

Translating Music

RICHARD PEVEAR

The Cahiers
Series

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THE ARTS ARENA

SYLPH EDITIONS

Рассказывать про Балдову победу,
 А Балда над морем опять шумит
 Да чертям верёвкой грозит.
 Вылез опять бесёнок: «Что ты хлопчешь?
 Будет тебе оброк, коли захочешь...» –
 «Нет, – говорит Балда, –
 Теперь моя черед,
 Условия сам назначу,
 Задам тебе, вражонок, задачу.
 Посмотрим, какова у тебя сила.
 Видишь, там сивая кобыла?
 Кобылу подыми-тка ты
 Да неси её полверсты;
 Снесёшь кобылу, оброк уж твой;
 Не снесёшь кобылы, ан будет он мой».



по нѣ таладоннѣмъ словѣ,

That will prove how strong you really are.
 Do you see that gray mare over there?
 Lift her and carry her half a mile,
 And keep your money with a smile.
 But if you can't, the money's mine."
 The little devil crept up behind
 The great gray mare, slipped underneath,
 Drew a deep breath,
 Strained and struggled,
 Raised her a little,
 Took one step, two steps, and at the third
 Went sprawling in the dirt.
 "Foolish devil!" Bumpkin laughed.
 "You're no match for me by half!
 Your arms couldn't hold her up, but watch –
 My legs and I will win the match."
 Bumpkin jumped up on the mare
 And rode a half mile down the shore,
 Kicking up a cloud of dust.
 Frightened, the little devil rushed
 To bring his grandpapa the news.
 Since there was nothing else to do,
 The devils put money in a sack
 And heaved it onto Bumpkin's back.
 He went off, groaning under the weight.
 The preacher was standing at the gate
 And saw him coming. In fear of his life,
 He ran and hid behind his wife.
 Bumpkin found him cowering there,
 Threw down the sack, and demanded his share.
 The poor preacher offered up his head.
 One flick and he flew over the shed.
 Flick, and he couldn't speak or hear.
 Flick, and he lost his wits for a year.
 And all the while Bumpkin kept repeating:
 "The cheaper the goods, the worse the beating."

Richard Pevear: On translation

Discussions of translation generally turn around the notions of faithfulness and freedom. But faithfulness to what? Freedom from what, and for what? Whom does the translator listen to? What inner voice guides him in this paradoxical operation? Publishers now have at their disposal a computer program which assesses what they call the "readability level" of a text – say, of a novel or a translation of a novel that is submitted to them. A certain quantity of polysyllabic words or complex sentences lowers the readability level. For marketing purposes, a high readability level is considered good. Books with a high readability level are known as "reader friendly." When we were translating *Anna Karenina*, we were told by our editors that what they wanted was a "reader friendly" translation, and that the version we had submitted was far from "reader friendly." I told them that if there was anything Tolstoy was *not* it was reader friendly. Fortunately, we were able to have the translation our way, but I wonder how a younger or less experienced translator would have fared.

Richard Pevear on translation (2)

Translation is not the transfer of a detachable "meaning" from one language to another. It is a dialogue between two languages. It takes place in a space between two languages. And most often also between two historical moments. Much of the real value of translation as an art comes from that unique situation. It is not exclusively the language of arrival or the time of the translator and reader that should be privileged. We all know, in the case of *War and Peace*, that we are reading a nineteenth-century Russian novel; it should not read as if it was written yesterday in English. That fact allows the twenty-first century translator a different range of possibilities than may exist for a twenty-first century writer. It allows for an enrichment of the translator's own language, rather than the imposition of his language on the foreign original.

Richard Pevear citing Paul Ricoeur

Translation is the mediation between the plurality of cultures and the unity of humanity . . . the astonishing phenomenon of translation is that it transfers the meaning of one language to another or of one culture to another, not making them identical, however, but offering only an equivalent. Translation is the phenomenon of equivalence without identity. In this it serves the project of humanity, without breaking down the initial plurality. That is a figure of humanity engendered by translation in the very flesh of plurality.



