

## SOURCE ata American Translators Association



## A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF ATA'S LITERARY DIVISION NO. 71 SPRING 2017

## THE FRENCH CONNECTION



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## FROM THE EDITORS



Michele Aynesworth Editor-in-Chief



Tony Beckwith Associate Editor



Patrick Saari Chief Copyeditor

In the wake of troubling events in France in 2015 and 2016, *Source* pays tribute to France, the French people, and the rich tradition of French literature.

This issue's *pièce de résistance* is the interview with our Editor-in-Chief Michele Aynesworth, who will soon be celebrating her tenth year at the head of our quarterly literary journal and who in 2016 published her latest translation, the World War II diary of the French economist and banker, Charles Rist (1874-1955). Michele provides us with an overview of her career and talks about her many connections to France, the French language, music, Argentina, poetry, travel, and translation.

Nanette McGuinness, translator of graphic novels for children and young adults, takes us on a tour of the wide variety of recent and highly popular French comic books made available in English thanks to translation and publication by two relatively new publishing houses, First Second Books and Papercutz.

Inspired by the successful 2015 UN Climate Change Conference in Paris, Patrick Saari writes about two key books in the social sciences in the second half of the twentieth century, *Tristes tropiques* and *La Pensée sauvage*, by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009). The essay focuses on the French ethnologist's careful use of the French language and how philosophical speculation, art, music, poetry, and literature are as much part of science as statistics, field work, and laboratories.

Regular columnist Tony Beckwith takes us on a walking tour through the heart of Paris, providing historical background to monuments and boulevards and musing on the etymology behind two signature French items, *le bérêt* and *la baguette*.

Finally, Donald Aynesworth pays tribute to Victor Hugo and his classic tale of *Les Misérables*, in which Paris and its feisty, courageous people take center stage.

#### *Next issue:*

We look forward to contributions on Arabic literature and language for our upcoming Summer issue. (See page 5.)

#### ABOUT THE EDITORS

**Michele Aynesworth** specializes in translating Argentine and French authors.

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**Tony Beckwith**, a native of South America's Southern Cone, resides in Austin, where he works as a writer, translator, poet, and cartoonist. E-mail: <a href="mailto:tony@tonybeckwith.com">tony@tonybeckwith.com</a>.

**Patrick Saari,** born in Pasadena, California, now living in Quito, Ecuador, writes, translates, and interprets in English, French, and Spanish. Email: <a href="mailto:patricksaari@netlife.ec">patricksaari@netlife.ec</a>.

Special thanks to **Jamie Padula** for proofreading and especially to Literary Division Administrators **Jesse Tomlinson** and **Paula Arturo** for their support.

### SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

## Topics for the Summer and Fall 2017 issues:

We are now soliciting contributions relating to literary translation from or into **Arabic** for our Summer issue and from or into **Portuguese** for the Fall issue.

Contributors are asked to follow the format guidelines below.

As the journal of the ATA's Literary Division, Source is both a forum for the discussion of literary translation and a vehicle for LD members and guest contributors to publish their work. Novice translators, as well as those with more experience, are encouraged to submit translations of poetry and prose together with their meditations on the process. We are also constantly on the lookout for submissions from Asia, Africa, and all other less frequently represented cultures.

FORMAT: Submit articles up to 1600 words, Word or text file, single-spaced. Palatino Linotype size 14 with indented paragraphs (1 tab), no line breaks between paragraphs and no word breaks. Unjustified righthand margin. Endnotes please, not footnotes.

Please include a brief, factual bio and photograph. Links and illustrations, etc., are encouraged. Submissions may be edited.

Submissions go to <u>michele@mckayaynesworth.com</u> Submission deadlines: June 15 for Summer, September 15 for Fall.

Source is published by ATA's Literary Division.
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## LETTER FROM THE LD ADMINISTRATOR

Thank you for reading *Source*!
Our efforts are continuing on the division's blogging project. We need a couple more submissions to help us fill out the article ranks. There are so many experienced translators in this division, people with expertise, information and opinions on literary translation that we would love to hear from. Would you consider submitting an article? Paula's explanation and guidelines for articles follow:

The idea behind the blog is to have an online conversation about literary translation by publishing at least one no-fluff, content-rich post every other month (six posts per year), creating an online place where we can discuss the ins and outs of the literary world as well as translation as an intellectual product, not just as a business. The fact that translation is a moneymaking activity should not be confused with the fantasy that translation is all about making money.

While publications like *Source* go a long way toward accomplishing this, it is my belief that a complementary blog can make a significant contribution as well and help support the invaluable work conducted by our editors,



Jesse Tomlinson is an interpreter, translator, editor, and voice talent. Originally hailing from Canada, she now lives in Mexico and translates from Spanish into English and interprets in both languages. Her special interest lies in Mexican culture, the tequila industry, and literature. Her translation The Consummate Art Dreaming, the Art of Rocío Caballero, published Black Coffee Gallery, was released in November at the Guadalajara International Book Fair.

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Assistant Administrator: Paula Arturo, paula@translatinglawyers.com

Michele Aynesworth, Tony Beckwith, and Patrick Saari. Contributing to the blog will also give even more visibility to the authors who generously share their ideas with us and challenge us to think about literary translation from unique perspectives.

- Audience: Our target audience consists of experienced literary and/ or book translators, authors, and other members of the publishing world. Our blog is open to all subjects that could potentially be of interest to them.
- Length and organization: 1500-3000 words. Although blog posts tend to be shorter, complex ideas sometimes require several pages. Content-rich posts that exceed that length may be published in parts.
- Bio: Please include a brief bio with your posts (no more than 120 words). Links to websites and personal blogs can also be included.
- **Content:** The content of each post is up to the author; however, listicles, how-to or self-promotional posts will not be published.
- **Disclaimer:** The blog team reserves the right to select, at its sole discretion, which posts to publish.
- **Editing:** The blog team will revise each post and provide suggested changes where applicable.

Please make sure your posts conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*. The blog team may also adjust the format of a post for technical reasons. Before publication, authors will receive a revised, marked-up version with the blog team's edits and will have the option of accepting or rejecting changes. For more information or for submitting a post, please feel free to email Paula directly: <a href="mailto:paula@translatinglawyers.com">paula@translatinglawyers.com</a>.

As always, the Literary Division welcomes your ideas and suggestions. Please get in touch with me if you'd like to be more involved. We welcome new ideas and suggestions for the newsletter, blog, and upcoming activities of interest.

Literally, Jesse

## AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHELE AYNESWORTH, Source Editor and Translator of Une Saison gâtée

## BY PATRICK SAARI



Michele with Dan at the SF Giants' Scottsdale Stadium for Spring Training, 2015

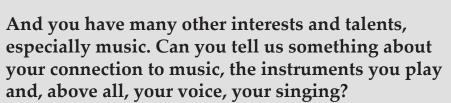
Michele Aynesworth has worn many hats, as student, scholar, mother, teacher, translator, writer, and singer.

A s part of our spotlight on French literature, Patrick Saari has interviewed Michele Aynesworth, whose translation from the French of *Season of Infamy*, the World War II diary of economist and banker Charles Rist (1874-1955), was published last year. Since 2008, Michele has also been Editor-in-Chief of *Source*, and the interview gives us the chance to learn more about Michele, her background, experiences as a translator, and many other interests.

How and when did you first get interested in literature and languages? First I want to thank you for this opportunity to reflect on where I've been and how I got where I am today.

To answer your first question, it all began with five years of French studies taught by excellent secondary school teachers, giving me a head start in French when I got to college. Then in my undergraduate days at

the University of Texas (UT), I was again blessed with great courses focused on world literature in the Plan II program. My favorite professor was Joseph Malof, who led our freshman class through "ports of entry" into the highs of poetry and the deeps of Dante. As for Spanish, twenty years in Argentina grounded me in the language and culture so that, when it came time to write a dissertation for my doctorate in comparative literature, I chose to translate a novel by Argentine writer Roberto Arlt (1900-1942)—along with a thorough introductory essay based on research. The reward was publication of *Mad Toy*, my translation of Arlt's first novel (*El juguete rabioso*, 1926), by Duke University Press in 2002.



I'm sure my love of singing has contributed to my love of Romance languages (which are famously singable), my desire to translate, and my sense of musicality and rhythm when translating. In fact, Paul LaFleur, my middle-school French teacher, taught us French through songs, and my own French student and now fellow translator/interpreter Steve Mines recently told me he had learned French pronunciation "from the French songs we sang in your classes."

