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Leslie Fillion

TRANSLATION INTO ENGLISH OF FRANCE DUCASSE'S *LES ENFANTS DE LA TRAGÉDIE*

Mémoire présenté à la Faculté de traduction et d'interprétation pour l'obtention du Master en
traduction, mention traduction spécialisée

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THE CHILDREN OF MYTH

We ought to lead our lives with anxious flippancy, taking nothing seriously and everything tragically.

– Roger Nimier

Alouette's near-death experience

Water.

“Spit!”

Tap water.

“Spit!”

More water. Quick!

“Spit! Spit!”

Her eyelids are swelling, her ears, her mouth. Her lips and tongue thicken.

“Can’t spit ‘nymore.”

The father says, “I’m calling an ambulance.”

She’s afraid. It hurts. She can’t breathe. Her chest constricts. The mother’s anxious eyes betray her reassuring actions, her even tone of voice.

“Mom, I can’t breathe.”

It’s an emergency, a matter of life and death. That’s her under all the swelling, her on a hospital gurney, manhandled, lurching into the darkness, pricked, prodded, resuscitated. Air. Give her some air. Pressure. Oxygen mask. I.V. Observation. Her heart is beating too fast. She can even hear it in her finger, the one that’s connected to a machine.

“Her name?”

“Alouette.”

“Age?”

“Fourteen.”

“You’re her parents?”

“Her parents, yes. Alouette’s parents.”

People usually say it’s a funny name, a bird’s name, a song, but the nurse has no time for such things. Resuscitating an Alouette is serious business.

“It’s ok, your daughter is out of danger. Do you understand?”

“Out of danger.”

“She could have died, you know. Did you know that?”

“Did you say *die*?”

“Yes, die.”

Despite her name, she is neither a bird nor a song. The second she was born she displayed her full, musical voice, hence the bird name her enthralled parents had chosen the day they first heard their newborn’s melodious babbling. One exceptional voice among countless lazy vocal cords, dry gullets and sounds as sharp and piercing as knives.

Early on, this gift had more than justified her presence in a discordant world. Her every desire came with a repertoire of trills and warbles. From her singing, Pauline and Paul knew when it was time for the essential acts of feeding, bathing, rocking. They would then take turns putting her to sleep. Their alternating voices would give birth to tireless characters. Charmed by the musicality of words, brave Alouette would fight sleep until the tale ended.

Since her night in the hospital, she’s “different”. Fretful, frightened. The daily risk of dying torments her; the naturally happy child has changed her tune. There had been a few warning signs, bursts of huskiness, a darker and darker repertoire. Her voice had grown grittier at the expense of airiness, lost in finesse and nuance what it had gained in strength. Alouette used to sing on key. Now she sings off key, and even when she speaks she’s off pitch. Not for lack of ear, but by defiance. Is she doing it for shock value, to be in tune with the surrounding cacophony, or out of exasperation, melancholy and fatigue?

As the days go by, she falls out of tune like an ill-played instrument. She is suffering, becoming ever-gloomier. Morose and lethargic, she listens to deafening music that defeats her rare attempts at

introspection. She has stopped singing, no melody or lyrics can be heard. Like a beating heart, only the music's rhythmic pulse is keeping her artificially alive. A luthier would say there is a risk the strings will snap, but then a luthier is not much help when it comes to flesh and bones.

The world is so much drabber and sadder than the young girl had imagined. She feels trapped by what she is learning. She had not pictured the planet like this, criss-crossed with badly healed borders. Before Geography, the Earth was a valley, a river, gently smoothed primeval hills, a horizon—a breath of fresh air. What should she make of volcanoes and tsunamis, of this earth that quakes, devastates, devours and engulfs? Her nightmares are compounded by History with its emperors and kings, presidents and prime ministers and their delusions of grandeur; mighty armies, narrow vision. School even boasts of teaching logic based on abstractions in which she is required to believe. As if calculus were a religion! No matter how hard she works, Alouette gets bad marks. Even in French. Especially in French. Dissecting isolated, story-less sentences causes words to lose their meaning. They become nothing but lifeless nouns, colourless adjectives, and verbs obsessed with the passage of time. Text analysis is repellent to her. Alouette refuses to lead her love of words to such slaughter.

Alouette never goes to sleep at night without reading for hours. So she goes to bed later than is recommended for children her age. Her parents receive the odd note from her teachers urging stricter discipline because the student falls asleep in class and is not making the necessary efforts. Why punish a child who reads ten books rather than the same required one ten times?

While some teenagers are eager for real life, Alouette yearns to escape it. Where's the crime in that?

"School is only good for getting in trouble," she says.

She doesn't want to go anymore. At all. Ever. One day, she is living with her family on firm ground, the next, she has vanished. She is up in the tall pine tree that shades the yard and refuses to come down. People fear for her life. What if the depressed teenager jumps off? But all she wants for now is to be allowed to stay up there.

Yes,

up there,

in the tree.

Her idea since resurrecting, her big secret idea—how can you tell if an idea can be trusted, if it is right, if it isn't crazy—her obsession had enjoined her to climb a pine tree and whittle herself a calamus.

According to Pliny the Elder, an author from Ancient Rome, the pine tree is the tree of writers. From it they carved calami in the shape of goose feathers which, naturally, they then used to write. But before being used, calami had to harden for months in manure. Once the calami had gone through this purgatory, authors of yore, and Pliny in particular, used them to pen books.

Alouette wants to write the way you write when you want to write, when that's all you want in life, when life is a revelation. The manure phase poses a few difficulties, but the mother, not wanting to upset her daughter, has promised to give it some thought.

"You should've been more leery, Pauline."

"Of what, Paul?"

In the eyes of a mother pleased to see her daughter take interest in anything at all after despairing of seeing her mope about aimlessly, this project of writing a book seems to justify the handcrafting of a calamus. It seems a doable thing, a desirable thing.

"Why did she have to take a shine to Pliny the Elder, eh?" asks Paul. "Isn't there a new Pliny, a Pliny the Younger, who writes with a pen like everybody else? If I were you, I would buy her scented, glow-in-the-dark pens."

"She wants to be left in peace."

"Fine. But why up there? Why not in the house, in her room, where it's warm?"

Peace. If he could, Paul would build peace for her. With his own two hands.

"She can't very well stay up there."

"Who's going to stop her? You?"

Alouette has lost her mind. How do you respond to people who blame her for it and accuse the mother and father of neglect? They ought to have the necessary authority to make the child come down from her perch. Isn't she their daughter after all? Some would say it's their "responsibility". Yet when they used to help Alouette with her schoolwork, there had been "lessons" beforehand. But now they are expected to intervene. In the name of what knowledge, of what rules?

“Let them talk, Pauline, it doesn’t matter! They’ll forget about us eventually, you’ll see. It won’t be hard, t.v. will give them something else to think about.”

“Do you really believe that we’ll get used to this? You think we should forget our own child, starving and freezing up there?”

“Of course not. It’s not the same for us.”

Paul suggests building her a platform. There are hardwood boards sitting in the basement, left over from a recent floor job. There is also enough for an awning. That way she would be protected from the elements.

“What do we do about food?”

Paul is thinking. Alouette would love her father right now if she could see the wrinkles on his forehead. She would laugh to see him rub the top of his head over and over as if to say that here, in this toolbox, is the key, the master key. There are no problems, he always says, only solutions. That’s it! The solution would be a system of ropes and pulleys working both vertically, up and down and down and up, and horizontally, from the tree to the house and back again. That way basic needs will be met by conveying basic necessities. He is keen to get to work.

“What if she says no?”

“She can’t.”

“She’s fourteen, she’s not a child anymore!”

“Until proven otherwise, darling, she hasn’t flown the coop yet. She’s not in a position to refuse our help.”

He disappears inside his workshop. His wife waits patiently beneath the tree, reading out loud. Alouette falls asleep.

Her classmates jostle each other to catch a glimpse of their friend. They call her name, but she doesn’t answer, doesn’t show herself. What little they do see piques their curiosity. The father demonstrates how the apparatus works to meet her needs and ensure her comfort and survival. The teens ask practical questions. But they can’t get their heads around Alouette’s behaviour.

To entertain them while attempting if at all possible an explanation, Paul tells them the story of a young woman in the western United States who had spent more than a year in a tree to save it from

evil loggers paid by no-less-evil business people wanting to cut it down. One of the boys in the group of Alouette's friends, a tall guy, with meticulously dishevelled raven black hair, refuses to listen. This pine tree looks healthy enough, not at all threatened by any businessman or disease.

"As far as I can tell, Sir, you yourself weren't planning on cutting it down, were you?"

The girl from out West can do nothing for the girl from out East; nor the venerable sequoia for the pine; nor a raven for an alouette.

"Have you heard of Diogenes?" asks Pauline, suggesting a new angle. Can the quest of a modern-day girl be compared to that of a Greek philosopher?

"Classical scholars have written of the philosopher who lived in a barrel. By all accounts, he scorned human vanity. To ridicule his fellow citizens, he roamed Athens in broad daylight, carrying a lit lantern. He used to say he was searching for a human being worthy of the name."

Except that Alouette is fleeing human contact. She is not cynical, not at all like that eccentric philosopher who lived in the public eye more than 2,350 years ago. She neither decries nor defends anything. There is no comparison between the two.

So someone suggests something else, that Alouette's choice rather resembles that of hermits who, through isolation, strengthened their faith. Someone mentions Buddha, sitting under his banyan tree, meditating for endless years, awaiting the "revelation".

Alouette, let's be clear, has neither the pride of Diogenes nor the slightest inclination to believe that she is the "chosen one" and the world will benefit from her experience. She is modestly waiting for the calamus to be ready. Alouette needs the calamus to write and, to write, the calamus needs an Alouette. Isn't it obvious? Oh joy, life is so much simpler than you think!

People say, "But, M'am, that's no life!"

They pity the poor woman for having to empty her daughter's bed pan. There was a time when everyone did it, but you shouldn't waste precious time on such thankless tasks anymore. What slavery! Besides, who does their own cleaning nowadays? There's hired help for that!

What a burden this heartless and moody teenager is! Obviously if you feed her, serve her and bow to her every whim, she's sure to take advantage.

"If you ask me," they advise, "you should starve her out. Let's see how long she lasts on an empty stomach."

Claim as they might that they're not depriving themselves of anything important, nobody believes Pauline and Paul. Actually, they're rather impressed by their daughter's determination. Where could she go anyhow? A tree is all it takes to take root; or a child to create a family bound by time, place and action. All it takes to write this book Alouette dreams of, aside from the calamus and paper, is time, time wrenched from the general hustle and bustle and obligations. And the patience of a dung beetle.

"What do you see?" asks Paul.

"A Grecian sky," replies Alouette.

"And below that?"

"The sea."

"It's far beyond the stars..."

"More like *what a great sea that would be.*"

"The Mediterranean?"

"Exactly."

"And in this sea?"

"Two hundred islands."

"Can you be more specific?"

"The island of Crete."

"What else?"

"Knossos—the palace and the labyrinth."

"What do you see in the labyrinth?"

"There's a monster, I can see him."

But she also sees something else, gets suddenly worked up.

“Oh my God, Daddy!”

“What is it?”

“Eric.”

“What about him?”

She screams.

“He’s fallen!”

Little Eric isn’t a monster, he isn’t in the labyrinth. He’s not from Crete or even from Greece and he isn’t in the Mediterranean either. Eric is a little boy. Enough chit-chat. If Paul doesn’t hurry, the boy will drown.

Paul races four houses down the road where, without even taking the time to remove his shoes, he jumps into the water to fish out the child, wide-eyed at the bottom of the pool. Then, he undertakes to revive him. Mouth to mouth, man and child kiss. The embrace seems to last forever. When Paul runs out of breath, Pauline takes over. Pauline and Paul, Paul and Pauline, mouth to mouth.

The babysitter had fallen asleep rocking the baby. She tells the whole story without leaving anything out, admits her mistake and describes the rescue to Eric’s parents who have finally come home. Eric is alive and well, he’s laughing in his mother’s arms as she consoles the babysitter because, to be honest, she too has dozed off with the baby on occasion. Eric’s dad doesn’t know how to show his gratitude. He kisses Pauline and Paul. He thanks Alouette, standing at the foot of her tree, he’s sorry, sorry for all the things he and his wife have said and thought. He wants absolution. She says nothing.

“Can’t she speak?” asks Eric.

No matter. The neighbours will never again snigger at the girl who saved their child. From now on, Alouette has her place, she watches, warns when she feels danger coming, before disaster strikes. By doing good from up there, she strives to grow along with the tree and hopes to reach a height that will allow her to broaden her line of sight.

The calamus squeaks away. Sheets of inked loose leaf fall from the tree which, over the course of its long life, had only seen the fall of pinecones. Pauline edits, Alouette corrects, Paul types. Teamwork at its best. Of course, she could have set up in a more comfortable spot, but Alouette was

not given a choice. Because of the pine tree in the yard. Nor was the Minotaur when he was locked away in the labyrinth!

Alouette says that little is known of him.

“But you know, do you?” asks her mother.

“No.”

“So you’re making it up?”

“He speaks to me.”

“Who does?”

“Him.”

“Him who?”

“Minotaur.”

Two months go by. Two months of white pages covered in black scribbles falling beneath a slate sky. To the autumn harvest, Alouette adds her morsel of Greek tragedy. Lots of people come to Pauline and Paul’s to celebrate the event. Refreshments are served. Will Alouette agree to come down from her tree? No one knows. It’s a beautiful day. The young stretch out on the carpet of leaves fallen from surrounding maple trees or on blankets, while the older guests unfold lawn chairs and settle in comfortably. Alouette’s legs dangle from the bough where she will read, finally.

Quiet! The tragic child is about to speak.

Iphigenia (*excerpts*)

Rebellion

The outcome of any war is uncertain. My father had been emotional when he bade us goodbye before joining his army. His tears had frightened me. This new conflict worried him more than usual.

We children were told that the wife of Menelaus, the beautiful Helen, the most beautiful of Greek women, had been abducted by Paris, son of Priam, king of Troy. Menelaus was bent on revenge and bringing back the hostage. The Trojans had best be prepared, for all the Hellenic kings, led by

Agamemnon himself, had sided with the jilted husband. Greeks against Trojans, Trojans against Greeks. There was no need to be good at arithmetic to understand the equation.

Helen was my mother's sister, and my father's brother was none other than Menelaus. This family affair was unprecedented in scale. Thousands of men were willing to fight for a woman of whom, to my astonishment, people spoke ill. Had she given in to the attentions of the handsome prince and his promises of a more luxurious life, as some claimed? I, for one, did not believe it. Her father, Tyndareus, had allowed her to choose her own husband, a privilege of which few women could boast. Amid her many suitors, all of them kings, Greek and valiant, Menelaus had been the lucky winner. What possible motive could a happy woman have to leave a man she had chosen?

Not to mention that Helen had a daughter, a fact some seemed to forget. I could not accept that she could have wished to be separated from her. I hoped for a swift and ruthless victory so that Hermione would not suffer unnecessarily from her mother's absence. I was moved by the idea that so many warriors had no other goal but that of reuniting a mother and her child.

How naive I was, in love and in politics! If fate had given me the opportunity, I would certainly have explored both topics.

The joy of seeing my father nearly made me forget the pain of leaving him. Thus, I teetered between sadness and happiness, paying no heed to my surroundings. My mother's cry tore me from my melancholic reverie.

How sinister the encampment was! She was right. Where were the men? There was not a soul to be seen. Then one of them appeared, stern, armour clinking. He motioned us to follow him. Agamemnon appeared sombre and distant. When he saw Clytemnestra, his brow furrowed, but he uttered no reproach. He nonetheless ordered that she be taken to her tent. My mother and I exchanged worried glances. Nothing was as we had pictured it.

As soon as we were alone, my father took me in his arms, holding me almost too tightly. He seemed troubled. Had my upbringing not taught me reserve, I would have bombarded him with all the questions milling around my head. He who was normally so talkative could not think of the right words and so let go of me and turned away. The silence was oppressive.

"How was the journey?"

The question stunned me. "What is the matter, Father?" I asked rather than reply to the question.

Since I had dared first, he dared next. What use was there in postponing the confession? So he confessed.

As he told me what Artemis and the gods, the augur, the oracle, the kings and war required of me, I trembled. In the face of all these wills relentlessly stripping me of my own, I rebelled. Against their determination and that of the commander in chief, I pitted my own resolve to live with this body, this much-admired hair, these eyes, this soft skin, these healthy, sturdy teeth, and all I had been taught, my thoughts, my plans, my appetite for life. Could this man, my father, in whom I had placed all my trust and whom I believed dearly loved me, truly surrender his child to the executioner?

How should I have reacted? I had just spent the previous days looking forward to great happiness, only to be forced to make the most unjust sacrifice. At least, that is how it appeared to me in the beginning. I thought of my sister and brother whom I had just left, tried to imagine their feelings upon learning my sad fate, but I could not, I could only picture myself alive, laughing, loving, surrounded by children, yes, that's it, lots of children. As I tried desperately to appeal to the king with my tears, my pleading, he kept repeating, repeating that he was bound by duty, that the oracle had named me, that we had no choice, no other choice, that justice was taking its course, that we owed allegiance to the gods. I beseeched him to tell me what I had done to displease them. How could I atone for my sin, if indeed I had sinned? Why me? Why not Hermione?

"Hermione!" he cried, growing tall and pushing me away. Had I committed a crime he could not have looked at me more harshly. I had dared picture another in my place, wished to save myself by condemning my kin. How unworthy of a king's daughter! My father was a man of honour and could not accept that I had been tempted by such thoughts. My cowardice was repugnant to him. He no longer saw in me a daughter. I was lost. In trying to save myself, I had only succeeded in earning the contempt of my father for whom the rule of law was paramount. To live under such conditions was intolerable to me! Yet I did not want to die, and in this state of confusion I ran to my mother.

Her scream was bloodcurdling. Every man in his tent was shaken by her outrage. She would never let this happen! She refused to lose her Iphigenia. She swore at her coward husband and the murderous gods, and I trembled lest the gods of Olympus should hear her and demand retribution.

Despite my fears, I did not leave her side as she seemed the only one capable of fighting for me. But she rebuffed me when I asked to come with her to see my father. I did not want to remain alone, I was terrified they would come for me in her absence. She was intractable. As I sat waiting, the encampment echoed with their shouts.

Achilles

I remember my mother's bruised face. Clytemnestra had lost the battle. But not the war, she assured me, swallowing her tears. Her husband's inflexibility had only superficially paralyzed her; she was already plotting her revenge. She was exasperated by my despair which she deemed unreasonable. She would have liked me to be feistier. Granted, our opponent was formidable, but failure was unthinkable. How I wished I had her confidence!

So it was with joy that she saw Achilles arrive, a joy she instantly camouflaged as severe bereavement. The man was brought in to a defeated woman. Without introduction, Achilles informed her of his intention to leave the encampment with his men. Until that day, he had not known of the dealings of King Agamemnon, who had lured Iphigenia under false pretences. Insulted by the unsanctioned use of his name to mislead the young girl by offering her a marriage of which, he, Achilles, the main interested party, had no knowledge, hurt by this offence, he threatened to definitively withdraw his support to Agamemnon's army.

So, the gallant Achilles was angry. What more could we ask for? He wanted to leave? His name, his honour, his pride. Excellent! Combined, these ingredients were explosive—my mother was counting on it.

Given his reputation and the weight of his military contingent, only Achilles could force the reversal of such a cruel decision. If we could convince him to change his plans, that is.

My mother had guessed the use she could make of this vainglorious man. By throwing herself at his feet (never had she humiliated herself to such a degree in front of anyone), she hoped to sway his heart.

I was ashamed to see her this way and disgusted by the man who tolerated this state of affairs, rigid and passive before the prostrate queen. How could I possibly have eagerly envisioned marriage to that disdainful man? I felt ridiculous. He had neither feeling, nor munificence, nor goodness. What relief from the depth of my distress to have escaped (even if it had all been fantasy) a person I was certain would have made me unhappy.

Achilles could not be accused of collusion in this matter since he himself had been ill-treated. His untimely departure would serve no one's cause. My mother's ploy was to offer him the opportunity, in exchange for a minor favour, to exact revenge on Agamemnon and remain in the encampment. The former could not afford to lose a warrior of the likes of Achilles, and Clytemnestra knew this. To spare the pride of men required stealthy manoeuvring.

“What if the oracle were mistaken?” suggested my mother.

“The gods are never mistaken,” replied the demi-god.

“But what of an augur like old Calchas? Why might he not interpret wrongly?”

Achilles remained unmoved, sceptical.

Ostensibly flummoxed (though she was not), Clytemnestra begged him to listen. She clung to his legs to keep him from leaving. There was another option.

Today I look back on that moment in horror. The idea was to prove that the virgin expected on the sacrificial altar was in fact no longer a virgin.

My own mother had dared offer up my virginity, arguing that there was no other way of saving me, and Achilles had not objected. Clytemnestra had expected the kind-hearted king to refuse, of course, instead offering marriage, a real one. Agamemnon would not have dared harm the future wife of the great Achilles. And he had nothing to lose by it, he was free to repudiate his wife afterwards if the bargain were not to his liking. But he kept silent, turning his gaze away from me.

My mother pressed on, not seeing the futility of it. “But is not the important thing to save this child?”

Suddenly, I was no longer my mother’s child. I spoke. Offended at the bartering of my virtue, I drove them both away. I did not wish them to interfere in my life any longer: if my fate would have me die, then I preferred to die proudly than to live in shame.

Achilles left without a word. My mother followed him. I knew she was displeased with me, deeply displeased.

Astyanax (*excerpt*)

The Trojan horse

Contrary to Cassandra’s predictions and continued moaning on the fate of our people, the Greeks were defeated. Overnight, they abandoned Troy. Repeat as I might that they had left, that their boats were no longer anchored in the port, I could see horror in her eyes and her torn robes. She wanted to show me her wound, but there was not the least redness beyond, perhaps, the blush brought on by the overwhelming emotion of her visions. Poor Cassandra!

I, like everyone else, doubted her gift of clairvoyance.

The Greeks had left us a memento of their visit: a gigantic wooden horse sat majestically on the beach. Was it a ruse, a trap? Were men hiding in the beast's hollow belly? A spear was hesitatingly jabbed into it and remained stuck in its bowels. No movement from within. Someone yelled 'Burn it!' But the horse was so majestic, stomachs clenched with indignation at the thought of such a sacrilegious act. The Trojans would pay dearly for their love of pretty things. Priam, after too little thought, decided to welcome the monument to the glory of Athena. He ordered the horse moved inside the walls.