Walking on Air

MURIEL SPARK

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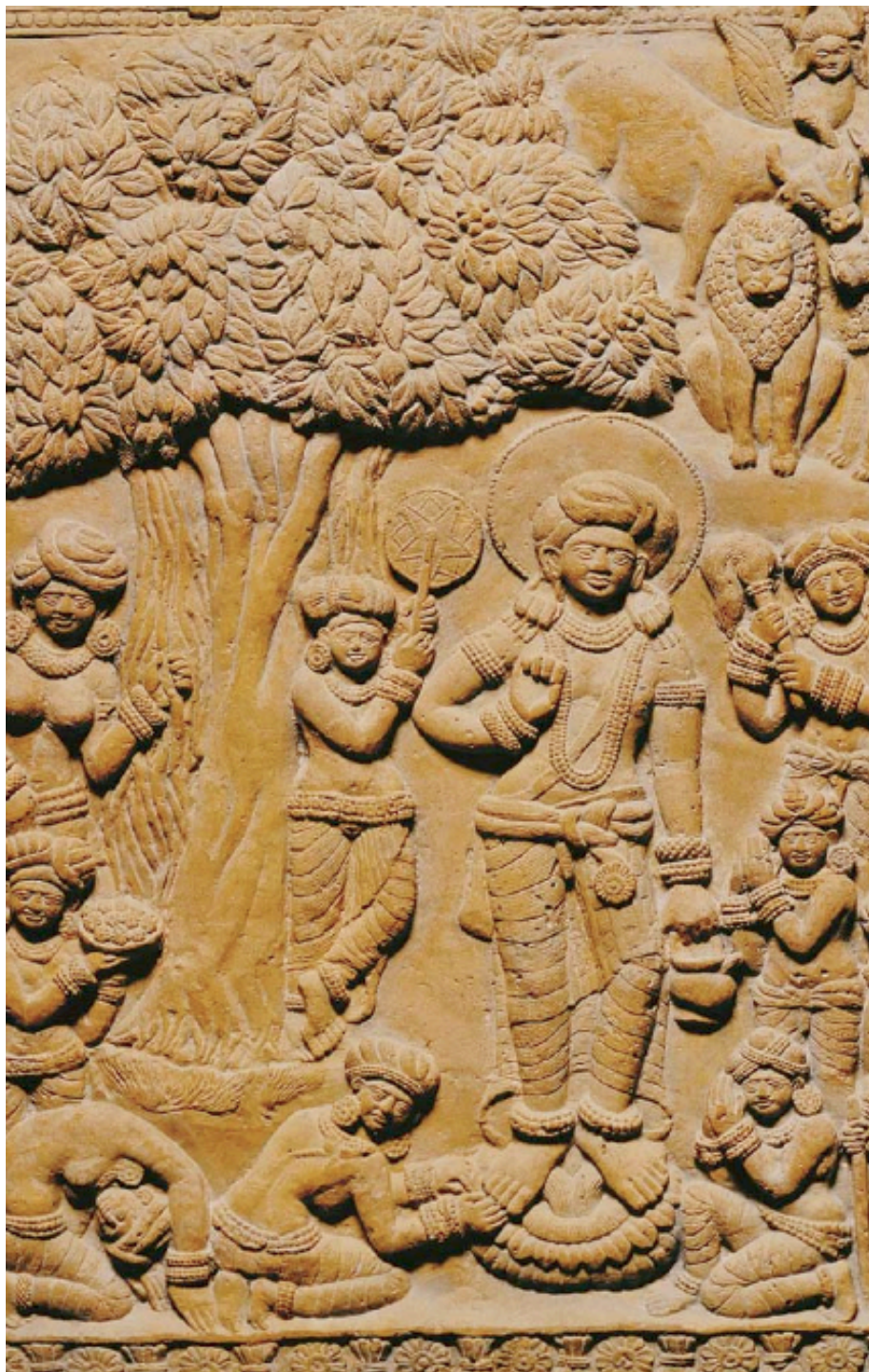
SYLPH EDITIONS

2 A Dream

AFTER LUNCH on Monday the 5th I fell asleep and dreamt I was at home at the Palazzo Taverna. I was clearing up some things and among them were several rows of wooden beads which I casually said I didn't want any more. Anna, my maid, seized on them for hers. Then I noticed that among the beads I had overlooked a wooden rosary which I rather like. It comes from Jerusalem. However, I didn't demand it back, reflecting that I had many other rosaries and could always get another like that one. (I had said a rosary after Communion in the morning here at the Salvatore Mundi.) But in my dream I was up and about. I came in from the terrace and started walking on air, about six inches from the ground. I was surprised that I had never exercised this faculty before and could see that, with a little practice, I could float, stride, manage quite a lot of feats above the ground. I called the maid to watch. I got into the big *salone* and called to Anna who stood by, smiling. She was impressed but not in the least frightened; it was just one of those things I could do and she couldn't. I found, after trying, that I could take long strides while walking on air. Once my back hurt so that I had to settle on the ground for a moment, but this was due to some fault of posture only, so I started again. My cat Spider was half snoozing on the rug, his eyes watching me more or less as usual and as I approached him he didn't budge or show the slightest sign that I was doing anything unusual. I thought it would be fun to walk right over him, and was sure Spider would have remained in his motionless normal curl-up. But the front doorbell rang and I thought it would be lovely to go and answer it. I thought how marvellous it was to find this ability. Then I remembered hearing of Popes and other special people who 'seemed to walk a few inches above the ground' when they appeared in public, and I thought maybe I could do so too, except that one doesn't wear long clothes very often, and so that floating impression would be lost. At one point I said to the maid, 'Look, Anna,' showing her my strides. 'Women,' I said 'have been walking in space for longer than men' - meaning I could have walked on air long before the first man did, if I had tried.