Music has always been central to me. I thank my mother for that. She had an amazing contralto voice, unlike any I've ever heard, and she was always singing as she cooked, washed dishes, made the beds. A great memory: when young Elvis Presley put out a two-sided recording of "Heartbreak Hotel" and "The Great Pretender," Rowena wore the record out and sang the songs over and over again—and she did a mean



version of "Saint Louis Woman" as well. The other side of Rowena: she and my father had a collection of 33 rpm recordings of opera singers, including Caruso and Lily Pons. When I was in high school, she and I would sing duets from the *Neapolitan Songbook* of operatic arias. We also sang other duets together—Simon and Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Waters," calypso songs, folk songs, and so on.



An old clipping of a young folksinger

I had piano and voice lessons in classical music, but along the way became a folk singer, learning to play the guitar with friends and listening to the great Joan Baez and Bob Dylan. When I moved to Buenos Aires in 1974, I discovered that there was a similar movement of folk singers/protesters there, only their music was very different, associated primarily with rural gaucho culture. I came to love the zamba especially and can recommend a great recording available on YouTube of Mercedes Sosa singing "Alfonsina y el mar" (Alfonsina and the Sea, <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=607vewJGMYk">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=607vewJGMYk</a>).

After I returned to Texas in 1997, I switched gears and began singing with the community

choruses in Austin—music by Bach, Handel, Beethoven, etc. It's only recently that I've returned to solo singing with my guitar, spurred on by our local translators/interpreters association to talk about and perform my translations of Argentine zambas. I'm now learning "City of Stars" from *La La Land*, a perfect theme song for a movie whose star couple are never sure whether they're in mournful minor or blissful major key.

You've published poetry as well, notably *Blue on Rye* (2008). I remember the poem about "The Women" and its three ladies, Ellen, Mama G, and Rowena, so brightly and concisely captured in just a few lines.

I just reread the poem after many years, and it brought a tear to my eye, as the portraits brought these women—my mother and two grandmothers—back to life for me. For instance, my mother:



Rowena, gypsy mother, who taught me to see, she of eerie sight and fearful artistry.

Through evening mist, bringing visions, her letters would dart swift and lemonade.



Rowena and Jack Gracey, wartime wedding photo

She was indeed an unusual woman. Here's a link to the whole poem: <a href="https://micheleaynesworth.wordpress.com/poetry/">https://micheleaynesworth.wordpress.com/poetry/</a>

I know you lived in Argentina for many years but you also went to France as a student. Can you tell us about your experiences abroad? How would you compare your first stay in France with your time there researching Charles Rist's diary?

I studied at the Sorbonne in 1971-72, then returned to France in 2010 to do research for the diary, thanks to a grant from the Kittredge Foundation. Quite a contrast, me then and now, and France then and now. Then: We lived near the Paris Flea Market (*le marché aux puces*), and I stood out like a sore thumb, wearing my red polyester pantsuit to class and speaking, shall we say, unpolished French. I left with thigh-high white boots with blue embroidery up the sides and a lime-green miniskirt, which made such a hit on a street corner in Buenos Aires in 1975 that I never wore them again. Go figure! In any case, Parisians were quite cool toward me and my then spouse in the seventies. But skip to 2010, another scene entirely. My husband Dan and I lived in the heart of Paris, and people couldn't have been kinder to us. So, sure, it was partly because of who we were, that is, older folks, but also partly because of a real difference, I felt, in the attitude toward Americans. And then, too, the Rist family had embraced us, making us feel welcome.

## Did you have an early interest in translation or was it something that came later in life?

My interest in translation gradually evolved from a couple of graduate courses in translating from French; the translation of Arlt's novel for my dissertation, mentored by Naomi Lindstrom; back in Austin, my involvement with the Austin Area Translators and Interpreters Association (AATIA) and its Literary Special Interest Group (LitSIG); Argentine short-story writer Fernando Sorrentino's reaching out to me after the Arlt publication, leading to a long collaboration; superb mentoring, primarily by LitSIG's Marian Schwartz and Borges translator Norman di Giovanni; my experiences editing for the American Translators Association's Literary Division; and, finally, my decision to quit full-time teaching in 2008 and seek a grant so I could do more literary translating, the spur that led me to Charles Rist.

You've been Editor-in-Chief of ATA's Source for almost ten years now. But before that, you had already been guest editor for one of ATA's annual anthologies of literary translation, Beacons. All of us working for and contributing to Source would very much like to

Beacons X

शक्र्या-दंगानः योखें शुद्धः योलयः लीयो।

र्देदश्रसक्षेत्रदः दुःचत्रवार्थेद॥

स्टब्रुंग्रथम्टियम्य। अर्वेदरक्षे अर्वेक्षेय्द्रमा

दुस्क्रयधिन्य-प्रेन्य। इस्वयोविर्मामहरूमी।

क्ट. उट्टेश.चेशश.तपु.जीश.स्

स.ब्र्र.क्ट.त्र्यायदीर.वेट्री

चैत्रकाराःसैचार्ट्रः संज्ञुद्धाः श्रीजाचीर्थरःस्त्रीःकुर्यःचा

hear your thoughts about these many years working as an editor.

I had no idea it's been almost ten years, as I've had so much fun doing this work. I love collaborating with people, and that's really how I see editing—working with people on a project. Editing that issue of *Beacons* was a marvelous experience that produced a terrific anthology. Unfortunately, it was the last issue, as no more funding was available.

As for *Source*, my first thought as the new editor was to bring Tony Beckwith on board as a regular contributor, and I feel his toons and essays have been our signature. Your own essays have also come to give a special flavor to our publication, and the contributions from our successive Literary Division chairs have also been important. I've worked under Enrica Ardemagni, Emilia Balke, Mercedes Guhl, and now Jesse Tomlinson, and I can't say enough about

the support we've had and the improvements that have been made. Most important for me has been the addition of co-editors. You Patrick, along with Tony Beckwith and Traci Andrighetti, agreed to work with me as co-editors for our Winter 2011-2012 issue, and that has really been huge for the quality and consistency of our publication.

Traci edited our "News and Views" section for a couple of years, followed by Julie Winter, who did that the next year. We didn't manage to recruit another person to replace Julie, but the door is open for anyone interested!

When you started working on Charles Rist's diary, you had already translated, from French into English, another book on a troubled moment in history, *Deir-Zor: On the Trail of the Armenian Genocide of 1915*, also very topical now as Turkey, on the hundredth anniversary of this holocaust (2015), refused to officially recognize it. Can you tell us about this book and your experience of translating it?

Working with Bardig Kouyoumdjian on the book was quite moving. Bardig photographed survivors of the genocide, enlisted Christine Siméone to write the text, hired me to translate the French, then found support to have the book printed in Canada in 2010. Bardig's passion for the project and his amazing

photographs were truly inspiring.



As for A Season of Infamy (Une Saison gâtée), it was a long-term project on a rather lengthy book. How did you get involved in this project? Hoping for a grant to justify doing more literary translation, my antenna were out when I heard my husband Dan talking about Rist's World War II diary to a friend. Dan had used parts of the book in teaching a class on French civilization at the University of Texas. The book clearly cried out for translation and publication in English, and I was fortunate that the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) awarded me a translation grant for the purpose. In the end, I spent about eight years on the project, including three months in Paris going through Rist's papers at the Banque de France and interviewing members of his family, including

some of his grandchildren who had been adolescents during the war. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The project's human impact soon outweighed the significance of the grant awarded to me by the NEA: I lived through the war with Charles Rist and developed a warm relationship with his descendants. To give you an idea of this human

connection: the very first day that Dan and I spent with grandson André Rist and his wife Michelle, we had a concert of Scottish songs that we'd planned by email. André played the violin, his daughter Marianne played the cello, a friend played the piano, and I sang.

This was only the beginning. Dan and I were invited on numerous occasions to have dinner with Rist family members: one of them provided me with the elusive manuscript; another invited us to stay with her in the south of France; yet another provided genealogy and helped decipher a couple of pages from the manuscript; and another sent me her poem (included in an



First-day concert. Clockwise left to right: Michelle, André bent over his violin, piano-playing friend, daughter Marianne with cello, Dan in foreground.

appendix to *Season of Infamy*) "As Many Stars...Under Nazi Rule, 1943" about her Jewish mother's efforts to hide during a raid.

#### Why did Rist write the diary?

Rist wrote the diary generally for family and friends, primarily as a record for his five sons to read, but it was not intended for publication. Rist talks a bit about his purpose and motives in a curious passage from June 17, 1941, in which he quotes Montaigne, asking "But how, in this season of infamy, can we believe anyone talking about himself?" <sup>1</sup>

Jeanneney took the diary's title *Une Saison gâtée* (literally, "a rotten season") from this quote when he arranged to publish it in 1983, and I have followed his lead with my title for the English translation. Of course my version, *Season of Infamy*, echoes the unforgettable words of Franklin D. Roosevelt after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 ("Yesterday, December 7, 1941, a date which will live in infamy...").

