exist, not for a smile pale as a dawn already dying and barely risen, not for a twilit sigh that torments nothing more somber than the repast of the evening, not for a future of stale bread of reduced dreams of deadened flesh of departed children

a becoming of shadow beset by its own mildews.
And if that looks like bitterness, too bad. Let it be a whiplash across my sleeping heart and let the husk thus cleaved give birth to a forbidden fruit held by a little tragic girl very close to her breast, for she knows, she does, that thus comes the true spoken word,

the only one that matters.
Crime doesn’t pay and yet I would like to kill. In me, something of the spoilt, a. Wound, a flaw, a. Cowardice. Is it me it is not me yet there is definitely an other. Who dreams who. Lives who. Writes who. Is. So what is it this scrap of rags of filth of.

Doormat that fades?

Crime doesn’t cry and yet. Me, yes. I contemplate my denatured body. That is licentious no more. Laughs no. More cries no more from great great joy. In the enthusiasm of discoveries. Passive glance that doesn’t haunt. Anyone anymore.

Crime doesn’t discriminate between. Its victims and yet within me I choose. To strip myself of she who. I no longer love.
She hatched this morning in grass black like a mirror her white shell scattered from all four sides she sleeps again her green skin of such softness it begs to be cut with a knife of a light so tepidly velvet that one melts simply by looking at her.

Her mouth is red ready to suck the golden sepals of a flower that would open its heart to the face blowing away its yellow pollen like a barrel organ its plaintive notes.

She unfurls herself like a shore of mangroves the air creases her fine layer of down with violet accents a twilight inhabits her and soon in her nightgown she will stretch out sticky from oblivion in salt-colored sand and the opaque water will capsize her sweet dead girl sweet sweet dead girl.
Had she come late in the afternoon, I would have welcomed her as a friend.

Had it been in the morning, like a woken sleep, I would have opened my legs to this lover.

Had she at ten o’clock, stumbling over the threshold of the church tower, brushed against me, I would have certainly come unhooked.

Had she, my desires sketched, invited me out onto the bitumen street, I would have drunk with her a small glass of bitterness.

But in the shadow of the unsubdued hour, how could I, how could I?

With the throbbing of an ochre night she came on foliated paws

In a gorgon’s tiger-cry and a madonna smile

A silence of nailed hands and an hourglass fact

She swooped down on my body, my lair, my shore, my death.
What I search for: one rhyme more. But this syllable doesn’t exist. It is the emptiness in the silence, and the death in the absence. It is the impossible compassion and the unresolved equation.
Impossible day
   Uproar of silver
   Anguish white and true
   Engraved in my silence

Even had I waited for time to come
Place on my lips
A kiss from memory

Nighted day
   Scoffed-at Sunday
   Newsprint from my walls
   I count my white hairs
And I remain.
We are no more than this fallen husk of winter and savagery

The present is ready to break our falls but of what had we need we needed our faults because to live is an evasion

My hand smokes reddens frees an odor of carbonized flesh such will be my becoming I wait to get there and will surrender myself head high

I fear nothing I lived I will die and I will live again in the absence of you

Nothing reflects the thoughts that bribe me I drink your dreams and I age I lay myself at the feet of my anguish my eyes turn towards this emptiness more empty than emptiness

I am no longer the one you knew on the pyre sleep the ashes of my laughter the first to die
I mourn all rain.

From the lowest point of the attic to the sun-filled nooks, I mourn the mildews.

I am no more than a larva that seeks its rest, I mourn my thirsts.

I no longer know how to read the violence of the stars, I mourn my gaze.

I lost the rhythm infused with remembrances, I mourn my memory.

I suspend myself, I interrupt myself, I dress myself in black Not in marbles of light rolling on my slopes

In silk gleaming sweetly on my stomach And who follows the rounded shape of my arms then comes untied and skips out

Like me like me a wisp of cloud that loses breath

A root that lost its tree by seeking the last drop of earth
I don’t know from where it came to me this last song this sigh

This appeal to the rain

This black noise

This bird’s feather that comes within a hair’s breadth of an air busy with gray

This emptiness that attracts me irresistible odor of ash

This path of sawdust in which the heart sinks

And cracks

I mourn the excess.
the almost-spoken memory
They spoke at length, but no longer found the words. Their faces disappeared beneath a simple refusal to see. Cries of bitumen had walled up the doors.