10/1970
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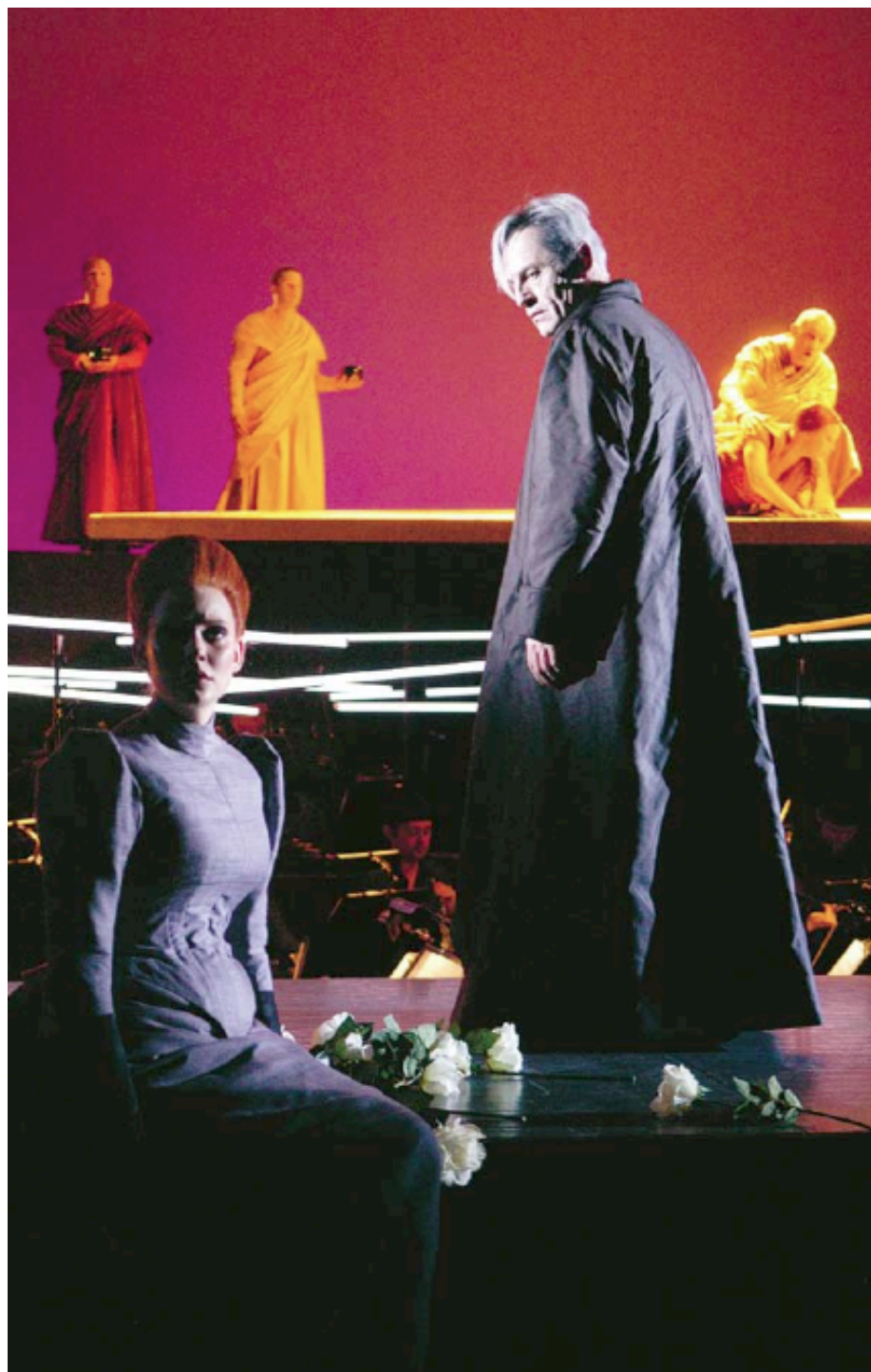
Circles of Silence

JONATHAN HARVEY &
JEAN-CLAUDE CARRIÈRE

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The silence between the notes is as important as the notes themselves.
W.A. Mozart

WHAT FOLLOWS IS A CONVERSATION which took place in March 2007 between a British composer (Jonathan Harvey) and his French librettist (Jean-Claude Carrière), with promptings by an American Comparative Literature professor specializing in Hispanic fiction (Margery Arent Safir). The subject of the conversation is *Wagner Dream*, a 21st-century opera whose protagonist is a 19th-century German composer (Richard Wagner) who dreams of composing an opera set in 4th-century BCE India and in which – thanks to the Buddha, as interpreted by Harvey and Carrière – he receives an ultimate gift (in both senses of the word ‘ultimate’). This leads the discussion to a 20th-century Argentine author, Jorge Luis Borges, who, in a celebrated essay, recounts that he discovered hints of the German-writing Czech author Kafka in the work of Zeno, Han Yu, Kierkegaard, and Browning.

An author creates his own precursors, Borges concludes, for had Borges never read a page of Kafka, these disparate authors would never have appeared as one in his mind. Echoing Chuang Tzu, Borges asks who is more real, the man who dreams he is a butterfly or the butterfly who dreams he is a man who dreams he is a butterfly; Borges speaks of a literature that is incomplete if it does not include its own contradictions; and of the Library of Babel that contains all words that have ever been or will be written, including the ones on this page. In ‘The Immortal’, this same Borges reflects that with enough time every man would create all works of art, would be Homer and write *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* – and so one day would be Jonathan Harvey and Jean-Claude Carrière and write *Wagner Dream*; elsewhere, he says that ‘All men, in the vertiginous moment of coitus, are the same man. All men who repeat a line from Shakespeare