Sometimes I tell myself that this diary is useless and will perhaps serve some day to show me my own errors of judgment. Even if that were the case, I should not regret having written it and having kept the memory of my impressions day by day, during such an infamous time, a time people will be anxious to forget when peace has come. It will perhaps be the measure of my illusions, perhaps also the measure of what I managed to preserve of good sense in the storm.

I am copying this passage from Montaigne (book 2, chapter 18, "Of Giving the Lie"):

But how, in this season of infamy, can we believe anyone talking about himself?—given that there are few, or none at all, whom we can believe speaking of others, when there is less temptation to lie. The first stage in the corruption of morals is the banishment of truth; for, as Pindar said, to be truthful is the beginning of great virtue and the first thing Plato requires of the Republic's ruler.

And these words, which are so magnificently applicable to our own time:

Our truth today is not what is but what others can be convinced of. (*Season of Infamy*, 149-150)

I think the diary helped Rist to stay sane, allowing him to say things he couldn't say in public—but it was a risky undertaking in any case, as the diary expresses his disdain for Pétain and the French bourgeoisie, whom he blamed for collaborating with Hitler because of their fear of communism.

For two or three decades after the Second World War, there seemed to be a tacit agreement in Europe to avoid focusing on the more troublesome and difficult aspects of the war. The Charles Rist diary, for example, was not published until 1983.

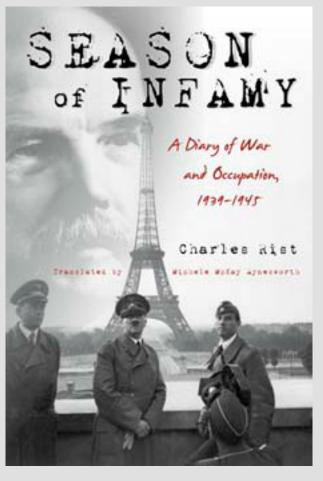
The reluctance of some French people to acknowledge their troublesome past was brought home to Dan and me in the Fall of 2010 when we were in Paris. I had seen The Sorrow and the Pity (Le Chagrin et la Pitié), a documentary film by Marcel Ophuls about collaboration between the Vichy government and Nazi Germany, soon after it came out in 1971. Then there was Robert O. Paxton's bombshell Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944, first published in 1972 in English, then in 1973 in French, showing that French collaboration with the Nazis was more active than passive. This was followed in 1981 by Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton's book *Vichy France and the Jews*, first published in 1981, which had been instrumental in further provoking examination of active French involvement in the persecution of Jews during the war. Perhaps these books inspired French historian Jean-Noël Jeanneney, who had a transcript of Rist's diary, to have it published in 1983. Paxton, who had reviewed Rist's diary when it was first published, kindly wrote a Foreword to *Season of Infamy*.

My grant from the Kittredge Foundation led to Dan's and my stay in Paris during the fall of 2010, a time that seemed crucial for French introspection. People were watching *The Round Up (La Rafle)*, a docudrama about the infamous roundup of 13,000 French Jews by French police in 1942; an anonymous donor gave the Shoah Memorial museum in Paris a document showing Marshal Pétain's own hand in making the anti-Jewish laws even harsher; and the French Senate sponsored a symposium, The Struggles of French Memory: World War II and the Algerian War (1940-1962: Les troubles de la mémoire française), to which Jean-Noël Jeanneney, an active participant, invited us.

Jeanneney, who engineered publication of Rist's diary in 1983, along with extensive annotation and an introduction, supported me every step of the way in my efforts to publish an English version.

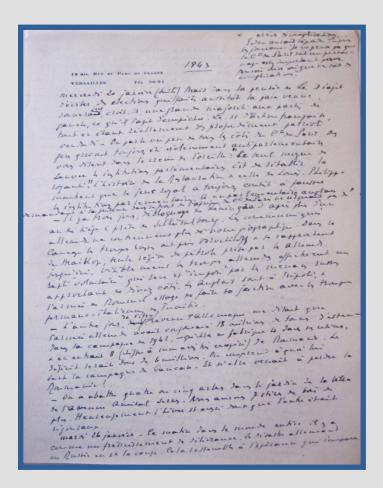
Do you think the Second World War can still be a subject of interest now, for young people, for example? Does a book like A Season of Infamy have something to say to us?

I've asked Dan (real name Donald), who was so helpful and supportive during my work on this project, to respond. Dan not only introduced me to the diary and served as an expert reader of my translation, he also shares Rist's wide knowledge of literature, philosophy, and history.



Dan Aynesworth: I know from long experience—years of teaching and of talking with friends and family—that the Second World War continues to be almost mesmerizing in its power to attract people of various ages and experiences. This, in spite of and, in a sense, because of the horror of the thing. So many written documents speak eloquently of the long-drawn-out experience of privation, misery, and finally of great expectations at long last realized, however tragic the circumstances. With the possible exception of the drama of Joan of Arc, I don't think my students ever responded to any historical event with more sustained interest or more searching questions than they did to the war. This was due in part, no doubt, to the fact they all knew, or knew of, someone—father, grandfather, uncle, mother, grandmother, aunt—who had been in that war or had been in some way affected by it. I used excerpts from several

diaries, including Rist's, to give them a first-hand, eye-witness sense of what it was like, and is like, to live day to day with hope, loss, despair, and at last life again in something approximating its "normal" state. Of the many diaries I have read, Rist's is the most complete. He brought to it a wealth of learning drawn from many fields and put the war into a context—historical, economic, literary, etc.—that made it more interesting to those who did not experience the event first-hand.



A page from Charles Rist's original manuscript, dated 20 to 26 January, 1943.

## Michele, did you encounter any special difficulties when working on this project?

The greatest challenge was tracking down Rist's original manuscript, as I knew some bits had been left out of the French publication. Fortunately, one of Charles Rist's grandsons, Jean-Pierre Rist, found it in some boxes he'd inherited from his father and allowed me to photograph every page. Charles Rist's handwriting was small and dense and hard to read, but I was able finally to add a few missing passages to the English version. Interestingly, I also discovered that one diary entry was *not* in the manuscript and had probably been added later by Rist's wife Germaine. The entry, dated 19 June 1940, bears witness to de Gaulle's radio speech calling on the French to resist.

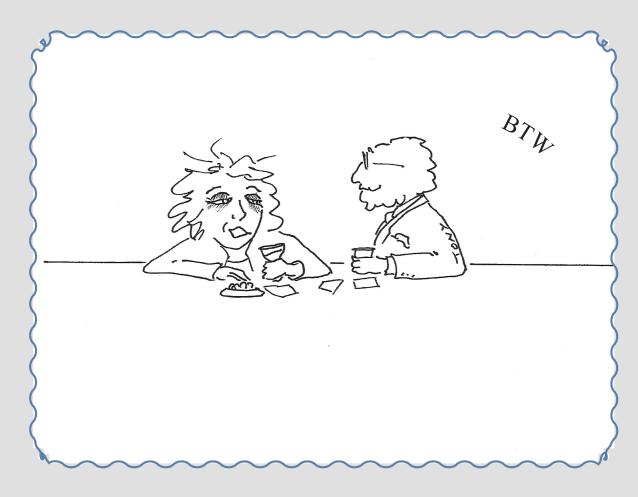
## What new projects have you been working on since publication of Season of Infamy?

I've been doing some translations from French and Spanish for *The Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization*, an ongoing collaboration between Yale University Press and the Posen Foundation, which works internationally to support Jewish education. It consists of a ten-volume collection of Jewish creative work, including essays, poems, artwork, primary historical documents, and excerpts from plays, stories, and novels, from different periods in different parts of the world. Pretty fascinating work.

Two recurring words that stand out for me as the project moves progressively back in time are "enlightenment" and "emancipation." Two good words to hang on to during seasons of infamy.

#### **NOTES**

1 Charles Rist, *A Season of Infamy*, trans. Michele Aynesworth (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), pp. 149-150. The quote in French from Michel de Montaigne's *Essais*, chapter on *Du démentir*: «Mais, à qui croyrons nous parlant de soy, en une saison si gastée?»



"Yesh, well, I've alsho been drinking outshide the box."