Forgetting had prolonged itself well beyond its time. It was the last fold, the almost-spoken memory. Because we needed to shut out the silences born in us at the edge of the tide, our vision too full of a disharmony, everything unburdened itself of life’s overflows, everything divested itself of grace without memory, o gods of orphaned moments, the night was empty and you no longer replied.

I borrowed a path of wings and indolence. My thoughts sank into a nocturnal salt, countries of sand dissolving under my oars. There was no wind. Except the breath of dead seaweed chattering over the sand. There was no mist. Except the blur of a presence long suspected, a small pensive god seated on a rock, awaiting me patiently.

I wanted to avert my lips, I cared nothing for his redemption held out like a lure. But he was singing softly with an unknown laugh. He looked at me from behind not able to call to me, he wove the sand into a soul, he dissipated its brown waters in outbursts of light.
So I headed toward him by heart. The water pitches from stone to stone. A spattering of pebbles hammered his spirit into shape. He turned towards me hands tearful and I saw that he was crying a useless stonedust.

So I left. I couldn’t help him. My time was accounted for. I had had enough of the arithmetic of shadows on blood.
Night falls with its hot-tempered rhythms. The swelled bat wings brew in a sky that no longer knows where it is, where the horizon starts, where the fissures of the earth end. The earth trembles. The thought flounders under the guillotine blade, and it’s thus that one knows nothing has changed, that people die executed by the absence of thought, by the fracture of the straight-ahead. It will require a second eternity to change it all.

The old cough into their slotted spoons, the sea carries along an odor of aged flesh. Coral pales from sadness when one night the moon ceases to liberate its yearning. What is served by expending so much energy to construct the sole beauty? No, beauty will fabricate her winds and her tides without losing time shining for poets.

You have not yet understood the futility of such an act. You who take pen to words, saliva to desire, stomach to coffin, ruin to arrogance, you’ll be the next wreckage. One day someone will no doubt rediscover some ore buried deep down in your uncertainties, some crystal of excess whose facets we will no longer know how to deduce, we will speak of writing with a limp regret like one speaks of a broken object scrapped from memory, or perhaps it will be the enigmatic weariness of the researcher before his hieroglyphs, but that’s all it will be.

You are nothing to the new divinities who hoodwink time and reduce its expiration to useless miracles.
Walk in the midst of your pool lick the savage mist on the window-panes the shadow leaves its sweat there and the insect its elytras your swollen stomach has no price.

Walk in the midst of your stonedust it will glue you to your feet without ever giving way friend enemy it is the dust of you that loses itself in the gathering.

Walk in the midst of your hatred it has rights over you for being born a woman and voided this void that has no sense that continually only empties.

Walk in the midst of your pain as on a jetty pitching in the sea from which the young men flew themselves off they were beautiful and imbecilic you will not be so.
One calls living this unformed thing repeatedly kneaded between the fingers in an attempt to mold the hymn of one’s dreams an absent body a lunacy of emptiness of amputated glass without which one could make an appeal to some talented sculptor or glass-blower and in the end nothing remains but a heaviness of air that doesn’t interfere with a vanilla-perfumed lip or fingers stained with ink, nothing more than a grief calm and without tumult that does evil only when one thinks of it

One calls living this unspeakable thing that takes you by the teeth like scratches of chalk this cloudy watertable that makes you slip as soon as you set foot on it the reflectionless surface has for solidity only its illusions and there it slides away and drowns you it moves its entrails away from the water lilies on its thick muds to let you see its stomach of silk and its stretch marks

One calls living this infirm thing that trails its crutches in all the corners collects all the dust the verdigris and the vomit but nothing will stop the hemorrhage not your attempt to put it on a drip your hopes nor the unique romantic kissing that you keep preciously in your toolbag of yearnings for the one who will not come when it’ll be too late when it is too late to make amends for the indifference your wallet is void of days

One calls living this thing inferior like the sweat of a wayward fly on the leftovers of all that one lived remains but the inessence all the rest effaced between two wasted regrets you slip on the icy surface
and the eternity you have only to do since to you it’s only a given that the thousandths of a second on the clock of infinity less than that one cannot even count you, you’ve left before you even arrived.

You’ve left before you even arrived.
In the gray, threats spread like an oil. Echoes of footsteps on the despairing lanes. Sounds of bells like a certified statement: the island vanishes, dissolves, frays. Its face, transparent with beautiful ripples of mist, fades. I am no longer the same. I have left the present.