So sudden and improbable a victory was debated for hours. Finally, tired of waiting for permission, the people began to celebrate. How could one keep them from drinking? While those men left standing slipped progressively into a stupor, we children took our fill of sun. We rolled about in the sand and frolicked in the waves, not straying too far from the shore. None of us knew how to swim. My mother had said she would join me, which she did. As a curse on all of humanity, she donned her yellow robes, stained with Hector's blood. Did she mean to wash off the filth of war in the water? Or was she simply out to find me, out of care and worry? The diluted blood formed a diaphanous wake.

When she walked past me without as much as a smile, I thought the sun had blinded her and she was still looking for me. The call of the waves was so much stronger than mine! I tried to run but the water held me back, pushing me back toward the shore. The sea will always be more powerful than a frail, unhappy child. Andromache waded deeper into the water.

Before the water closed up over her head, perhaps my mother thought of me and took pity on me. "Never apart," she said as she pulled me from the swirling waters. "Together always, as long as we live." She kept that promise.

Life is so short.

Death, whatever people say, does not reunite those who love one another.

That was to be the only night of festivities. The Greeks, hidden in the horse, took advantage of the darkness and general inebriation to attack. It was a bloodbath. Not a single man was spared. The women and children were assembled in the public square and doled out as slaves to the warlords. Long deprived of women, the soldiers relieved themselves brutally, regardless of the age of their prey. I recognized a few of my playmates who were barely older than I was. "Mere children," whispered my mother. I could feel her hand clenching my shoulder.

I can still feel each and every one of her nails digging into my flesh. I see my grand-mother leaving the palace. Already shaken by the death of her husband and all of her sons, the queen sways with every step. Why such an ordeal? At her age! Where are they taking her? What is she shouting? What has she lost? Who has lost their mind? Cassandra? Where is Cassandra, what have they done with her? Who tore her robes? Who is nursing her wound? “Hide!” says my mother. She is frightened for me. Must I really hide in Hector’s tomb? What is that smell? Why does it stink so badly? How long must I bear this extreme stench? Does one get used to extreme stench? What if I pulled off my father’s helmet? What if I put on his armour? In these trappings I would be the strongest. Strong enough to repel the invaders and defend my mother, my poor mother forced to remarry a Greek. Who could want to hurt me? How can I defend myself? Father, what say you to the son whose death they seek? Why say you nothing? Has the cat got your tongue? Who ate your tongue? Who stole all the heat from you? It is cold. Why is it so cold? When will my mother be back? What if she does not come back? What if she is too late? How long does it take to die? They will question her to find out where I am, where I am hiding. What will they do to her? Would they go as far as torture her? Would they dare kill her? How can I find out? How can I live without her? How can I die without her?

If I must die to save her, so be it. I will come out of here, but please do not hurt her—do not hurt me—I am coming, I am coming (too bright), where are you taking me? Where is my mother? Leave me be, I beg you, not my father’s helmet! No, it is mine, where are we going? I am hungry. Where? There? But it is dangerous, I am not allowed, children are not allowed to come up here, it is forbidden, I must ask my mother, she will worry.

“Walk!” they say.

I walk.

I could still have fled, I am nimble and fast when I want to be, I could have escaped them.

“Walk!”

I walk.

Cassandra had told me I would be the last to die. If all the men are dead then I am already old. This tiny old man of seven must prove his worth.

Instinctively, I knew not to call my mother for help. They pushed me from atop one of our beautiful cliffs. They always forbade us children going near the edge because it was dangerous. I deduced that I was a child no more.

INTRODUCTION

Theory v. practice

It was clear to me from the outset that I wanted to work on a piece of literature for my M.A. dissertation. The main reason being that, realistically, I will not be making a living from this form of translation so it seemed the perfect opportunity to try my hand at it. Beyond the desire to do an annotated translation of a work of fiction, it was also important to me to make a Québécois contribution to the annals of the Faculté de traduction et d'interprétation (FTI) because I thought it would be useful and interesting for the faculty and students to be exposed to a piece of my home province's literature. If the *raison d'être* of my translation was, in my mind, the stylistic, linguistic and cultural uniqueness of the text I chose to work with, then it followed that my objective was to convey all the elements that constituted that uniqueness, even if they stuck out in English. This dovetailed nicely with Lawrence Venuti's foreignizing approach to translation according to which the foreign text is "privileged in a foreignizing translation only in so far as it enables a disruption of target-language cultural values" (2006: 556). But is this "disruption" achievable in practice? Are there parameters of the translation act or features of a source text that impair a translator's ability to reach this ideal?

Les Enfants de la Tragédie

I set out to test the "disruptibility" of English-language cultural values by choosing a Quebec novel. My father put me in touch with a friend of his who happened to be looking to have some of her books translated. She kindly met with me and graciously agreed that I should dissect *Les Enfants de la Tragédie* for the purpose of my higher education.

Les Enfants was published in 2003 and is directed at a secondary school audience. When I first sat down to read it, I had this preconceived notion of what the novel would be like: easy to read, unsophisticatedly romantic and somewhat simplistic in its portrayal of the subject matter. But it quickly became clear that this was not your run-of-the-mill novel for young readers (even when taking into consideration the fact that I hadn't read any books for 14 year-olds in some 15 years).

Les Enfants tells the story of 14-year-old Alouette who, after suffering a near-fatal allergy attack, struggles to overcome her nascent fear of death and to find meaning and purpose in life. She takes up residence in a pine tree in the family yard to re-write Greek myths from the perspective of the murdered children. Giving these innocent lives a voice proves cathartic for Alouette, and she finally comes down from her tree, after what the reader guesses through the changing seasons is approximately a year, having rediscovered her own voice and armed with newfound direction and even love. The novel recounts five stories from Greek mythology, narrated from the viewpoint of nine

child characters (the Minotaur, Icarus, the five children of Heracles, Iphigenia and Astyanax), interspersed with episodes in Alouette's life up in the tree, unfolding in the present day and related by an omniscient narrator. The result is a continuous interplay between past and present, Ancient Greece and modern-day Quebec, first person and third person narration, child and adult.

The primary aim of *Les Enfants* is without a doubt didactic, yet it is written in such a way as to make readers forget the teaching component and lose themselves in both Alouette's arboreal universe and the fantastical world of mythology. Although the premise does require that readers suspend their disbelief somewhat (which, as a rather down-to-earth adult, I am not sure I entirely achieved), it is a profound and thought provoking read, written in a style both poetic and unexpected. Upon further reading, I began to discover just how rich and multi-layered the narration was, which is what, in the end, prompted me to choose this book for my dissertation.

What exactly makes the novel so remarkable, so foreign? Is it its content or the way it is written or both? What specificities would lead to a loss for the reader if not carried over in the translation? One would expect any cultural references embedded in the story to be the most compelling elements and to cause the most immediate difficulty. However, *Les Enfants* contains very few overt cultural references. There are some instances of colloquialisms which, by virtue of their scarcity, are significant and invaluable and thereby inescapable in translation. I would argue, though, that the novel really stands out by its style: the formal register, rhythm, many-layered narration, occasional verse-like syntax, imagery and didactic elements. These aspects must be carried over otherwise the readers will receive a truncated and distorted version of the story from which they will be unable to form a reasonable interpretation. This may seem self-evident, but the question remains: how feasible is wholesale replication of the foreign in practice? The following analysis will answer this question and discuss what exigencies affect a translator's choices and, by extension, the degree of foreignizing achieved.

TRANSLATION IN CONTEXT

Before I embark on the discussion of my translational choices, it is pertinent to describe how I set the scene for this act of translation. When a translation is undertaken by a competent translator under optimal conditions (i.e., a realistic deadline, adequate reference materials, fair remuneration, etc.), the act of translation implies choices and engages the translator's responsibility *vis-à-vis* those choices and their effects (Hewson, 2011b). It seemed impossible to me to make thoughtful and consistent choices without first delineating the boundaries of my translation project. The main boundary—one I anticipated would doom my foreignizing project—was that of my audience.

Audience

Age

When I tackled the translation of *Les Enfants de la Tragédie*, I had no other brief than to translate for an English-speaking Canadian audience. Indeed, as France Ducasse later explained, the idiosyncrasies of today's publishing industry are such that, realistically, the market for her books would have to remain Canada, should she even be so lucky as to manage to have the English manuscript picked up by a publisher. So armed with an idea of my reader's general cultural background, I needed to figure out whether I was translating for children or adults. This proved somewhat more of a challenge than expected.

In an early exchange, Ms. Ducasse told me that she had not written the book with a single category of reader in mind. Yet given her choice of characters, she knew that she would be broaching the child and teen psyche and therefore the story was likely to interest that age group. In light of her experience reading to primary school children, she knew that she could tell the stories in a variety of ways to fit a range of ages, but she opted to target 14-year-olds, as that was the approximate age at which mythology was introduced in Quebec secondary schools. However, her publisher had something different in mind and was looking for a book aimed at a slightly older readership, that is, cégep¹ or university level. As a result, Ms. Ducasse endeavoured to write a book for a mixed audience, blending different elements to appeal to specific groups while striving to stay somewhat neutral.

At first glance, *Les Enfants* is clearly for a younger audience: Alouette, arguably the main character, or at least the one who holds the story together, is 14; the characters she attempts to bring back to life are children of various ages; and there is a definite, if largely subtle, didactic component. Ms. Ducasse explained that she created the character of Alouette for the exact purpose of pulling in younger readers, as she had found that such connective characters were a common feature of children's literature.

However, as one delves into the novel, it becomes quickly apparent that Ms. Ducasse's style is better suited to an older, more experienced reader. The terms are at times advanced or dated and the syntax tends to be rather complex, making for a less-than-smooth read at times. In addition, the thoughts expressed and certain images often reflect a more mature outlook, or perhaps that of a precocious youth, which Alouette certainly is. If nothing else, *Les Enfants* is quite a cerebral, philosophical book, which could be off-putting to many young readers.

¹ The collège d'enseignement général et professionnel is a post-secondary education facility unique to the province of Quebec that offers technical and pre-university training. Students begin to focus their field of study at this stage.

To confirm my appreciation of the level of the novel and gain a better idea of the targeted age group, I conducted a little experiment in which I asked my nieces to read *Les Enfants de la Tragédie* and give me their honest opinion of it. My nieces are 13- and 16-year-old monolingual Francophones, born in Quebec, but raised and schooled in French-speaking Switzerland.

My elder niece describes herself as a fairly avid reader, typically of dramatic or detective novels, although the demands of school and her extracurricular activities have put a dent in how much she now reads. She told me that at first she could not really get into the novel because she did not understand what Alouette was doing in the tree, she found that there was too much jumping around from topic to topic, and that having the mother chiming in was confusing. However, it was not enough to put her off entirely, and once she reached the myths she really enjoyed the book. She also liked the latter chapters when Alouette falls in love. Aside from the initial confusion, the style did not faze her and there was nothing that she did not understand, that she had to ask an adult for clarifications on, or that hindered her appreciation of the book. She remembered that they had briefly talked about myths in school when she was 10 or 12, so she already knew the stories of the Minotaur and Heracles (though she knew him under his Roman persona) but not those of Icarus, Iphigenia or Astyanax. Mythology is taught in the ninth grade, but only to those students in the advanced stream who go on to the ‘gymnase’ and university.

She admitted that had she seen *Les Enfants* in a bookstore, she most likely would not have bought it on the basis of the synopsis on the back cover. She thought that her friends who “read a lot” would certainly enjoy it too, although the girls much more than the boys. She thought younger readers (12-13-year-olds) would have trouble keeping up with the plot and probably tended to enjoy lighter books.

Our suspicion was confirmed by my younger niece who told me that the synopsis on the back cover did not tempt her to read the book. She nonetheless gave it a try, despite her lack of appetite for “history stuff” or death and murder. That is to say, her mother read her the first chapter (i.e., the chapter on Alouette that sets the stage for the myths), on the basis of which she did not want to read on, marking the end of her foray into *Les Enfants*. She said she would have liked to reach the mythical sections but was put off by the level of the vocabulary. Nor did she like or understand the abrupt rhythm of the novel’s opening lines. Although she admitted to not being much of a reader and preferring comical stories, she did not think her friends would enjoy *Les Enfants* either.

The upshot of my experiment was that, even though Ms. Ducasse had intended her novel for 14-year-olds, the level of difficulty was likely set too high. This left me with two options for my translation, assuming I was targeting the same age group: lowering the level to what I thought was appropriate or giving my readers credit and emulating the level of language.

Encyclopaedia

However, determining my target age group was not a solid enough basis for my translational choices. Readers are not a *tabula rasa*; they come to a text with a certain amount of baggage that conditions how they read the text. In order to make responsible choices, I had to understand what my readers' baggage was.

It is self-evident that for two people to understand one another they must share a common language. In the absence of a mutually intelligible language, two people cannot have a proper conversation beyond what can be communicated through signs and gestures. But even when two people do share a language, miscommunications still arise, and such disconnects often stem from discrepancies between the speaker's intent—as embodied by the words used—and the message perceived by the listener. The same is true of the relationship between what an author writes and that which a reader understands. We do not, as a rule, choose our words at random: authors carefully craft their sentences to reflect what they mean—directly or indirectly—and ensure that their reader correctly interprets them. And that is where the rub is. Interpretation. “There is meaning concealed in the text, and it is the task of interpretation to discover, unveil and disclose that meaning. [...] [T]he truth of our interpretation is defined as the adequacy between the interpretation and the speaker's or author's (intention of) meaning.” (Lecercle, 1999: 3-4) Many elements go into how we interpret messages, and though the author may have had one intention, there can be myriad interpretations of that intention resulting from the diverse knowledge, or lack thereof, readers bring to the text.

Eco pushes this notion further by stating that “the meaning of the text is not a direct function of the author's intention, it is determined by the context” (Lecercle, 1999: 127). In turn, the context consists of language and what he terms the ‘encyclopaedia’. He contrasts the encyclopaedia with the dictionary, which merely provides pragmatic definitions of observable things. The encyclopaedia encompasses all the images, connotations and ideas that have become associated with a given object, place or state. And since languages—and related encyclopaedias—grow out of people's response to the material environment they live in, they are necessarily a reflection of those groups' perspective and the importance they ascribe to various aspects of that environment at a given time (Vico in Lecercle, 1999: 107-8). Thus, the encyclopaedia is a constantly evolving ‘local map’, designed to represent that which is not representable (Eco, 1984: 83).

It is clear, therefore, that for communication between author and reader to be successful, both sides need to share encyclopaedic knowledge. It is through this knowledge that the reader selects the relevant information and gives it computable shape (Lecercle, 1999: 203-4). More accurately, the

authors' encyclopaedia need not overlap exactly with that of their readers², but they must at least have a clear idea of it if they are to keep their attention. Lecercle goes as far as to state that correctly interpreting a text depends just as much on its meaning as on its intended audience since the reader informs the angle of a text (*ibid*: 17).

In order to properly understand where my prospective audience was coming from and what its needs might be when reading my translation, I thought it was crucial to compare the readers of the source text (Francophone teenagers from Quebec) and those of the target text (teenagers from English-speaking Canada). My research revealed that the background knowledge of the two sets of readers might be rather different.

Prior to 2000 when the curriculum reform was rolled out across Quebec, the general history course taught in the second year of secondary school (i.e., grade 8 [13-14 year-olds]) did touch upon Ancient Greece and its political, economic and social life as well as mythology as an aspect of culture. However, since the reform, the general history course has been divided into two strands taught in the first and second years. Ancient Greece is broached in the first year, but strictly from the standpoint of the birth of democracy. That being said, the Ministry of Education has also drafted new teaching documents highlighting content that should be broached with students in order to properly integrate the various concepts. In one such document, under the heading "culture and beliefs", students are expected to distinguish between philosophy and mythology, although teachers are given very little instruction on how to go about this. The upshot is that today's 14-year-olds in Quebec get only two hours of history per week that include only a perfunctory look at mythology, if any. Therefore it can be surmised that the average Quebec teenager has very little knowledge of Greek mythology.

The same cannot be said of most of their counterparts in English-speaking Canada who, in theory, should have at least basic knowledge of Greek mythology. There is a major caveat to this, however, and that is that English-speaking Canada is far from a homogenous place. Canada is a federation and education was devolved to the provinces; consequently, each province designs its own curriculum. My research into the secondary school curricula in all eight English-speaking provinces and the one officially bilingual province shows striking differences in their social studies programmes.

Ontario appears to have the most comprehensive study of the topic: it is addressed in two separate disciplines, history and world religions, with stated learning objectives related to the role and importance of legends, myths and traditions in society and the contribution of certain individuals to the Arts, including the Homeric epics. New Brunswick also has a sizeable unit on "The Glory that was

² In fact, it cannot exactly overlap since no two encyclopaedias are precisely the same because they are largely conditioned by time, place, experience and, I would add, age. You could take two people of similar age from the same geographical area and still find that their encyclopaedias diverge wildly because their personal history has caused them to see and categorize the world differently.

Greece” which discusses Greek values as revealed by the gods and myths, the Greek gods as compared with the Christian god, and Greek dramatic theatre. The curricula in British Columbia and Alberta are similar to Quebec’s, focusing on how Ancient Greece helped forge Western civilization and philosophy. The social studies and history curricula of the remaining provinces are heavily centred on Canada or the post-war era, or both, and do not appear to deal with Ancient Greece at all. The one constant among those curricula that do address Ancient Greece is that the subject is taught later (in the last two years of secondary school, i.e., grades 11-12 [ages 16 -18]³) than in Quebec.

In sum, not only did my target audience comprise variegated age groups, the main readership the author wished to reach through translation did not have uniform background knowledge to draw on. Based on this and the conclusion of my age experiment, I thought it best to err on the side of caution in terms of the language I used—in other words, nothing too historical or allusive—all the while trying to keep older readers on board and striving to be faithful to the author’s unique style and penchants.

A tale of two model readers

It is not sufficient, however, for authors/translators to be aware of their readers’ encyclopaedia: the actual activation of that knowledge is entirely dependent on the reader’s interpretive needs, goals and talents (Lecercle, 1999: 208). Thus they have to envision a composite of their reader, baptized by Eco as the Model Reader, capable of “deal[ing] interpretively with the expressions in the same way the author deals generatively with them” (Eco, 1979: 7). When conceiving the Model Reader, authors/translators must imagine all the possible interpretative paths the Model Reader might take in order to then write in a way that orients him in the desired direction. In light of the previous section on encyclopaedia, we know that every reader comes to a text with different knowledge. This does not render the concept of Model Reader irrelevant; however it does mean that authors/translators must control for certain factors and make a conscious decision as to what level they can feasibly pitch complicated elements. Naturally, imagining a Model Reader and multiple interpretative paths requires time, a luxury translators often do not have (and it is doubtful that most authors bother with this step either). In fact, Venuti (2008) asserts that low remuneration for literary translation drives freelance translators to produce several translations a year, inevitably limiting the creativeness and critical reflection applied to a project.

In the context of translation, there can be said to be two Model Readers who affect the end product: the translator and the reader of the target text. I, as the conveyor of *Les Enfants* to an English-speaking audience, was the first test of how the novel is interpreted. Of course, being an adult with a certain reading experience and a translator with a purpose to boot, my interpretation was unlikely to

³ In New Brunswick the subject is part of the grade 10 programme (ages 14-15).

match that which Ms. Ducasse intended/expected from the source text audience. However daunting it may be, particularly for a novice translator such as myself, to settle on an interpretation and decide that it is valid enough to be the version imposed on a given audience, translators must stand by their interpretation and make the relevant logical choices.

So it was my task to put across my interpretation, formed to the best of my knowledge on the basis of the textual clues left by the author, in a way that ensured my readers gleaned a similar meaning. In this particular case, there was the added difficulty that my readership was homogenous in neither age nor encyclopaedia. It seemed the best course of action to cater to the lowest common denominator, which meant that my Model Reader was approximately 14 years old, an English-speaking Canadian (or non-Canadian going through the Canadian school system), and somewhat to moderately familiar with Greek mythology. Yet I did not want to disregard the author's secondary intention of also appealing to an older audience, so my Model Reader, though perhaps ill-versed in things Greek, was nonetheless a fairly experienced reader open to being occasionally challenged by a text. In the case of *Les Enfants*, the challenge for the reader lay not so much in the lexis but rather in the depth and formal treatment of the subject matter and the overall style, including syntax, register and rhythm.

Systems

Now armed with information on my target readers' age and background knowledge, I turned to setting my next boundary, that is, how my translation fitted into the target culture. My translation of *Les Enfants de la Tragédie*, regardless of whether or not it would ever be published, could not be seen in isolation: it was in part the product of the English-Canadian literary system it was trying to penetrate.

Systems theory was born out of Russian structuralism and, although it can be applied to society as a whole, the model is quite interesting in relation to literature and, by extension, literature in translation. In essence, the Arts are a function of a multi-layered polysystem⁴, each layer being dependent on the previous, from the religious stratum, through the political organization, to the artistic scene and down to the specific literary system which itself consists of a range of dynamic sub-systems. The literary system—and its sub-systems—can be represented as two concentric circles, or a centre and periphery. The centre comprises a core of dominant works while the periphery is home to newer, less rule-bound texts. There is constant interplay between the two, with experimental or 'lesser' classes of literature gradually pushing towards the centre, thus relegating established works to the literary hinterland as society, cultures and tastes evolve. Ironically, the edginess of peripheral works

⁴ Itamar Even-Zohar, one of the most prominent proponents of this theory, coined the term 'polysystem' (Hermans, 1999). However, for the sake of simplicity and because the term is somewhat tautological, I propose to use the term 'system' in this dissertation, as a system already implies a network of interdependent elements.

drives them to greater notoriety, popularity and acceptability (i.e., to the centre) where by definition they petrify over time and run the risk of being dislodged by new arrivals from the periphery (Hermans, 1999: 105).

The literary system of a given country, culture or language is not a stand-alone entity. Its centre and periphery interact not only with each other but also with the literary systems of other countries, cultures and languages. The boundaries of a given system can be more or less permeable depending on its current condition (*idem*: 109). According to Lambert, the balance within a system:

[...] dépend essentiellement de la cohérence qui caractérise les normes et modèles reconnus comme le centre du système. L'état d'équilibre ou de déséquilibre du système dépend des relations entre le centre (le système dominant) et les (sous-) systèmes environnants. Son fonctionnement et son évolution sont orientés par les interférences entre la production, la tradition et l'importation. (Lambert, 2006: 17)

Young literary systems and those in flux tend to be more open to atypical texts, lesser genres or foreign works as they forge their core of mainstream oeuvres. It follows that if such systems are importing works from other systems with which to build or shore up their foundational centres, the role of translations—and translators—is crucial. Conversely, well established systems are much more reluctant to accept unconventional texts, let alone foreign ones, and on the contrary tend to be more forceful in imposing their own works on other systems.

