

Looking at Shadows: Four French Texts in English Translation
by
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A BH & NH

Vous êtes les meilleurs modèles de la courage, la grâce et la persévérance. Merci de m'inspirer de suivre mes passions.

A As, Rs, et KSM

Merci de m'aider à retrouver ce que j'ai perdu.

*“Au milieu de l'hiver,
j'apprenais enfin qu'il y avait
en moi un été invincible”*

Albert Camus, Retour à Tipasa

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Introduction

Studying French literature these past few years has been a great joy and has led to a better understanding and new perspectives on many topics. However, one of the difficulties with studying literary material in another language is the fact that I can't share what I'm studying with most of my peers and family. That is one of the reasons that I have been so fascinated with translation and what inspired this project.

Literature, of course, reveals a great deal to us through pieces filled with joy, hope, and love. We are able to see how humans triumph. These works show us what their writers value, what we search for, and what we cherish. On the other hand, works that contains darker themes of loss, death, hardship, and pain reveal something very different to us. We are able to see through these works how their authors, and, by extension, their cultures, view and deal with these difficult issues. One of the great struggles of humankind is figuring out how to make sense of pain and loss; literature can give us invaluable insight into how others have tried to decipher this: what pieces of the puzzle they have managed to find and put together.

This project present four French texts in English translation that share the theme of loss. This theme is perhaps one of the most poignant and relevant; loss is an experience that every human will encounter, and as people we continue across time to grapple with what it means for us and how to deal with it. These four texts will bring the perspectives of four authors to light in English. When we study how other countries and cultures deal with common human issues, we are able to gain new views on these issues. This project will make these texts accessible to English speakers and allow them to study the messages contained in them. I have chosen four texts from different time

periods, by different writers, and of different styles to give the reader a greater sampling of this theme across French literature.

The first work I have chosen is by one of the best-known French authors, Victor Hugo. He is most well-known in the English-speaking world as the writer of novels such as *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, but unknown to many Americans, he is also an accomplished poet. I have selected this poem in particular for its poignant presentation of loss. This poem was written by Hugo after the death of his daughter, Léopoldine. This work shows the poetic “I”, the first-person voice of the poem’s narrator, journeying like a ghost to his destination, blinded and burdened by this great absence. Flowing with beautiful imagery and rhythm, this poem, titled *Tomorrow at Dawn*, will show readers this theme in full poetic form.

After the classic structure of *Tomorrow at Dawn*, I chose to present a slightly different and more free-flowing, *Mirabeau Bridge* by Guillaume Apollinaire. While this poem certainly still has rhythm and rhyme schemes, these schemes vary throughout the poem, giving it a much different feel than what we find in the steady structure of Hugo’s poem. In addition to a different artistic structure, this poem also deals with a different type of loss. Instead of loss in the form of death, here we see the poetic “I” dealing with the loss of a lover (or lovers), and the loss of hope for love in general. This poem greatly contrasts Hugo’s presentation of this experience. Hugo’s poetic “I” finds loss to be crippling and blinding, taking up all his concentration; his whole world is wrapped up in what is missing from it. Apollinaire’s poetic “I” instead focuses on the passage of time, noting how life continues on despite those who are no longer a part of his life.

Hugo’s poetic “I” only sees what is gone and does not see life going on around him; Apollinaire’s poetic “I” sees all that is happening around him *in light* of what he has lost. Hugo’s poetic “I” is fixed on a certain point in time—his arrival at his destination. All is focused on this singular goal. Conversely, Apollinaire’s poetic “I”

recognizes the flow of time and the movement and motion of life. This is especially clear in his imagery of the river—a body always in motion, moving forward. Despite his losses, he sees life moving on and compares its motion to his comparative stagnation. These two poignant experiences showcase two different relationships with loss: one focused and tunnel-visioned; the other flowing and linear.

Following the first two works of poetry, I move on to another genre of literature, prose. This first short story that I selected is *The Madwoman* by another one of France's literary giants, Guy de Maupassant, which is unique in its portrayal of loss. Unlike the three other texts, this one examines the person enduring the loss in third person. We do not get to see the inner thoughts of this person; we only watch her going through an excruciating period of her life. After losing her family in a single day, this woman is driven mad by grief. She cannot face her life anymore and shuts herself away, a shell of a human being. We see the external manifestations of her grief, not the inner workings of loss as we do in the other works. In her case, though, perhaps this is all we need. In this story, Maupassant makes a point about the brutality of war and its effects on everyday civilians, but he also shows us the crippling effects of sorrow. This “madwoman”'s grief leads to her to pursue one single goal, to stay in her bed at all costs. Like Hugo's poetic “I”, she is focused on a singular objective; all else is meaningless fog around her. She is literally driven to a vegetative state by the pain she has experienced. Whether conscious or unconscious, she has decided it is better to remain unmoving and closed off than to deal with the immense loss she has undergone. Maupassant's representation of grief and loss is especially poignant; we see a woman so broken that she lets herself be devoured by wolves because to this woman, her spirit has already been devoured.