*

Here and there at the same time. All there is of the unexplored in the boundlessness of our desires. To follow a course made of impotence and the unhoped-for, to exhaust its soul like a hand too-tensed, become clear-phantom, the transparent flesh of a fantasy. The striations of time on my face resemble the fingers of shadow that delineate the light. A game on a pluvial surface, a crest of bitumen lifted up from heat or from sea delirium — this time that you mistell, thrown backwards, you open it like a book up to its first page, and there, you see it: nothing was written.

*

I open my mouth to the salt of the sea. It enters me by whispered breezes, by mouthfuls of sultriness and I swallow it. I am salt. It devours me. It leaves in my flesh strange lacerations, the way one makes an incision in a tree. The burning is full. I like the odor and the noise and the taste of salt. Its bitter substance, its insolence. Inside me, it leeches then cauterizes the wound.

*
There are the smells of spices that are like a language. By listening to them, one cries from the eyes and the heart ravages itself. But their taste is like a tale: it reawakens the sleeping palaces that had forgotten the sensory feast.

*

Centered on myself again, I see the ruins of yesterday and the tombstones of tomorrow. I draw from hope in the other reality, the one that knows nothing of useless battles. I am passing through and the maritime anguish of living and dying are but passing sadnesses. Floating above, I see myself, marionette, puppet or weathercock, and I play idly with the threads of my lives. Pang of sorrow, incongruous tear, unexpected laugh, all this is quite infinitesimal. Somewhere, a thing larger than myself listens to me and scorns.

*

The encounter and the forgetting are nothing other than acts of faith that become at the close of the day dilapidated walls. Who has never sought to tame the brick by brick of a love reconstructed in the middle of the debris? Encounter and conjugal reconciliation of all pasts to make them into irreversible futures.

Memories gnawed on to the marrow to the last particle to the point of freeing the moldy juices of the emptiness and of the defeat. Memories-ruins. Bark of camphor trees that very gently wither. Many had been killed, in the days they were thought to be living.
The camphor trees. Their green odor licking the fingers gives rise to the desire to pray. Then one faces facts: their existence itself is a prayer. No other is needed.

*

I remember this chapel where the light broken by the stained-glass windows had come to cry on my hands. The eyes of the Virgin were of fragments blue, black, violet. I looked at her face, her mouth veiled with rain and the wet pleats of her dress, the offered curve of her hands. I remember that in this half-night, alone and reflective, tranquil as the rustling stone, I allowed the prayers escaped from the shadows to enter me. They were like a water that silvered the space. All men are beautiful in such moments, when he offers himself to grace.

*

Grace? Have I not touched it, sometimes, since I forgot myself?

*

Tumult. Balanced on our high cordillera, we weave our infinities. From our mouths escape the cries of evasion, but, fallen from childhood, all that remains is the collapse.

*

Rickety daydreams rescued from our mountaintops. To lose the aim of our cadence, to forget our starred eyes, our song of rebirth. You know that all this is true. The adult dons his mask of cynicism, but in the end he confuses it for his face.
* 

The eye of the other makes of sadness a spectacle, and betrays it and the meaning and the content.

* 

He wipes his mouth with his scorn.
   I wipe my own of the back of my tears.
   I am a shadow that lost its body.
   One will seek me long after the night.

* 

The uncertainty of poetry keeps muddying the source.
   The oil flows from between my fingers.
   I dive into it, but I don’t know if I’ll resurface. If I am to be condemned to wander in this material brined and glossy without breathing, without regaining my footing. Distressed, distraught, lost, squashed by the weight of all these words that end always in losing their meaning and their way in the folds of the phrases.

* 

One makes an act of phrases, a pact of words. A dwindling story edges around a final point that uncorks a debauchery of dreams of glory. All this finishes by leading to the halftone music of a single Reader seduced. And this suffices.

   Today, the act of the poem. Poetry tempts me, attracts me like a siren. A woman, to be sure, half-moon with clouding voice. I attract myself, me, toward these acts of burning, this uncertainty that buries tempests, this sorcery of the self that haunts my own desires. The
man gave me their key. But the half-open door delivers me only to myself.

Autobiography of a dream stillborn.

*

You, my magnificent double.

I believed myself narcissistic, but it’s you I had loved in me. You that I glimpsed, in cloudedness and in splendor, this superior light coming not from me but from your violence between two lulls.