So then what exactly makes a central piece of literature central? According to Lefevere (1992), it is a matter of ideology; in other words, a deliberate choice based on certain beliefs that condition what a society or culture sees as acceptable and desirable. Naturally, literary works that conform to this ideology will garner more official support and have greater sway with the public, hence their central status. It is important to note that in this context 'ideology' is not merely political but denotes a generally held worldview. Which takes us back to communication between author and reader. The prevailing literary ideology is expressed through a code known as poetics which, as defined by Hermans, consists of "two components: one is an inventory of literary devices, genres, motifs, symbols, prototypical characters and situations, the other a concept of what the role of literature is, or should be, in society at large." (Hermans, 1985: 229) So if authors are true to the generally recognized poetics, their oeuvre is likely to join the ranks of literary heavy-weights, whereas if they deviate from them—be it through their use of language or choice of genre or by overstepping their bounds as authors—it might fall into relative literary oblivion.

Fluid as the centre and periphery may be, there is a near immutable "centre of the centre", a canon of works that were instrumental in shaping a literary system from its inception. In the Western

literary tradition, that canon is arguably composed of early writings such as the Greek epics and scripture. Besides the fact that these classics are some of the first written records of those primeval societies (to have survived, that is), they also cemented their beliefs and mores. They formed the basis for subsequent writings, models for capturing the world we inhabit. A spot in the canon confers a certain status: “not only are elements constantly viewed in relation to other elements, but they derive their value from their position in a network.” (Hermans, 1999: 107)

This hierarchy of works means that, by default, certain genres sit squarely in the periphery, though they are by no means less popular. Such is the case, for example, of crime novels, science fiction and Harlequin romances. (Of course, given the implied multiplicity of systems in the polysystemic model, it could be said that each genre is itself a system with a canonical centre and a periphery. For example, the centre of the ‘thriller’ sub-system could include category-defining books by the likes of, say, Steven King, while more recent contributions by lesser known authors which do not necessarily exactly fit the well-worn format would occupy the periphery.) Children’s literature is one of those “lesser” genres, as a result of both the stylistic specificities of writing for children and the perception that its audience is made up of less sophisticated readers.

The systemic model had a double influence on me as I embarked on my translation of *Les Enfants de la Tragédie*. First, the novel’s subject matter, Greek mythology, is an undisputed part of the Western literary canon and as such calls for a degree of deference. For Lefevre, the translator translates “out of reverence for the cultural prestige the original has acquired. The greater the prestige, the more ‘grammatical and logical’ the translation is likely to be, especially in the case of texts regarded as the ‘foundation texts’ of a certain type of society.” (1992: 50) To be sure, *Les Enfants* is not a “pure” re-write of the Homeric epics: the stories are recounted in prose, from an unconventional angle and with some creative additions. Nevertheless, Ms. Ducasse wanted to be true to the spirit of the original myths by attempting to preserve their atmosphere. Part of what makes the myths so appealing is their aura of mystique. Even nowadays, when most of what mythology sought to explain has been elucidated by science, the stories still resonate with people. In her mind, the only way to convey that world was through language that, although not archaic, was not quite contemporary either.

Second, the fact that the intended audience is a younger readership positions *Les Enfants* in the periphery of the literary system of French-speaking Quebec. So not only is it a minor work in the source system, there is likely to be little appetite for its translation in the target system (English Canada) which is dominant, has its own well-developed repertoire of children’s literature and, proportionally to non-English-language systems, tends not to publish much translated literature.

It was with these two apparently competing forces in mind that I set out to translate this novel. On the one hand, I felt a degree of responsibility, not only to Ms. Ducasse’s intention and her novel,

but also to the history and tradition inherent in the subject matter, not to mention the expectations of the readers that come with the status enjoyed by the Greek myths. On the other hand, I could not lose sight of the fact that I was translating for a young audience who might not yet have such an engrained notion of the world they were being asked to embrace.

Approach

In addition to determining the external parameters of a translation project—in this case, who I was translating for and in what context—a translator should also establish an overarching goal in order to make consistent choices.

Foreign v. domestic

Here I recall my aim to translate *Les Enfants de la Tragédie* in a way that would “disrupt” Canadian English-language values. It was based on my own proclivities as a translator and on Venuti’s work on source-oriented translation. He contrasts a domesticating method, defined as an “ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values”, with a foreignizing method, or “an ethno-deviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text” (2006: 548). The former, which he equates with a strategy of fluency, continues to be the dominant theory and practice in English-language translation (*ibid*: 553). He proposes instead a strategy he terms resistancy, which “challenges the target-language culture” (*ibid*: 554). So a translator can either distill the foreign elements to make them more digestible for the readers or exercise pressure on the readers to incorporate those elements into their frame of reference.

Foreignizing goes against the grain of what is generally considered acceptable by most literary stakeholders (publishers, critics and readers), who tend to value fluency over visibility of the original (Venuti, 2008: 1). For proponents of the domesticating approach, a translated text is at its best when:

the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem more transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer’s personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text—the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation but the ‘original’ (*ibid*).

This view simply is not logical to me. By making the translation read more smoothly, without any jarring parts that “don’t sound quite right”, the translator does not put across the foreignness of the original but rather glosses it over and even removes it altogether. The end result is that readers may have a comfortable reading experience but will certainly, unbeknownst to them, lose out on the text’s stimulating elements, on an opportunity for a bit of virtual travel. Venuti goes on to say that, for fans of domestication, “the more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and, presumably,

the more visible the writer or meaning of the foreign text” (*ibid*). In my opinion, to espouse this belief is to completely misunderstand the act of translation. I would say the exact opposite: the fluency of a translation is proof of intervention by the translator, whereas in a “resistant” translation, the translator is in a way effaced by the author and meaning of the foreign text. Sense may come through more clearly in a fluent translation, but it is almost surely a perversion of the author’s original meaning.

So, for proponents of target-oriented translation, attempts to showcase the foreign aspects of a text only succeed in making its translation inaccessible to readers. Translated texts have a function which can only be fulfilled if the translation is made palatable to its target readers by considering their needs and adhering to the prescriptions of the target language. The most extreme of the functionalist approaches is Vermeer’s skopos theory which argues that the purpose of the target text is the determining factor in the choice of a translation strategy for producing a functional result (Munday, 2008: 79). Although skopos theory was widely criticized for being applicable only to pragmatic texts and ignoring micro-level textual features (*ibid*: 81), other theorists such as Holz-Mänttari (translational action) and, to a lesser extent, Nord (translation-oriented text analysis) also built their translation models on the primacy of text function in the target context (*ibid*: 87).

Venuti himself partly invalidates his foreignizing approach by suggesting that no translation can offer “unmediated access to the foreign but rather constructs a certain image of the foreign that is informed by the receiving situation but aims to question it by drawing on materials that are not currently dominant” (2008: 20). In theory, anything can be explained to the reader by way of an explication, explicitation or footnote, at least when it comes to lexical, conceptual or cultural problems. Of course, the matter of differing encyclopaedias makes deciding which elements will be unclear to the reader a never-ending guessing game, bringing to light another issue, that of the arrogant translator who assumes an ignorant reader. It is tricky defining a Model Reader: setting the bar low enough to keep the greatest number of readers on board yet not too low that they get irritated for being infantilized (except in my case they actually are children) and dismiss the book. Indiscriminate explicating and explicitating can also alter the rhythm of a text and, more importantly, the interpretation the target readers form from it, thereby affecting the degree of foreignness they receive. Thus, the wisdom of resorting to such paratextual devices is dubious, but the bottom line is that it can be done. Paratextual devices are, admittedly, a form of mediation, but they are arguably more in keeping with a foreignizing approach than omission or adaptation to known quantities of the target language and culture.

Complexities of style, on the other hand, are less easily carried over since many are intimately bound with the source-language linguistic system. However, this linguistic straightjacket tends to be looser between French and English than between other, less related pairs of languages. This is not to say that stylistic differences are inconsequential—in fact, it will become clear that they are a bigger

concern than I gave them credit for—but I saw no obvious theoretical reason why I could not replicate the style as well, and doing so seemed more in line with a foreignizing approach.

Although I find Venuti's work rather compelling and lucid, the foreign v. domestic debate is somewhat of a moot point to me, at least when it comes to non pragmatic texts (as opposed to technical texts, such as instruction manuals, which need to be localized). The whole purpose of literary translation is to expose a given culture or language group to a text from another culture or language group. If the underlying assumption of translation is that people are interested in different cultures, then why translate a foreign book only to gloss over what makes it unique and interesting? Although in reality several practical considerations, such as time and money, inform the decision to translate a book, I like to believe that it is still primarily based on translators' love of the subject, plot and language, on a desire to share these with readers from their native language and culture, and on the belief that they would benefit from the exposure. On that premise, why whitewash the very elements of a book that contribute to its appeal and make it worth disseminating?

That being said, it is a fact that every source language and culture has specificities and peculiarities that do not always transition easily into the target language and culture. In that sense, it is useful to bear the foreign/domestic dichotomy in mind when making translational choices regarding such elements. I see it as a sliding scale that can guide translators in making responsible decisions as to how much foreignness is acceptable to their target audience. I myself used it to find the correct “dosage” of Ms. Ducasse's style, French-language singularities and Québécois culture to include in my translation of *Les Enfants*.

My strategy

My default modus operandi—or, rather, intention—is to include all foreign elements of a text in my translations, otherwise I do not feel I am doing the original justice. It stands to reason that I planned to do the same with *Les Enfants de la Tragédie*, especially in light of my “disruptive” aim. The novel's cultural uniqueness appeared the most obvious contender for foreignization; however Ms. Ducasse's stylistic uniqueness also required, and deserved, special treatment in translation. Her style is often marked or gives pause. But if the source-language audience can handle it why couldn't the target audience? Markedness may not always fall on the same place in French and English (e.g., a verb may be turned into a noun or a clause placed at the end instead of the start of a sentence), but that does not mean signalling a particular element is impossible or out of the readers' reach.

However noble these objectives and sentiments, there remained the prosaic reality of what I could reasonably expect my Model Reader—a 14 year-old, English-speaking Canadian with a fondness for reading—to understand, accept and, ideally, enjoy. This meant balancing the demands I

derived from my reading of the source text and the preferences and expectations I knew existed in my target audience.⁵

It will become clear throughout the following analysis of issues I encountered with *Les Enfants* that the results of my strategy were mixed. I tried to take on the role of cultural mediator (Lathey, 2006), adjudicating when my Model Reader could or could not comprehend the foreign element or when it was or was not worth conveying in the translation and, based on those determinations, choosing the most effective way of rendering that element in English.

SOURCE CULTURE SPECIFICITIES

What's in a name?

The most obvious and immediate decision when it came to translating *Les Enfants*—in fact it virtually flew off the page at me—was what to do about the main character's name, Alouette. What I originally saw as a clear-cut decision turned out to be a drawn-out internal debate which eventually came to include many other people and resulted in a solution that I will admit is a minor disappointment to me.

Although the contemporary trend has been to leave proper nouns untouched in translation, my initial reaction was that something had to be done with 'Alouette', for several reasons. The foremost is that she is arguably the main protagonist and her unusual name is a recurring theme throughout the book, many sections of which are laced with bird metaphors, imagery and plays-on-words. Therefore, it would not do for the target reader to miss out on the particular connotation of her name.

Two further arguments (initially) convinced me that it was necessary to convey the meaning behind her name by translating it in the English version. First, the opening chapter contains a somewhat explicit reference to a very well-known song. "Alouette"⁶ is of French Canadian origin and is widely known in Quebec, and to a certain extent in other parts of the French speaking world. It functions as a reiterative nursery rhyme of sorts, used to teach children the different parts of avian and human anatomy. The song is so entrenched that a sample of Francophones of varying ages from Quebec, France and Switzerland all told me it comes to mind immediately, or a close second, when they see the word 'alouette'.

⁵ See Hermans' discussion of non-compulsory translational choices in *Translation in Systems*. Manchester: St Jerome, 1999: 74.

⁶ For full lyrics, see <http://123comptines.free.fr/> and history, see <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=Q1ARTQ0000062>.

Second, current thinking on translating literature for children posits that names that “enrich the text with a particular connotation or whose meaning is relevant for the narration process are to be translated or adapted so that the reader [...] can access their semantic content.” (Pascua-Febles, 2006: 116). It is quite common in children’s literature to translate character names in order to achieve the same function in the target language, particularly if the names are meant to be comical. Failure to do so can cause distortions, misunderstandings and plain loss of content. For example, the translators into Spanish of the initial Harry Potter books, unlike those into French and Dutch, chose to leave all the proper nouns intact, leading to a significant loss of the suggestive quality of Rowling’s name-giving (González Cascallana, 2006: 103; Van Coillie, 2006: 128-9). Although the amount of translating or modifying of names lessens with older age groups, I nonetheless felt it was wiser to find an equivalent name for Alouette in English.

That translating the name appeared self-evident did not, however, make the choice of a new name any easier. The accepted translation of ‘alouette’ is ‘lark’. It goes without saying that, given the secondary meaning of ‘lark’ as an “amusing adventure or escapade” (Oxford English Dictionary), it would not be a suitable choice as the name of a young sensitive girl. Not to mention that the word does not conjure up any songs. So I turned to my well-thumbed book of nursery rhymes and came up with an assortment of wrens, geese and robins. None of those was particularly appealing: wren simply is not a very pleasant sounding word; geese squawk, waddle and are vicious (though I toyed with ‘goosey’ as a term of endearment); and robin is actually a human name (unisex to boot), which would obviously have negated the unusualness of Alouette’s name. I then ran through a long list of songbirds with pretty names but the fact remained that I was unable to find one that could satisfy both the song/nursery rhyme reference and the uniqueness of the French.

So it was with some regret that I decided to leave Alouette intact in my translation. However, it was of some consolation that Ms. Ducasse wholeheartedly agreed with me. She was very interested in my thought process, especially since it had not even occurred to her that her heroine’s name might pose a translational problem. I decided that the two or three perfunctory references to the song were, after all, too inconsequential to warrant changing Alouette’s name in English. The song is well-known enough and is a common tool in French as a Second Language classes to believe that many of my readers would recognize the reference. Those who missed it would lose a glimpse into Québécois culture, but in the end I do not believe it would adversely affect their understanding of the novel.

Logically, the initial desire to change Alouette’s name in English led to the question of what to do with the other character names in the story, namely her parents, boyfriend and neighbour (the question did not apply to the Greek characters as they all have established equivalents in English which had to be used for reasons of historical accuracy and didactics). For the sake of consistency, it was tempting to translate them all. In fact, it would have been a quick and easy fix since Édouard, Jean

and Jeanne all have exonyms in English (Edward, John and Joan). However, once the decision was made to leave Alouette untouched, it made little immediate sense to change the other characters' names. Moreover, they are easily recognizable and intelligible to anyone who has had a modicum of French, as most Canadian secondary school students have⁷. Even without prior knowledge of French, I did not feel the names were alien enough to put off readers. I did nonetheless think that some readers could initially be confused by the fact that 'Jean' in English is a female name, but, again, I thought that would be a tiny fraction of readers who would soon be put back on the right track through elemental logic and accompanying pronouns.

However, my advisor thought I was perhaps underestimating the possible gender confusion and suggested an alternate option which had not occurred to me: re-naming the parents, not in English, but rather choosing another doublet in French that was intelligible yet not inherently confusing. I was reluctant at first, but then I realized it was quite a good fix since it enabled me to both ward off any risk that my readers would be confounded and stand by my foreignizing strategy. Once again, though, there was no easy solution, mainly because both 'Jean' and 'Jeanne' are one-syllable words whereas most other feminizations add on an extra syllable, which could interfere with the rhythm of certain passages. I ran through as many pairs as I could think of and in the end settled on 'Paul' and 'Pauline' because they are just as ordinary as the original, are spelled the same way in English, and do not really connote a specific age although they are more "grown-up" names (like the original). I fretted a little over the two-syllable mother's name, but, after trying it out in the potentially tricky passages, decided it did not throw off the rhythm.

Unlike the parents, Édouard causes no difficulty in English so I left it unchanged, especially since the added factor of the regal-sounding French would appeal to any reader with a romantic bent. The case of the neighbour, monsieur Brière, was somewhat less obvious. Aside from little Eric who almost drowns, he is the only neighbour who is explicitly named which, quite frankly, struck me as somewhat random and unnecessary (it could be a nod by the author to someone in her life, but that would be of no consequence to either source or target text readers) so I could have substituted in an English name. The surname Brière is neither common nor uncommon in Quebec, though it is the name of a famous and well-liked comedian, therefore there is no implicit meaning to convey. I left it intact because he is a negligible character, the name is pronounceable in English and, more importantly, it was more in line with my overall strategy.

⁷ It is of interest to note that, although Canada has two constitutionally-recognized official languages (English and French) and a set number of years of language teaching is mandatory in primary and secondary schools, the make-up of the immigrant population on the West Coast is so different from that in central and Eastern Canada that many high school students now choose Mandarin or other Asian languages as a second language over French. Therefore to assume a certain level of knowledge of French in young English Canadians may be more fraught than in the past.

The vernacular problem

As was mentioned in passing in the introduction to this dissertation, part of my interest in working with a Québécois novel related to tackling French as it is spoken in the province. As the French (from France) have their argot, so francophone Québécois have *joual*. Joual is a basilectal variant of Quebec French that originated from the Montreal working class, though it has since crossed the educational and economic divide. The term is often used to designate all forms of spoken Quebec French, but some outside Montreal eschew such a blanket term. While anglicisms are a salient feature, many of its phonological, lexical and morphosyntactic elements, such as diphthongs and flat vowel sounds, are similar to the sociolects of north-western France spoken by the settlers. Joual is by and large an oral sociolect and does not have a fixed written form. Though the term was derogatory at the outset, joual became the symbol of national (i.e., Québécois) assertion in the late 1960s, through the work of various prominent artists. It can still be heard in music, the media, cinema and conversation.

There are few instances of joual in *Les Enfants de la Tragédie*; indeed it would have gone quite against the grain of Ms. Ducasse's literary project to write in that style. But in a sense, the overall lack of colloquialisms makes the handful of examples that much more salient. However, as could be expected, they are restricted to the Alouette chapters so the text is internally coherent, and the author did tell me that they were there to give Alouette a modern, Québécois feel in contrast with the myths. Even so, she chose to put her use of joual in inverted commas, at once signalling its presence and distancing her "poetic" prose from the vernacular.

Sherry Simon (2006) describes cases where joual was left in certain translations to mingle with the English. But that would always be a political statement, which was not the purpose of *Les Enfants* nor was it appropriate for my audience. Leaving in a joual expression would require at the very least an explication and more likely a footnote, which is widely seen as off-putting to most readers, especially young ones. I wanted my readers to somehow perceive the Québécois flavour of the author's purposeful linguistic choices through "equivalent" expressions in English.

L'un des garçons du groupe d'amis d'Alouette, un grand Jack méticuleusement dépeigné [...] (p17)	One of the boys in the group of Alouette's friends, a tall guy with meticulously dishevelled [...] (vi)
Le calame « griche » activement. (p22)	The calamus squeaks away. (viii)
(a) « Tu ris, vache qui rit, tête de « beu » ? » (p35) (b) [...] et j'essayais d'imaginer ce qu'il y avait dans sa tête de « beu » . (p56)	(a) "Laughing are we? Eh, laughing cow? Moo!" (b) [...] and I would try to imagine what was going on in that mulish mind of his.
— Jamais vu p'tit gars aussi « petteux de broue », disent-ils. (p84)	"Have you ever seen such a smart-ass kid?"
— T'occupe pas, « y » comprend rien à rien ! (p84)	"Just ignore'em, he doesn't get a darn thing!"

Here I admit defeat. I did not manage to convey the joulal spice to my liking in any of the five instances of it. Essentially, I would have had to choose a sociolect of English (e.g., Glaswegian English, which has been used in a translation of Michel Tremblay's "Les belles-soeurs") to approximate the tone. But even so, I would have likely run into the similar problem of not finding equivalent expressions. After all, idioms result from a worldview and linguistic evolution that are very specific to a given place. Besides, using Glaswegian would be nearly as unintelligible to my readers as leaving in the joulal.

'Jack' in Québécois is, just as I translated it, a guy. It can be paired with any number of adjectives, most commonly 'bon' as in, "Lui, c't'un bon Jack" (He's a good/great guy.). So far, so good. But obviously what makes the word stand out in a French text is the anglicism. That is where 'guy' falls short. I toyed with replacing it with 'chap', 'fellow' or 'bloke', but those are distinctly British and, though perfectly intelligible to my audience yet foreign enough to stand out, simply did not seem right in the context. Using an unremarkable term, thereby losing the resonance of the original, seemed less treasonous to both my strategy of carrying over Québécois cultural references and my audience than introducing a reference to a completely unrelated culture. Therefore, disappointing as 'guy' may be, it remained the better option, especially since the slight dip in register and the conversational tone do bring attention to it.

'Griche' (from the verb 'gricher') most commonly means that something is staticky (e.g., *Le téléphone griche./ There is static on the line.*) or that something squeaks (e.g., *Ces crotttes de fromage grichent sous la dent./ These cheese curds squeak when you chew them.*), and is likely a deformation of 'grincer' although it could also be an onomatopoeia. It is this second definition that is meant in the source text. The most common equivalent image in English would be 'to scratch', but it is precisely too banal for my purposes. I thought of 'to itch'—and perhaps a more adventurous translator than myself would have dared to use it—but in my opinion turning the meaning on its head for a less-than-perfect result was going a bit too far. Instead, I went with 'to squeak' which I decided, although not unheard of in reference to pencils, was sonorous enough to give off some effect especially in conjunction with the chatty use of 'away'.

I would say that 'tête de beu' is the biggest let-down in my treatment of joulal. 'Beu' is the transliteration of the pronunciation of 'boeuf' ('beef' and 'bull', and 'police' incidentally). It is the correct pronunciation of the plural ('boeufs'), but it is also that of the singular in joulal. The expression has two common meanings: to be stubborn and to wear an unhappy expression. It is difficult to tell which of the two meanings is actually meant. I believe iteration (b) of 'tête de beu' reflects the former meaning, based on the following sentence in which Icarus describes himself as also obstinate. However, (a) appears to be neither; rather, given that the inverted commas only bracket 'beu' and not the entire expression, it is a mere comment on the Minotaur's physique. Hence my different treatment

of each iteration. In the end, I entirely re-worked sentence (a). I felt compelled to put in ‘laughing cow’ because it is fairly obvious that ‘vache qui rit’ is a reference to the popular brand of soft cheese by the same name and I have seen advertisements in English use this literal translation. For lack of a usable bovine insult (despite the best efforts of the Urban Dictionary.com), I decided that Icarus was taunting the Minotaur and that ‘moo’ would convey his attempt at imitating the poor wretch’s sounds. Finally, I added ‘eh’, an interjection that is widely associated with Canadians and for which they are mercilessly mocked by their neighbours to the south, to compensate somewhat for the loss of the joul ‘beu’. Sentence (b) was also a bit of a headache. I ended up with a mixed metaphor and an alliteration that is not in the original, but at least my choice conveys the sense of the Québécois expression and the ‘of his’ brings the tone down.