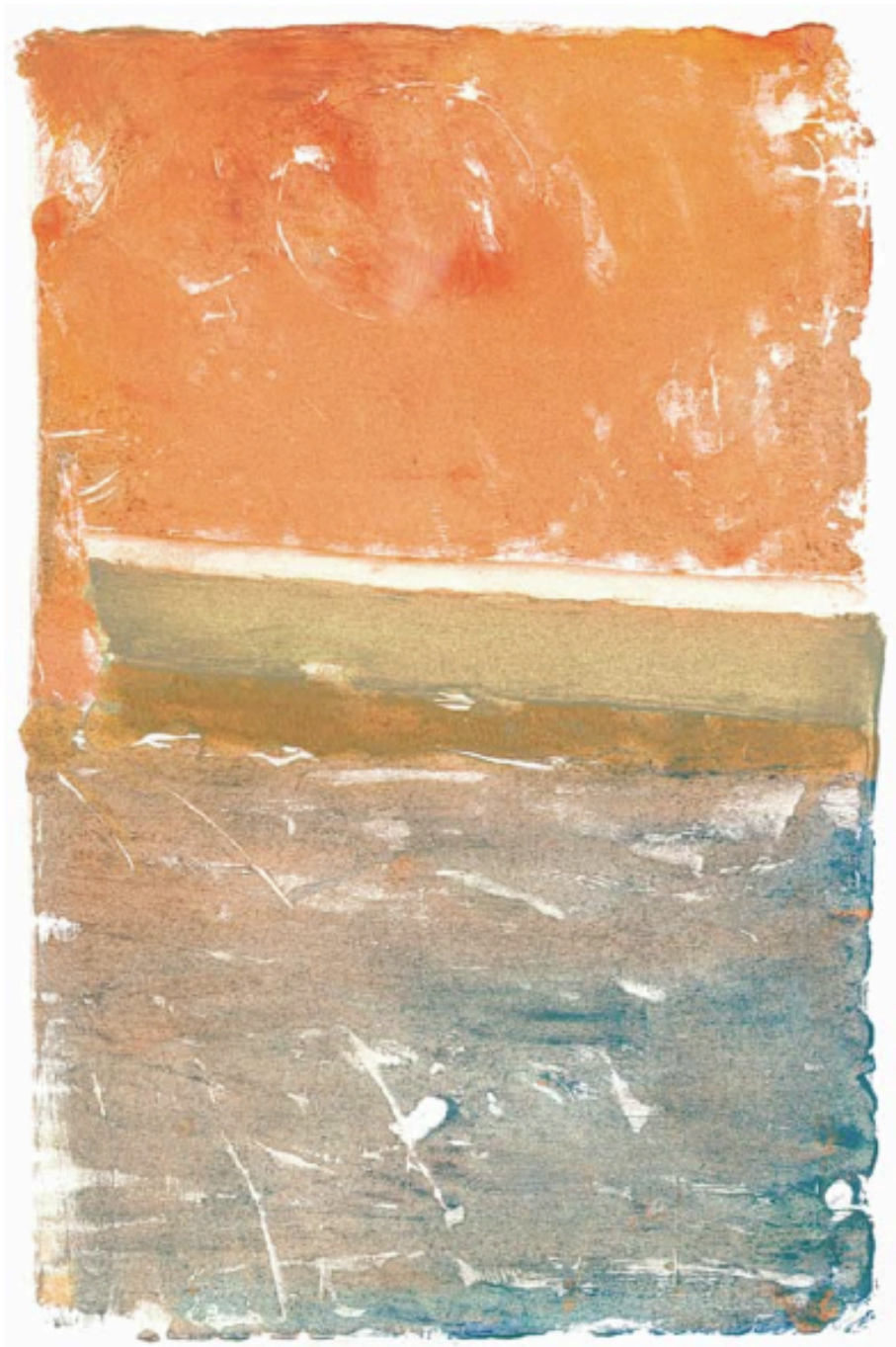
Chuang Tzu (Zhuangzi): 4th-century BCE Chinese philosopher who, along with his predecessor Lao Tzu (Laozi), is one of the principal figures of classical Taoism. His famous line of reasoning ends: ‘Between Chuang Tzu and a butterfly there must be some distinction! This is called

Handwritten musical score on ten staves. The lyrics are written below the notes. The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are: "er - sent, a - wave op", "Be at - tention or - dark", "at a wave", "The star - me", "open your mind", "open your mind", "ME", "Hura", "active", "f", "nat. 1".

AT A TIME WHEN WE ARE critically taking stock of the value of classical contemporary music, and composers are uneasy about their place in the world – and about their music's relation to their fellow human beings – it may be appropriate to address the fundamentals of valuation within a broadly ethical context, which in my case is informed by Buddhist practice.

We composers mostly form part of a broad historical sweep stretching onwards from the orchestration of Debussy. Before that, to simplify brutally, Brahms and the post-Beethovenians, Wagner and the post-Wagnerians, were questioning the clarities of motivic, thematic and harmonic working. From around the time of Debussy, the clarities of sound were questioned, made ambiguous. Now, with spectralism and the sound research of computer programmes, we are led towards ever more complex transformations of expressive sound. But these transitions, this movement, bring with them a crisis of communication between the contemporary composer and his audience – a crisis which requires a fundamental examination.

What do all good, 'likeable', listening experiences have in common? They are fresh, unpredictable, not too chaotic, and they constantly awaken the attention. What do all bad listening experiences have in common? They are banal, predictable, clichéd – or there's no rhyme or reason to what happens and they are merely chaotic, failing to hold the interest; unless, of course, the text or some extra-musical element mitigates. Between the boring and the chaotic, just the right balance of clarity and complexity must be found. There must be clear statement of ideas, and intriguing dissolution of the ideas formed. Statement and ambiguity must both be strong. All statement, and the music is tediously



Drunken Boats

ALAN JENKINS

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Ultissima verba



Le Bateau ivre

The Drunken Boat

Arthur Rimbaud

Pris d'absinthe pure et de philomathie
 Je m'enmende et pourtant au besoin j'apprécie
 Les théâtres qu'on peut avoir et les Gatti.
 "Quatre vingt treize" a des beautés et c'est
 Comme une merde, quoi qu'on ^{sente} dise
 Cros et Tronche
 Et l'Académie où les Murgers boivent du
 Mais plus de bleus et la daromphie ^{ronche} machée.
 C'est triste et merde alors et que foutre? g/g
 Pensé beaucoup. Carlisse? Ah non, c'est
 A cause de l'émendement de la ^{rien qui va} mitraille!
 F. C.

