

PRIZE FOR NEW TALENT IN TRANSLATION

Introduction by Frances Hedges

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I decided to enter this competition because I've always found translation a very satisfying exercise. I studied English and French at university, so having to do a translation often seemed less a chore than a welcome respite from all those literature essays!

These translations were particularly enjoyable because the passages selected were both so beautifully written, yet formed such a contrast to one another. In the case of *Rose*, it was wonderful to have something to translate that was complete in itself, allowing me to get to grips with the story. I loved the childlike narrative voice, apparently so naive but suddenly turning vicious at the end – the final sentence (“J’achèterai un fusil”) comes as quite a shock. The portrayal of *Rose* is equally subtle – on the one hand, we see her through the narrator’s devoted eyes, but on the other hand, we have glimpses of her manipulative side (she even persuades the long-suffering narrator to sign her bad reports) as well as her coy, flirtatious behaviour. I was particularly amused by the ant’s metonymic journey into *Rose*’s knickers – so obviously a displacement of the narrator’s own desires.

The passage presents considerable difficulties to a translator, notably the word-play on ‘rose’. I chose not to translate the string of ‘rose’-related words (“rose roseau roselet”) literally, preferring to preserve the word-play by substituting the English words “rose rosy rosemary”. Another challenge was maintaining the sense of a stream of consciousness. In order to suggest the lack of order in the narrator’s thoughts, I decided to run certain sentences together without punctuation, and I put the pronoun ‘I’ in the lower case to convey the narrator’s childish lack of grasp on grammar.

L’Enlacement presented a very different challenge. The passage is shorter but more dense and more suggestive, requiring the reader or translator to guess at hidden meanings. It was difficult to find adequate substitutes for the mixed metaphors in the passage, for instance in the case of the halo made of invisible threads, an evocative

image which portrays the woman both as an angel and as a cunning spider spinning a complex web. The translation also needed to do justice to the dramatic quality of the passage, which gradually builds up suspense and culminates in the woman's unexpected collapse. The tenses were quite complex towards the end of the passage, as the translation had to convey the image of the woman in the present, lying with her raincoat riding up to her knees, while also looking ahead to her future sense of shame.

I really enjoyed taking on the challenge of translating these very different texts, and I do hope to be able to read more from these authors in the future. Many thanks to everyone involved in organising and judging the competition!