A ‘petteux de broue’ (or ‘petteuse’) is literally someone who farts foam, in other words a person who tries to look good by professing erudite opinions and confidently talking about things he knows nothing about. The translation that immediately came to mind was ‘talking out of his ass’ which, though similar anatomically, is much too vulgar for this novel. Besides, the Québécois expression may denote an irritating quality but it is still only a mild insult. With that in mind, I had originally settled on ‘smart aleck’, but it fell a bit flat, especially because it was difficult to work in the patronizing “p’tit gars”. So in the end, I chose ‘smart-ass’ paired with ‘kid’ as the best overall match, even though I balked at ‘ass’.

Lastly, ‘y’ is the joul pronunciation of the third person pronoun, both singular and plural (‘il’ and ‘ils’). There was no equivalent way to convey that in English so I reverted to an oft-used device of written oral English, the truncated object pronoun. “Ignore’em” conveys both the ‘y’ and the poor grammar of the partial negation in “t’occupe pas”. For good measure, I chose the verb ‘to get’ for ‘to understand’ in order to add an extra layer of colloquialism.

Geographic and cultural references

There are only two instances of patent references to Quebec in *Les Enfants* and, naturally, both relate to the cold. Whether or not it stems from Voltaire’s dismissal of New France as “quelques arpents de neige”, non-Canadians’ encyclopaedic entry for “Quebec” seems to be something akin to the North Pole. I am all too familiar with Quebec winters, but the province does not have a monopoly on cold, extreme and erratic weather; in fact there are far worse places in Canada. It is a truism that Canadians from “coast to coast to coast” love to talk about the weather. It is the icebreaker (pun intended) of choice when forced to make small talk with strangers in an elevator or at a social function. Therefore, it was reasonable to assume that my readers could relate to, or at least easily imagine, what was being described and that this might be an easy translational choice.

... qu'ils s'imaginaient aussi vif qu' un ciel bleu sec d'hiver québécois . (p48)	... which they pictured as vivid a blue as a crisp Quebec sky in winter.
... le froid aussi mordant qu' un soir de parade du Carnaval . (p81)	... a cold as biting as on Carnaval parade night in February.

The reason I was so intent on conveying these two images is that they are very evocative to me; I knew exactly what was meant the instant I read the words and a multitude of images and memories sprang to mind. Needless to say, my encyclopaedic entries for “Quebec in winter” (e.g., what -38°C feels like) and “Carnaval de Québec” are complete and wide-ranging, if very personal in parts. It was important to me, because of both my heritage and my translation strategy, to communicate everything associated with those two concepts.

The first phrase did not pose any particular problem. Aside from disassociating ‘blue’ from ‘crisp’ and spelling out ‘sky in winter’ instead of a telescoped ‘winter sky’, which was done mainly for rhythm, I felt most of my readers, especially those from Ontario and the prairie provinces, would envision precisely what was meant. Those who did not would have no problem understanding the general drift and could easily plough on.

The second reference to cold was slightly dicier. Despite its suggestiveness, the comparison is not a cliché and, while the Carnaval de Québec and its effigy “Bonhomme” enjoy a degree of renown outside the province, I still found it necessary to help my readers along. Objectively, adding ‘February’ does not exactly add any qualitative detail to the idea of cold, but I felt the reference could use a little extra context and that month is often the bitterest of the year. I toyed with removing ‘Carnaval’ altogether for a smoother read (i.e., ‘as biting as on [a] parade night in February’), but then the folkloric reference was completely lost. In the end, the addition is harmless enough stylistically, might help a few readers form a truer image of the circumstances, and is more in line with my strategy.

There is another instance of overt cultural reference (a two-in-one in fact), though it is not to something specifically Québécois but rather to songs that emanated from France and have spread around the French-speaking world. Partial lyrics to two songs are mentioned in quick succession, in fact in opposition to each other, during a dialogue between Alouette and her father in which she describes what she is seeing in her mind’s eye.

— La mer. — <i>Qu'on voit danser le long des golfes clairs</i> . — Plutôt <i>la mer mé-mé-mé</i> ... (p20)	“The sea.” “It’s far beyond the stars...” “More like <i>what a great sea that would be</i> .” (vii)
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Both are signalled in the source text by italics, but the first was unknown to me while the second was immediately clear. The first reference, in combination with the preceding line, is the opening line of Charles Trenet’s “La mer”. This is a not a song I was familiar with, though naturally I had heard of Trenet. In fact, I was only cued into the fact that these were lyrics by the presence of the

italics (and the following line of text which I recognized). After learning the title of the song and the name of its composer and original performer, my research uncovered that “La mer” is arguably Trenet’s best-known work outside the French-speaking world and has been used in soundtracks to a number of films and advertisements, including English-language ones. More relevant is the fact that an English version of the song was written for American singer Bobby Darin, albeit with unrelated lyrics. Although the song continues to be used in French and English, I believe there is a definite generational gap. If I did not know the piece then it is reasonable to think that the source text reader likely did not either, let alone my Model Reader. However, I judged that it would not hamper my readers’ ability to understand the scene—at worst, the reference would go over their head as it did with me, at best, it would send up a flare and they would think “Hmmm, that’s a bit random, I wonder what it is.”—which is why I chose to use a lyric from the Bobby Darin version. It is not the opening line of the song as in the French, but I felt it flowed decently well from the previous sentence in the way it does in the source text.

Alouette’s reply to her father’s quote is, on the other hand, a line from a very recognizable children’s song, “Il était un petit navire”⁸. It is an extremely (and quite annoyingly) repetitive and rather macabre song which, incidentally, I did not know because I only ever learned the first two stanzas before the gory cannibalistic parts. In any case, it does not exist in English so I turned once again to Mother Goose and found a nursery rhyme that could fit the bill, “If all the seas were one sea”. I am not entirely satisfied with my choice because I suspect this nursery rhyme is not as broadly known as “Il était un petit navire” and the explicit naming of the Mediterranean is lost. That being said, it respects Ms. Ducasse’s particular stylistic device.

Epigraphs

Ms. Ducasse begins *Les Enfant de la Tragédie* and each of the five Greek myths with a quote from a different author. These epigraphs either epitomize the story that they introduce or illustrate a facet of it. They are a strategic element for establishing communication between author, text and reader (Durot-Bouc , 2004: 44). Her selection of those specific quotes is indicative of the orientation she wished to give to the reading, but, given the novel’s audience, it is above all a means of introducing a potentially unknown subject to her readers. For those slightly more adventurous readers, the epigraphs by a range of writers could also be seen as a didactic element meant to spark an interest in further and more diverse reading on the topic of mythology. In her study of the use of epigraphs by English gothic novelist Ann Radcliffe, Durot-Bouc  states that the literary device lent credibility and status to a text that might otherwise surprise and even be rejected by the reader (*ibid*: 46) owing to its atypical subject matter and, likely at the time, the gender of the author. Considering the peripheral

⁸ For lyrics, see <http://www.annuaire-enfants-kibodio.com/paroles-chansons/il-etait-un-petit-navire.html>.

status of the *Les Enfants*, Ms. Ducasse may have sought to give her re-writing of the myths a bit more weight by linking them to other accepted interpretations of them by famous authors. These considerations overrode the fact that epigraphs are antiquated device, presenting me with the challenge of how to treat them in my translation.

I naturally wondered whether or not I should translate the epigraphs or to find relevant quotes by celebrated authors from the English-speaking world. If the aim was to lend credence to Ms. Ducasse's myths, then the latter solution could be argued for. But it was more in keeping with my strategy of carrying over the foreign to translate the epigraphs or use existing translations, as the case may be. Besides, with the exception of Roger Nimier (a 20th century novelist, journalist and critic whose work did not extend much outside of France), Denys Néron (a Québécois poet) and potentially Racine, the authors of the other quotes are renowned enough across Western cultures to elicit the desired interest and deference from the target audience. Accordingly, I used existing translations for the quotes from Goethe, Sade and Homer and translated those by Nimier, Néron and Racine.

STYLE

France Ducasse's distinctive style

As mentioned earlier, *Les Enfants de la Tragédie* is not an ordinary novel for young readers, not so much because of its subject matter and plot, but owing to the style in which it is written. It creatively blends the fantastical with the didactic. Ms. Ducasse explained to me that it was important to her to render the myths authentically, despite her unusual angle and imaginative additions, which for her was inextricably linked to language. Over the course of her research for the novel, she read many versions of the Greek epics, some in verse and others in prose. She found that the adaptations that tried to give the myths a contemporary feel through a lower register somehow lacked the enchanting quality of more "standard" versions. She wanted her myths to be relevant for people today, but not at the expense of the atmosphere created by the style. Ms. Ducasse describes her writing as poetic and she intentionally did not create too stark a difference between the Alouette chapters and the Greek myths, between present and past. Her style is very rhythmic, alternating long sentences with short, clipped ones. She uses a range of devices to mark her prose, some typical of French writing, such as fronting, and others less so, such as repetition, all of which posed translational challenges that forced me to weigh my decisions against my strategy.

Syntactic, lexical and stylistic choices

Sentence structure

On the whole, I did not make any significant changes to the overall form of *Les Enfants*: the division and order of chapters remained the same. However, there were a handful of places where I abutted two one-sentence paragraphs simply because I did not see the utility of them being separate. In the two cases below, I inverted two sentences for logical flow. In the first example, I thought ‘nouvelle piste’ was illogically positioned because the new angle is Diogenes (the previous dialogue is about sequoias) and the paragraph that follows the phrase continues to discuss this philosopher. Sandwiching this link between two paragraphs on the same topic leads the reader to expect a new topic, causing confusion when the reader gets to the anaphoric ‘ce philosophe’. I thought moving the lead-in forward did not change the meaning or the author’s didactic intention and ensured that my readers would glide smoothly through the passage. I could have made it an independent sentence, as in the French, and placed it before ‘Have you heard of Diogenes’, but I chose instead to embed it after the question for fluidity.

<p>— Vous connaissez Diogène? La quête d’une jeune fille des temps modernes peut-elle se comparer à celle du penseur grec? Jeanne propose une nouvelle piste. (p18)</p>	<p>“Have you heard of Diogenes?” asks Pauline, suggesting a new angle. Can the quest of a modern-day girl be compared with that of a Greek philosopher? (vi)</p>
<p>Alouette parle fort pour enterrer le chant des oiseaux. Jeanne aussi, pour attirer l’attention de ceux qui s’excitent à raconter leur voyage. Certaines versions de l’histoire proposent une fin différente au drame d’Iphigénie. Jeanne s’adresse à tous ceux qui sont rassemblés dans la Cour-du-Grand-Pin. (p130)</p>	<p>Alouette speaks loudly to drown out the birdsong. Pauline does too, in order to attract the attention of those who are excitedly retelling their trip. Pauline is speaking to all who have gathered at the Court-of-the-Great-Pine. Some versions of the story give a different end to the tragedy of Iphigenia.</p>

In the second example, once again, the position of the bolded sentence was chronologically odd. ‘Certaines versions de l’histoire...’ is reported speech and should logically come after the reader is told to whom Jeanne/Pauline is talking. For this reason, I inverted the second and third paragraphs and deleted the paragraph break to underscore the following reported speech. It was simply a case of thinking that this was a harmless improvement to the timeline.

In both the above cases, my adjudications were meant to correct what I considered poor or confusing writing in the source text, not to adapt the source text to English norms. They were cases where I believed textual flow and my audience’s comprehension outweighed whether or not the corrected features had been deliberate on the part of the author, and thereby held some sort of meaning.

As there is a tendency to do in French to English translation, I broke some long sentences into smaller ones, typically for emphasis or naturalness but sometimes also for ease of comprehension.

Pour se prouver à lui-même qu’il était bien l’égal des dieux, il somma le dieu de la mer, le terrible Poséidon, de faire surgir des flots une bête digne de lui, en échange de quoi le tout-puissant roi de Crète s’engageait à la lui sacrifier conformément à la coutume. (p31)	To prove to himself that he was in fact equal to the gods, he commanded the god of the seas, the terrible Poseidon, to send from the waters a beast worthy of him. In exchange, the all-mighty king of Crete pledged, as custom would have it, to kill the beast.
Si, au moins, Icare avait eu un maître pour l’instruire, au lieu de traîner dans les rues, des frères, des sœurs, une famille nombreuse et des tâches quotidiennes pour aider les siens, de quoi s’occuper l’esprit, il aurait eu mieux à faire que s’acoquiner avec le premier monstre venu! (p35)	If only Icarus had had a tutor to teach him, instead of loitering about the streets. Or brothers and sisters, a large family and daily chores, anything to keep his mind and body busy. Then he would have had better things to do than take up with the first monster to cross his path.
Ces deux-là ont des arbres une expérience intime, et c’est donc en sciant, en taillant, en sculptant, en polissant, en vernissant qu’il aime sa fille, d’un amour aussi solide qu’une armoire. (p48-9)	They both have an intimate knowledge of trees. And so it is through sawing, carving, sculpting, burnishing and varnishing that he loves his daughter. His is a love as solid as a wardrobe.

All three examples above are cases where I thought the connection between events or ideas could be clearer and more emphatic, hence the full stops. However, this was not due to a belief that my readers could not have understood the passages had I kept the original syntax and punctuation. Rather, my choices seemed more idiomatic.

Conversely, I took a few of the short partial sentences and bunched them together into one, usually when I did not grasp the stylistic benefit of the staccato.

Jeanne et Jean pleurent. On cherche les mots qui consolent. Il n’y en a pas. On aide à ranger. Remerciements. (p47-8)	Pauline and Paul weep. Guests search for consoling words, but there aren’t any. They help clean up, thank their hosts.
Elle avait raison. Où étaient les hommes? On ne voyait personne. Puis l’un d’eux apparut. Visage grave. Cliquetis d’armure. Il nous invita à le suivre. (p112-3)	She was right. Where were the men? There was not a soul to be seen. Then one of them appeared, stern, armour clinking. He motioned us to follow him. (x)

These are examples of passages where the reason for the clipped pace was not apparent to me. Of course, that in itself does not justify changing the form, particularly since replicating it would not have caused any difficulties for my readers. That being said, I also felt that juxtaposing the clauses in the first example using commas better conveyed the awkwardness of the situation: people tend to rush through uncomfortable situations. Most importantly, though, the sentences that I combined are nominal sentences in the source text, which English has a very difficult time accommodating. For example, having “Thank you” as a stand-alone sentence was impossible, while “stern” and “clinking armour” (that individual phrase was also put into a verbal form) would lose their meaning if they were severed from the referent by full stops. Even had it been possible to keep the short sentences in English, they would have been inordinately more marked than in the original.

Despite what the three sets of examples above show, I tried to avoid tinkering with sentence structure and length as much as possible because I did not want to destroy the poetic quality and

expressiveness of Ms. Ducasse's writing. The following are examples of passages I replicated in my translation, even though they were slightly unusual in English.

J'aurais épousé la plus belle fille de Cnossos. A défaut de celle que j'aimais et de qui je n'étais pas aimé. (p57)	I would have married the prettiest girl in Knossos. Instead of the one I loved and who did not love me.
Puis, un jour que j'étais là, pensif, à califourchon sur le mur, je me mis à réfléchir à voix haute. (p60)	Then, one day, as I sat pensively, straddling the wall, I began to think aloud.
Pendant qu'il me racontait ce que la déesse Artémis et les dieux, le devin, l'oracle, les rois et la guerre exigeaient de moi, je tremblais. Chacune de ces volontés acharnées à me dépouiller de la mienne me révoltait. A la leur et à celle du commandant en chef, j'opposais ma propre résolution de vivre avec ce corps, cette chevelure admirée, ces yeux, cette peau douce, ces dents saines, bien plantées, et tout ce dont on m'avait instruite, mes pensées, mes projets, mon appétit. Ce père en qui j'avais mis toute ma confiance et dont je me croyais tendrement aimée pouvait-il vraiment consentir à livrer au bourreau son enfant ? (p113-4)	As he told me what Artemis and the gods, the augur, the oracle, the kings and war required of me, I trembled. In the face of all these wills relentlessly stripping me of my own, I rebelled. Against their determination and that of the commander in chief, I pitted my own resolve to live with this body, this much-admired hair, these eyes, this soft skin, these healthy, sturdy teeth, and all I had been taught, my thoughts, my plans, my appetite for life. Could this man, my father, in whom I had placed all my trust and whom I believed dearly loved me, truly surrender his child to the executioner? (xi)

In the first example, Icarus is musing about the alternate path his life could have taken, and the stark opposition signaled by the full stop and prepositional phrase implies that living, marrying and having a family were preferable to marrying the woman of his dreams. Starting a sentence with a prepositional phrase is marked in both languages, therefore I saw no reason to change it in my translation, particularly since the link between the two sentences and their meaning is still perfectly clear. The second is a typical example of how French happily juxtaposes several clauses: details are added one after the other to form the complete picture and build up to the crux of the sentence. English is less amenable to this construction. However, I reproduced it because the measured pace is in contrast with the previous very short sentences. The progressive description also leads the reader to think something is coming yet the final clause is rather anticlimactic. Although I am unsure this bathos was intentional on the part of Ms. Ducasse, it is there and easily reproduced.

The last example is taken from the chapter on Iphigenia entitled "Révolte". The three consecutive instances of prepositioning combined with the long serial lists are like a gathering storm and eloquently express Iphigenia's rage, determination and despair. Prepositioning is much more common in French than in English, but the repetition of the device in this excerpt is particularly marked. Reordering the sentences canonically (subject, verb, object)—as I had originally done—completely deflates the passage, so I opted to replicate the French syntax, even if it produced a stronger effect in the translation.

Aside from its form, *Les Enfants* presents the typical array of French syntactical peculiarities that a translator has to address more or less aggressively in order to write idiomatically in English, most of which are of minor interest in this dissertation. However, some instances of these characteristics as well as other aspects of Ms. Ducasse's writing were trickier and are worth discussing briefly.

Fronting

It is common in French to take a clause from its expected position and give it pride of place at the start of a sentence as a way of signaling its importance. Writers (and readers) of English are more attached to the canonical order, so prepositioning tends to be much more marked in English than in French. Of the instances of fronting I actually noticed, most were put back into canonical order in my translation. There are a few examples, though, that stood out as being somewhat unusual even in French and which resulted in different translational choices.

1	Ni oiseau, ni chanson bien qu'Alouette. (p10)	Despite her name, she is neither a bird nor a song. (ii)
2	A le ranimer ensuite, Jean s'attelle. (p21)	Then, he undertakes to revive him. (viii)
3	A la récolte d'automne, Alouette ajoute son grain de tragédie grecque. (p23)	To the autumn harvest, Alouette adds her morsel of Greek tragedy. (ix)
4	Par ma robe il m'a rattrapée... (p95)	He caught me by the dress...
5	De ses beuveries nous évitions de parler. (p97)	We avoided mentioning his binges.
6	Sans fin la haine depuis qu'il m'a tuée. (p98)	There is no end to hatred since he killed me.
7	A aimer les jolies choses, les Troyens furent bien punis. (p150)	The Trojans would pay dearly for their love of pretty things. (xiv)
8	Dans l'eau, voulait-elle se laver des saletés de la guerre ? (p150)	Did she mean to wash off the filth of war in the water? (xiv)

Examples 1, 4, 5 and 7 are typical instances of reverting to canonical order when there was, strictly speaking, no reason not to calque the French syntax. I could just as easily have rendered them as: Neither bird nor song, despite her name; By my dress he caught me; His binges we avoided mentioning/ Of his binges, we avoided talking; For their love of pretty things, the Trojans would pay dearly. There is no particular reason to highlight 'robe' or 'beuveries', therefore the fronting in 4 and 5 is purely esthetic and exemplifies the poetry of Ms. Ducasse's writing which is lost in my translation. But I felt, particularly in examples 4 and 5, that fronting in English, instead of being poetic, would be just plain strange and much more marked. The fronting in 7 contains a lesson or warning to the readers of the perils of beautiful objects or not to judge a book by its cover. Although placing 'pretty things' at the end of the sentence takes some of the focus off, I think the sentence is still marked, if differently, by the sudden occurrence of the future 'would'.

In examples 3 and 6, on the other hand, I emulated the original syntax because I felt it could be done without causing a disproportionate effect. In 6, I may have respected the overall word order;

however the effect is lessened by the fact that my translation is a complete sentence in contrast with the verb-less original. Example 8 falls a little flat, but it was a case where prepositioning simply could not be done. The fronting here is a comment on the very feasibility of such horrors being washed away by mere water, whereas my translation becomes a simple question as to Andromache's intent as she wades into the sea.

Example 2 turned out to be one of the most complex sentences to translate in the entire novel owing to the poetry created by the fronting and the positioning of 'ensuite', and the lexical difficulty posed by 's'atteler' and, to some degree, 'ranimer'. I realized early on that there was no way the English language would enable me to reproduce the fronting, so my translation was inevitably going to fall both flat and short. The verb 's'atteler' was a problem because the most obvious equivalents (e.g., set about, take up, launch into, embark upon) were either the wrong register or unwieldy verbal phrases or both. My initial translation ended up being 'He begins CPR.' I was very much aware that it was a miss on every level: not only did the canonical order completely erase the poetry of the French, but replacing the verb 'ranimer' by the more customary noun 'CPR' also broke the rhythm and made the sentence sound ever so banal. I was supremely unhappy with my solution, yet so completely flummoxed. My attempts to replicate the fronting smacked of literal translation and I thought 'CPR', which any person who took swimming lessons would readily recognize from the first aid component⁹, would resonate more with my readers. However, such egregiousness could not be left on the page, so I eventually settled on 'Then, he undertakes to revive him.' I had to maintain canonical order (I toyed with 'To revive him, Paul then undertakes', but the sentence felt so unfinished not to mention un-English), but prepositioning the connector (instead of 'He then undertakes to revive him') at least breaks up the rhythm somewhat and paves the way for the following elliptical sentences and the reader's quasi out-of-body experience.

Juxtaposition

On the whole, I made very few additions in my translation to explicitate words or concepts; however, I did find it necessary to explicitate several sentences in which the relationship between the various juxtaposed components was not clear. Objectively, there is no reason why the readers of my translation could not handle these juxtapositions as well as those of the source text. I nonetheless chose to give them a smoother, painless read since I myself had stumbled over a few of the sentences.