J'ai vu des archipels sidéraux! et des îles
Dont les cieux délirants sont ouverts au vogueur:
— Est-ce en ces nuits sans fonds que tu dors et t'exiles,
Million d'oiseaux d'or, ô future Vigueur? –

Mais, vrai, j'ai trop pleuré! Les Aubes sont navrantes.
Toute lune est atroce et tout soleil amer:
L'âcre amour m'a gonflé de torpeurs enivrantes.
Ô que ma quille éclate! Ô que j'aille à la mer!

Si je désire une eau d'Europe, c'est la flache
Noire et froide où vers le crépuscule embaumé
Un enfant accroupi plein de tristesses, lâche
Un bateau frêle comme un papillon de mai.

Je ne puis plus, baigné de vos langueurs, ô lames,
Enlever leur sillage aux porteurs de cotons,
Ni traverser l'orgueil des drapeaux et des flammes,
Ni nager sous les yeux horribles des pontons.

I've seen star-archipelagos, and island-skies,
Heavens wide open to the voyager-at-sea.
Is that where you're exiled: unplumbed nights, sleep's disguise –
You great flocks of gilded birds, Life-Force yet to be?

True, fuck it: I've wept buckets. Daybreaks break my heart.
Every moon is torment; bitter every sun.
Sour love has drugged, bloated me. O that my strakes could part,
My keel split, and I go down! . . . If I long for *one*

Of Europe's waters, it's this one: on his haunches
Beside that cold black puddle, a sad little boy,
As the scented twilight comes on, squats and launches
A boat as frail as a butterfly – his paper toy.

Steeped in the languorous swell, I can't, any more,
Tack in the big barges' wake, lift the clipper's prize
Or breast the proud flags and the flapping pennants; nor
Drift past the prison hulks, beneath their hollow eyes.



Proust, Blanchot and a Woman in Red

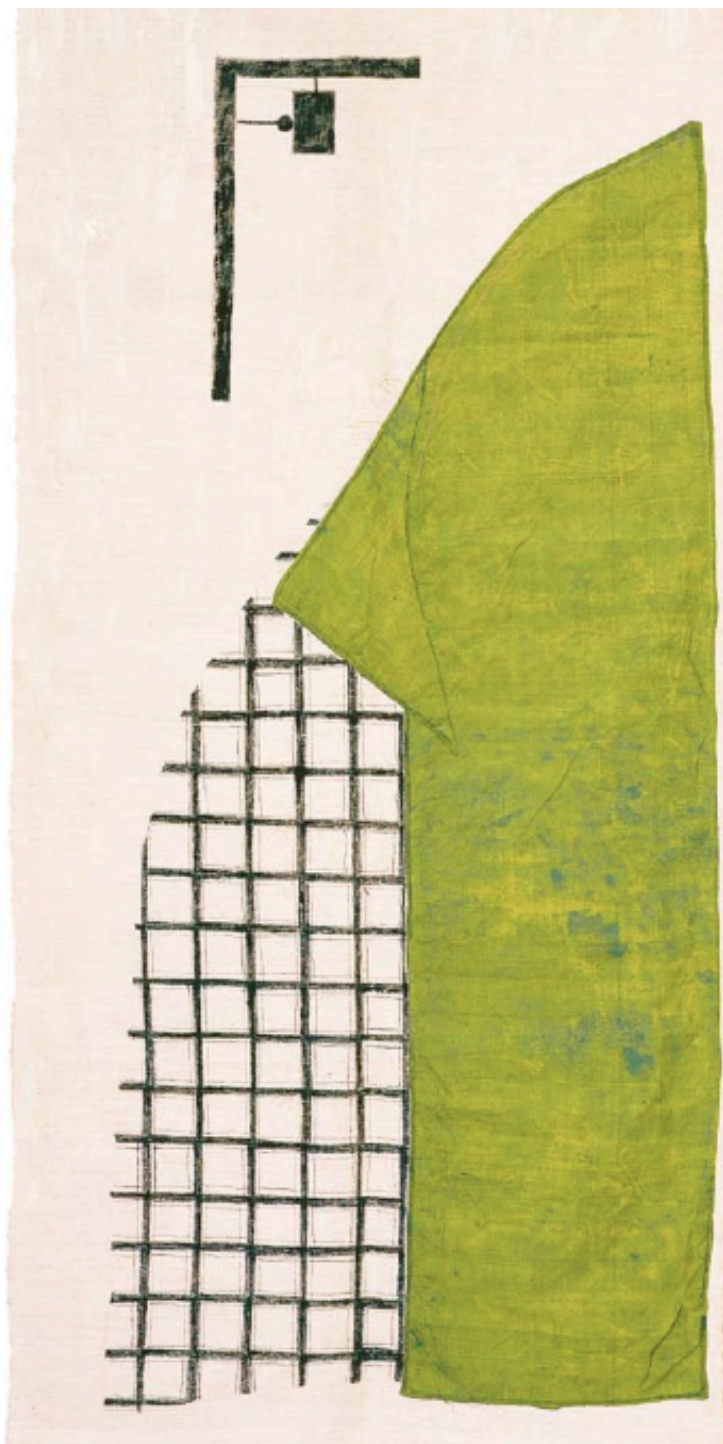
LYDIA DAVIS

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I BEGAN TRANSLATING *Du Côté de chez Swann* in 1997 and continued to revise the translation, after its UK publication in 2002 (under the title *The Way by Swann's*, the choice of title being a story in itself), for two further editions of what was by then being called *Swann's Way* – the American 2003 hardcover and 2004 softcover. In working on Proust, I tended to consider and reconsider even the smallest questions, to the extent of looking for enlightenment in the etymologies of the original French words, something I had never done before. Some of the struggles interested me, and I noted their progress in a Proust translation diary – the debate with my horticulturalist friend over just what sort of ivy was turning color in the Bois de Boulogne at the close of *Swann's Way*; the correspondence with an old man in Oxford over the umbrels and titmice in the meadow outside his window. Eventually, I began to write up some of these struggles in the form of an *Alphabet of Proust Translation Problems*. Here follow several entries.