# FRENCH GRAPHIC NOVELS IN TRANSLATION: FIRST SECOND BOOKS AND PAPERCUTZ

## BY NANETTE MCGUINNESS



Award-winning opera singer Nanette McGuinness is the translator of over 40 books for children and adults, including the well-known Geronimo Stilton Graphic Novels. Her latest translations, California Dreamin': Cass Elliot Before the Mamas & the Papas (First Second Books, from French into English) and Thea Sisters #7: A Song for the Thea Sisters (Papercutz, from Italian into English), were released in March 2017.

raphic novels (GNs) are inherently a mixed-genre art form involving sequential art (visual art that takes place over time) and, with an occasional exception, words. When one *translates* a GN—adding a second verbal level—it is important to keep in mind that one is only dealing with a single part of a larger artistic whole. In other words, in a GN, the art on the page (retained in translation, for the most part) partners with the text to tell the whole story, much as the music in an opera fills out what the libretto is not saying. (Indeed, to swap genres for a confusing moment, it can be said that the art in a GN replaces much

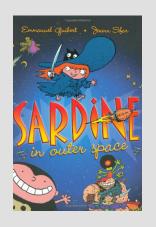
of the narrative description found in a prose novel.) Thus, as part of their work, GN translators must always remain cognizant of the information imparted by the art on the page as well as in the source text. There may even be text in the images, as well, which may need to be translated—or not—depending on the publisher, target language, and target market.

Returning to our operatic comparison for a moment, both GNs and operas as art forms can cover a wide range of subject matter, from societal commentary and satire to comedic fiction, from pure entertainment to artistically presented nonfiction—and all points between. When the component genres of our two forms are done equally well, their sum is considerably more than their individual parts; when one aspect dominates, the results can be hit-or-miss. And at their lowest common denominators, both become crude action pieces without much subtlety or longevity.

Why even bother comparing these two art forms—except as a flight of fancy by someone involved in both? Because comparing GNs to operas helps emphasize that translating a GN is both a cross-genre and cross-format act rather than merely a linguistic feat.

The francophone world has a strong tradition of GNs that succeed beautifully on all levels, and historically, French-language GNs have been translated into English in the U.S. more often than other types of books, on average. Famous twentieth-century examples that most English-speaking readers will be familiar with are *Asterix* and *Tintin*, as well as the turn-of-the-twenty-first-century breakaway hit, *Persepolis*. In this article, I will take a look at several more recent translations from French into English from two excellent graphic novel publishers that I am honored to have worked with. Both publishers are a little over a decade old and both publish what I would consider European-style, art-driven GNs, by which I mean that the art and text are well-done and equal partners—so that the books are a true marriage of both aspects and a delight to read—works that are, indeed, greater than the sums of their excellently executed parts.

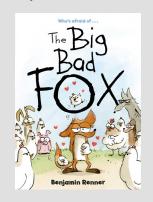
Starting with an impressive initial list in 2006, First Second Books has been an imprint of beautiful graphic novels for all ages, featuring



numerous award-winning books, such as *Kirkus Reviews* Best Book of the Year, *Sardine in Outer Space* (by Emmanuel Guibert and Joann Sfar, translated by Sasha Watson, 2006). In the first of six volumes of this marvelously zany series, we meet the young swashbuckling Sardine, her cousin Little Louie and her pirate uncle, Captain Yellow Shoulder. Flying the spaceship Huckleberry, they're always on the run from the child-hating Supermuscleman and his evil henchman Doc Krok—except when Yellow's

mom crash-visits into them with her ship, the Blue Java—hoping to hitch Yellow up with the unavailable Vinaigrette. A chapter book for middle-grade readers (children age 8-12) filled with pure punny fun fortified with a huge dose of silly wordplay, *Sardine*... cracks me up every time I read it.

Zooming from the past to the future, we find *The Big Bad Fox* (by Benjamin Renner, translated by Joe Johnson, scheduled for release on



June 20, 2017). A sweet, anthropomorphic tale with adorable watercolor illustrations, *The Big Bad Fox* is about a fox who is, well, truly bad at being a fox. But he makes a wonderful mother—despite himself—when the eggs that he steals (and then broods on at the forceful behest of the Big Bad Wolf) hatch and the chicks imprint on him. With well-differentiated, giggle-worthy characters and laugh-out-loud narrative twists and running gags, *The Big Bad Fox* is a children's

story that works well on multiple levels; adults, too, will find the situations hilarious. As in all the best children's books, whether graphic or not, *The Big Bad Fox* explores major, universal themes, in this case about identity vs. appearance, self-acceptance and love.

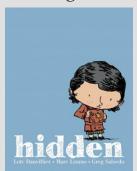
Turning next to a GN for adults—one sprinkled with sex, drugs, and music (if not always strictly rock 'n' roll)—we encounter *California Dreamin'*: Cass Elliot Before The Mamas & the Papas (by Pénélope Bagieu, my translation, released March 7, 2017). An engaging story illustrated



with great black-and-white drawings, the book covers the life of Cass Elliot (née Ellen Cohen, aka Mama Cass) from her birth into a musical Jewish family to a singing teen with an eating disorder, through her start as a singer trying to catch her break to stardom, and ending with the formation and then dissolution of The Mamas & the Papas. As a musician, I found it intriguing to read about how the song "California Dreamin" was created—especially because it is an eternal, cross-genre

challenge (one that Bagieu meets admirably) to depict music-making accurately via words or art. As the translator of Bagieu's well-wrought bio, I found the story of this talented, unique artist both fascinating and yet very sad, much as Elliot's life inevitably was. As is the case with all the books I'm mentioning from First Second, the unifying themes here are identity and the struggle to find self-acceptance, which are presented via the hallmarks of this imprint: good storytelling, excellent writing, and stellar art.

Finally, moving to the very serious, we now turn to another award-winning GN for children, *Hidden: A Child's Story of the Holocaust* (by Loïc



Dauvillier, translated by Alexis Siegel, 2014). *Hidden* is a great example of something that, at their finest, GNs can do with almost unparalleled success: address a most difficult topic in a way that is palatable and understandable for young readers—it's told from a child's viewpoint—and that still speaks just as well to adults. Written in simple, direct language, *Hidden* is the award-winning story of a French Jewish grandmother

telling her granddaughter about her own experiences as a child during the Holocaust—encountering discrimination and prejudice at school in Paris, hiding from the Nazis, being forced to flee to the countryside without her parents, losing her father, eventually being reunited with her post-concentration camp mother who is literally skin and bones—set in an intergenerational frame that is heartwarming despite the awfulness of the intervening history. While it is not a light read, it's a beautiful story that brought me to tears more than a few times—and no matter how

many times I return to the last page, I still cannot read it and remain dryeyed.

Let's now turn to another wonderful graphic novel publishing house, Papercutz. Founded in 2005, Papercutz proudly (with good reason) proclaims itself to be the only publisher that focuses solely on graphic novels for children—for "reluctant readers and gifted readers,"

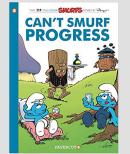


and "kids, tweens, and teens," in genres such as "humor, action, adventure, mystery, horror, and favorite characters." This includes a number of licensed properties and GN adaptations of classic literature, for example, Alexis Nesme's adaptation of Jules Verne's *The Children of Captain Grant* (translated by Joe Johnson, 2016, released by the new Papercutz YA imprint, Super Genius). With a similar emphasis on European GN style and art-driven,

excellent storytelling as First Second—but with a greater emphasis on series and licensed properties—Papercutz GNs fit comfortably into the middle-grade (and occasionally YA) age range they target, a niche that they serve superbly.

Navigating in a publishing sea of graphic novels and comic books geared primarily towards boys, Papercutz deserves a good deal of credit for the number of girl-friendly titles on its list. As part of the publisher's girl-friendly offerings, Papercutz has just launched a new tween imprint, Charmz, and its first volume-in-translation is the popular French series *The Scarlet Rose* (by Patricia Lyfoung), to be released in late November 2017 (translated by Joe Johnson).

However, this is not to say that Papercutz' list ignores boys by any means. For example, if one takes a look at a few of Papercutz' published

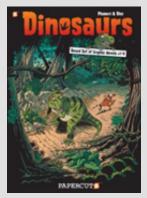


translations of GNs from French, past and present, it is hard to ignore—if only because of bookshelf bulk, not to mention silly cuteness and readability factors—the many books populated by those beloved imaginary Belgian creatures, the Smurfs. Papercutz began issuing the *Smurfs* series in 2010 (by Yvan Delporte and Peyo, series translator, Joe Johnson) with *The Purple Smurfs*,

continuing with #23 *Can't Smurf Progress* (upcoming, June 20, 2017). In each volume, the irascible but adorable blue smurfs bumble—or as they

themselves would say, "smurf"—through the vicissitudes of life, with smurfing jokes abounding on every page. The Seven Dwarves have nothing on these colorful guys (all but one—Smurfette—are male), who regularly deliver pure fun for young middle-grade readers of either sex.