You, my magical singleton, my unity, my multiplicity.

*

Wipe not away the good sweat, the kind that springs from your effort from your working hands from your forehead bent over your hours better than the tears the sweat frees without drying out your sorrow better than the blood the sweat talks not of life that flows but that expresses these drops that glisten on your back, they are the juice of your energy and the thick odor of your desires and the secret sound of your laughter.

*

In this station of blazing iron where horses and trains are nonexistent because they pace up and down the silence of the tracks, where the moon’s cheek turns blue from cold because your song is not there, between two noises in season and two pursuits wound together without our being able to slip the Gordian knot of sentences, slip this station where I design my departures knowing that the place where I daydream is one of denial, slip this half-said that will never sound under the architraves I dispense with me like one cuts a vein, red stroke in the blue life.
*  

My island has no meaning but through my dreams. I breathe from afar the smoked odor of the acacias. A large sky without cracks, voices of birds and of trees faint of heart, I carry you and I breathe you in. They make me serene.

Island profound, the only one that matters. On its surface, people move about. They distance themselves from the half-music of the poems hatched between its loins. Their eyes either shy away or they sharpen. They no longer hum. Alone the walker seated between two casks whistles again an air of rain while the verses quit him through the toes.

*

But presently I live in the city of the crippled chair.

The city in its arms carries its child of shadow and glory.

On the plaza of the broken chair, they have been hungry. The banderoles in seven words told their story: sixteenth day of strikes to the death.

Stretched out, pale from infinity, they had waited. They had switched to their half-day, but all around, people had carried on. Cars buses trams pedestrians. Nothing stopped them. The hunger for a cry for freedom haunted them no more. Seventeenth day of strikes. To the death.

The Himalayan peaks are very far away. Your stories don’t concern them. You lived on the roof of the world – what is it you seek here?
In its eyes the city wears its frozen smile. The cold comes. Eighteenth day of death. No one sings. The bells are dead.

*

I would like to tell them, that their memory haunts me. I don’t know where they’ve gone. The number of days, hours, nights. And then forgetting.

*

The weathercock over the house turns not with the wind but with the silence.

*

These words fit together in the flat of a gaze full of wearing out.

   My memories are tied to the time of writing – my only past – I have nothing else – barely lived – without making much of a wake, or a difference.

   What purpose will I have served when all is said and done?

   If nothing remains, no more pages or dried ink, only this line so straight line too linear and too flat, had I not left these scattered things these germs of unhope, these particles fragments of something larger than I knew how to touch.

       Tired of looking and not knowing, of being only me in the blackness, of living like a mote of dust so readily dwarfed, so disturbed by the least noise    Without wings    Without harmony    So spineless toward everything    The air of a false angel

       If only I had followed the way that had been shown me    If I hadn’t taken this too-travelled path
What could I have done otherwise, or more?

Like today,
In a naked silence,
I wonder,
And wind sinks.
wrack
You sleep in the lethargy of your limp eyes. Your world has denatured. The clouds are greasy with rain. The birds load their cries with gunshot. A forest of dead ivy encircles your jaws. You blink like time. You are on the slope of your dreams, towards sunset, westward. You will never escape from your atoms. They eat into the universe with the teeth of madness. They lose their electrons in a Dantean jig. It is hell on the inferior microlevel.

You have tensed hands to hide your palmfolds. Your truce is finite, your expiry nigh. Did you know, in giving yourself this fecal name of modern man, that you had hollowed your own grave?

Under the pylons the wind tears the evening to shreds. An avalanche of sparks floods the sky. Final oath indefatigable relentlessly cried you balance between the two poles without knowing to whom you are linked.

Defend yourself. Place last. Try to be. Live as a half-dream. Break your word in two and make of it two lightning bolts for fashioning eternity.
Kneeling before the vertebral spaces, you will die from habituation.

No, not from a love song and coral, not from thorn-finger skerries muffled by rolling ships, not from the tide rising with the harpoon. It is not of this that I speak.

I speak of the finite.

I dig deeply into this soil of sediment, my words are organic refuse, you cut your fists clenching them, you burn yourself hammering them, we ignite our orgasms with these Bengal lights with this explosion, it’s thus we’ll finish, you green from fear me grey from nausea, no child will ever emerge from between our thighs. It’s thus I see the end.