Text on Textile

ISABELLA DUCROT

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certe lasche improvvise svogliatezze
che t'impaniano la corsa, sia che davvero
stranito si risenta mostrandosi nei nervi
ostile e scabro. E poi comunque
questo doversi sempre intersecare
non è già questo un dramma, il dramma appunto
dello stato coniugale?

Straccio o broccato,
ogni tessuto è dunque il risultato
di questo stringersi costretti insieme
da un progetto il cui concepimento è dato
solo all'ingegno umano: un matrimonio
che mai in natura potrebbe avere luogo.
Prendete il ragno, poveraccio. Imbroglia.
Il ragno mica tesse, il ragno incolla.

Patrizia Cavalli

whether he feigns some sudden slack rebuff
that snares the run, or whether his frayed nerves
reveal how tense and coarse he truly feels.
And then, in any case, this obligation
always to entwine: is this not
a drama in itself, the very play
of the married state?

Rag or brocade
every woven textile thus results
from this enforced embrace, a grand design
that only human minds are meant to grasp
and execute; and thus a marriage that
could not in nature ever find its place.
Take the spider, poor thing. It dupes.
The spider doesn't weave; the spider glues.

Patrizia Cavalli

*Translated from the Italian
by Olivia E. Sears*





Days Bygone

RACHEL SHIHOR

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everything in the name of its one and only master, emptiness. Indeed, should anyone happen to mention the name Netanya in my parents' presence, I would see a shadow cross their faces. But the name Dora was never mentioned in their presence, since it was a remote neighbourhood with only one street that every winter was covered with mud, and it had no pavements and its people were few and poor. But ever since then Dora has lodged in my memory because it was there that my parents understood that throughout their lives success would evade them, even though they could not really understand the word and they only grasped its meaning by how it was transmitted to them by others and by how it was mentioned in the newspapers and in radio broadcasts. And this success would not be part of their lot. This they understood, and in Dora they reconciled themselves to this understanding, which somehow or other passed on to me too, and I lived it, and later on I handed it down to my children.



Ornan Rotem on modern Hebrew

Modern Hebrew readily draws on a linguistic practice and on an elaborate literature that spans some two and a half millennia. Even a simple sentence in Modern Hebrew bears immediate testimony to the different epochs that have converged in this language. One of the more prominent myths about Hebrew is that it was a dead language, which in the nineteenth century was revived alongside the regeneration of the Jewish people as a national entity. The political agenda underlying the promulgation of this myth need not concern us here, but it is important to note that throughout its long history Hebrew has always displayed an unwavering commitment to its past. It evolved not by obliterating preceding layers, but rather by assimilating them into the fabric

of the language. In simple terms, this means that a very young speaker of Modern Hebrew can comfortably understand the less complicated sections of the Bible, a literature that dates back two and a half millennia (by comparison, the same cannot be said of Homer and speakers of Modern Greek, the Vedas and speakers of Hindi, or Chaucer and English-speakers). It might be argued that one of the unique developments of the last few decades in Hebrew literature and language is that for the first time one can detect a relaxation of this commitment. In this respect, Rachel Shihor's writings are different. Hannah Herzig, again on *Ha-Tel Avivim*, evokes the subtle, yet important, distinction between 'Israeli literature' and the more dated term 'Hebrew literature'. Both are written in Hebrew, yet Israeli literature (a body of work measured in decades) pertains to the experience of a people in a well-defined geographical area; while the great arc of Hebrew literature (measured in millennia) pertains to a much broader cultural phenomenon reaching far beyond geographical confines. Herzig claims that Shihor's work reads not like Israeli, but like Hebrew literature, and suggests aligning it with the work of such writers as S. Y. Agnon, David Fogel, and Amalia Kahana-Carmon – to whom one could add Ya'akov Shabtai.

Notes from the Hall of Uselessness

SIMON LEYS



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translation. What is required is to give to the reader the illusion that he has direct access to the original. The ideal translator is an invisible man. His aesthetic is that of the pane of glass. If the glass is perfect, you cease to see it, viewing only the landscape beyond it; it is only in so far as the glass contains flaws that you become conscious of the thickness of the glass which hangs between you and the landscape.

TRANSLATION AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR CREATION (1)

Somewhere, Roland Barthes remarked: 'a creative writer is one for whom language is a problem'. As is often the case with Barthes, the brio of the formulation conceals a lack of intellectual rigour.

Barthes' phrase is both too narrow and too broad. Too narrow in that there exist creative writers for whom, in fact, language is not a problem – from Tolstoy to Simenon, the list is a long one, of inventors of worlds and characters who write in a functional, neutral, lack-lustre language. (Nabokov could not forgive Dostoevsky his flat loose prose which he judged suited to serialised romance. Evelyn Waugh reproached his fellow novelist and friend Graham Greene with using words without regard to their specific weight and autonomous life, wielding them as indifferent tools.) One might even claim that, frequently, the capacity for invention and creation is accompanied by a certain indifference to language, whereas an extreme attention to language can inhibit creation.

