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## Five Poems by Chase Twichell, translated by Claire Gacioch

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*Five Poems*

by Chase Twichell

translated by Claire Gacioch

*Introduction*

Chase Twichell's poetry is a perfect example of the contemporary American lyric. It is brief, intimate, and sharp-edged. At once it is self-aware and self-effacing, muddling the human and natural landscapes, the emotional and physical worlds.

"I want to see things as they are / without me," Twichell writes in "Roadkill." Seeing one's work translated may be one such version of seeing oneself without oneself, though in this case, this is not completely true. Claire Gacioch's translations of Twichell's work into French are a decade in the making, stemming from a love and appreciation of her poetry, as a reader, in English. The two have worked closely together, so that these translations are not "without" their original author.

Yet, in considering the wide gulfs that divide the French and English languages and the necessarily different approaches and backgrounds of author and translator to the work at hand, the following translations must also be considered as existing "without" their original author. Regardless of one's grasp on the French language, there are immediately recognizable differences between the English poems and their French counterparts. Often, the lines in French are longer—quite a bit longer at times, as if the French language itself cannot help but to demand more of its own presence.

French does, indeed, tend to turn its face towards the poetic. This is perhaps why many find it an aesthetically pleasing language. Sometimes direct translations which one would think would be simple, cannot be. Take the aforementioned poem for example: there is no French term for roadkill, at least not one which reflects the directness of the English. Gacioch translates it as "Les animaux tués sur la route," ["The animals killed on the road"]. The effect is startling in its difference. The French almost sounds, at least in relation to the English, like a poeticized phrase. It also draws far more attention to the aliveness of these now-dead creatures. "Roadkill" offers no such generosity. In combining the place of death and the killing itself, there is almost no space to remember the life and the creature that precede the term. And all of this is in regards to just one word.

Despite these drastic differences, Gacioch achieves a tonal uniformity in her translations of Twichell. Perhaps it is Gacioch's own voice carrying through in the French, but the effect is of a new, French version of Twichell herself. This is the mark of excellent translation. Rather than marrying herself to just the words on the page, Gacioch seems to invent a new version of the original author, as she might have written in French if that had been her language from the first.

The following translations are part of a larger, forthcoming collection in French. May they be seen, "as they are."

*Yolande Schutter*  
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*Arsonist and Fireman*

It was the hot orange edge,  
the flame biting and tearing its way  
out of the field—that's what I loved.

I looked up the word *loins* in the dictionary,  
and lit the dry grass with its meaning.

Put that memory away now. Its magnet  
is weak after all these years. It's time to stop.  
He's dead, long dead, dead for years.

Let his sad soul go off by itself.  
Let it rest for a while in the scorched grass.

*Pyromane et pompier*

Cette bordure orange brûlante,  
cette flamme mordant et embrasant son chemin  
à travers le champ—voilà ce que j'aimais.

J'ai cherché le mot *reins* dans le dictionnaire,  
et allumé l'herbe sèche de sa signification.

Range ce souvenir maintenant. Son aimant  
est faible après toutes ces années. Il est temps d'arrêter.  
Il est mort, mort depuis longtemps, mort depuis des années.

Laisse son âme triste partir toute seule.  
Laisse-la reposer pendant un moment dans l'herbe brûlée.

*The Park from Above*

What scared them? Scores of wild green parrots  
fly up shrieking out of the palms,

circle and return, settling their now-invisible wings.

A man has crawled out of the mangroves,  
zipping his fly. It's the spot where the dogs  
always stop overlong, then look at me as if to say,

*Explain this, please.* It's the guy who sleeps  
on a nearby bench and loiters by the boat launch.

The dogs sniff out a roll of toilet paper in a plastic bag,  
hidden behind leaves with his backpack and tarp.

The only other witnesses are two white ibis  
nervous on the concrete seawall, swiveling

their slender necks, which look too thin  
to swallow anything. They fly when we come near,  
up to join the ruckus of small green angels

hidden in the palms or spiraling up into the realm

just above the human one, from which they can see  
the silver streams of traffic, small figures walking dogs,

the glass and plastic mysteries delivered by the tide.

*Le parc vu d'en haut*

Qu'est-ce qui les a effrayé ? Des dizaines de perroquets verts sauvages  
s'envolent en hurlant depuis les palmiers,

faisant des cercles puis revenant, installant leurs ailes désormais invisibles.

Un homme a rampé hors des mangroves,  
remontant sa braguette. C'est l'endroit où les chiens  
s'arrêtent toujours trop longtemps, puis me regardent comme pour me dire:

*Explique-nous ça, s'il te plaît. C'est le gars qui dort  
sur un banc pas loin et traîne près de la rampe de mise à l'eau.*

Les chiens reniflent un rouleau de papier toilette dans un sac en plastique,  
caché derrière des feuilles avec son sac à dos et sa bâche.