Pour une voix exceptionnelle, que de gorges à la glotte paresseuse, de gosiers secs et de sons aussi pointus et blessants qu'une lame ! (p10)	One exceptional voice among countless lazy vocal cords, dry gullets and sounds as sharp and piercing as knives. (ii)
La fille de l'Ouest ne peut rien pour celle de	The girl from out West can do nothing for the girl

⁹ This may be a case of me overestimating the general awareness of first aid terminology given that I was a swim instructor myself.

l'Est ; le séquoia vénérable pour le pin ; un corbeau pour une alouette. (p18)	from out East; nor the venerable sequoia for the pine; nor a raven for an alouette. (vi)
Un arbre suffit à prendre racine. Une enfant, pour fonder une famille unie par le temps, le lieu, l'action. (p20)	A tree is all it takes to take root; or a child to create a family bound by time, place and action. (vii)

The first sentence posed several translational problems beyond the issue of the juxtaposition. The loss of the alliteration and assonance (**gorges**, **glotte**, **gosiers**) was simply a function of the accepted equivalents for those words in English. Alliteration did nonetheless make its way into the translation (countless, **lazy**, vocal, **gullets**), but it is not as effective because it spans two grammatical categories against the original's one (nouns). Moreover, it did not result from any conscious decision. The choice of 'vocal cords', though perhaps less evocative and more pedestrian than 'glotte', was better suited to an Anglophone audience, irrespective of age, than 'glottis' which is much too technical. I could have experimented further with word choice, but I would likely have lost the musical imagery which seemed the more important element to convey. My use of 'among' does not exactly convey the implied correlation between the multitude of less than lovely voices and the "one exceptional voice". Nor does my construction bring out the veiled criticism of 'que' in combination with the exclamation point. It does, however, preserve the opposition and was the only way I managed to make sense of the sentence.

The second example is deliberately elliptical; the link between the three clauses hinges on the semi-colons. There was nothing inherent to the English language that stopped me from reproducing the original, but without the conjunctions the sentence sounded strange to me. My version may be more marked and forceful, but it does not distort the meaning and I thought my readers could use the extra help.

The third example is similar to the previous in its deliberate abstruseness and received much the same treatment in my translation. I felt that separating the two sentences by a full stop severed the link of the second with 'suffit à'. Hence my choice of combining them into one sentence, divided by a semi-colon and a conjunction. In addition, 'le temps, le lieu, l'action' is immediately recognizable as the ABCs of storytelling. I had originally gone with 'shared experience' for 'action', which at least made sense in the context, but it was pointed out to me that I had missed out on a reference to Aristotle's Unities of Time, Place and Action. As much as the triplet sounds ridiculous and contrived, I could not do away with the didactical moment, especially since it belonged to the same historical period as the novel's subject matter.

The decision I made to explicitate the relationship between clauses or sentences in the above examples was based on a belief that my readers might lose out on just how creative and ontological

Ms. Ducasse's writing is if the connections were not reinforced. My choices do not alter the meaning (except for a slight contraction in the first example) or rhythm of the passages.

Vocabulary

As mentioned previously, Ms. Ducasse wanted to render the atmosphere of the myths through language that was, without being archaic and outdated, not contemporary either. That was especially important in the myths but she also avoided too stark a difference between them and the connecting chapters on Alouette. She did take a few liberties with her own project, peppering it with Québécois colloquialisms, but those are few and marked by inverted commas. In keeping with my own strategy, I tried to reflect her approach. However, I chose to make the transition from past to present slightly more deliberate by using contractions in the Alouette chapters and avoiding them completely in the myths.

For the most part, this faintly older style was not a hindrance, but there are a few examples of specific vocabulary that stood out from the rest and were not necessarily straightforward to translate considering the level of my audience. 'Calame', 'labyrinthe' and 'devin' are three terms whose accepted equivalent in English, which I used anyway, is far more erudite. Granted, 'calame' is not an everyday word in French either, but somehow the Latin ending of 'calamus' makes it less accessible in English. 'Labyrinth' exists in English and is the correct term in the context of the Minotaur, however, unlike in French, it is not the standard word most people use, 'maze' is. Similarly, 'daedalus' is one step up compared to 'dédale'. As for 'devin', it is much more commonly used than 'augur'. I chose to use the more advanced words regardless because their meaning can be inferred from the context and it suited the didactic aim of *Les Enfants* to be historically accurate and introduce the reader to new terminology.

'Gynécée' and 'hyménée', on the other hand, are not explained in the text, yet are just as obscure in French as in English. For the former I chose to use the dictionary equivalent 'gynaecium' for the same reasons listed above. My readers would undoubtedly not be familiar with this term and it is a safe bet that they would not recognize the prefix 'gyno' from which an approximate definition could be derived; however, it is hardly a pivotal element of the plot so it is reasonable to think that it would cause only a minor, if any, hiccup in the readers' progression. 'Hyménée' does not appear to have carried over into English. To maintain the old-fashioned feel, I settled on 'betrothal' which is part of the fairy tale/Medieval romance encyclopaedic entry and so would resonate with my Model Reader.

Rhythm

The most salient stylistic feature of *Les Enfants de la Tragédie* is rhythm. The rhythm is generally constructed around sudden bursts of short, sometimes single-word sentences, the growing momentum or waning energy inherent to serial commas, and savvy use of punctuation.

<p>De l'eau. — Crache ! De l'eau du robinet. — Crache ! Encore de l'eau. Vite. — Crache ! Crache ! Gonflement des paupières. Des oreilles. De la bouche. Lèvres et langue s'épaississent. — Peut plus cracher. Le père dit: — J'appelle l'ambulance. Elle a peur. Elle a mal. Du mal à respirer. Douleur dans la poitrine. Les yeux anxieux de la mère contredisent ses gestes rassurants, le ton de sa voix. — Maman, j'étouffe. Urgence. Cas d'extrême urgence. C'est elle sous l'enflure, elle sur un lit d'hôpital, bousculée, basculant dans le noir, piquée, ranimée. De l'air. De l'air. Pression. Masque à oxygène. Soluté. Surveillance. Son cœur bat trop fort. Elle l'entend aussi dans son doigt, celui qui est relié à une machine. (p9-10)</p>	<p>Water. "Spit!" Tap water. "Spit!" More water. Quick! "Spit! Spit!" Her eyelids are swelling, her ears, her mouth. Her lips and tongue thicken. "Can't spit 'nymore." The father says, "I'm calling an ambulance." She's afraid. It hurts. She can't breathe. Her chest constricts. The mother's anxious eyes betray her reassuring actions, her even tone of voice. "Mom, I can't breathe." It's an emergency, a matter of life and death. That's her under all the swelling, her on a hospital gurney, manhandled, lurching into the darkness, pricked, prodded, resuscitated. Air. Give her some air. Pressure. Oxygen mask. I.V. Observation. Her heart is beating too fast. She can even hear it in her finger, the one that's connected to a machine. (i)</p>
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The excerpt above is the opening scene of *Les Enfants*. Alouette goes into anaphylactic shock following an allergic reaction and is taken to the emergency room. The short, verb-less lines (except for the imperative 'crache') combined with the exclamation points perfectly capture the mounting panic. The full stops separating the different body parts produce a swelling effect, the way a balloon gets incrementally larger with every breath. The reader can really feel the spread of the allergic reaction. Yet the same device in the next paragraph gives the opposite effect: Alouette turns inwards, focusing on her pain, on her airways closing in. Interestingly, I felt commas were a more effective way of rendering the swelling, while I kept the full stops in the second highlighted section. That may be because I wanted to compensate for the distancing effect of '**It hurts**' and the loss of the repetition of 'elle' and 'mal'. In the third highlighted portion, the ping-pong effect created by the commas reflects the confusion of the parents as they helplessly watch their daughter being treated in hospital. The full stops then provide a counterweight, the steadiness of the medical staff going through the motions. I reproduced the syntax and punctuation so as not to disrupt this balance (my addition of an imperative at the repetition of 'air' will be discussed in the section on voice).

Likewise, the serial and conjunctive comma play a central role in the rhythm of the bolded portions of the excerpt below, prompting me to reproduce them in my translation, with the added help of ‘and’ before ‘engulfs’, which I felt was needed to render the chronological order of the Earth’s devastating power (not to mention that it is far more common in English for the final item of a list to be preceded by a conjunction than not). I did not add a conjunction in the final sentence because a comma better conveyed the opposition—and ironic tone—between the first two items of the list and the last. In this excerpt, the escalation and sudden end owe as much to lexis as to punctuation. I believe ‘engulfs’ is just as final as ‘engloutit’, but I was not as successful with the last phrase. First, I eliminated ‘chefs d’Etat’ because I could not make it work in my sentence and I felt it was needlessly redundant. Second, the repetition of ‘grandes’ and the choice of ‘courtes’ make for a more effective opposition which I was unable to fully reproduce. However, using a semi-colon to separate ‘grandeur’ from the final two phrases contributes to restoring a degree of irony, which was missing because of the loss of repetition, and pulls the reader away from the distracting, and more marked, effect of the parataxis.

<p>Le monde est tellement plus terne et triste que la jeune fille se l’imaginait. Ce qu’elle apprend l’étouffe. Elle ne voyait pas la planète ainsi, quadrillée de frontières mal cicatrisées. Avant la géographie, la terre était une vallée, un fleuve, de vieilles collines tendrement arrondies, un horizon, une grande bouffée d’air frais. Que penser des volcans, des raz de marée, de la terre qui tremble, dévaste, dévore, engloutit ? A ces cauchemars s’ajoute l’histoire des empereurs, des rois, des chefs d’Etat, des présidents, des premiers ministres aux grandes ambitions, grandes armées, courtes vues. (p12)</p>	<p>The world is so much drabber and sadder than the young girl had imagined. She feels trapped by what she is learning. She had not pictured the planet like this, criss-crossed with badly healed borders. Before Geography, the Earth was a valley, a river, gently smoothed primeval hills, a horizon—a breath of fresh air. What should she make of volcanoes and tsunamis, of this earth that quakes, devastates, devours and engulfs? Her nightmares are compounded by History with its emperors and kings, presidents and prime ministers and their delusions of grandeur; mighty armies, narrow vision. (iii)</p>
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In the excerpt below, Troy has been taken by the Greeks, all the men have been slaughtered and Astyanax, a seven-year-old prince and last remaining male, hides, is found and then marched to his death.

<p>Il me semble sentir encore chacun de ses ongles enfoncés dans ma chair. Je revois ma grand-mère quitter le palais. Déjà ébranlée par la mort de son mari et de tous ses fils, la reine vacille à chacun de ses pas. Pourquoi cette épreuve ? A son âge ! Où l’emmènent-ils ? Que crie-t-elle ? Qu’a-t-elle perdu ? Qui donc a perdu la raison ? Cassandre ? Où est Cassandre ? Qu’ont-ils fait de Cassandre ? Qui a déchiré sa robe ? Qui soigne sa blessure ? Ma mère dit : « Cache-toi ! » Elle a peur pour moi. Fallait-il vraiment que je me cache dans le tombeau</p>	<p>I can still feel each and every one of her nails digging into my flesh. I see my grand-mother leaving the palace. Already shaken by the death of her husband and all of her sons, the queen sways with every step. Why such an ordeal? At her age! Where are they taking her? What is she shouting? What has she lost? Who has lost their mind? Cassandre? Where is Cassandre, what have they done with her? Who tore her robes? Who is nursing her wound? “Hide!” says my mother. She is frightened for me. Must I really hide in Hector’s tomb? What is that smell? Why</p>
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<p>d'Hector ? Quelle est cette odeur ? Pourquoi cela pue-t-il autant ? Faut-il supporter longtemps cette puanteur extrême ? Peut-on s'habituer à la puanteur extrême ? Et si je lui retirais son casque, à mon père ? Si je me revêtais de son armure ? Ainsi harnaché, je serais le plus fort. Assez fort pour repousser les envahisseurs et défendre ma mère, ma pauvre mère que l'on force à se remarier avec un Grec. Mais qui donc me veut du mal ? Comment me défendre ? Père, que dites-vous à votre fils dont on veut la mort ? Pourquoi ne dites-vous rien ? Avez-vous perdu la langue ? Qui a dévoré votre langue ? Qui a retiré de vous toute chaleur ? Il fait froid. Pourquoi fait-il si froid ? Quand est-ce que ma mère va revenir ? Et si elle ne revient pas ? Si elle arrive trop tard ? Combien de temps faut-il pour mourir ? Ils vont l'interroger pour savoir où je suis, où je me cache. Que vont-ils lui faire ? Iraient-ils jusqu'à la torturer ? Oseraient-ils la tuer ? Comment le savoir ? Comment vivre sans elle ? Comment mourir sans elle ?</p> <p>S'il faut mourir pour la sauver, je veux bien, je veux bien sortir d'ici, ne lui faites pas de mal surtout, ne me faites pas de mal, je viens, je viens (trop de lumière), où m'emmenez-vous ? où est ma mère ? laissez-moi, je vous en supplie, pas le casque de mon père ! non, il est à moi, où allons-nous ? j'ai faim, jusqu'où ? Jusque-là, mais c'est dangereux, je n'ai pas le droit, les enfants n'ont pas le droit de venir jusqu'ici, c'est interdit, il faut que je demande à ma mère, elle va s'inquiéter. (p151-3)</p>	<p>does it stink so badly? How long must I bear this extreme stench? Does one get used to extreme stench? What if I pulled off my father's helmet? What if I put on his armour? In these trappings I would be the strongest. Strong enough to repel the invaders and defend my mother, my poor mother forced to remarry a Greek. Who could want to hurt me? How can I defend myself? Father, what say you to the son whose death they seek? Why say you nothing? Has the cat got your tongue? Who ate your tongue? Who stole all the heat from you? It is cold. Why is it so cold? When will my mother be back? What if she does not come back? What if she is too late? How long does it take to die? They will question her to find out where I am, where I am hiding. What will they do to her? Would they go as far as torture her? Would they dare kill her? How can I find out? How can I live without her? How can I die without her?</p> <p>If I must die to save her, so be it. I will come out of here, but please do not hurt her—do not hurt me—I am coming, I am coming (too bright), where are you taking me? Where is my mother? Leave me be, I beg you, not my father's helmet! No, it is mine, where are we going? I am hungry. Where? There? But it is dangerous, I am not allowed, children are not allowed to come up here, it is forbidden, I must ask my mother, she will worry. (xv)</p>
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The most prominent feature of these paragraphs is manifestly the surfeit of question marks. Although these in themselves contribute to the rhythmic effect, the real coup is actually the interplay of assertion and question. The three comparatively short assertions among the questions allow Astyanax—and the reader—to catch his breath, collect himself. The whirlwind of confusion and bravado momentarily stops, only to start afresh. The brief respite only makes what follows more heart-breaking: three times there is hope for Astyanax and three times that hope is dashed. Except for some tinkering with punctuation in the last paragraph, which I did for voice-related reasons and because it did not diminish the rhythmic effect, I dutifully reproduced all the full stops, commas and question and exclamation marks in order to bring across the same alternating chaos and reprieve in my translation.

In sum, I mostly stuck to the pattern of punctuation and syntax of the source text since they were critical to the rollercoaster rhythm and because doing so did not create any hurdles for my readers. However, in a sense, by replicating sentence length and punctuation, I actually effaced the foreign because all the short sentences are far less typical of modern French prosody than they are of

modern English fiction. In other words, despite being true to my foreignizing strategy, I did not disrupt English-language values.

Imagery

Ms. Ducasse's writing is often very evocative. She stokes the reader's imagination with analogies, at times pushing the boundaries of the French language. The most pervasive imagery throughout the novel relates to birds and music (or the melodic quality thereof). Though mostly contained to the Alouette chapters, there are a few allusions to birds, flying and freedom in the myths as well.

<p>Ni oiseau ni chanson bien qu'Alouette. Dès sa naissance, le bébé avait la gorge déployée et musicale d'où ce nom d'oiseau que ses parents envoûtés ont choisi le jour où ils entendirent pour la première fois le gazouillement harmonieux de leur nouveau-né. Pour une voix exceptionnelle, que de gorges à la glotte paresseuse, de gosiers secs et de sons aussi pointus et blessants qu'une lame !</p> <p>Au début, il y avait ce don qui justifiait amplement sa présence en un monde dissonant. Chacun de ses désirs s'accompagnait d'un répertoire de vocalises. Ainsi, à son chant, Jeanne et Jean savaient que l'heure était venue des gestes essentiels : nourrir, laver, bercer. Les parents se relayaient ensuite pour l'endormir. Leurs voix alternées faisaient naître des personnages infatigables. Charmée par la musique des mots, la courageuse Alouette luttait contre le sommeil jusqu'à la fin du conte.</p> <p>Depuis son retour de sa nuit d'hôpital, elle est « différente ». Soucieuse. Apeurée. Le risque quotidien de mourir la tourmente. L'enfant au naturel joyeux a changé de registre. Il y avait bien eu quelques signes avant-coureurs, des éclats de voix rauque, un répertoire de plus en plus sombre. En perdant de sa légèreté, la voix avait pris du caractère, perdu en finesse et en nuances ce qu'elle avait gagné en puissance. Alouette chantait juste ; elle chante faux, même quand elle parle, elle parle faux, non pas faux par manque d'oreille, mais par défi. Est-ce pour le plaisir de choquer et de s'accorder à la cacophonie ambiante ou exaspération, mélancolie, fatigue ? (p10-11)</p>	<p>Despite her name, she is neither a bird nor a song. The second she was born she displayed her full, musical voice, hence the bird name her enthralled parents had chosen the day they first heard their newborn's melodious babbling. One exceptional voice among countless lazy vocal cords, dry gullets and sounds as sharp and piercing as knives.</p> <p>Early on, this gift had more than justified her presence in a discordant world. Her every desire came with a repertoire of trills and warbles. From her singing, Pauline and Paul knew when it was time for the essential acts of feeding, bathing, rocking. They would then take turns putting her to sleep. Their alternating voices would give birth to tireless characters. Charmed by the musicality of words, brave Alouette would fight sleep until the tale ended.</p> <p>Since her night in the hospital, she's "different". Fretful, frightened. The daily risk of dying torments her; the naturally happy child has changed her tune. There had been a few warning signs, come to think of it, bursts of huskiness, a darker and darker repertoire. Her voice had grown grittier at the expense of airiness, lost in finesse and nuance what it had gained in strength. Alouette used to sing on key. Now she sings off key, and even when she speaks she's off pitch. Not for lack of ear, but by defiance. Is she doing it for shock value, to be in tune with the surrounding cacophony, or out of exasperation, melancholy and fatigue? (ii)</p>
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This excerpt comes on the heels of Alouette's trip to the emergency room. It explains how she got her unusual name and describes how the dramatic event has changed her. It is essentially one long analogy. There were instances where I was only moderately successful at reproducing the French,

where I failed to find a clever expression and had to re-categorize certain words and then reorganize the sentence or clause (e.g., ‘she displayed her full, musical voice’ for ‘avait la gorge déployée et musicale; and ‘among countless lazy vocal cords’ for ‘que de gorges à la glotte paresseuse’). Once, I was forced to embellish for lack of a workable equivalent in English (i.e., ‘trills and warbles’ for ‘vocalises’). But for the most part, I managed to translate an image by an image, a metaphor by a metaphor, a cliché for a cliché (e.g., ‘changed her tune’ for ‘changé de registre’). The trickiest was the wordplay on ‘chanter juste’ et ‘chanter faux’. I am very pleased with my choice because I was able to stay within musical terminology despite having to find a third idiom since ‘off key’ is not applicable to speech as ‘juste’ and ‘faux’ can be in French.

Rhetorical questions

There are myriad examples of the use of rhetorical questions throughout *Les Enfants*; indeed they appear to be a favourite device of Ms. Ducasse. They serve one of two purposes in the novel; therefore doing away with them might impact the reader’s interpretation.

Their first purpose is didactic. Especially when asked by Jeanne/Pauline, the questions tend to be philosophical and offer a new perspective or invite Alouette’s audience—and the reader—to delve deeper into a concept or event. They are an exercise in critical thinking. In the myths, on the other hand, the questions are often veiled hints, as in the example below:

[...] un gigantesque cheval de bois trônait sur la plage. Etait-ce une ruse ? Un piège ? Des hommes se cachaient-ils dans le ventre creux de la bête ? (p149)	[...] a gigantic wooden horse sat majestically on the beach. Was it a ruse, a trap? Were men hiding in the beast’s hollow belly? (xiv)
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Obviously, for those readers who are already familiar with the story of Troy, these questions may seem silly and unnecessary; but for those who are not, they are an opportunity to see into the Trojans’ minds, clues into what is going to happen next. Therefore, I chose to leave them in.

Second, the rhetorical questions are the interjection of the characters’ voice in the narration. To turn them into assertions would remove a layer of complexity and could skew interpretation. The example below is doubly interesting: it is posed by the fourth child of Heracles, but I believe it is also Alouette grappling with her own questions.

Qu’avions-nous fait de mal pour qu’il nous tue ? (p92)	What had we done that he should kill us?
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Though rhetorical questions tend to be less common in English than in French, except in certain genres, there is no grammatically entrenched reason not to resort to this device. So in order to

preserve her style and intent, I replicated a vast majority of the questions in my translation, even when I felt they were gratuitous.

Didactics v. anaphoric reference

Throughout most of *Les Enfants de la Tragédie*, Ms. Ducasse is unequivocal about her didactic aim: the teaching components are largely blatant, taking the form of explanatory paragraphs on a character or event meant to give a lot of information in a digestible burst (and, I suspect, to inject a dose of “realism” amid the author’s imaginings). These “lessons” are often introduced by Alouette’s mother, although many are found in the myths as well, but are not of much interest here as they pose no particular translational difficulty.

However, the teaching components also take a subtler form, anaphoric reference, which English uses rather less than French. Most instances of this device in French contain no extra information on the subject to which they refer; however when they do, that often entails an explanatory clause in the translation, something I prefer to avoid when possible. The default mode in English would be to prune all the exogenous details about people/characters and keep to one or two names for them. But it is a fine line between didactics and anaphoric reference in *Les Enfants* because Ms. Ducasse peppers the story with morsels of additional information, making it difficult to judge whether to cut out or leave in.