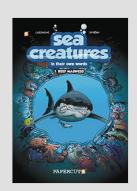
Another set of frequently cranky creatures—in this case, real ones from the distant past—for a decidedly boy-targeted GN (if the incidence of blood and guts is any indication) come to life in the *Dinosaurs Graphic Novels* (by Arnaud Plumeri and Bloz, my translation, 2014-15), a four-volume series, which Papercutz is about to release as a boxed set on April



4, 2017. Narrated in one-to-two page vignettes by a wiseacre Compsognathus (who is constantly meeting his maker on his way to becoming a fossil), this terrific series is based on up-to-date paleontological findings and includes leading characters such as the perpetually downtrodden paleontologist Indino Jones. The jokes run wild throughout as the dinosaurs romp through the Jurassic and Cretaceous eras (among others). The fourth and final volume features an extra

eight-page insert about a new, complete baby Parasaurolophus fossil recently discovered in Utah. Despite my having been a dino-loving kid (what's not to love, right?), I learned more about dinosaurs in translating these books than I had ever known and encountered many dinosaurs I had never heard of.

Last but not least, at the start of 2017, Papercutz published the first volume in another new nonfiction series, *Sea Creatures in Their Own Words* (by Christophe Cazenove and Thierry Jytéry, my translation). With the same tongue-in-cheek humor he employs—or should one say, deploys?—in his other GN series, Cazenove devotes one to two pages each to



various creatures of the sea, using snarky talking marine animals, silly jokes, and scads of fascinating, fabulous factoids—as well as information about a species' endangered status—to create this enticing example of middle-grade edutainment. *Volume 1: Reef Madness* was released on January 24, 2017 and *Volume 2: Armed and Dangerous* is due out on May 16, 2017. Much like the *Dinosaurs Graphic Novels, Sea Creatures in* 

Their Own Words looks to be a four-volume series that will be every bit as enjoyable and equally educational.

So there you have it: a "translator's eye" view of a selected few of the wonderful works that have been translated from French into English by these two different but excellent GN publishers. They are by no means the only game in town for French GNs in translation, though. Abrams, Archaia Comics, Archipelago, Drawn & Quarterly, Europe Comics, Humanoid, Lerner, and SelfMadeHero, to name only a handful, all publish French GNs translated into English. To see more about GNs translated from French in the United States in 2016 and the American houses publishing them, you will find a useful list put together by the Book Department of the French Embassy in the United States at <a href="http://frenchculture.org/books/news/french-books-us-2016-edition">http://frenchculture.org/books/news/french-books-us-2016-edition</a>.

#### **NOTES**

Most of this article originally appeared in two parts in March 2017 for the Global Literature in Libraries Initiative blog: <a href="https://tinyurl.com/l3gszsd">https://tinyurl.com/l3gszsd</a> and <a href="https://tinyurl.com/l9sscq3">https://tinyurl.com/l9sscq3</a>.

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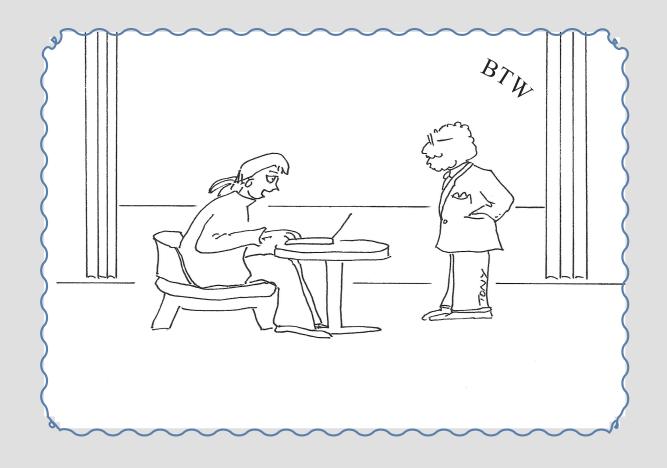
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"The Ministry of Redundancy has ordered the initiatives to be carried out concurrently, simultaneously, and at the same time."

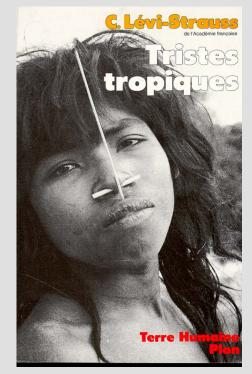
## WILDFLOWERS

## BY PATRICK SAARI

For all averred, I had killed the bird That made the breeze to blow<sup>1</sup> Coleridge, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

In 1954, the French publishing house Éditions Plon launched the series Collection Terre Humaine, aimed at highlighting the voice of minorities, peasant and working class communities, and peoples steeped in oral cultures and traditions, as well as building bridges between the social sciences and literature by using the first-person narratives of explorers

and ethnologists.<sup>2</sup> Tristes tropiques (1955), by the French ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, was one of its first and most successful books, so widely acclaimed that the jury of the Prix Goncourt that year announced its regret that it could not award its prize to this bestseller because it was not a novel. On its cover there was the black-and-white photograph of a young disheveled Nambikwara Indian of the Amazon looking straight at the reader with his head slightly tilted back and off to one side as if out of curiosity or wistfulness. In addition to its enigmatic title (literally "sad tropics"), the book, purportedly an account of Lévi-Strauss's travels during the 1930s in Brazil's Amazon region, as well as many other places in the world, started out with an angry, edgy bang: "Je hais les voyages et les explorateurs" [I loathe faraway travels and explorers].



Although, over the years, much has been said of the irony deployed by Lévi-Strauss in this first line, especially for a collection devoted to explorers, no one has noticed it is also an almost-perfect alexandrine (iambic hexameter, 12 syllables, with a caesura between two hemistiches), harking back to the classical seventeenth-century metrics of Racine, Corneille, and Boileau. Or that its mood is unmistakably that of Baudelaire in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, as it plays with the many themes of the last poem "Le Voyage" and slyly echoes: "Amer savoir, celui qu'on tire du voyage!" [Bitter is the wisdom gained from travelling afar!]. Or that it evokes the weariness and *Weltschmerz* of Mallarmé's "Brise marine": "La chair est triste, hélas! Et j'ai lu tous les livres" [Wretched is the flesh, alas! And there's no book I haven't read], which is also a poem of flight, sailing away, and hopeless yearning, unmistakably patterned after Baudelaire. And both of these heartfelt exclamatory one-liners are classical alexandrines as well.

The book's title *Tristes tropiques* was not as straightforward as it might have initially seemed. In French, the adjective triste means "sad," "unhappy," and "downcast," on the one hand, but also "unfortunate" and "regrettable," as well as "wretched," "shabby," and "unsavory," on the other, in addition to three dozen other options, with the meaning changing depending on the context, the tone of voice, circumambient words, and whether it is placed before or after the noun it modifies. When John Rutherford translated *Don Quixote*, he noted how, in previous English translations, the delusional Quixote, after one of many embarrassing incidents, was called by his sidekick Sancho Panza "Knight of the Sad Countenance" or "Knight of the Sorrowful Figure," a lofty, heroic, if not romantic, appellation, although the Spanish original was el Caballero de la Triste Figura. As in French, when triste is placed before a noun, chances are it simply means "pathetic" or "pitiable." Rutherford understood that Sancho Panza was making fun of his master, who was too full of himself and vain to see the gibe, which Rutherford accurately translated as "Knight of the Sorry Face" although "Knight of the Beat-up Face" or "Pathetic-looking Knight" highlighting a thoroughly wrecked and rundown appearance would have done the trick as well, since

Quixote had just had some teeth knocked out, fingers broken, and ribs crushed by shepherds defending their flocks from him in the previous chapter.<sup>3</sup>

And this joke running throughout Cervantes' novel, underscoring Sancho Panza's casual sassy cockiness and Quixote's impervious ego, disappears altogether unless the translation gets it right. The same holds for *Tristes tropiques* where any translation too grand or melancholy for the word *triste* would simply not work. Even the alliteration and assonance of the title, with the repetition of the "tr" and "i," give a creaky, comical flavor to it, as if dismissively spoken by an onlooker who's not about to be fooled by the Emperor's new exotic clothes.

As for *tropiques*, it means "the region lying between the Tropic of Capricorn and the Tropic of Cancer where the sun is directly overhead," except that, behind the word and geographical location it identifies, there is the rich connotation of a life unfettered by the ills of civilization, social or economic constraints, in other words, a life of bodily ease, purity, honesty, a paradise regained as epitomized in the eighteenth century by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's popular novel Paul et Virginie (1788) and stretching uninterruptedly (including Jean-Jacques Rousseau on the way) to Paul Gauguin's masterpieces in Tahiti and Henri Le Douanier Rousseau's naïve, exotic jungle paintings (*Le Rêve*, for example, painted in 1910). This tradition, however, has long been trivialized into oblivion by the trope of package tours and cruises to blue seas, sunny skies, sandy beaches, and palm trees, a theme Jean-Luc Godard was playing with in his movie *Pierrot le Fou* (1965), with the escapade of its protagonists Jean-Paul Belmondo and Ana Karina to the Mediterranean and its sly references to Robert Louis Stevenson, author of Treasure Island, who like Gauguin also traveled the South Seas and died on a Pacific island (Samoa).