Shade and midnight. Passages unexplored. Roses split late on in life in the mirror of the asphalt. This featherstep that dances between rays, it’ll lose itself sooner or later when by the beam of the light-houses it understands its desolation. Dance on your rays while there is yet time. Gather the pleats of your melody, it won’t resonate for much longer. Unless you engrave it on the naked mountainside or cement it on your tomb, but which epitaph will you choose? The truth or the lie?

Choose well these words that will speak to you in past tense. Monument or anvil or buried stele. Choose them well. Nothing will be able to erase them. They will deify or defy you and you will have nothing more to lament. Of you, nothing will remain. Nowhere and nothing. You erase yourself. Annihilation. Lunar pauper without shame and without destination.

Were there not a starbird to fly you away.
From the start, she takes you by the throat by the maw only handing over enough time for a gulp of the obscure before the ventral replunge into your eddies’ depths.

Happy are you who are taken, that you never mislay your laughing mouth your suffering eyes your exhaling nostrils so that you may better consign yourselves to ash.

You who harness your clouds
Ceaselessly miraculous
Off on your hunt for glory

Hand outstretched as a token of good faith I need only to write, throat fully extended, of my lianas of my echoes of my furrows dense and ploughed Dumbfounded ceaselessly indulge your intimate others Breathed in by this maelstrom I absorb and I become never had tipping aureole danced so infinitely

When comes the moment of passage, cleaved water between two cliffs, eyes lost in the subterranean malfeasance of not knowing what to say, this moment now one will ruin it perhaps on our voyage against the current of each other. The slope of our glaze leads us, and the darkening vault. Hold out your hand to me say nothing

Eat the fruits of nothing
Fruits of virtue
Fruits unnumbered that shake off the swell
Fallen naked between your hands
They have the taste of roots and colors.
IV

Rancid shade prison divined body resignation you construct your passersby in the middle of the story they come to life for the truth and dream you for an evening then their bite takes back its slow voyage at the pleasure of your skin

Thus one returns from death, at once new and quite ancient, relieved of its fears and terrified of failing so close to the goal. Miracle of plucked branches, winter. They speak of forgetting and of reason, these sage men of such great knowledge. A cloud like a breath

Passes

I will forget for you the vain search the lugubrious accents of reason

Sinner in my nocturnal sheets

When my body rejects its wrecks

V

And there she is at the end of the road
Old-woman-death
She walks straight without stumbling
She doesn’t look to the side she knows where she goes
She arranges her steps without shadow without desire
The sun doesn’t attach itself to her breasts
Nor the butterfly to her lips
Her pallor fretted the gravel
My fingers stammered on the keyboard
I believe that she comes for me
When the last word will be placed
And the slate will be blanked.
VI

I am of those women who cruise the winds and navigate without compass. Each cardinal vision carries its aureole and dirties time. She moors and rigs. There’s nothing more than the salt of our silences.

This space has no cross with open flanks. The sail lowered from choppy days, she remembers these filings and the storm on her bed in open cry. This winter had been harsh. And harsher still, much more cruel, the weather the evidence. No one can love you better than yourself.

Know how to rid the Cross from your forehead. Purity that’s different, because without waiting. Horse of shade that mists from the flank, gallop of the unfinished.

Listen.

Where does she come from?

These lips too hot these eyes too white that hollow out the light and uproot her. Aspirated by the spear with assassin tips, you that one burdens with the stumps of your dementia, you lie frosted and dream of indecency.

VII

Turn your words around
Draw yourself
Enter
Carry your voice
Enchained
Like a nail.
Even had we talked, all this leads to nothing but the lack of reason of one instant of breakage without common measure with anything at all and then we each shoulder our cloaks of offhandedness and return home and once there we take our shoes off. Thus begins the orison.

Give me back the horizons you stole from me my quills without them I cannot steal away look at my naked bones my back without pride by dint of hearing them cry these children from nowhere and elsewhere. You box my ears again with the names of your gods. It’s a scream to die that way.

Water rolls its infinite ripplings the oar fits heavy from meaning into the seconds of absence I do not know where I am my reflection leads nowhere Upside down from the truths each man is his own tomb

What does it matter if this has an odor of wrack and leeches of lives latent in roots confounded folds of muddy birth ignorance of the sands that pounce on the rocks eager bite
What does it matter if love lasts only one night And one day Not one minute longer Afterwards that comes from habit To live for one second or one hundred thousand The stake is worth the effort The sea contains enough of eternity So that one is mistaken in believing it

Reclose these senses one instant geared down we have played well Stay now to put time back together like a cord to fold life like a pocket handkerchief and take off whistling to catch the eels behind the rocks

I might say — and I’m not lying — That I have known happiness.