Les seuls autres témoins sont deux ibis blancs  
nerveux sur la digue de béton, faisant pivoter

leurs cous minces, qui semblent trop élancés  
pour avaler quoi que ce soit. Ils volent quand nous nous approchons,  
jusqu'à rejoindre le raffut des petits anges verts

caché dans les palmiers ou faisant des spirales dans ce royaume

situé juste au-dessus de celui des humains, d'où ils peuvent voir  
les flots argentés de la circulation, les petites silhouettes promenant les chiens,

les mystères en verre et en plastique livrés par la marée.

*Animals, Not Initials*

The crematorium sent Mom's ashes  
via UPS, which left them on the porch  
with the mail. In the box,

a card taped to a plastic urn bore  
her name in schoolgirl calligraphy.

A name on a stone. How soon  
no one remembers the person.

Watering her flowers, Mom left  
sepia footprints on the slates.

Painters of caves left handprints  
the colors of charcoal, pulverized rock.

Also legs and horns, outlines of lives—

antelope, bison, and bear.  
Come to me, crude animals.

Tell me where you are now.

*Des animaux, pas des initiales*

Le crématorium a envoyé les cendres de Maman  
avec UPS, qui les a laissées sous le porche  
avec le courrier. Dans la boîte,

une carte collée à une urne en plastique portait  
son nom dans une écriture d'écolière.

Un nom sur une pierre. Comme il faut peu de temps  
pour oublier la personne.

En arrosant ses fleurs, Maman a laissé  
des empreintes couleur sépia sur les ardoises.

Les peintres des grottes ont laissé des empreintes de main  
de la couleur du fusain, d'une roche effritée.

Des jambes et des cornes également, contours de vies –

antilope, bison, et ours.  
Venez à moi, animaux grossiers.

Dites-moi où vous êtes maintenant.

*Architecture*

I peer into Japanese characters  
as into faraway buildings  
cut from the mind's trees.

In the late afternoon a small bird  
shakes a branch, lets drop a white splash.

In the wind, in the rain,  
the delicate wire cage glistens,  
empty of suet.

Poetry's not window-cleaning.  
It breaks the glass.

*Architecture*

Je scrute les caractères japonais  
comme des bâtiments lointains  
coupés des arbres de l'esprit.

En fin d'après-midi un petit oiseau  
fait frémir une branche, laisse tomber une tache blanche.

Dans le vent, sous la pluie,  
la délicate cage métallique scintille,  
vide de suif.

La poésie n'est pas un nettoyage de vitres.  
Elle brise le verre.

*Roadkill*

I want to see things as they are  
without me. Why, I don't know.

As a kid I always looked  
at roadkill close up, and poked  
a stick into it. I want to look at death

with eyes like my own baby eyes,  
not yet blinded by knowledge.

I told this to my friend the monk,  
and he said, *Want, want, want.*

*Les animaux tués sur la route*

Je veux voir les choses telles qu'elles le sont  
sans moi. Pourquoi, je ne sais pas.

Enfant, j'ai toujours regardé  
de près ces animaux tués sur la route, et piqué  
un bâton dedans. Je veux regarder la mort

avec des yeux comme mes propres yeux de bébé,  
non encore aveuglés par le savoir.

J'ai dit ceci à mon ami le moine,  
et il me rétorqua, *Veux, veux, veux.*



### *Biographies*

**Chase Twichell** has published eight books of poetry, the most recent of which is *Things as It Is* (Copper Canyon, 2018). *Horses Where the Answers Should Have Been: New & Selected Poems* (Copper Canyon, 2010), won both the Kingsley Tufts Award from Claremont Graduate University and the Balcones Poetry Prize. She's taught at Hampshire College, The University of Alabama, Goddard College, Warren Wilson, and Princeton University. In 1998 she left academia to found Ausable Press, a not-for-profit publisher of poetry that was acquired by Copper Canyon in 2008. She has received fellowships and awards from the NEA, the Artists Foundation, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 1997 *The Snow Watcher* won the Alice Fay DiCastagnola Award from the Poetry Society of America.

A passion for the English language and culture, **Claire Gacioch** graduated from La Sorbonne University where she studied Shakespeare and wrote her thesis "Disruptions in the festive mood" in *Romeo and Juliet*. She participated in group translation sessions at the Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) university. She started her career as a translator and communication officer in the French Navy, travelling the world. She also wrote speeches for diplomats in both languages when she was appointed in embassies abroad. A passion for words and the editorial, she participated in writing sessions and followed trainings in publishing in UCL London. Claire graduated from a communication university (EFAP Paris) while becoming a communication specialist in editing. After reading for the first time a poem by Chase Twichell, she dedicated her free time translating Chase's poems into French for the last ten years, and started writing poems in French and English as well.

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