And that is Levi-Strauss's gibe, something like "pathetic tropical illusions," not only at the silly cliché itself but also at the predatory consumer society behind it that would elevate an ideal of pristine beauty and innocence while doing everything to make sure it would be destroyed forever. The message emerging from the book was as clear as

subsequent warnings from Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) and Jared Diamond's *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (2005).

Although the first translation into English, by John Russell in 1961, caught Lévi-Strauss's elegiac mood and came up with the thoughtful title *A World on the Wane*, subsequent editions did away with that title as well and simply used the French original *Tristes tropiques*. Another English translation, by John and Doreen Weightman, originally published in 1973, with the most recent edition issued in 2012 by Penguin Books, wisely never made any attempt to translate the untranslatable.

As for Lévi-Strauss's next big hit, *La Pensée sauvage*, published in 1962, it seems at first an oblique reference to Blaise Pascal and his *Pensées*, a book whose title has rarely been translated, although "thoughts" is usually proposed as the tepid English equivalent for the French philosopher's posthumously published fragments of mystically inspired meditations upon the existence of God. If *Pensées* were contemplative spiritual reflections best translated as "meditations" and if *pensée* appearing in Levi-Strauss's title in the singular could be construed as a "meditation," then how was *sauvage* supposed to be translated?

When in 1672, the English poet John Dryden coined the term "noble savage," he was referring to a person unpolluted by civilization, someone whose innocence was to be cherished and whose nobility was a natural gift superior to the hereditary wealth and privileges bestowed upon the few landed aristocrats ruling the world at the time. And when in 1697, the English playwright William Congreve wrote: "Musick has Charms to sooth a savage Breast," he meant an uncouth, unrefined sensibility. Although the title for *La Pensée sauvage*'s first and only English translation, *The Savage Mind* (1966, no translator credited), may have wanted to hark back to those halcyon times almost three centuries earlier, before the word "savage" meant fierce, barbarian, cruel, or brutal, the result was more akin to the title for a science-fiction horror thriller in the vein of Stephen King or Clive Barker, than to a learned treatise of ethnology.

However thoughtful and meditative Levi-Strauss's book might have been, the word "mind" in the English title did point out that it was focusing on how the mind works. The word in English that was missing here was "wild," which now means rambunctious, rebellious, footloose, and crazy rather than untutored or untamed. In French, the word *sauvage* has kept its seventeenth-century connotation and unlike English, which has both the words "savage" and "wild," French only has *sauvage*, so that a *bête sauvage* is an animal living in the wild (wildlife) and a *fleur sauvage* is a flower of the fields or woods (wildflower) rather than one cultivated in a garden and subject to selective cross-breeding and hybridization or benefiting from the controlled conditions of a greenhouse. François Truffaut's movie *L'Enfant sauvage* was about a child surviving without any human contact, also living in the wild, who would have been identified in English as a "feral" or "wild" child.

Since Levi-Strauss's book was inspired by his research in the field, specifically the Amazon region, an apt title in English might have been *Meditations in the Wild*, but because it explored how the human brain, the nervous system, and the body's perceptions process both the tangible outer world and the inner world of thoughts, another more apt, albeit unfeasible, translation might have been "the way we think in an unstructured environment closely connected to nature" or "an approach to non-scientific not-for-profit thinking harking back to nomadic lifestyles." The problem with this benign, if not patronizing, understanding of the title was that *La Pensée sauvage*, just like *Tristes* tropiques, upends our facile notions of how "primitive" peoples think. Ultimately, this "thinking," whether we view it as under-developed and lagging behind (with a lot of catching up to do) or simply undomesticated (with still a lot of disciplined civilizing missionary taming to do), is just as complex and works just as obsessively to understand itself and the universe as the thinking behind the achievements of civilization and the scientific method, whose performance and high yields are incontrovertible. The title is therefore a tongue-in-cheek cluster bomb of intellect, humor, and wisdom.

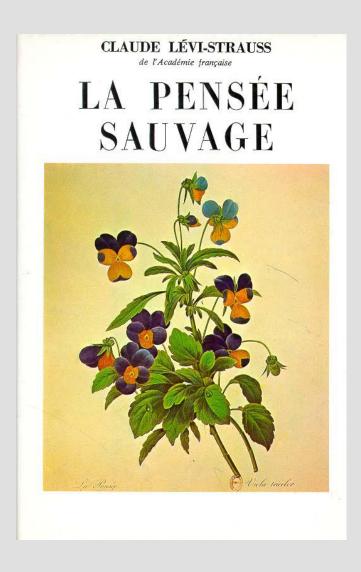
But there is more to it than that, because, at the end of the book, just before the bibliography, there is also a two-page *Appendice*, consisting of six short passages quoted from various sources explaining European folklore behind a specific flower. In French the flower is identified as: "la Pensée sauvage (*Viola tricolor*, L.; Pensée des champs, Herbe de la

Trinité)." This appendix describes how this wildflower's petals, sepals, and calyx, their positioning and colors, and even the flower's absence of scent once spoke a rich metaphorical language, highlighting life's harsh realities but also poetic justice. In past centuries, this language had been known as the "language of flowers." One of the stories behind the flower is about marriage, death, widowhood, daughters and stepdaughters, discrimination, heartlessness, humility, and the triumph of the weak over the strong (similar to the folktale of Cinderella<sup>4</sup>). This uncultivated shortlived perennial European flower (its species is identified in Latin as *Viola tricolor*) is now commonly known in English as a "wild pansy" or "field violet" although, over the centuries, it has had at least a dozen other names, including heart's ease, heart's delight, love-in-idleness, ticklemy-fancy, etc. The etymology of "pansy" comes straight from the French *pensée* (thought, thinking) which in turn comes from the Latin *pensare* (to think.)

In short, the title of the book in French, truth be told, was also the common name of a field flower, clearly appearing on the cover of the book, a delicate painting of *Viola tricolor* taken from an 1827 compendium of flowers.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, in English, the title could well have been translated as *The Field Violet*. However, it can only be surmised that the publishers of the English version in both the United Kingdom (George Weidenfeld and Nicholson) and the United States (University of Chicago Press) decided that this business of flowers would be viewed with skepticism if not scorn by book reviewers, intellectuals, scientists, scholars, and academics, not to mention the general reader. For the English translation, the painting of this wildflower was therefore removed from the cover, and the brief Appendix at the end of the book with its references to German, Polish, and Ukrainian flower folklore was also deleted, possibly never even translated. I've browsed in vain for a new edition with a new translation, but the only one available is a reissue of *The Savage Mind* in 2004, although the French title *La Pensée sauvage* has been added as a subtitle.

It has been claimed that Lévi-Strauss would have liked the English title to be *Pansies for Thought*, taken from Ophelia's words in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Deranged by the killing of her father, Hamlet's

rejection, and other events at Elsinore, Ophelia sings an old ballad before committing suicide: "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance. Pray, love, remember. There is pansies, that's for thoughts." The French ethnologist's brave attempt to bring back the flower (and its connection to thoughts and thinking) that had been arbitrarily banned from the English translation was unsuccessful. Despite its Shakespearean pedigree, his translation sounded just as out of kilter as *The Savage Mind*, albeit less intimidating. A preferable option would have been *The Field Violet* or no translation at all.



To do justice, long overdue, to the neglected untranslated endof-book Supplement to Levi-Strauss's *La Pensée sauvage*, which highlights how Neolithic thinking (thinking in its original, purest, contemplative form rather than harnessed for exerting power over others, nature, and the world) is still alive and kicking, albeit confined to the realm of folklore, art, poetry, and flowers, here are two excerpts, duly translated<sup>6</sup>:

Long ago, the three-colored violet [wild pansy/field violet] gave forth a scent that was more sweet-smelling than that of the March violet (or fragrant violet). At that time she grew in the middle of fields of wheat, which would be trampled by all those eager to pick her. The violet took pity on the wheat and humbly begged the Holy Trinity to take her scent away. Her prayer was answered, and that it is why we call her flower of the Trinity. (Panzer, II, 203, quoted by Perger, p. 151.)<sup>7</sup>