Chaque jour, l’enfant se désaccorde comme un instrument dont on joue mal. L’adolescente souffre, elle s’assombrit. (p11)	As the days go by, she falls out of tune like an ill-played instrument. She is suffering, becoming ever-gloomier. (ii)
La paix. S’il pouvait, son homme lui en fabriquerait une. (p15)	Peace. If he could, Paul would build peace for her. With his own two hands. (iv)
Les feuilles achevées tombent du conifère qui, de sa longue vie, n’avait connu que des chutes de pommes de pin. (p22)	Sheets of inked loose leaf fall from the tree which, over the course of its long life, had only seen the fall of pinecones. (viii)
Etant donné sa réputation et l’importance de son contingent militaire, seul le roi des Myrmidons pouvait faire renverser une décision aussi cruelle. [...] Ma propre mère osait offrir ma virginité sous prétexte qu’il n’y avait aucun autre moyen de me sauver, et l’homme d’honneur n’y trouvait rien à redire. Clytemnestre s’était attendue à ce que le roi au grand cœur refuse... Mais le monarque se taisait, me dévisageait. (p117-9)	Given his reputation and the weight of his military contingent, only Achilles could force the reversal of such a cruel decision. [...] My own mother had dared offer up my virginity, arguing that there was no other way of saving me, and Achilles had not objected. Clytemnestra had expected the kind-hearted king to refuse... But he kept silent, turning his gaze away from me. (xii-xiii)

My readers are likely not as adept as francophones at navigating multiple appellations for the same person. For example, Alouette is alternately referred to as ‘l’enfant’, ‘l’adolescente’ and ‘l’élève’ (the child, the teenager and the student); Jean, her father, as ‘le père’, ‘l’homme’ and ‘l’ébéniste’ (the

father, the man and the carpenter); and the pine tree as ‘le pin’, ‘le pin sylvestre’, ‘le conifère’ and ‘l’arbre’ (the pine tree, the fir tree, the coniferous tree and the tree). It is confusing and you can waste a lot of time and brainpower trying to track down a referent, and in so doing lose the momentum of a story. Therefore, on many occasions, I made my readers’ life easier by repeating the character’s most common name or using a pronoun (see first three examples in the table above). On some occasions, as in the first example with the opposition between child and teenager, I may have unintentionally removed the comment the narrator was making about the character or situation. When I did not deem it detrimental to my reader’s understanding, I left the appellation unchanged.

Similarly, in the myths, the child protagonists often use the proper name, relation and title interchangeably when referring to their parents (e.g., ‘Agamemnon’, ‘mon père’, ‘le roi’ / Agamemnon, my father, the king). This may be the not uncommon habit among Québécois children of calling their parents by their proper name (which was always strange to me growing up, and still is now as an adult) seeping into Ms. Ducasse’s writing, but more likely it is random elegant variation meant to remind the reader of all of a character’s functions and affiliations. For this tenuous didactic reason, I usually left those occurrences untouched as well.

The last example is quite an extreme case. I hesitated over ‘roi des Myrmidons’ and ‘l’homme d’honneur’; the former because it explains to the reader why Achilles is the only one with the clout to intercede, and the latter because the author is being sarcastic. However, in both cases I chose the generic ‘Achilles’ because his kingship had already been mentioned in an earlier paragraph and honour had been previously ascribed to Agamemnon. Thus, for the sake of clarity, I removed many of the variations on Achilles (of which there were six).

Titles

The question of what to do with ‘tragédie’ also proved quite problematic. The word in French conveniently denotes both a horrific event and the theatre genre (the original Greek plays and those of 17th and 18th century France based on Greek myths); it is both generic and specific. The word in English also bears this latter meaning, but, unlike in French, it is a secondary and lesser recognized definition which would probably not come readily to people’s minds. This was a translational challenge because the title of the book, *Les Enfants de la Tragédie*, refers not only to the children of Greek myth but also to Alouette, both as the author of the (re)written myths and the victim of tragedy herself. My choice to use ‘myth’ in the title of my translation seemed the best compromise: it does not evoke the theatre, but it does to a certain extent encompass the child characters and Alouette. Incidentally, I thought ‘myth’ has an alluring quality to it that ‘tragedy’ does not and might be more likely to grab a youth’s attention in a bookstore.

Unfortunately, I felt this solution could not be applied to the final line of the opening chapter when, about to speak, Alouette is introduced to her audience as “l’enfant de la Tragédie”. It struck me as a bit grandiose, but I suppose it adds an extra element of theatricality to Alouette’s recital. Re-categorizing ‘tragédie’ as the adjectival ‘tragic’ and juxtaposing it with ‘child’ gives the phrase presupposed status, lifting the aura of strangeness and mystique and removing the reference to Greek tragedies which Alouette’s audience is not necessarily aware of before the reading.

The titles of the chapters within each myth did not cause any problems of particular interest, but all those of the Alouette sections did. It was mainly a matter of style, of finding idiomatic ways of rendering the clichés, images and wordplay. I am not entirely sure how successful I was: I did manage to preserve the imagery and where there was a cliché I substituted an English one, but sometimes to the detriment of matching registers and idiomatic syntax. Nevertheless, I believe the main purposes of titles are preserved, that is, to bait the reader and summarize in a nutshell the upcoming chapter.

Voice

Just as Alouette hears the voices of the mythological children, so *Les Enfants de la Tragédie* echoes with the voices of the various characters. Unlike in Jane Austen’s *Emma* where the characters’ voices creeping out through the narration are essential to creating the village atmosphere and decrypting the plot (Hewson, 2011a), the different voices interjecting in *Les Enfants* do not, for the most part, seem to serve any specific purpose. However, they are deliberate and add a layer of complexity and interest to the text and, as such, should be carried over in the translation. Failure to do so would fundamentally alter the original style. More importantly, given the story’s depth and educational aim, it would reduce the number of characters’ viewpoints, thus closing up avenues for reflection on the various themes brought up in the novel.

Free Indirect Discourse

Ms. Ducasse interposes voices other than the narrator’s in the reporting discourse through the use of free indirect discourse (FID). As defined by Bosseaux (2007: 59 in Hewson, 2011a: 83), FID:

injects into the narrative the vivacity of direct speech, evoking the personal tone, the gesture, and often the idiom of the speaker or thinker reported. In its simplest form, it is found in the mimicry of expressions characteristic of a person, but in more extensive forms it is used to represent non-verbal levels of mental responses, ranging from the most evident and readily expressed observations to the most obscure movement of the mind. [...] FID is often difficult to identify in a narrative, but this elusiveness is very much part of its stylistic effect. (*idem*)

It was not until my third reading of *Les Enfants de la Tragédie* that I started cottoning on to the occurrences of FID, and then it seemed they would not stop cropping up, even as I wrote this dissertation. If I were true to my guiding principle of attempting to convey as much as possible of the salient features of the source text, then I had to replicate the device, however subtly introduced. Though I may not have caught on to the FID right away, I still tripped over some of the syntactical markers which nagged at me enough to go back and figure out what was going on. I could not deny my readers that extra layer of complexity, richness and tone in the narration. There are simply too many examples of FID to discuss here; I have selected a few passages to illustrate the different ways Ms. Ducasse introduces an alternate voice, and the result in my translation.

Urgence. Cas d'extrême urgence. C'est elle sous l'enflure, elle sur un lit d'hôpital, bousculée, basculant dans le noir, piquée, ranimée. De l'air. De l'air. Pression. Masque à oxygène. Soluté. Surveillance. Son cœur bat trop fort. Elle l'entend aussi dans son doigt, celui qui est relié à une machine. (p9-10)	It's an emergency, a matter of life and death. That's her under all the swelling, her on a hospital gurney, manhandled, lurching into the darkness, pricked, prodded, resuscitated. Air. Give her some air. Pressure. Oxygen mask. I.V. Observation. Her heart is beating too fast. She can even hear it in her finger, the one that's connected to a machine. (i)
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The particular rhythm of this excerpt has been discussed previously. However, beyond the bustle and professionalism, two voices come through. I believe the first iteration of 'urgence' is both a place marker, telling the reader the action has moved from Alouette's house to the emergency room, and a statement of fact on the severity of the situation. The following bolded sentence is actually the voice of a triage nurse saying that Alouette's case needs immediate attention. My translation can still be read as FID, but instead of the nurse the reader hears Jean/Paul, Alouette's father, on the phone with the 911 operator. The clipped pace of the next bolded segment reveals the ER doctor giving instructions and asking for equipment. Replicating the syntax and punctuation was enough to have the same effect. Still, the spoken quality of my 'Give her some air' (instead of a plain repetition as in the French) explicates the doctor's voice.

De ses professeurs, les parents reçoivent parfois un message pour les encourager à plus de discipline, car l'élève s'endort en classe et ne fournit pas tous les efforts prévus dans le programme. (p13)	Her parents receive the odd note from her teachers urging stricter discipline because the student falls asleep in class and is not making the necessary efforts. (iii)
Quel fardeau quand même que cette adolescente lunatique et sans cœur ! Evidemment, si on la nourrit, la sert, lui passe ses caprices, il ne faut pas s'étonner de ce qu'elle abuse. (p19)	What a burden this heartless and moody teenager is! Obviously if you feed her, serve her and bow to her every whim, she's sure to take advantage. (vi)
Eric est vivant, il rit, il est dans les bras de sa maman qui rassure la gardienne parce que, pour être honnête , il lui est arrivé à elle aussi de somnoler avec le bébé. [...] Il remercie Alouette, il est au pied de son arbre, il lui demande	Eric is alive and well, he's laughing in his mother's arms as she consoles the babysitter because, to be honest, she too has dozed off with the baby on occasion. [...] He thanks Alouette, standing at the foot of her tree, he's sorry, sorry

pardon, pardon pour tout ce qu'ils ont dit, lui et sa femme, tout ce qu'ils ont pensé , il veut l'absolution. (p21-22)	for all the things he and his wife have said and thought. He wants absolution. (viii)
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In the first example of the table above, the reader can literally hear the voice of a teacher preaching to the parents as a result of the definite article, the distancing effect of 'élève' instead of 'Alouette' and the general tone of the highlighted segment. The effect of my translation is mixed: 'the student' has the same effect as 'l'élève' but the voice is weakened by the canonical order of the sentence and the banal wording of the final verbal clause.

The second example depicts the voice of gossiping neighbours who blame the parents for letting Alouette do as she likes. The FID is signalled by the exclamation mark, 'évidemment' and the impersonal 'on'. The effect comes through in my translation, albeit a smidge more forcefully, owing to the very chatty use of 'you'.

The third example reveals two voices: that of Eric's mother and his father. 'Pour être honnête' is a self-justifying phrase people use all the time and was easily reproduced in English for the same effect. The parataxis, commas and repetition in the second bolded segment depict a man overcome with emotion, almost grovelling on his knees at the foot of Alouette's tree. I did not keep the segment completely intact, instead separating the final clause with a full stop because this is no longer Eric's father's voice but that of the omniscient narrator. The example also contains several repetitions. In 'il rit, il est dans les bras de sa maman', I left out the second iteration of the pronoun since it served no obvious purpose and was awkward in English. For the same reason, I omitted the middle iteration of the pronoun in 'Il remercie Alouette, il est au pied de son arbre, il lui demande pardon' and the pronoun in 'pardon pour tout ce qu'ils ont dit, lui et sa femme'. However, the repetition of 'pardon' was necessary for the creation of FID, therefore I left it in. Removing some of the repetition in the second bolded segment does weaken the gushing sensation, but the important component, FID, is respected.

The chapters on Iphigenia are some of the richest in FID. The table below shows two perfect, yet very different, examples.

Et pendant que j'essayais désespérément d'attendrir le roi avec mes larmes, mes supplications, il répétait, répétait que son devoir l'exigeait, que l'oracle m'avait désignée, que nous n'avions pas le choix, pas le choix , que la justice suivait son cours et que nous devons obéissance aux dieux. En quoi leur avais-je déplu, pouvait-il me le dire ? Comment réparer ma faute, si faute il y avait ? Pourquoi moi ? Pourquoi pas Hermione ? (p114)	As I tried desperately to appeal to the king with my tears, my pleading, he kept repeating, repeating that he was bound by duty, that the oracle had named me, that we had no choice, no other choice, that justice was taking its course, that we owed allegiance to the gods. I beseeched him to tell me what I had done to displease them. How could I atone for my sin, if indeed I had sinned? Why me? Why not Hermione? (xi)
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<p>Sans autre préambule, Achille lui fit part de son intention de quitter le camp avec ses soldats. Jusqu'à ce jour, il ignorait tout de la manigance du roi Agamemnon, qui avait inventé un faux prétexte pour faire venir Iphigénie. Insulté que l'on se soit impunément servi de son nom à lui, Achille, sans sa permission, pour tromper la jeune fille en lui offrant un mariage dont le principal intéressé ignorait tout, blessé par cet affront, il menaçait de retirer définitivement son appui à l'armée d'Agamemnon. (p116-7)</p>	<p>Without introduction, Achilles informed her of his intention to leave the encampment with his men. Until that day, he had not known of the dealings of King Agamemnon, who had lured Iphigenia under false pretences. Insulted by the unsanctioned use of his name to mislead the young girl by offering her a marriage of which, he, Achilles, the main interested party, had no knowledge, hurt by this offence, he threatened to definitively withdraw his support to Agamemnon's army. (xii)</p>
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King Agamemnon's voice in the first half of the first example is clear in the repetition (of 'que' and 'pas le choix') and juxtaposition from which the reader can hear his anguish and helplessness as he struggles to explain to Iphigenia (and himself) what the gods expect of her. My initial translation read smoothly; the meaning was preserved but the FID was essentially gone, favouring Iphigenia's perspective over Agamemnon's. When I detected the incursion of the king's voice I realized the repetition had to be put back in, regardless of how disruptive it was to the flow of the sentence. Besides, the original is no less effective for all its choppiness. The four questions ending the paragraph are Iphigenia's voice layered over her narration. They are direct speech more than FID and as such easier to replicate, but wanting to maintain the register of the myths, I lost the pleading and desperation of 'pouvait-il me le dire?' by turning the question into an assertion.

The second example is almost entirely FID, but in a much subtler form. In fact, the only indication that the reader is actually listening to Achilles does not come until the middle of the paragraph: from 'à lui, Achille' the reader can picture him pointing at his puffed out chest and hear his disbelief at Agamemnon's scheme. Although the demands of English grammar and syntax forced me to place it later on in the sentence, I believe 'he, Achilles' achieves the same effect as the source text.

This final excerpt is my favourite of the entire novel, despite its dreadful end. It is precisely the anguish brought out by the punctuation, rhythm and FID that makes the passage so effective and moving. Even after reading it more than a dozen times, my pulse still races and I still get a lump in my throat.

<p>Il me semble sentir encore chacun de ses ongles enfoncés dans ma chair. Je revois ma grand-mère quitter le palais. Déjà ébranlée par la mort de son mari et de tous ses fils, la reine vacille à chacun de ses pas. Pourquoi cette épreuve ? A son âge ! Où l'emmènent-ils ? Que crie-t-elle ? Qu'a-t-elle perdu ? Qui donc a perdu la raison ? Cassandra ? Où est Cassandra ? Qu'ont-ils fait de Cassandra ? Qui a déchiré sa robe ? Qui soigne sa blessure ? Ma mère dit : « Cache-toi ! » Elle a peur pour moi. Fallait-il</p>	<p>I can still feel each and every one of her nails digging into my flesh. I see my grand-mother leaving the palace. Already shaken by the death of her husband and all of her sons, the queen sways with every step. Why such an ordeal? At her age! Where are they taking her? What is she shouting? What has she lost? Who has lost their mind? Cassandra? Where is Cassandra, what have they done with her? Who tore her robes? Who is nursing her wound? "Hide!" says my mother. She is frightened for me. Must I really</p>
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<p>vraiment que je me cache dans le tombeau d'Hector ? Quelle est cette odeur ? Pourquoi cela pue-t-il autant ? Faut-il supporter longtemps cette puanteur extrême ? Peut-on s'habituer à la puanteur extrême ? Et si je lui retirais son casque, à mon père ? Si je me revêtais de son armure ? Ainsi harnaché, je serais le plus fort. Assez fort pour repousser les envahisseurs et défendre ma mère, ma pauvre mère que l'on force à se remarier avec un Grec. Mais qui donc me veut du mal ? Comment me défendre ? Père, que dites-vous à votre fils dont on veut la mort ? Pourquoi ne dites-vous rien ? Avez-vous perdu la langue ? Qui a dévoré votre langue ? Qui a retiré de vous toute chaleur ? Il fait froid. Pourquoi fait-il si froid ? Quand est-ce que ma mère va revenir ? Et si elle ne revient pas ? Si elle arrive trop tard ? Combien de temps faut-il pour mourir ? Ils vont l'interroger pour savoir où je suis, où je me cache. Que vont-ils lui faire ? Iraient-ils jusqu'à la torturer ? Oseraient-ils la tuer ? Comment le savoir ? Comment vivre sans elle ? Comment mourir sans elle ?</p> <p>S'il faut mourir pour la sauver, je veux bien, je veux bien sortir d'ici, ne lui faites pas de mal surtout, ne me faites pas de mal, je viens, je viens (trop de lumière), où m'emmenez-vous ? où est ma mère ? laissez-moi, je vous en supplie, pas le casque de mon père ! non, il est à moi, où allons-nous ? j'ai faim, jusqu'où ? Jusque-là, mais c'est dangereux, je n'ai pas le droit, les enfants n'ont pas le droit de venir jusqu'ici, c'est interdit, il faut que je demande à ma mère, elle va s'inquiéter. (p151-3)</p>	<p>hide in Hector's tomb? What is that smell? Why does it stink so badly? How long must I bear this extreme stench? Does one get used to extreme stench? What if I pulled off my father's helmet? What if I put on his armour? In these trappings I would be the strongest. Strong enough to repel the invaders and defend my mother, my poor mother forced to remarry a Greek man. Who could want to hurt me? How can I defend myself? Father, what say you to a son whose death they seek? Why say you nothing? Has the cat got your tongue? Who ate your tongue? Who stole all the heat from you? It is cold. Why is it so cold? When will my mother be back? What if she does not come back? What if she is too late? How long does it take to die? They will question her to find out where I am, where I am hiding. What will they do to her? Would they go as far as torture her? Would they dare kill her? How can I find out? How can I live without her? How can I die without her?</p> <p>If I must die to save her, so be it. I will come out of here, but please do not hurt her—do not hurt me—I am coming, I am coming (too bright), where are you taking me? Where is my mother? Leave me be, I beg you, not my father's helmet! No, it is mine, where are we going? I am hungry. Where? There? But it is dangerous, I am not allowed, children are not allowed to come up here, it is forbidden, I must ask my mother, she will worry. (xv)</p>
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I think cacophony best describes this passage. On the surface, it looks like Astyanax's thoughts most of the way through when, in fact, the reader can hear Hecuba and the Greek soldiers woven in among the desperate thoughts of a plucky prince and a scared little boy.

The first bolded section is quite clearly Queen Hecuba, while the second section could be both Astyanax and Hecuba, although the queen comes through more strongly in the second and third questions as the reader pictures a desperate mother clutching at an invader's sleeve, trying to gain any information on the fate of her daughter. I would venture to say that there are three Astyanaxes in this passage: the narrator (dead Astyanax), the audacious prince trying desperately to be a man, and the frightened little boy. Most of the passage is a tug-of-war between those two "personalities", sometimes within a single sentence, with one or the other winning out. For example, frightened and whiny Astyanax comes through in the third, fourth and fifth bolded sentences, while brave Astyanax shines in sentences like 'Ainsi harnaché, je serais le plus fort.' The voice of the soldiers is debatable in the

last bolded phrase because of the comma, but it is plausible that to end the litany of questions, they choose to give the boy at least one answer.

As complex as the interplay of voices is in this passage, it was quite easily replicated and I believe my translation produces the intended effect, save that the soldiers are removed from the equation.

Focalization

The narration is far from homogenous throughout *Les Enfants de la Tragédie*. There are two main trends: the narrator in the Alouette chapters is third person omniscient while the myths are recounted in the first person by the child protagonists.

Though most of the Alouette sections are in zero focalization, in other words seen by an impartial onlooker, once in a while that narrator takes a more proactive stance and puts in his two-cents worth, as in the two examples below.

Alouette, entendons-nous bien , n'a ni l'orgueil de Diogène ni la velléité de croire qu'elle est une « élue » et que le monde va profiter de son expérience. Modestement, elle attend que le calame soit prêt. (p19)	Alouette, let's be clear, has neither the pride of Diogenes nor the slightest inclination to believe that she is the "chosen one" and the world will benefit from her experience. She is modestly waiting for the calamus to be ready. (vi)
Le petit Eric n'est pas un monstre, il n'est pas dans le labyrinthe, il n'est ni de Crète ni de Grèce, ni dans la mer Méditerranée. Eric est un petit garçon. Trêve de bavardage , si Jean ne fait pas vite, l'enfant va se noyer. (p21)	Little Eric isn't a monster, he isn't in the labyrinth. He's not from Crete or even from Greece and he isn't in the Mediterranean either. Eric is a little boy. Enough chit-chat. If Paul doesn't hurry, the boy will drown. (viii)

Within the first person narration by the children, there are often two voices: that of the child when he was alive and the wiser one of the child now dead. Even so, the narration is in places marked by what sometimes seems yet another person. In the examples below, these incursions are signalled by parentheses.

Ma mère avait reconnu le parti qu'elle pouvait tirer de cet homme vaniteux. En se jetant à ses pieds (jamais elle ne s'était humiliée à ce point devant personne), elle espérait l'attendrir... [...] Je me sentais ridicule. Il n'avait ni cœur, ni grandeur d'âme, ni bonté. Quel soulagement au fond de ma détresse d'avoir échappé (même si tout n'avait été que fabulation) à un individu dont j'étais certaine qu'il m'aurait rendue malheureuse. (p117)	My mother had guessed the use she could make of this vainglorious man. By throwing herself at his feet (never had she humiliated herself to such a degree in front of anyone), she hoped to sway his heart. [...] I felt ridiculous. He had neither feeling, nor munificence, nor goodness. What relief from the depth of my distress to have escaped (even if it had all been fantasy) a person I was certain would have made me unhappy. (xii)
S'il faut mourir pour la sauver, je veux bien, je veux bien sortir d'ici, ne lui faites pas de mal surtout, ne me faites pas de mal, je viens, je viens	If I must die to save her, so be it. I will come out of here, but please do not hurt her—do not hurt me—I am coming, I am coming (too bright),

In all the cited examples, my reaction was to reproduce the tone or parentheses since I was uncertain what the intention was behind them and did not want to lead my readers astray by cutting them out or otherwise manipulating them to fit my interpretation. I believe my translation reflects the ambiguity as to whether it is the narrator speaking or the voice of someone even further removed.

Which leads me to the following theory: as in all Greek tragedies, the myths in *Les Enfants* include a chorus that punctuates the narration with additional information for the spectators’ (or readers’) benefit. My theory, however intriguing, does not fit the novel snugly enough to be borne out. It could be that these interventions are in fact Alouette. Either way, the interpretive paths are left open to my reader.

SOME CONSTRUCTIVE SELF-CRITICISM

In light of the preceding sections on the cultural and stylistic issues I encountered in my translation of *Les Enfants de la Tragédie*, how does my version of the novel stack up against the original? In other words, how much foreign did I manage to carry over in translation? Though I may be my own harshest critic, a formal critical framework is nevertheless necessary to proceed with a more objective assessment (as objective as such an exercise can be given that we are dealing with degrees of interpretation).

Hewson (2011a) provides a comprehensive yet clear and manageable such model. Through his contrastive critical study of translations of *Emma* and *Mme Bovary* comes a list of identifiable categories of writing (and therefore translational) choices on the micro-level and an explanation of how those choices add up to a given effect on the meso- and then macro-level and lead the reader to a just or false interpretation. On the basis of Hewson’s classification, I have discussed in the preceding sections the individual effects, intended and unintended, produced by my translational choices.