XI

Poet
One has
No other choice
But to be secret
If not how would One hear
Singing
The night?
I believe, that’s enough for me, said I like a person drowning.

The first gulp of air: after having so much suffocated so much sought at the depths of lungs the ultimate molecule that would permit me to live and not abandoning never abandoning why abandon the brain is there in order to not despair, I will believe in the last virtues I no longer have anything to lose to live without jettisoning ballast it’s impossible walled-in crescent in zenith that scatters its light she erodes against the windowpane leaves the obscure ardors that take root — oh how much — take root in my stomach there they are that push that push that push microscopic oars fractal excrescences that hollow out the nerves in order to lay eggs there and there they are that push that push that push and from there he’s born of fruits of the impossible

God, where will all this bring us?

He tosses the flowers of lightning and delirium
They scale the silence
Float at midnight on half-thought water
All transparence
I swim in search of the flowers of the abyss
When my skin will cross their mind, pierced with their rage
I will sink from delicacies
In his coral arms
No more will I be fished out
Do you know how long a star lasts? No longer than your gaze So work, pass, stop losing and finding yourself Life muddled with dreams Slate fibers chalk fingers listen to the infinite crying like a lost child
Her voice in the black shatters you
Breaks you
It’s for you that life goes
Goes without end pilgrim
Rambling in its conversation
Its seashells
Its baskets
Its gravel
In this village they laugh beautifully
From all this sun
And your feet blister
On the shining gravel
Your jaw crackles from your songs
Your skull balds slowly

Finally a hand outstretches
To your highest sadness
To the cry that you rebuke
To the cut of your ripples
To the litanies for lianas
To the gap on your forehead
That one thrust a finger through
To all the rotting
Of your soul too damned
To all the nourishments
Of your petrified lips

The hand reaches out to you
But you no longer have hands
To take ahold of it
Safiya: I’m in pain, suddenly, thinking of her face. You know, that woman who knows she’s going to die has aged twenty years in twenty days. By the white blade of nights, wrinkles have dug hollows in her cheeks. She resembles a mummy who has been peeled of its cloth strips. In her expression, centuries of silence. Settled underneath is a kind of yellow wax, resin or amber, that lignified the body in its solemn posture, giving the skin an appearance of leather, written from miniscule letters onto the parchment of its lives.

No, I digress. The woman. Look at her. Her face so often seen on TV. Her little baby who seems to us, to us so far away, already an orphan. As if hanging from a dead tree.

I want to get into your head right now, Safiya, to share a moment of your resigned stupor, your flat heart, your weariness with the insolence of life. Of course, it’s presumptuous and indecent of me. I am not in your place, and here, well sheltered behind my walls, I have nothing to fear from men. Impossible, to put myself in your place. I would cry, I would struggle. Or, I would let myself die at once. That has to seem terribly infantile to you. You have no opinion of me, I am the least of your concerns. But if I’m trying so hard to imagine you, it’s because I want to read you from the inside, to know what happens behind your unmoving face.

The ultimate confinement: the impossibility of autonomous thought. Here. This is my child. Take him. It appears that I have no right to. Here. This is me. Take me. It appears that don’t have the right. I will do nothing, say nothing when you take me by the armpits. Your hands sticky and stinking, me dry. The world debates, but
not me. Over there, they can cry, fight. Not me. A single slap in the face would be enough to shatter my mouth.

Dawn. The already-dug hole waits for me. A smell of fresh moved mud, outside. A tree at the door speaks to me of patience.

Come, it’s time. At the time it is I’m numb up to the brain.

Always by the armpits, lifted like a limpid butterfly. My feet barely hold me up. Ah, how strong they are, the men! How strong. At the touch of their hands, I feel no emotion. They smell strongly. Or maybe it’s me. I don’t look at them. I look at the ground. I look at my last steps on earth, and it’s a relief.

Arriving in front, they leave me facing the half-light where I will descend. Do they hate me? I don’t think so. I am no longer anything at all. Lamed animals are put to death.

Pushed and slid, I am at the bottom. Easy for them, I don’t struggle don’t cry out. They take this for contrition. It is, simply, the fatigue of despair.

