

MINGLING

par/by
Robert Hébert

[translation by/par Pat Nolan]

Éditions Néo-Mimeo

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[In this translation of Hébert's code switching poem, the Bold text is from the French and the non-Bold text retains the original English. PN]

MINGLING

To Rosemary and Keith Waldrop on a burning deck

Follow the codes

By your false love
of the past,
you steal your
future.

—Nietzsche
Posthumous
Fragments

You need a delicate category
to include the boomerang of invisible things

grit of a voice, memory's future

*

Pain, scribed on the skin

but also the stupefying quantum drift
between generations

*

Sounds of virtual happiness

time's fletched arrow into the flesh of one's
own nescience
stuck there, nailed to the clue

*

"The human fetus already understands the
catastrophe of the senses"
so says a veterinarian friend

exhilarating exile

*

lamb so sweetie-pee-tee, fledgling so Parkinson
proud foal, polar cub

don't hide the word

*

Extrapolate, grand illusion of understanding

now let's take a look at
key-holes and human T-bones

*

Stuck in a lovable double bind
"be free and spontaneous" spouts your boss
might as well be dead, all ready

*

Daft drum or drill
up to tolerating slavery
a membrane will in time reflect

*

That distant window
joining the subjective chewing gum of a child
the most massive exteriority

*

Across an incredible span to the indistinct up
to now

ego, horse rides
of a telltale old hide

*

here is the famous maze, made by Daedalus
sack ass bottom of Mom's maze and Dad's
dead end

inferno's squeamish bayous

★

Tumbled onto the panel of appearances
you and I, private eyes beyond common sense
each of us, **crossed bones**

★

Metaphors of the labyrinth, of deciphering, of
investigation
are at the heart of any desire to know
"drop in, for god's sake"

★

breaking a law does not result in chocolate bits
we must shout **eureka** in another cypher
also bitter

*

sensory codes
detecting movements, the scent of a possible
prey

family Squalidae, hats off

*

Hale-Bopp
My seagull comet's whitish comma

I'd like to hook up at the get go

*

Gaining a new flesh with this www
but bullying man into complete conformity
to negation

Winning or key to a field of champs

I swear I will never
translate myself at all,
only to him or her who
privately stays
with me in the open air

Walt Whitman

Leaves of Grass

(between each text heard from afar is the music
of Charles Ives, Hector Zazou and the Prologue
pour un Marco Polo by Claude Vivier)

a thought advances at its own risk and peril
ancient demons
primeval tongues & virgin language

this thought in no way dogmatizes
blood, sweat and gears

*

insects everywhere, monads minding others'
business

humming **Microcosmos**
I cry from exhaustion

miles to go
no juice to appease my madness

*

sacred high places
a must for travel agencies
a nexus for dogs in a stagnant afternoon

where then are
the illegal passions of yesteryear

*

I had a queer dream
a Māori Wittgenstein in the middle of a kayak
what a challenge

to rearrange the given
and follow the rules of hospitality

*

I don't remember much of Wenders' Paris, Texas
but I saw Milan, Quebec
same as all the boonies on a Sunday

crossroads, garage sale
a bumpkin swinging on a balcony

*

Living near an airport
you become an air corridor, it's no coincidence
large scale turbulence

n parallel worlds
make a move to test your power

*

Who can imagine the One
all the records of the whole world
where this god abides, missing

swallowing the infinite mishmash of its
intrigues
rotten

*

Bulletproof
his cash values dancing on screens
man's beliefs don't bring any damn relief

so he channel surfs
and yelps under his own yoke

*

postmodernity
corpus of a well cultivated consumerism
under halogens

hypertension of these silk worms
stunned by their own chat

★

Shelves of bloodless quotes coat the western
self

I want to change my point of view
or shred it

not easy, this life
toxins all around

★

O! frenchyfawn cocooning
to the obese zombies of translations and free
mags
the indigenous is frightening

in the limbo of a dream of empire
the chameleons freeze

★

all creation is violently mongrel
uncanny, unsustainable
boxed

blind affection
unraveling an unknown tempo

*

writ in hard currency, full blooded
my only soul's ambition
but I hate the play of words

rip off pants
just poor laughs

*

FRESH CHARCOAL HERE
the integral gods are dead, I praised them
al dente

me-mouth
has redolent alligator breath

*

Casual creator in his dereliction
for the flaming love of each morning
cries foul for some

for the others, the stink
of derricks on the surface of their slick

*

Miraculous ballet on a treasure isle
MIR, cocoon to 100,000 chips
and so much speed in Julie's little body

words gravitate, gregarious
hoping under plastic canopies

*

No future, but nature still flows toward what's
to come
berries under metal scrap, beluga champions
dreamlike mimicry

I abandon myself
peaceful night pungent with resin

*

The knack of judging at distance
helpless to stop his discriminating taste from
abolishing it
full plain caresses

!

there

*

I think of the term "hypothesis"
bothered as if by
a delta of erotic suggestion

traveling I long for you
your lusciousness as such won me over

Post-Scriptum Ex Vivo

Why did I write these textual anomalies or UFOs? I don't want to elaborate too much on what was both a vivid experience and a crystallization of problems of which in the last century seemed to me to be exaggerated. I will describe the precise circumstance that have brought with it a few shards of theory, as if it were yesterday.