Barthes' phrase is too broad, however, in that for literary translators language always constitutes the central problem, and this in spite of the fact that translators are *not* creative per se. Translation is often a substitute for creation, whose procedures it imitates. As Maurice-Edgar Coindreau, the great translator and introducer to France of modern American literature, put it, 'the translator is the novelist's ape. He must make the same grimaces, whether these please him or not'. Translation can mimic creation as much as it likes, but it can never claim the same status; 'creative translation' could only ever be a pejorative term, rather as it is said of a corrupt accountant that he practises 'creative accounting'.

Rain

Jiang Jie (13th century)

少年聽雨歌樓上
紅燭昏羅帳
壯年聽雨客舟中
江闊雲低斷雁叫西風
而今聽雨僧廬下
鬢已星星也
悲歡離合總無情
一任階前點滴到天明

憶癡詞

李克曼書



In my youth I used to listen to the rain in the houses of
sing-song girls; the lights of red candles were dancing on silk
curtains.

In middle age I have listened to the rain as I travelled on
board boats on the broad river; under low clouds, a wild goose
that had lost its mate was calling in the west wind.

But tonight I am listening to the rain in a hermit's hut;
my hair has turned white; all passion spent – grief and joy,
separation and reunion – I let the drops drip on the front steps
till day-break.

Simon Leys on translation & creation

A SUBSTITUTE FOR CREATION (III)

One can only really translate successfully those books which one would have liked to write oneself. For a literary translation to be inspired and lively, the translator must achieve identification with the author, by whose spirit he becomes inhabited. It would seem to me impossible to translate well a writer for whom I had neither sympathy nor respect, or whose values I did not share, or whose intellectual, moral, artistic and psychological universe were indifferent or hostile to me. This is so commonplace that it is repeated by every master-translator. So Coindreau: 'A translator must know his own limitations and not take on works which he himself could not, or more exactly would not have wished to write. Translating is an act of loving collaboration'. And Valéry Larbaud: 'I'll never be shaken from the idea that a translation whose author begins by telling us in his preface that he chose it because he liked the original has every chance of being good'. But then Larbaud goes much further, as he develops the idea that translation is a sort of sublime plagiarism. According to him, the writer's first gesture is that of plagiarism. (Malraux underlined the same phenomenon in the plastic arts, commenting for example on the way in which the young Rembrandt used to imitate Lastman: 'Genius begins with pastiche'.) Larbaud continues: 'It is only later, when we have noticed that as a general rule we don't like our own works, that it is enough for us to like a poem or a book to feel that it is not our own; it is only then that we note the difference between yours and mine, and that plagiarism becomes not merely odious to us, but impossible. And yet there remains in us something of this primitive instinct for appropriation. It dwells deep within us as one of the instinctive vices of childhood, which the full development of our character refuses to permit to be reawakened'.



When the Pie Was Opened

PAUL MULDOON

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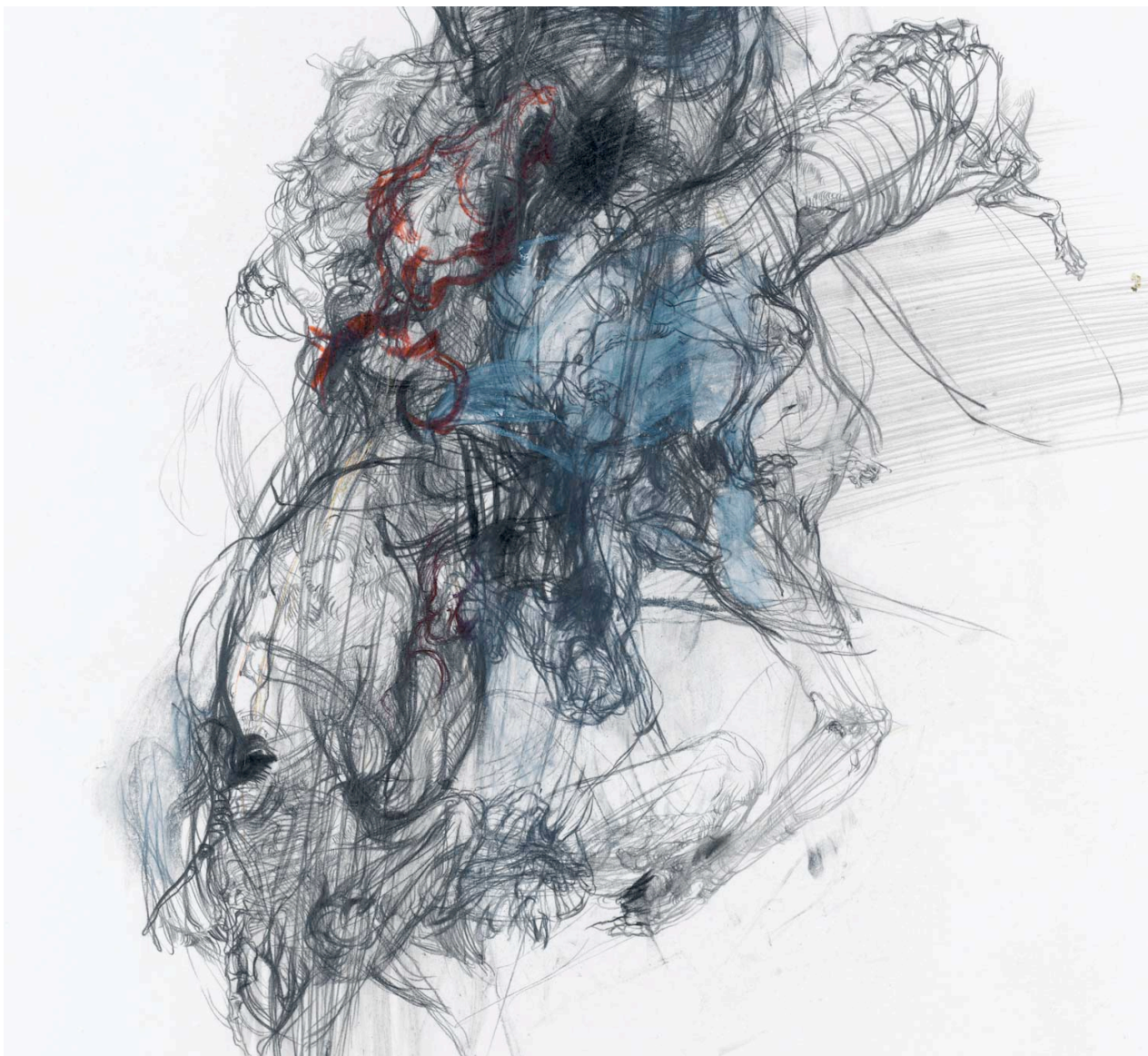
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Lanfranco Quadrio