I lift my eyes for a moment. People are there, peaceful, waiting. No pity? No, no pity. That time is past. They are like a flock of birds that take off, at the first gunshot, in a whirlwind of wings, feathers, claws, talons, with the cries of nervous old girls.

It does them good to have a bit of excitement, from time to time.

I will close my eyes when comes

the limp shock of the first stone.

I don’t know how long I’ll take to die.
A dream of sand fills my mouth and cracks under my tooth
It has a strange taste, the sand
A taste of wind stuffed with speech
Mutter my history to me, sand,
Crystallize me with your words
Dig your craters into my tongue
I want to hear you

Head thus rammed into the sand, I believed I understood.
I hadn’t known the body elicited this much hate.
When my dress took its leave, they no longer saw my eyes.
Stranger, read my back on which my story is engraved.

This will soothe me.
The child will be alone. If he grows up other, I will leave him my hands. I am only the mother. Him, he’s the future. But I read in his eyes the impliability of metal. The future is a man born of me, and one who will read my wounds.

The human, a species of assassin.
You, standing all around me. My torso and my head twisted from
sludge and blood. Eye split, mouth askance. Nothing will stop you.
My putting-to-death will last however long it must. It’s also yours.
What god will you come face to face with, when the time comes? I
would like very much to know.

How good it seems to you to, in this way, let run through your veins
and into your gut the shuddering wet heat of the pain of others!
Laughter breaks through the ends of your curled lips. Your saliva is
acid. Your stones heavier and heavier.

Religions exempt you from listening to god.
Material

Writing to plunge into the material russet and raw with hot-tempered splashings. Words, phrases, silences, themselves the center of the wound. Strip the words like electric wires, turn them live. Do not fear their sharp edges. Because the ridge of writing simultaneously severs and solders, burns and cauterizes.

Distending thought and its elastic shadow. In the flux, in the tide that swells and deepens the sense of things, it’s sometimes necessary to let thought erase itself like foam on waves, and take hold of the dilated shadow that it briefly overhung. It’s this shadow that contains the substance. That performs the act of prohibition, that goes searching for the mad seasons, the microscopic instants of excess. Allow thought to leave codified, stiffened by centuries of rust. Find the pure source that says what one truly wants to say, without wringing it out or subjugating it to the imperious tyranny of mimicry.

Rummaging by the handful for want of a mouth through the exuded fluids. Nudge life under the pumice stone. In the minuscule blades of the minuscule mosses hooking their minuscule fangs to the bellies of stones are built the majuscule existences. Uppercased by their very brevity, they put all their strength into taking each second for granted.
After a while, the equation between energy thus drawn and the exhaustion of its absorption is broken. So resumes the search that is its own goal and its own torment. Its own end, in both senses.

What things revealed by walking on the wrong side of stones! Batter ing interrupted, death subtle but untrue, as in games, because some threads retie us to our impalpable identity.

I speak of a stroll, the walk of thought as it looks across a frosted glass. I mean to say, into the ordinary of things that, paradoxically, contains the most extraordinary things.

Writing is a place. Once the door has been opened, one unceasingly returns to it. The rest is utterly unimportant.

Writing is work that runs upstream of one’s self, of one’s own weaknesses, of one’s proper sloth. To write is to contradict that which, in one’s self, strives for the half-measure.

I cannot describe the cramped without the paradoxical vision of the immense. My two poles: the narrowness of the immediate space (a lime kiln, a cage, a minuscule hamlet, a hole), and the amplitude of the sought-after vision. I depart from the narrow to reach the broad. The oceanic breadth that is the dream of every islander, and the breadth of immortality that overhangs our pathetic span of existence. Touch on the stitches of infinity tautened around us instead of always contemplating the narrowness of the finite, or the stop near the end of the journey, the corruption foretold from the cradle, at the moment of the countdown’s triggering.

From birth, we are on borrowed time.
Doubt.
Always.
I have no more antecedents. No more past. This child, this sensitive adolescent, practically mute, always somber, and for whom all of life passed by on pages blackened by him each day, no longer exists, not a trace. It’s me and this is not. I don’t know who I am, but I know she existed, that she perhaps chose to disappear. I hope this isn’t from the feeling I betrayed her. She was proud.
The novel, always, is an adventure.

Premeditation, quite happily, is not sheltered from shock and the gratifying excitation of discovery.