It was in the spring of 1997 that I found the first two issues of the journal *Feux Chalins* (Heat Lightning) subtitled *Litteratures des Maritimes* (Literature of the Maritime Provinces) in the outdoor bin in front of my friend Adrian King-Edwards' marvelous bookstore, The Word. It didn't surprise me to learn that this journal originated from Sainte-Anne University, Nova Scotia. Only that this was the same place my father, as an orphaned teen, from 1922 to 1927 attended secondary school, : Sainte-Anne's boarding school and college, Church Point. Memories of his obsession with dormitories on icy nights, haunted by rising tides, without lifebuoys. This find triggered several synapses as well as that of a project that had lain dormant for a long time: evoking echoes of an unknown, intermittent, pre-uterine but primordial world, in a tongue unknown. . . . I got on it the following day. On August 6, 1997, I sent the Director [of Sainte-Anne's], Professor Ollivier Dyens, a text entitled "Wise Doom". A week before Christmas, I received a phone call from an enthusiastic Dyens. "Strong, unusual, singular voice". Wonderful conversation. An

equally surreal situation between Montreal and Church Point beyond the Bay of Fundy: two snowstorms at each end and my ghosts of old dormitories stirring through a network of telephone lines. Taking a chance, I decided at this time to follow through by resuming the minimalist forms of *Rudiment d'us* (1983) back when I had given up on poetry, those "harmonica daze," to better face up to the prosaic archives linked to the labyrinth of History, that of French America. I also viewed again the foreign film, *Louisiana Story*, by Robert Flaherty, and for the first time, *Man of Aran*. Speak to be understood, even if only the bare minimum at the heart of a more or less hostile landscape.¹

I wanted to make public these short texts that I called jubilations, sort of free floating elementary particles. Five years of wasted effort! At one point I was even reproached (with anger) for a condescending contempt of Provincial Law 101. Nothing less. Was I the go-between of the last taboo to be lifted, after sex or gory morbidity? Obviously the language of "Mingling" is not joul or Volapuk, nor a chaosmic sum of equivocations à la Finnigan's Wake, nor northern French-patois nor the stupid Sabir of our cousins in the overseas media. At best, it's a French and English code switching where it is not a question of translation but of advancing the meaning by leaps, arbitrary alternations, alliterations, borrowings, dislocated diction, etc. Blending this, that, and the other, to merge with it. The exaggerated problem, so-called "bilingualism", is neither a flaw nor fatal when it becomes experimental,

creative, always accommodating, enhancing the everyday in the vast field of poetry, and also a rejection of the reduction of language to a marketable commodity; the fabricated assumption of this question is a way of refusing the essentialism of all language by a fixed, empty, nice predictable style that says nothing. Against any form of judgement, thought still develops at its own risk and peril, without any all-in policy. Trouble for sure. And through necessity, makes joy a virtue.

¹ It should be noted here that my father spoke very good French (without an accent) and a fluent English; during the last eight years of his life he also practiced a rather dark language: cryptography. (Cf. "Wise Doom," Feux Chalins 4, 1998, special issue, "Acadia/Louisiana".) Ironically, the seven issues of this Nova Scotian journal are nowhere to be found in any library catalog in all of Quebec or even in the University of Moncton [New Brunswick]. NB: text reprinted in *Usages d'un monde*, p. 111-118 Editions Trahir, 2012.

Robert Hébert, from *Derniers Tabous* (Éditions Nota Bene, 2015)
Translated by Pat Nolan

Translator's Notes:

Code switching is quite common in bilingual households, not only in French Canada. Highlighting bilingualism and code switching in this work, the Bold text is the translation from the French and the non-Bold text retains the original English. As Hébert states in his Post-Scriptum, it is "a French and English code switching where it is not a question of translation but of advancing the meaning by leaps, arbitrary alternation, alliteration, borrowings, dislocated diction, etc." An example at the beginning of Mingling is the line "stuck there, nailed to the clue" where the homophones "clou" (nail) and "clue" transform the sense of a word in one language echoed by the other.

family Squalidae

"Squalidae, more commonly known as dogfish, dog sharks, or spiny dogfish, are one of several families of sharks categorized under Squaliformes, making it the second largest order of sharks, numbering one hundred nineteen species across seven families." Wiki

Provincial Law 101

"Bill 101, Law 101 (French: Loi 101), or Quebec French Preference Law, is a law in the Province of Quebec defining French, the language of the majority of the population, as the official language of the provincial government." Wiki

University of Moncton

"The Université de Moncton is a Canadian university in New Brunswick. The university was founded in 1963 following the recommendation of the royal commission on higher education in New Brunswick. Since then, the institution has been widely regarded as the heir to several earlier Acadian institutions of higher learning." Wiki

"Wise Doom"

The entirety of Usage D'un Monde (Editions Trahir, 2012) including the ground breaking "Wise Doom" can be accessed as a pdf at Academia.edu for free.

Joual

Canadian French dialect, from the French for cheval (horse), apparently the way "cheval" is pronounced in rural Quebec.

Volapuk

An artificial language devised in 1879 and proposed for international use by a German cleric, Johann M. Schleyer, and based on extremely modified forms of words from English and Romance languages.

Sabir

A French-based pidgin language of North Africa.

Robert Hébert was born in Montreal at the end of World War II. He studied in France for four years and has recently retired from teaching at Collège de Maisonneuve in Montreal. Author of numerous books, his recently published work include Derniers Tabous (Éditions Nota Bene, 2015), Monsieur Rhésus, also with Éditions Nota Bene (2019), and Coulisses from La Compagnie à Numéro (2020). He is currently working on new projects.

Pat Nolan was born in a bilingual household in Montreal in 1943. His translations from the French have appeared in a number of magazines and anthologies including Big Sky, Contemporary Literature In Translation, Otoliths, The Random House Book of 20th Century French Poetry, and Poems for the Millenium, Vol. I. His earlier translations of Robert Hébert's poetry have appeared in Parole, blog of The New Black Bart Poetry Society, of which he is the founder and editor. He lives at the opposite end of the North American continent from his place of his birth: in Northern California along the rustic Russian River.