Broadly speaking, most of my choices which lead to a loss for the target audience relate to elements of the source culture, namely Alouette’s name and the instances of *joual*. My inability to convey them in my translation was foremost due to constraints imposed by the English language. However, Alouette is only a partial loss since I kept the French word but by doing so, my readers may not get the full benefit of the meaning behind her name. Conversely, the other cultural references in the form of character names, epigraphs and allusions to climate and songs were successfully conveyed because the English language and culture either had existing equivalents for or were flexible enough to incorporate them. Very few of my decisions on these cultural elements were conditioned by the perceived competence of my audience.

Most of my choices on stylistic elements were also successful in bringing across the original meaning or intent, although paradoxically that success was at times contingent on replicating the stylistic device (e.g., imagery and rhetorical questions) and at others on modifying it in response to the strictures of English (e.g., chapter titles). Since many of the stylistic effects hinged on punctuation, successful transmission meant either imitating the pattern of punctuation or selecting the more natural way of punctuating in English to give the same effect. Interestingly, the device that produced the most mixed results was fronting. The English translator's instinctive habit of shifting sentences back into canonical order, which I did manage to offset on a few occasions, entailed that the poetry and some meaning was lost. My treatment of juxtaposition and anaphoric reference could qualify as a loss given that I often clarified the original structures for my readers. That being said, the effect of my choices on the meaning is neutral.

It goes without saying that an assessment of excerpts, however thorough, cannot provide a full picture of the potential effect of my translation on my readers. The following paragraphs summarize my choices and tendencies in the rest of the novel (which it was unnecessary to include for the purposes of this dissertation) in order to supplement the preceding discussion and contribute to a more accurate appraisal of how successful my translation is.

Syntactically, I tended to make decisions typical of French to English translators, that is, place elements back into canonical order and re-categorize elements into other syntactic categories. There are also a few instances of modulation and, as seen, I omitted some repetitions. Most of these decisions were driven by the demands of the English language and the need to make my writing more idiomatic. I freely admit that much of this "need" was idiosyncratic and did not reflect any objective flaw in the original text or misfit with English or potential weakness of my audience. I made next to no grammatical changes, save a handful of modifications to tense, aspect and modality, either for internal consistency or to convey my interpretation. In terms of the lexis, there was very little need for addition or elimination; I believe I consciously made three of the former and one of the latter as well as two explicitations. The additions were either for driving home a point or amplifying an image. I am guilty of using a fairly large number of hyperonyms and hyponyms, usually to embellish a formulation I thought was lacking or to target my audience better or because the accepted English equivalent was not the best match.

Much has already been said about the style of *Les Enfants* and to what extent I did or did not deviate from it, so I will not revisit the stylistic devices already covered. I will add, however, that I was surprised at how often I resorted to clichés, even in the absence of one in the source text. In this case, I managed to hit the correct register, but the very use of clichés affects the tone of a text. I do not think it is of much consequence in the *Alouette* chapters since Ms. Ducasse livens them up with a few Québécois colloquialisms, but some of the clichés may clash with the more solemn tone of the myths.

I also tended to throw in a few alliterations, especially in the titles, for much the same reasons as the use of clichés. On the other hand, I did not add any metaphors that were not already in the text.

In sum, my translation choices tended to: explicitate connections between sentences, clauses and ideas; revert to canonical word order; and resort to clichés. The effects of these choices were: periodic drops in register, anachronisms, and loss or weakening of voice. On the meso-level, there may well be some deformation of voice owing to my inability on a few occasions to make a character's voice come through as strongly as in the source text. However, I did not fundamentally alter any characters or events and my translation does not stray irreparably from the source text. Therefore, I believe that my choices do not in aggregate lead to any substantial ill effects in the broader text, and that my readers are led down a just interpretive path.

So my translation could be described as an overall success in terms of reflecting the original meaning, though the form required some intervention. But what of the foreignizing aim and my strategy to “disrupt” English-language and cultural values? On that score, my translation is far from an unqualified success. I was very much torn between carrying over the substantive and formal uniqueness of the original text and a compulsion to re-write in a way that seemed more natural. I am guilty of making formal and syntactic changes that were not objectively necessary merely because I thought they sounded better. The result is somewhat of a hybrid, with some idiomatic passages and some more marked owing to imitation of the French.

Interestingly, I believed at the outset that the needs of my audience would inform my choices to a far greater extent than they did in practice. My readers' encyclopaedia was more of a consideration in decisions concerning elements of the source culture embedded in the story, whereas their needs were barely a factor in stylistic matters. Those choices were by and large made on the basis of what I thought the English language could absorb. The partial failure of my disruptive strategy is chiefly attributable to my biases as a translator rather than to any impossibility related to audience or language.

CONCLUSION

The main lesson of my foreignizing aim—and its failure—is that Venuti's two poles are too simplistic a reduction of the choices literary translators face. Responsible translational choices are rarely purely foreign or purely domestic. They fall somewhere in between because some disruptions are simply too momentous for the target language to sustain while some workarounds are altogether treasonous to the source text. I would also venture to add that translational choices are a hybrid because not all elements of a source text are equally foreign, and thereby equally important to the eyes of a translator on a foreignizing mission. Based on my experience with *Les Enfants de la Tragédie*,

cultural references rank much higher on the foreign scale—and in value for the target reader—and are as a rule, with the major exception of colloquial speech, easier to convey. Stylistic features, on the other hand, are not as patently foreign yet they are the most stubbornly resistant to reproduction owing to linguistic imperatives.

This notion of degrees of foreignness leads me to another lacuna in Venuti's method: the significance of purpose. It became very clear to me as I analyzed my choices that I had in fact based a lot of my decisions, especially those pertaining to style, on the perceived purpose of a given feature. When constraints of the English language meant that I was unable to reproduce a device, I looked beyond its outer markers to what it was trying to achieve and attempted to reproduce that. So being true to the source text does not necessarily imply matching styles to a tee but, rather, to creating an equivalent effect.

Moreover, Venuti's very premise that "in its efforts to do right abroad, [a foreignizing] translation method must do wrong at home, deviating from native norms to stage an alien reading experience" (2006: 548) is not a hard and fast rule. My experience showed that conveying the cultural and linguistic elements did not always "do wrong" in English. In fact, most of the ones that did carry over were included precisely because it could be done without too much violence against the target language or reader. It is possible to fail to disrupt the target language, and therefore to fully foreignize one's translation, even as one succeeds in rendering the source-text feature.

Not only is Venuti's method superficial, it is not a universally applicable method either: some languages are linguistically and culturally close enough and have enough shared history that including elements of the source language and culture is less disruptive to the target language and culture than in combinations of less compatible languages.

Foreignizing may be a worthy objective to the naïve and idealistic translator, but it is next to impossible to achieve in practice. There are limitations to how disruptive a translation can be: in the case of *Les Enfants* the immediate obstacle was the target audience. A younger readership cannot be expected to be as receptive to atypical English prose as a more experienced audience. Though the level of my readership did inform some of my decisions regarding the inclusion of foreign elements, the key factor turned out to be my perception of what the English language could take on board. It is a lot easier said than done to carry over the foreign into the target text in a way that will not go over the heads of the readers or deter them from reading on, simply because there is only so much you can coax out of the target language. In the end, the duty I felt towards fluency in the target language outweighed my keenness to convey the specificities of the source text.

Translating *Les Enfants de la Tragédie* was an excellent, often humbling, experience. There were days when I felt like I had regressed two years and was right back in first semester, re-learning the rules of English and not quite knowing where the boundary lay between what I could and couldn't do as a translator. It was a lesson in perspective and humility. Translators are biased creatures, biased towards the source text (otherwise they would not be translating it), biased towards their target language (it is their job, after all, to know their language inside out) and biased towards their audience (who doesn't want to please?). They have to vie with this triad of expectations and one of them has to win. In my case with *Les Enfants*, it is the status quo of fluency that triumphed.

That being said, I remain a source-oriented translator in that I believe it is the translator's job to convey as much of the original text as possible, even if the adaptability of the target language means the reader gets a filtered view of the foreign. A filtered or somewhat constructed view is better than no view at all—as long as the reader can still form a just interpretation of the text.

As I wrap up this dissertation, I have not so far submitted my translation to Ms. Ducasse. She may yet quibble with some of my choices, forcing changes to my version. Time will tell if my translation is published, if it sells and if people enjoy it. If it never makes it to book form, it will at least have been a tremendous exercise I hope has made me a more mature and deliberate translator. Translation is a balancing act—and that's a huge part of the fun.

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ANNEX I – About the author



I am fortunate to know France Ducasse personally and so have been privy to first-hand information about her as a woman and an author. She was born to a military father and a homemaker and grew up in Limoilou, a working class neighbourhood of Quebec City. She studied history at Université Laval then went on to teach history and French as a Second Language. Her first book was published in 1981 but it was when she was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award in 1983 that she realized she had finally found her path. Writing for adult and youth audiences alike, Ms. Ducasse's works of fiction range from novels and short stories to plays, for which she has garnered much praise and several awards. Based on the novel and book of short stories of hers I have read as well as the titles of many of her other works, she is deeply attached to her native city and province, a love that permeates her writing, at times overtly and other times as a backdrop, a silent companion for the reader. Although her oeuvre is mostly known in Quebec, she made her first foray abroad in the autumn of 2010 with public readings of her works in Paris. In addition to writing, Ms. Ducasse is a member of the professional choir "Les Rhapsodes" and has performed in a bevy of plays and budget films.

My own impression of Ms. Ducasse on the handful of occasions we have met is one of a wonderfully creative, animated and sensitive woman. She is an openly loving mother of three and somehow exudes a deep connection with nature and life. All these traits imbue her fiction; one truly feels that each book is a piece of its author.

ANNEX II – Source text excerpts

« Il faut vivre sous le signe d'une désinvolture panique, ne rien prendre au sérieux, tout prendre au tragique. »

Roger Nimier

1. Alouette entre la vie et la mort

De l'eau.
— Crache !
De l'eau du robinet.
— Crache !
Encore de l'eau. Vite.
— Crache ! Crache !
Gonflement des paupières. Des oreilles.
De la bouche. Lèvres et langue s'épaississent.
— Peut plus cracher.
Le père dit :
— J'appelle l'ambulance.
Elle a peur. Elle a mal. Du mal à respirer.
Douleur dans la poitrine. Les yeux anxieux de
la mère contredisent ses gestes rassurants, le
ton de sa voix.
— Maman, j'étouffe.
Urgence. Cas d'extrême urgence. C'est
elle sous l'enflure, elle sur un lit d'hôpital,
bousculée, basculant dans le noir, piquée,
ranimée. De l'air. De l'air. Pression, Masque à
oxygène. Soluté. Surveillance. Son cœur bat

trop fort. Elle l'entend aussi dans son doigt, celui qui est relié à une machine.

— Son nom ?

— Alouette.

— Âge ?

— Quatorze ans.

— Vous êtes ses parents ?

— Ses parents. Les parents d'Alouette.

Les gens disent d'habitude que c'est un drôle de nom, un nom d'oiseau, de chanson, mais l'infirmière n'a pas le temps. On est sérieux quand on ranime une Alouette.

— Rassurez-vous, votre fille est hors de danger, vous m'entendez ?

— Hors de danger.

— Elle aurait pu mourir, vous savez. Vous le saviez ?

— Vous avez dit : « mourir » ?

— Mourir.

Ni oiseau ni chanson bien qu'Alouette. Dès sa naissance, le bébé avait la gorge déployée et musicale d'où ce nom d'oiseau que ses parents envoûtés ont choisi le jour où ils entendirent pour la première fois le gazouillement harmonieux de leur nouveau-né. Pour une voix exceptionnelle, que de gorges à la glotte paresseuse, de gosiers secs et de sons aussi pointus et blessants qu'une lame !

Au début, il y avait ce don qui justifiait amplement sa présence en un monde dissonant. Chacun de ses désirs s'accompagnait

d'un répertoire de vocalises. Ainsi, à son chant, Jeanne et Jean savaient que l'heure était venue des gestes essentiels : nourrir, laver, bercer. Les parents se relayaient ensuite pour l'endormir. Leurs voix alternées faisaient naître des personnages infatigables. Charmée par la musique des mots, la courageuse Alouette luttait contre le sommeil jusqu'à la fin du conte.

Depuis son retour de sa nuit d'hôpital, elle est « différente ». Soucieuse. Apeurée. Le risque quotidien de mourir la tourmente. L'enfant au naturel joyeux a changé de registre. Il y avait bien eu quelques signes avant-coureurs, des éclats de voix rauque, un répertoire de plus en plus sombre. En perdant de sa légèreté, la voix avait pris du caractère, perdu en finesse et en nuances ce qu'elle avait gagné en puissance. Alouette chantait juste; elle chante faux, même quand elle parle, elle parle faux, non pas faux par manque d'oreille, mais par défi. Est-ce pour le plaisir de choquer et de s'accorder à la cacophonie ambiante ou exaspération, mélancolie, fatigue ?

Chaque jour, l'enfant se désaccorde comme un instrument dont on joue mal. L'adolescente souffre, elle s'assombrit. La mine morose et sans remuer, elle écoute une musique assourdissante qui se joue de ses rares tentatives de réflexion. Elle ne chante

plus, il n'y a pas d'air, pas de paroles audibles. Comme un cœur qui bat, le rythme seul la maintient artificiellement en vie. Un luthier dirait qu'il y a danger que les cordes cassent, mais on ne consulte pas de luthier quand on est fait de chair et d'os.

Le monde est tellement plus terne et triste que la jeune fille se l'imaginait. Ce qu'elle apprend l'étouffe. Elle ne voyait pas la planète ainsi, quadrillée de frontières mal cicatrisées. Avant la géographie, la terre était une vallée, un fleuve, de vieilles collines tendrement arrondies, un horizon, une grande bouffée d'air frais. Que penser des volcans, des raz de marée, de la terre qui tremble, dévaste, dévore, engloutit ? À ces cauchemars s'ajoute l'histoire des empereurs, des rois, des chefs d'État, des présidents, des premiers ministres aux grandes ambitions, grandes armées, courtes vues. L'école se targue en plus d'enseigner la logique fondée sur des abstractions auxquelles on lui demande de croire. À croire que le calcul est une religion ! Alouette a beau travailler, elle a de mauvaises notes. Même en français. Surtout en français. À disséquer des phrases isolées qui ne racontent rien, les mots perdent leur sens, ils ne sont plus que des noms communs, des adjectifs sans qualités et des verbes obnubilés par le temps qui passe. Les analyses de textes la révoltent.

Alouette refuse de livrer son amour des mots à cette boucherie.

Alouette ne s'endort jamais le soir sans des heures de lecture. Elle se couche donc plus tard qu'il n'est suggéré aux jeunes de son âge. De ses professeurs, les parents reçoivent parfois un message pour les encourager à plus de discipline, car l'élève s'endort en classe et ne fournit pas tous les efforts prévus dans le programme. Pourquoi punir une enfant qui lit dix livres plutôt que dix fois le même livre obligatoire ?

Si certains adolescents préfèrent, quant à eux, se colleter avec la vraie vie, Alouette rêve violemment d'y échapper. Est-ce un crime ?

«À l'école, dit-elle, on apprend surtout à se faire disputer.»

Elle ne veut plus y aller. Plus du tout. Plus jamais. Un jour, elle vit avec sa famille, sur la terre ferme. Le suivant, elle n'y est plus. Elle est dans le grand pin qui ombrage la cour et ne veut plus en redescendre. On craint pour sa vie. Si l'adolescente dépressive allait se jeter dans le vide ? Tout ce qu'elle veut pour le moment, c'est qu'on lui permette de rester là-haut,

oui,
là-haut,
dans l'arbre.

Son idée depuis sa résurrection, sa grande idée secrète – comment savoir si l'on peut s'y fier, si l'idée a raison, si ce n'est pas une idée folle –, son idée fixe lui aurait enjoint de grimper dans un pin pour s'y tailler un calame.

Selon Pline l'Ancien, un auteur latin de l'Antiquité romaine, le pin serait l'arbre des écrivains. Les écrivains taillaient dans le grand conifère des calames qui avaient la forme d'une plume d'oie et dont ils se servaient, bien entendu, pour écrire. Mais avant qu'on en fasse usage, les calames durcissaient pendant des mois dans le fumier. Après ce purgatoire, les auteurs de jadis, et Pline en particulier, s'en servaient pour rédiger des livres.

Alouette veut écrire comme on écrit quand on veut écrire, quand on ne veut plus que ça dans la vie, quand la vie est une révélation. L'étape du fumier présente quelques difficultés, mais la mère qui ne veut pas contrarier sa fille a promis d'y penser.

— Tu aurais dû te méfier, Jeanne.

— De quoi, Jean ?

Aux yeux d'une mère qui se réjouit de voir sa fille s'intéresser au moins à quelque chose, alors qu'elle se désespérait de la voir traîner sans but, sans joie, ce projet d'écrire un livre semblait justifier la fabrication artisanale du calame. La chose semblait envisageable, même souhaitable.

— Pourquoi a-t-il fallu qu'elle s'entiche de Pline l'Ancien, veux-tu bien me le dire ? demande Jean. Il n'y a donc pas de nouveau Pline, un Pline le Jeune qui écrirait avec un stylo comme tout le monde ? À ta place, je lui aurais acheté des stylos parfumés, phosphorescents.

— Elle veut la paix.

— Je veux bien. Pourquoi là-haut ? Pourquoi pas dans la maison, au chaud, dans sa chambre ?

La paix. S'il pouvait, son homme lui en fabriquerait une.

De ses propres mains.

— Elle ne peut quand même pas rester là-haut.

— Qui va l'en empêcher ? Toi ?

Alouette a perdu la tête. Que répondre à ceux qui le lui reprochent et accusent la mère et le père de négligence ? Ils auraient, dit-on, toute autorité pour faire descendre l'enfant de son perchoir. N'est-ce pas leur fille après tout ? Ce serait comme qui dirait leur « devoir ». Or, quand ils aidaient Alouette à faire ses devoirs d'écolière, justement, il y avait eu « leçons » au préalable. Maintenant, on leur demande d'intervenir. Au nom de quel savoir ? De quelles règles ?

— Laisse-les dire, Jeanne, c'est sans importance ! Ils vont finir par nous oublier, tu vas

voir, ce ne sera pas difficile, ils ont de quoi se changer les idées avec la télévision.

— Tu crois vraiment qu'on va s'habituer, tu penses qu'il faut oublier notre enfant affamée qui gèle là-haut ?

— Mais non, nous, ce n'est pas pareil.

Jean propose de lui construire une plateforme. Comme il a refait un plancher récemment, des planches de bois franc traînent dans la cave. Il y en aurait assez également pour un auvent. Ainsi, elle serait protégée des intempéries.

— Qu'est-ce qu'on fait pour la nourriture ?

Il réfléchit. Alouette aimerait son père en ce moment même si elle pouvait voir les rides sur son front dégarni. Elle s'amuserait de le voir passer et repasser sa main sur le sommet de son crane en ayant l'air de penser que là se trouve, dans cette boîte à outils, l'outil par excellence, le maître outil. Il n'y a pas de problème, dit-il toujours. Que des solutions ! La solution est un système de cordes et de poulies qui fonctionne aussi bien à la verticale, de bas en haut et de haut en bas, qu'à l'horizontale, de l'arbre à la maison et vice versa. Ainsi, les besoins essentiels seront assurés grâce à la circulation du nécessaire. On le sent déjà pressé de se mettre au travail.

— Si elle refusait ?

— Elle ne peut pas.

— Elle a quatorze ans, ce n'est plus un bébé!

— Jusqu'à preuve du contraire, ma chère Jeanne, elle ne vole pas encore de ses propres ailes, elle n'est donc pas en mesure de refuser notre aide.

L'homme disparaît dans son atelier. Sa femme patiente au pied de l'arbre. Elle lit à voix haute. Alouette s'endort.

Les camarades de classe se bousculent pour essayer d'apercevoir leur amie. Ils crient son nom, mais elle ne répond pas, elle ne se montre pas. Le peu qu'ils devinent excite leur curiosité. Le père fait une démonstration du fonctionnement de l'appareillage qui assure ses besoins, son confort, sa survie. Les jeunes posent des questions d'ordre pratique. Le comportement d'Alouette échappe toutefois à leur compréhension.

Pour les distraire et tenter si possible une explication, Jean leur raconte l'histoire d'une jeune femme qui aurait passé plus d'un an dans un arbre de l'Ouest américain pour le sauver de vils bucherons à la solde de non moins vils gens d'affaires qui voulaient l'abattre. L'un des garçons du groupe d'amis d'Alouette, un grand Jack méticuleusement dépeigné, aux cheveux teints d'un noir corbeau, refuse d'écouter. Ce pin

a l'air en santé, pas du tout menacé par un entrepreneur ou par quelque maladie.

— Vous-même, monsieur, vous n'aviez pas l'intention de le couper, que je sache ?

La fille de l'Ouest ne peut rien pour celle de l'Est; le séquoia vénérable pour le pin; un corbeau pour une alouette.

— Vous connaissez Diogène ?

La quête d'une jeune fille des temps modernes peut-elle se comparer à celle du penseur grec ? Jeanne propose une nouvelle piste.

— Les spécialistes de l'Antiquité ont raconté l'histoire de ce philosophe qui vivait dans un tonneau. Il se moquait, apparemment, de la vanité humaine. Pour ridiculiser ses concitoyens, il se promenait en plein jour dans Athènes avec une lanterne allumée. Il se disait à la recherche d'un homme digne de ce nom.

Sauf qu'Alouette fuit les hommes. Elle n'est pas cynique, pas du tout comme cet excentrique qui vivait sur la place publique, il y a plus de deux mille trois cent cinquante ans, elle ne dénonce rien, ne défend rien. La comparaison est impossible.

Quelqu'un propose donc autre chose. Le choix d'Alouette la rapproche plutôt des ermites qui trouvaient dans l'isolement un affermissement de leur foi. On prononce le nom du Bouddha sous le banian, ou il aurait

passé d'interminables années à méditer en attendant la « révélation ».

Alouette, entendons-nous bien, n'a ni l'orgueil de Diogène ni la velléité de croire qu'elle est une « élue » et que le monde va profiter de son expérience. Modestement, elle attend que le calame soit prêt. Alouette a besoin du calame pour écrire et, pour écrire, le calame a besoin d'une Alouette. Une évidence. Quel bonheur ! La vie est tellement plus simple qu'on se l'imagine.

Les gens disent:

— Ce n'est pas une vie, ça, madame !

On plaint la pauvre femme qui doit vider le seau d'aisance de sa fille. À une époque révolue, tout le monde le faisait, mais il ne faut plus gaspiller un temps précieux pour des tâches aussi ingrates. Quel esclavage ! De nos jours d'ailleurs, qui fait son ménage ? On engage une femme de ménage !