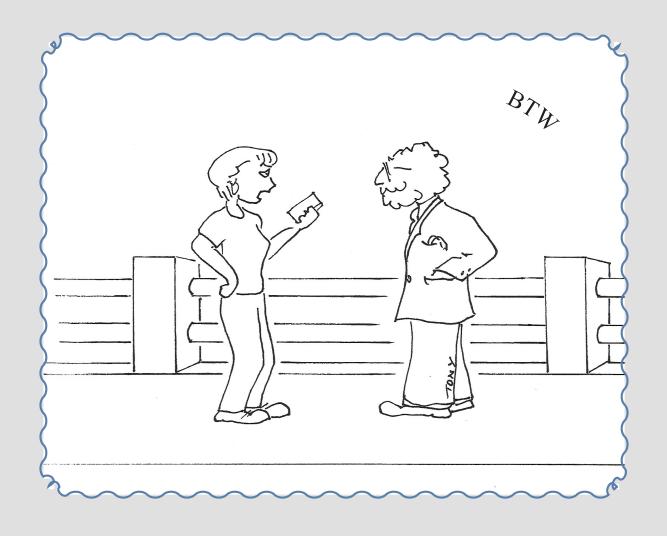
You admire my petals, said the blossom of the field violet, but look at them more closely: their size and ornamentation differ. The lower petal spreads out boastfully, it's the evil stepmother who grabs everything for herself; she's taken two chairs to sit on at the same time, because as you can see there are two sepals propping up this large petal. To her right and left she has her own daughters and each one has her own seat. And very far from her, you can see the two petals above: her two stepdaughters, who humbly huddle together on the same seat. But the Good Lord took pity on the fate of the neglected stepdaughters; He punished the evil stepmother by turning the flower around on its peduncle: the stepmother, who had been at the top when the flower was upright, would now be below and would have a big hump growing on her back; her daughters would be given a beard [spotted tips of their petals] to punish them for their pride, and their beard now makes them look silly and children everywhere make fun of them, whereas the stepdaughters who had been scorned are now sitting above them." (Herm. Wagner, In die Natur, p. 3; quoted by Branky, Pflanzensagen.)8

#### **NOTES**

*Editor's Note:* All translations from French into English (Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Lévi-Strauss) are by the author of the essay, Patrick Saari. Special thanks to Éditions Plon, Edi8, and Monique Lévi-Strauss for their kind permission to reproduce the two Lévi-Strauss book covers and two excerpts from the Appendix to *La Pensée sauvage*. For an engaging introduction to Claude Lévi-Strauss, see Bernard Pivot's May 4, 1984 interview: <a href="http://www.ina.fr/video/CPB84051579">http://www.ina.fr/video/CPB84051579</a>

- Lines 93-94. Richard Holmes, biographer of Coleridge, explains how *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) brings together the prophetic tradition, the folk tale and ballad, the romantic sea voyage of exploration and subsequent disaster to compose an eco-fable about the price humankind pays for its carelessness toward the forces and mysteries of nature. See <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKr-anv1SII">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKr-anv1SII</a>
- 2 "Terre Humaine est un pont entre les sciences sociales et la littérature, une révolution qui dure depuis 60 ans avec, pour horizon, le témoignage des invisibles." See website at: <a href="http://www.plon.fr/catalogue/collection/terre-humaine">http://www.plon.fr/catalogue/collection/terre-humaine</a>
- John Rutherford, "Translating Don Quixote" in Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, trans. John Rutherford (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), xxviii-xxix.
- The definitive French version of this folktale appeared in 1697: "Cendrillon ou la Petite Pantoufle de verre" in the book *Les Contes de ma mère l'Oye: Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités* by Charles Perrault (1628-1703), at the helm of those arguing that modernism (in this case, European folktales) was superior to classical antiquity (*la querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*).
- Pierre-Joseph Redouté, *Choix des plus belles fleurs* (Paris: Ernest Panckoucke, 1827). Redouté (1759-1840) was a Belgian watercolorist, painter, and art teacher, who had been dubbed "le Raphaël des fleurs" for his famous detailed watercolors of flowers and his illustrations for more than 50 botanical publications.
- 6 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1962), 323-324. Edi8 and Claude Lévi-Strauss's assignee have granted *Source* the right to use the two excerpts as translated into English © Plon.
- 7 German botanist Georg Wolfgang Franz Panzer (1755-1829) and the Austrian painter Anton Franz Ritter von Perger (1809-1876), author of a compilation of plant lore, *Deutsche Pflanzensagen* (1865).
- 8 German geographer Hermann Wagner (1840-1929), whose book *In die Natur* was aimed at teaching young people to love nature, and Austrian teacher Franz Branky (1842-1911), also author of a compilation of plant lore, *Pflanzensagen*, and contributor to a German journal on folklore (*Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*, 1888-1892).

À la mémoire de ma mère, Jacqueline Suzanne Caye (1922-2016), qui comme tout cœur sensible cultivait son jardin et aimait les fleurs



"It says he was roundly booed when he suggested that it might have been a case of the blonde leading the blonde."

## REMEMBRANCE OF TIMES PAST

### BY TONY BECKWITH



Tony Beckwith, a writer, translator, interpreter, poet, and cartoonist, is a regular contributor to Source.

Oh what I'd give for a moment or two Under the bridges of Paris with you<sup>1</sup>

It was mid-morning and we had stopped at the Café de Flore on the Boulevard Saint-Germain. Sitting at a sidewalk table on red and green chairs, facing the street, savoring the thrill of being in Paris. Deux croissants et deux cafés au lait, s'il vous plaît. French phrases resurfacing after hibernating in memory for years, gliding tentatively over the tongue, stirring memories of days gone by. Dunking croissants in our milky coffee. Merci!

Lillian and I had flown in late the previous afternoon and, after sleeping off the jet lag, had risen and struck out from our hotel in Le Marais district on a crisp, sunny morning. With guide book in hand and only a vague plan in mind, we wandered down to the river, where we paused to get our bearings. Then we strolled along the right bank, past the Hôtel de Ville, crossed over the Pont Neuf and turned right on the Boulevard Saint-Germain. On perusing a map, we saw that we could

continue in a westerly direction, veer left on the rue Saint-Dominique, and eventually come to the Eiffel Tower. It would be a long walk, but the idea was appealing, so off we went.



Place des Vosges in Le Marais, Paris, the city's oldest planned square (built in 1605-1612)

We had read about the massive public works program undertaken by Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann in the mid-nineteenth century, and learned that part of that project involved demolishing the narrow, cobble-stoned rue du Jardinet to make way for the Boulevard Saint-Germain. On June 22, 1853, Napoléon III appointed Haussmann to the office of Prefect of the Seine; a week later the Emperor instructed him to aérer, unifier, et embellir Paris: to create open spaces designed to circulate fresh air throughout the city, connect and unify the different neighborhoods, and make it all more beautiful. The project, which dragged on for decades into the 1920s, involved tearing down crowded, unhealthy, medieval neighborhoods, building broad avenues, parks, and squares, annexing surrounding suburbs, and putting in new sewers, fountains, and aqueducts. Unsurprisingly, Haussmann's work prompted fierce opposition—he was eventually dismissed by Napoléon in 1870 but the layout and distinctive look of central Paris today is largely the result of his vision.



Camille Pissarro, Avenue de l'Opéra, soleil, matinée d'hiver (1898)

The sun was out but there was a cool breeze, which reminded me of the Emperor's instructions to air out the city. Hats off to the Baron, I thought, as I donned my beret, which I carried in my shoulder bag for precisely this sort of climatic condition. It was a chilly day, it's true, but wearing berets isn't always about the weather. They are a traditional item of apparel in some places: many rural Mediterraneans, for example, would no more leave the house without their beret than without their pants. For some, too, they are part of a uniform. Berets were worn by the French Army's mountain infantry as early as the 1880s, and elite military units the world over have used them ever since, the Green Berets to name just one. Guerrillas and revolutionaries have also worn them, from Che Guevara to the Black Panthers to Patty Hearst after she was kidnapped by the SLA.

In the English-speaking world, generally speaking, berets are seen as a French fashion accessory. To some extent, this might be because we call them by their French name, but France has certainly contributed a great deal to their image and appeal. Berets were at their most popular

in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s, when the poets and writers of the Beat Generation took to wearing them in San Francisco and other places where cool was king. They were simply following the lead set by Picasso and other Left Bank artists, and Camus and Sartre and the Existentialists, not to mention the heroes of the French Resistance during World War II.

The beret's French connections notwithstanding, its origins can actually be traced back to the Basques, those mysterious people living in the borderlands between southwestern France and northern Spain. For centuries, the *Vascos* have inhabited their mountainous corner of Europe, where they raised sheep and spun the wool they needed to knit the soft, flat, one-piece *txapela*, their trademark hat. During the Carlist Wars of the early 1800s, its popularity spread to Spain, where it was called the *boina vasca* in honor of its ancestry—or *boina* for short. The Basques were intrepid sailors and fishermen, whose sturdy ships sailed up and down the western coast of Europe and, according to some, probably made land in the Americas long before the arrival of Columbus. It is interesting to note that the Scots, far to the north, also had a version of the traditional Basque headgear: a woolen bonnet known in Scotland as the tam o' shanter. Is the tam a first cousin to the beret and the *boina*? It's certainly possible, but we shall probably never know.