Nor does it entirely dissipate the fog that surrounds the novelist who advances blindly, without a detailed plan or preparatory knowledge of the story besides the broad strokes and maybe the ending. And, thus, it takes nothing at all away from deeply felt happiness, like no other, when with adventure the fog dissipates and the landscape, until now subterranean, stands out and emerges, clear, in the nude light of dawn.

Landscapes formed if only by the association of sonorities, that beget their own music in turn. With every step forward, the landscape changes. The footpath — sandy, muddy, dusty — alters, depending on whether one heads for the sea or for the bluer-green hinterlands. At times one voluntarily follows vertigo’s paths, bristly with pitons and winds. Misleading journey. The image is first a welcoming blue, which turns to gray the moment one least expects it. Very quickly, topples over into black. One grows used to it. Step by step of the poem. At times slow, because such a great void awaits us at the end of the line, at times rapid because the soil shies away and because one must follow the downward slopes.

No one knows where words come from. It is the greatest of mysteries. Light, entered into the mind by the keyhole of memory, and
clarifying only some fragments apparently without connection. When one reassembles them, an image is born.

It's thus I saw, one evening, a dance of the medusas, and another day, a decapitated moon. Plunge like an oar into the silence, stir up its depths, trouble what remains of its mud. Material warm and mystical, bitter and spumy. On a London bus, the words espousing the form of the poem succeeded in erasing the hazy presence of the people and places. When I looked at my hands, they were pruned from having plunged into such secret dampenings.

Words, in every sense. Their ingress achieved by breaking and entering, no one knows how, so as to turn us into idiots, to incite us, disturb us, dissolve us. In the nostrils, they open spice-paths and nocturnal and olfactory vertigos. In the mouth they burst like the belly laugh of balsam seeds that as children we crunched for their bitter fragrance or like the juice of nasturtiums that we inhaled like insects, with tiny lips pointed and greedy. Words open a shadow road in the path of sensations, run a hand counter to our desires, scatter a slack silk that nothing separates from our skin, intimate lining. In our eyes, a ribbon from infinity to fertile hybridities unceasingly uncoiled from our imagination, and in our ears...

Ah, in our ears words are a breath of liberty and a complicit melody, alternation of the bright and the intimate, temptation to we alone murmured and by we alone known — the form of our verity and our veritable flesh.

Words, sole earth in the silence of the written. Ample, snatched up, immensely magnetized. No solitude can be more precious than that where, free from being and creating, we model visions behind our
closed eyes. Dialogue from self to self that opens, one day, onto the Other. There the bedazzlement, foreshadower and founder of thought, unexpectedly crops up — sole veritable angel with a mouth full of gifts. The miracle of words is that, in their refracted foldings, all is beautiful: the somber and the sordid. They act in one still unknown place, well above simple intellect but further inside than emotions, there where the ventral passions have wings and horror has an air of grace. Transmutation of flesh and materials in thick-set streaks of verbal gouaches.

The wounds coagulate in flat, colored tints. The only thing that matters is to know how to speak them. It’s the balm and the repose, the smooth salve that in one stroke freshens the cut, without reclosing it all the way.

Quietening is a question of time.

Often, this intimate vacillation. Attempt at order, at opposition, at discrimination: words, laid out after ripe reflection, are prose. Words assembled without premeditation are poetry. But doesn’t it have to do with the difference between pre- and meditation? Is there not, in the most rigorous moments of prose, a wave of poetic shock? And the text that wants to be poetic, doesn’t it sometimes subject itself to the subtle inflection that causes intentions to reflect themselves in the mirror of reason?

But no doubt poetry is an interior void, that only the shadow caught in mid-air can fill. One passes the most often to the side, with the heaviness and useless noise of a moving train — I know it, having so many times reread passages that stamped their feet, wishing them onto the tips of their wings.

But when with adventure one harnesses this void, and when one stops it, and when one listens to it without daring to breathe for fear
of diluting it with thicker breaths, well, the vacillation stops. The most impalpable of emotions — trembling more than battering, depth more than swells — opens a gap in the space, and, inside, for a few too-brief instants, the images interlace like clasped hands, of which one would belong to us, and the other...

But one doesn’t know where the other hand comes from.

A miracle, to know that.

Gratitude, as for a salt breeze whose origins are known, even when the sea can’t be seen.

And dismay, in the face of such undeserved plenty.