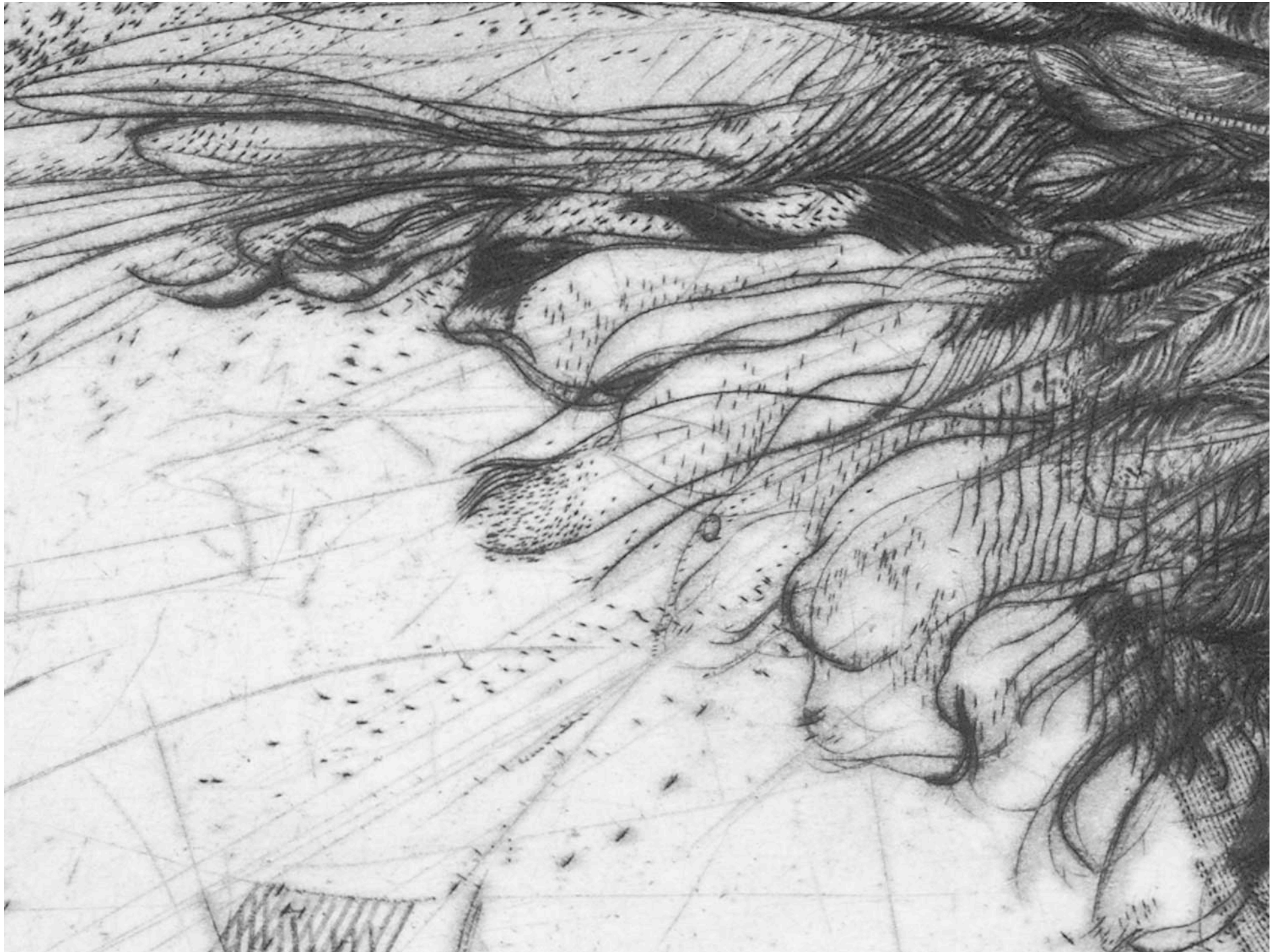














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