"Fine," said Lillian, "but if we're going to talk about iconic symbols of French culture, how about the baguette?" Good point. At certain times of the day this particular version of our daily bread can be seen everywhere. As we walked (and walked, and walked) we saw dozens of people carrying the distinctive long, thin loaf in their hands, under their arms, and strapped onto the handlebars of their bicycles, presumably on their way home for lunch. There is nothing quite like a baguette, especially when it is still warm, just out of the oven. Its crisp crust and soft, doughy interior is delicious all by itself, and when slathered with melting butter it is out of this world. The loaf as we know it today has probably been around for a long time, but it has only been known as a baguette since about 1920. The word in this context is apparently derived from the Italian word *baccheta* (a small rod), which is a diminutive of

bacchio (rod), which in turn comes from the Latin baculum (a stick). Lillian reminded me—raising her eyebrows as she does when she wants me to read between the lines—that the same etymology and sense apply to the elegant, long cut diamond, though that specific meaning did not surface until a few years later.

The sight and thought of all those baguettes stimulated our appetites and, having taken a slight detour to see Rodin's *Thinker* and the Place des Invalides, we came across a street vendor selling crepes, hot off a flat grill. One filled with spinach and cheese, one with chocolate, consumed on a park bench with sincere compliments to the chef, and we were off again, now getting very close to our destination. And, sure enough, after just a few more blocks, there it was in all its iconic beauty.

This wrought iron lattice tower is named for the engineer Gustave Eiffel, whose company designed and built it in 1887–89. It was intended as the grand entrance to the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*, which was organized to celebrate the centennial of the French Revolution. The original plan envisioned the structure being taken down after 20 years, in 1909, but it proved so useful for experimental and communication purposes that it was allowed to remain aloft after the permit expired.

The graceful *Tour* rises up from a square base that measures 410 feet on each side. It is 1,063 feet tall, or roughly the same height as an 81-storey building. On completion it was the tallest man-made structure in the world, a title it held until it was overtaken by the Chrysler Building in New York in 1930. The Eiffel Tower has three floors—the top level's upper platform is 906 feet above the ground, where tourists can gaze out at breathtaking views in all directions—with stairs and elevators to all of them. As a historical note, when German armed forces occupied Paris in 1940, during World War II, members of the French Resistance cut the elevator cables. The tower was closed to the public during the occupation, and the cables were not repaired until after the war. In August 1944, when the Allies were poised to retake the city, Hitler ordered General Dietrich von Choltitz, the military governor of Paris, to destroy the Eiffel Tower along with the rest of the city. To his enduring credit, and our profound relief, von Choltitz chose to disobey the Führer. About 25,000

people visit the tower every day, which means there can sometimes be long queues, but we were lucky and didn't have to wait very long before we stood on the second level, with Paris spread out beneath us in the late afternoon.

We had walked many miles that day, and climbed many stairs, so when we got back down to the Champ de Mars we set about trying to find a cab. We were in luck again, and were able to flag down a small Citroën piloted by a rather intense woman of uncertain age who chainsmoked all the way back to the hotel. A small, nondescript dog was settled comfortably on the seat beside her, utterly oblivious to us, so I asked her what would happen if three or more passengers needed a ride, and one of them wanted to sit in front. "Ah, no," she replied, "only the back seat is available for customers." When I asked what she called the dog, she peered at me sternly in the rear-view mirror, removed the Gauloise from between her lips, and said "Her name is *Cigarette*."

After a short rest in our room, we ventured back out for dinner. We walked past a tiny restaurant just off the rue Saint-Antoine, and when we opened the door for closer inspection an extraordinarily sophisticated Airedale Terrier came to greet us, wagging his tail. When traveling far from home we believe in trying to read the signs we might encounter along the way. Meeting a second highly domesticated dog struck us as being a positive sign, so we took a seat in one of the four booths along the left-hand wall of the miniscule dining room. The only other patrons at the time were sitting in one of the four booths on the right-hand wall. These two elderly men from New York told us that our instincts were sound because this was their favorite restaurant in Paris, and they made a point of having dinner there every time they were in town. The house special that night was duck confit, which we had heard of but never tried. The chef-owner, a fussy man with disheveled white hair wearing a white apron, explained that this was a classic dish that required time and patience to prepare. He told us, very seriously, that his version was sublime and assured us that we would not be disappointed. He was right. I have ordered duck confit a few times since then, in various restaurants around the world, and have never had a better one.

After dinner we strolled back to the hotel. It was a chilly night that definitely called for a beret and a scarf. It was quite late and the streets were quiet. In retrospect, all these years later, that day seems to be from a different era entirely, almost a different world. Long before Charlie Hebdo, the Bataclan Theater, Bastille Day in Nice, and other dark events that have changed something precious about France and the world we knew. It was a simpler time when, to me, any mention of the City of Light seemed to summon up memories of Eartha Kitt and her irresistible promise: "Under the bridges of Paris with you, I'll make your dreams come true."



Le Pont Neuf (built 1578-1607), oldest standing bridge in Paris despite its name

#### **NOTES**

Sous les ponts de Paris [Under the Bridges of Paris] (1913), a popular song, music by Vincent Scotto, original French lyrics by Jean Rodor. English lyrics by Dorcas Cochran were added in 1952. The bilingual version by Eartha Kitt, with Henri René and his orchestra and chorus, was recorded in New York City on October 25, 1953. Listen to it here: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\_fs3J--izU8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\_fs3J--izU8</a>

# LES MISÉRABLES

## BY DONALD AYNESWORTH



Dan on the Seine River, 2010

Donald ("Dan") Aynesworth taught courses in French literature and civilization as well as in Humanities for twenty-five years at the University of Texas in Austin and has published articles in nineteenth- and twentieth-century French literature.

Tictor Hugo was a social romantic, convinced that he could change society for the better through his writing. And, to a degree, he did just that. In a recent account from *The New York Times Book Review*, Tobias Grey says that *Les Misérables* helped to bring about progressive change in the criminal law and in education for the poor ("Songs from the Barricades," April 2, 2017, 13). The work in question is Hugo's most memorable attack on social injustice, a narrative masterpiece endowed by Hugo with his gift for drawing and painting, the ability to render in French prose his vivid, visual sense of physical and psychological reality: fear and uncertainty, houses, persons and places, etc.



Victor Hugo, Gavroche at 11 years old (1850), pen and ink drawing.

Translated into British and American English immediately upon its appearance and repeatedly since then into who knows how many other languages, the novel is world renowned. Less well known are some of the sources, written and unwritten, from which Hugo drew his materials. Ever a great Parisian *flâneur*, he constantly searched the streets for things he might use in his work. For example, in the early hours of the Revolution of 1848, the writer witnessed a murderous encounter between insurgents and the National Guard, the militant guardians of

middle-class France. At a barricade erected by workers near the St. Denis gate in northern, working-class Paris, Hugo saw, one after the other, two disheveled young women, common whores, climb atop the barricade, and, raising their dresses, defy the national guardsmen to shoot them. And, in quick succession, they were cut down (Hugo, *Souvenirs personnels*). Provocative in part precisely because they are unarmed, these two prostitutes, the very embodiment of privation and despair, are partisans of the people and, arguably, in their shameless cheek, statues

of liberty. They also mark one of the first appearances in Hugo's work of "les misérables."

Hugo's title is a classic instance of the anonymity with which the common people enter history and literature. Privation of identity is, in fact, one of the evils the writer set himself to undo. The boy he calls Gavroche is a case in point. Riot and revolution were often frequented by others like Gavroche, the *gamins de Paris*, running to riot, as Marx and Tocqueville remarked, as to a festival. Gavroche is one of these lost children; orphans as often as not, they multiplied in Paris in the first half of the nineteenth century. The wild young women at the barricade are, one might suspect, gamines de Paris.

The great poet Arthur Rimbaud called *Les Misérables* "un vrai poème" (a real poem). The expression is not too strong.



Émile Bayard, Young Cosette sweeping, 1886 engraving for Victor Hugo's Les Misérables

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*Beacons X* was published in 2007 by ATA on behalf of the Literary Division. On the cover is Tibetan script for the first three poems appearing on page 63 of the anthology. The poems were composed by the Sixth Dalai Lama and translated by Geoff Waters, in whose memory the book was dedicated.

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Deir-Zor: On the Trail of the Armenian Genocide of 1915. Published by Bardig Kouyoumdjian, the photographer of the cover photo and all other photographs in the book.

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Victor Hugo, *Gavroche à 11 ans* (1850), pen and ink drawing. From Wikimedia

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Emile Bayard, Young Cosette sweeping, 1886 engraving for Victor Hugo's Les Misérables. Public Domain.

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