Quel fardeau tout de même que cette adolescente lunatique et sans cœur ! Évidemment, si on la nourrit, la sert, lui passe ses caprices, il ne faut pas s'étonner de ce qu'elle abuse.

— Un conseil, disent les gens, il faut l'affamer. On va bien voir si elle résiste longtemps, le ventre vide.

Jeanne et Jean ont beau déclarer qu'ils ne se privent de rien d'important, on ne les croit

pas. Ils se disent même plutôt impressionnés par la détermination de leur fille. Ou aller de toute façon ? Un arbre suffit à prendre racine. Une enfant, pour fonder une famille unie par le temps, le lieu, l'action. Pour écrire ce fameux livre dont rêve Alouette, hormis le calame et le papier, il ne faut que du temps, celui qu'on arrache de force à l'agitation générale, aux obligations. Une patience de coléoptère.

— Qu'est-ce que tu vois ? demande Jean.

— Le ciel de Grèce, répond Alouette.

— Plus bas ?

— La mer.

— *Qu'on voit danser le long des golfes clairs.*

— *Plutôt la mer me-me-me...*

— Méditerranée ?

— Oui.

— Et dans la mer ?

— Deux cents îles.

— Mais encore ?

— L'île de Crète.

— Plus précisément ?

— Cnossos et son palais, son labyrinthe.

— Et que vois-tu dans le labyrinthe ?

— Il y a un monstre, je le vois.

Mais elle aperçoit aussi autre chose, elle s'énerve tout à coup.

— Mon dieu, papa !

— Quoi ?

— Éric.

— Quoi ?

Elle crie.

— Il est tombé.

Le petit Éric n'est pas un monstre, il n'est pas dans le labyrinthe, il n'est ni de Crète ni de Grèce, ni dans la mer Méditerranée. Éric est un petit garçon. Trêve de bavardage, si Jean ne fait pas vite, l'enfant va se noyer.

Jean se précipite chez le quatrième voisin et, sans même prendre le temps d'enlever ses chaussures, il se jette dans la piscine pour y repêcher l'enfant aux yeux grands ouverts au fond de l'eau. À le ranimer ensuite, Jean s'attelle. Bouche contre bouche, l'homme et l'enfant s'embrassent. L'étreinte n'en finit plus. Quand le souffle s'épuise, Jeanne prend la relève. Jeanne et Jean, tour à tour, bouche à bouche.

La gardienne s'était endormie en berçant le bébé. La jeune fille raconte sans rien omettre, avoue son forfait, décrit le sauvetage aux parents d'Éric qui sont enfin de retour. Éric est vivant, il rit, il est dans les bras de sa maman qui rassure la gardienne parce que, pour être honnête, il lui est arrivé à elle aussi de somnoler avec le bébé. Le papa d'Éric ne sait comment prouver sa reconnaissance. Il embrasse Jeanne et Jean. Il remercie Alouette, il est au pied de son arbre, il lui demande pardon, pardon pour tout ce qu'ils ont dit, lui et sa femme,

tout ce qu'ils ont pensé, il veut l'absolution. Elle ne dit rien.

— Elle est muette ? demande Éric.

Peu importe. Jamais plus les voisins ne se moqueront de celle qui a sauvé leur enfant. Alouette a sa place désormais, elle veille, prévient quand elle pressent le danger, avant le désastre. En faisant le bien de là-haut, elle s'efforce de grandir avec l'arbre et espère atteindre une hauteur qui lui permettrait d'étendre son champ de vision.

Le calame «griche» activement. Les feuilles achevées tombent du conifère qui, de sa longue vie, n'avait connu que chutes de pommes de pin. Jeanne révisé. Alouette corrige. Jean tape. Du travail d'équipe à son meilleur. Évidemment, cette fille aurait pu s'installer dans un lieu plus confortable, mais Alouette n'a pas choisi. À cause du pin qui se trouvait dans sa cour. Le Minotaure non plus quand il fut enfermé dans le labyrinthe !

Alouette dit qu'on sait peu de chose de lui.

— Parce que toi, tu sais ? lui demande sa mère.

— Non.

— Tu inventes ?

— Il me parle.

— Qui ?

— Lui.

— Qui ça, lui ?

— Minotaure.

Deux mois passent. Deux mois de chutes de feuilles blanches gribouillées de noir sous un ciel gris. À la récolte d'automne, Alouette ajoute son grain de tragédie grecque. Chez Jeanne et Jean, il y a beaucoup de monde pour fêter l'événement. Des rafraîchissements sont servis. Alouette va-t-elle consentir à descendre de son arbre ? On ne sait pas. Il fait beau. Les plus jeunes s'étendent sur le tapis de feuilles tombées des érables alentour ou sur des couvertures. Les plus vieux déplient les chaises de parterre et s'assoient confortablement. Les jambes d'Alouette pendent de la branche d'où elle va lire enfin.

Silence ! L'enfant de la Tragédie va parler.

Révolte

L'issue de toute guerre est incertaine. En nous faisant ses adieux avant de rejoindre son armée, mon père s'était ému. Ses larmes m'avaient effrayée. Ce nouveau conflit l'inquiétait plus que de coutume.

On nous avait expliqué, à nous, les enfants, que l'épouse de Ménélas, la belle Hélène, la plus belle des Grecques, avait été enlevée par Pâris, un Troyen, le fils de Priam, roi de Troie. Le mari voulait se venger et ramener la captive. Les Troyens n'avaient qu'à bien se tenir, parce que tous les rois grecs de l'Hellénie, conduits par Agamemnon lui-même, s'étaient associés au mari bafoué. Grecs contre Troyens. Troyens contre Grecs. Nul besoin d'être fort en calcul pour comprendre l'équation.

Hélène était la sœur de ma mère, et le frère de mon père n'était autre que Ménélas. Cette affaire de famille avait pris une ampleur sans précédent. Des milliers d'hommes étaient prêts à se battre pour une femme dont, par ailleurs et à mon grand étonnement, on médissait. Avait-elle cédé aux avances du beau

prince et à ses promesses de vie plus fastueuse, comme certains le prétendaient ? Pour ma part, j'en doutais. Tyndare, son père, lui avait permis de choisir elle-même son époux, un privilège dont peu de femmes pouvaient s'enorgueillir. Entre les nombreux prétendants, tous aussi rois, grecs et valeureux les uns que les autres, Ménélas fut l'heureux élu. Quelle raison aurait eue l'heureuse femme de vouloir quitter un homme qu'elle avait choisi ?

Et puis, on semblait l'oublier, Hélène avait une fille. Je ne pouvais admettre qu'elle eût voulu s'en séparer. Pour qu'Hermione ne souffre pas trop de l'absence de sa mère, j'espérais une victoire rapide et fracassante. Je trouvais émouvant de penser que tant de guerriers n'avaient d'autre but que de réunir une mère et son enfant.

Comme j'étais naïve, aussi bien en amour qu'en politique ! Si le destin m'en avait offert la chance, j'aurais sûrement approfondi l'une et l'autre question.

Tout à la joie de revoir mon père, j'avais presque oublié ma peine de le quitter. J'oscillais donc entre la tristesse et le bonheur sans prêter attention à ce qui m'entourait. L'exclamation de ma mère me sortit brutalement de ma rêverie mélancolique.

Qu'il était sinistre ce camp de soldats ! Elle avait raison. Où étaient les hommes ? On

ne voyait personne. Puis l'un d'eux apparut. Visage grave. Cliquetis d'armure. Il nous invita à le suivre. Agamemnon avait l'air sombre et distant. Quand il aperçut Clytemnestre, ses sourcils se froncèrent, mais il ne lui fit aucun reproche. Il ordonna cependant qu'elle fût reconduite à sa tente. Ma mère et moi échangeâmes un regard inquiet. Rien n'était comme nous l'avions imaginé.

Dès que nous fûmes seuls, mon père me prit dans ses bras, en me serrant presque trop fort. Il semblait troublé. Si mon éducation ne m'avait pas enseigné la retenue, je l'aurais bombardé de questions tellement elles se bousculaient dans ma tête. Lui, si loquace d'habitude, ne trouvait pas les mots, puis il me lâcha, se détourna. Le silence était oppressant.

« Tu as fait bon voyage ? »

La question me surprit.

« Qu'y a-t-il père ? » lui demandai-je plutôt que de répondre.

Et parce que j'avais osé la première, il osa. À quoi bon retarder l'aveu ! Il avoua.

Pendant qu'il me racontait ce que la déesse Artémis et les dieux, le devin, l'oracle, les rois et la guerre exigeaient de moi, je tremblais. Chacune de ces volontés acharnées à me dépouiller de la mienne me révoltait. À la leur et à celle du commandant en chef, j'opposais ma propre résolution de vivre avec ce corps, cette chevelure admirée, ces yeux, cette peau

douce, ces dents saines, bien plantées, et tout ce dont on m'avait instruite, mes pensées, mes projets, mon appétit. Ce père en qui j'avais mis toute ma confiance et dont je me croyais tendrement aimée pouvait-il vraiment consentir à livrer au bourreau son enfant ?

Comment aurait-il fallu que je réagisse ? Je venais de vivre les derniers jours dans la perspective d'un grand bonheur, et voilà qu'on exigeait de moi le plus injuste des sacrifices. Du moins, est-ce ainsi qu'il m'apparut d'abord. Je repensais à ma sœur et à mon frère que je venais de quitter, j'essayais d'imaginer leur sentiment en apprenant mon triste sort, mais je ne pouvais pas, je ne me voyais que vivante, riante, caressante, avec des enfants, c'est ça, oui, beaucoup d'enfants. Et pendant que j'essayais désespérément d'attendrir le roi avec mes larmes, mes supplications, il répétait, répétait que son devoir l'exigeait, que l'oracle m'avait désignée, que nous n'avions pas le choix, pas le choix, que la justice suivait son cours et que nous devions obéissance aux dieux. En quoi leur avais-je déplu, pouvait-il me le dire ? Comment réparer ma faute, si faute il y avait ? Pourquoi moi ? Pourquoi pas Hermione ?

« Hermione ! » s'exclama-t-il en se durcissant, me repoussant. Si j'avais commis un crime, il ne m'aurait pas regardée plus sévèrement. Oser imaginer une autre à ma place.

Vouloir me sauver en condamnant ma semblable. Quelle indignité pour une fille de roi ! Cet homme d'honneur qu'était mon père ne pouvait admettre que telle avait été ma tentation. Ma lâcheté lui faisait horreur. En moi, il ne reconnaissait plus sa fille. Je ne savais plus où j'en étais. En voulant sauver ma peau, je n'avais gagné que le mépris de mon père, qui attachait une grande importance au respect de la loi. Survivre dans ces conditions me semblait intolérable ! Pourtant, je ne voulais pas mourir, et c'est dans cet état de confusion que je me précipitai dans les bras de ma mère.

Le cri qu'elle poussa fut effroyable. Dans toutes les tentes, les hommes furent atteints par sa colère. Jamais, criait-elle, elle ne laisserait une telle chose se produire. Elle refusait de faire le sacrifice de son Iphigénie. Elle traitait son mari de lâche, les dieux d'assassins, et je tremblais, à l'entendre, que l'Olympe n'exige réparation.

En dépit de mes craintes, je la suivais comme une ombre, elle seule m'apparaissant capable de se battre pour moi. Mais elle me repoussa quand je demandai à l'accompagner auprès de mon père ; je ne voulais pas rester seule, j'avais terriblement peur qu'on vienne me chercher en son absence. Elle fut intraitable. Pendant que je l'attendais, le camp résonnait de leurs éclats de voix.

Achille

Je me souviens du visage tuméfié de ma mère. Clytemnestre avait perdu une bataille. «Non la guerre », m'assura-t-elle en ravalant ses larmes. L'inflexibilité de son mari ne l'avait paralysée qu'en surface; elle méditait déjà sa revanche. Mon désespoir, jugé déraisonnable, l'exaspérait. Elle m'aurait voulue plus combative. L'adversaire était de taille, d'accord, mais l'échec impensable. Comme j'aurais voulu avoir son assurance !

Elle vit donc arriver Achille avec joie, une joie qu'elle sut aussitôt déguiser en profond accablement. L'homme fut introduit auprès d'une femme défaite. Sans autre préambule, Achille lui fit part de son intention de quitter le camp avec ses soldats. Jusqu'à ce jour, il ignorait tout de la manigance du roi Agamemnon, qui avait inventé un faux prétexte pour faire venir Iphigénie. Insulté que l'on se soit impunément servi de son nom à lui, Achille, sans sa permission, pour tromper la jeune fille en lui offrant un mariage dont le principal intéressé ignorait tout, blessé par

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cet affront, il menaçait de retirer définitivement son appui à l'armée d'Agamemnon.

Le brave Achille était donc en colère. Quoi de mieux ! Il voulait partir ? Son nom. Son honneur. Son orgueil. Excellent! Les ingrédients réunis promettaient de l'action, et c'est ce que ma mère escomptait.

Étant donné sa réputation et l'importance de son contingent militaire, seul le roi des Myrmidons pouvait faire renverser une décision aussi cruelle. Encore fallait-il le convaincre de changer ses projets !

Ma mère avait reconnu le parti qu'elle pouvait tirer de cet homme vaniteux. En se jetant à ses pieds (jamais elle ne s'était humiliée à ce point devant personne), elle espérait l'attendrir...

J'eus honte en la voyant ainsi et dégoût pour l'homme qui tolérait cet état de chose, raide et passif devant la reine prostrée. Comment avais-je pu entrevoir avec plaisir un mariage avec cet homme méprisant ? Je me sentais ridicule. Il n'avait ni cœur ni grandeur d'âme, ni bonté. Quel soulagement au fond de ma détresse d'avoir échappé (même si tout n'avait été que fabulation) à un individu dont j'étais certaine qu'il m'aurait rendue malheureuse.

Achille ne pouvait pas être accusé de complicité dans cette affaire puisqu'il avait été lui-même abusé. Son départ intempestif

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n'aurait servi la cause de personne. La ruse de ma mère consistait à lui offrir l'occasion, en échange d'un petit service, de se venger d'Agamemnon tout en demeurant sur place. Celui-ci ne pouvait se permettre de perdre un combattant de la trempe d'Achille et ça, Clytemnestre le savait. Pour préserver l'orgueil des hommes, il fallait manœuvrer subtilement.

« Si l'oracle se trompait ? » suggéra ma mère.

« Les dieux ne se trompent pas », répliqua le demi-dieu.

« Mais un devin, un vieux devin comme Calchas, pourquoi ne serait-il pas à l'abri des erreurs d'interprétation ? »

Froideur et scepticisme.

Apparemment prise de court (mais elle ne l'était pas), Clytemnestre le supplia de l'écouter encore, et elle s'accrochait à ses jambes pour ne pas qu'il parte. Il y avait une autre possibilité.

Aujourd'hui, je ne me rappelle ce moment qu'avec horreur. Il s'agissait de prouver que la vierge attendue sur l'autel du sacrifice ne l'était plus.

Ma propre mère osait offrir ma virginité sous prétexte qu'il n'y avait aucun autre moyen de me sauver, et l'homme d'honneur n'y trouvait rien à redire. Clytemnestre s'était attendue à ce que le roi au grand cœur refuse,

bien entendu, et propose le mariage, un vrai mariage cette fois. Agamemnon n'aurait pas osé s'en prendre à la future épouse du grand Achille. Celui-ci ne perdait rien à s'engager, quitte à répudier son épouse plus tard si cet arrangement lui déplaisait. Mais le monarque se taisait, me dévisageait.

« L'important, continuait ma mère, qui ne voyait pas le gâchis, n'est-il pas de sauver cette enfant ? »

Du coup, je n'étais plus l'enfant de ma mère. Je pris la parole. En vierge offensée, je les chassai tous les deux. Je ne voulais plus de leur intercession dans ma vie : si mon destin m'acculait à la mort, je préférerais mourir fièrement plutôt que vivre dans la honte.

Achille partit sans un mot. Ma mère le suivit. Je la savais mécontente de moi, très mécontente.

Le cheval de Troie

Contrairement à ce qu'avait prédit Cassandre, qui continuait pourtant de gémir sur le sort des nôtres, les Grecs furent défaits. Du jour au lendemain, ils abandonnèrent le site de Troie. J'avais beau lui répéter qu'ils étaient partis, que les bateaux n'étaient plus en rade dans le port, je voyais l'horreur dans ses yeux, sa robe déchirée. Elle voulait me montrer sa blessure, mais il n'y avait pas la moindre rougeur, si ce n'est celle de l'émotion trop vive qui lui venait de ses visions. Pauvre Cassandre!

Moi aussi, comme les autres, j'ai douté de ses dons de voyance.

Les Grecs avaient laissé un souvenir de leur passage : un gigantesque cheval de bois trônait sur la plage. Était-ce une ruse ? Un piège ? Des hommes se cachaient-ils dans le ventre creux de la bête ? Avec méfiance, on y enfonça une lance qui resta figée dans les entrailles. Rien ne remuait à l'intérieur. Quelqu'un cria : « Qu'on le brûle ! » Ce cheval avait si fière allure qu'à l'idée d'un tel sacrilège, les cœurs se serraient, indignés. À aimer

les jolies choses, les Troyens furent bien punis. Après trop courte réflexion, Priam décida d'accueillir ce monument à la gloire d'Athéna. Ordre fut donc donné de transporter le cheval à l'intérieur des murs.

Cette victoire si soudaine, si invraisemblable, fut débattue durant des heures. Enfin, las d'attendre une permission qui ne venait pas, les gens se mirent à fêter. Comment les empêcher de boire ? Tandis que les hommes encore valides semblaient peu à peu dans l'ivresse, nous, les enfants, nous nous enivrons de soleil, nous nous roulions dans le sable, dans les vagues, sans trop nous éloigner de la plage. Aucun de nous ne savait nager. Ma mère avait dit : « Je te rejoindrai ». Ce qu'elle fit. Comme un reproche à l'humanité tout entière, elle exhibait le sang d'Hector sur sa robe jaune. Dans l'eau, voulait-elle se laver des saletés de la guerre ? Ou venait-elle seulement à ma rencontre, inquiète pour moi, se souciant de moi ? Le sang dilué lui faisait une traîne vaporeuse.

Quand elle me dépassa sans même m'accorder un sourire, je crus que le soleil l'avait aveuglée et qu'elle me cherchait encore. La voix des vagues était tellement plus puissante que la mienne ! Je m'efforçais de courir, mais l'eau me retenait, me repoussait vers la rive, la mer est plus musclée que ne le sera jamais un petit enfant frêle et malheureux.

Andromaque s'enfonçait dans l'eau profonde.

Avant que l'eau se referme sur ma mère, celle-ci s'est peut-être souvenu de moi, elle a eu pitié de moi. « Jamais séparés, a dit ma mère en m'arrachant à ce bouillon, ensemble, toujours, toute la vie. » Elle a tenu promesse.

La vie est si courte.

La mort, quoi qu'on en dise, ne réunit pas ceux qui s'aiment.

Cette nuit-là de réjouissances fut la seule. Les Grecs cachés dans le cheval profitèrent de l'obscurité et de l'ivresse de la population pour attaquer. Ce fut un massacre. Pas un homme ne fut épargné. Quant aux femmes et aux enfants, ils furent rassemblés sur la place publique et attribués comme esclaves aux chefs de guerre. Ayant été longtemps privés de femmes, les soldats se soulageaient brutalement. Peu leur importait l'âge de leurs proies. Je reconnus même parmi les assaillies certaines de mes compagnes de jeux à peine plus vieilles que moi : « Des enfants », murmurait ma mère. Je sentais sa main crispée sur mon épaule.

Il me semble sentir encore chacun de ses ongles enfoncés dans ma chair. Je revois ma grand-mère quitter le palais. Déjà ébranlée par la mort de son mari et de tous ses fils, la reine vacille à chacun de ses pas. Pourquoi cette épreuve ? À son âge ! Où l'emmènent-

ils ? Que crie-t-elle ? Qu'a-t-elle perdu ? Qui donc a perdu la raison ? Cassandre ? Où est Cassandre ? Qu'ont-ils fait de Cassandre ? Qui a déchiré sa robe ? Qui soigne sa blessure ? Ma mère dit: « Cache-toi ! » Elle a peur pour moi. Fallait-il vraiment que je me cache dans le tombeau d'Hector ? Quelle est cette odeur ? Pourquoi cela pue-t-il autant ? Faut-il supporter longtemps cette puanteur extrême ? Peut-on s'habituer à la puanteur extrême ? Et si je lui retirais son casque, à mon père ? Si je me revêtais de son armure ? Ainsi harnaché, je serais le plus fort. Assez fort pour repousser les envahisseurs et défendre ma mère, ma pauvre mère que l'on force à se remarier avec un Grec. Mais qui donc me veut du mal ? Comment me défendre ? Père, que dites-vous à votre fils dont on veut la mort ? Pourquoi ne dites-vous rien ? Avez-vous perdu la langue ? Qui a dévoré votre langue ? Qui a retiré de vous toute chaleur ? Il fait froid. Pourquoi fait-il si froid ? Quand est-ce que ma mère va revenir ? Et si elle ne revient pas ? Si elle arrive trop tard ? Combien de temps faut-il pour mourir ? Ils vont l'interroger pour savoir où je suis, où je me cache. Que vont-ils lui faire ? Iraient-ils jusqu'à la torturer ? Oseraient-ils la tuer ? Comment le savoir ? Comment vivre sans elle ? Comment mourir sans elle ?

S'il faut mourir pour la sauver, je veux bien, je veux bien sortir d'ici, ne lui faites pas de mal surtout, ne me faites pas de mal, je viens, je viens (trop de lumière), où m'emmenez-vous ? où est ma mère ? laissez-moi, je vous en supplie, pas le casque de mon père ! non, il est à moi, où allons-nous ? j'ai faim, jusqu'où ? Jusque-là, mais c'est dangereux, je n'ai pas le droit, les enfants n'ont pas le droit de venir jusqu'ici, c'est interdit, il faut que je demande à ma mère, elle va s'inquiéter.

Ils disent: « Avance ! »

J'avance.

Je pouvais encore m'enfuir, je suis agile et rapide quand je le veux, j'aurais pu leur échapper.

« Avance ! »

J'avance.

Cassandre m'avait dit que je serais le dernier à mourir. Si donc tous les hommes sont morts, je suis vieux déjà. Le vieux tout petit que je suis, sept ans, doit se montrer digne.

J'ai su d'instinct qu'il ne fallait pas appeler ma mère à mon secours. Ils m'ont poussé dans le vide du haut de l'une de nos belles collines. Toujours, on nous interdisait, à nous, les enfants, d'approcher du précipice, parce que c'était dangereux. J'en ai déduit que je n'étais plus un enfant.