The last text that I have chosen to include in this mini-collection is *The House Overlooking the Sea* by Marie-Célie Agnant, a Haitian-Canadian writer. French is widely spoken outside of Metropolitan France, and I thought it would be important to include a piece from a writer that represents the French language's diversity. Like Maupassant's

commentary on the war, this short story also speaks about an important time in Haiti's history: the totalitarian rule of President François Duvalier, also known as "Papa Doc". Duvalier's special operations unit, the *Tonton Macoute*, were known to kidnap, kill, burn alive, rape, stone, and display the corpses of those who were perceived to oppose his despotic regime. People would often simply go "missing", never to be seen again. It is estimated that this militia murdered between 30,000 and 60,000 Haitians during Duvalier and his son's twenty-eight year reign.

Out of this terrible period in Haitian history, Agnant crafts a story of a family who has lost nearly everything, centered in the house where it all happened. Agnant's narrator, named Marisa, thinks of her loss in a similar way to the madwoman and Hugo's narrator. They all are focused on a singular point as the crux of their pain. For Marisa, it is a single sentence, a leitmotif in this story. She, like the madwoman, is ghost-like, powerless beneath the throngs of grief that have overtaken her life. She lives out her days as a phantom, a prisoner in the house she once loved. One of the most poignant uses of imagery in this piece is that of the sea. Across literature and cultures, the ocean represents freedom, openness, and opportunity. It is often a symbol of hope, beauty, and inspiration. Through the events of this story, the ocean is turned crimson with blood, and becomes a symbol of the corruption of the country and Marisa's personal loss. The ocean, once beautiful and free, now is a constant reminder of the family's grief. So great is this transformation that Marisa and her mother can no longer ever bear to look at the sea; they pull thick curtains over the windows facing the sea. The best feature of this house, a beautiful ocean view, is obscured because it has been so tarnished by memories of the past. Their grief is something so great, so overwhelming, that it is easier to shut it away than face it. Yet the house still overlooks the sea. The pain is still there, churning beneath the surface of everyday life. Agnant presents loss as something we may not be able to escape, but something with which we must learn to live.

This theme of loss may be difficult and saddening to examine, but it gives us insight into how others have dealt with this shared experience and what it means to be human. As Victor Hugo said, “to contemplate is to look at shadows”, and perhaps by looking at these shadows of loss and grief, we can better understand the life we move forward with.

Kalena Hermes

WLC 460 - Senior Project

Dr. Brian Kennelly

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Tomorrow at Dawn

[Victor Hugo]

Tomorrow at dawn, as the sun touches the fields
As I know you await me, I will depart.
To my feet, the mountains and forests will yield.
For I cannot go on with us far apart.

I will walk with my eyes fixed on my thoughts,
Quite deaf and blind to the world I pass by,
A hunched-over stranger with my hands crossed,
To me, the day will be like the night.

I will not see the setting sun's golden face,
Nor the sails that descend toward the bay,
And when I arrive, on your grave I will place
Flowering heather and a holly bouquet.

Mirabeau Bridge

[Guillaume Apollinaire]

Under Mirabeau bridge flows the Seine
And our loves
I must remember them
After pain, love always comes again

The hour rings and night fades
The days go on and I remain

Hand in hand, let us stay face to face
While under the bridge
That our arms make
The river tires of lovers' embrace

The hour rings and night fades
The days go on and I remain

Love comes and goes like this flowing tide
Love goes on
Life takes its time
And Hope is violent and not at all kind

The hour rings and night fades
The days go on and I remain

Minutes, days, and weeks come and go
But lost time and lovers
Won't come back any more
Under Mirabeau Bridge, the Seine flows

The hour rings and night fades
The days go on and I remain

The Madwoman

[Guy de Maupassant]

“You know,” Mr. Mathieu d’Endolin said, “the woodcocks remind me of a quite sinister story from the war.”

“You remember my place in the Corneil area.

I lived there when the Prussians arrived.

There, I had some sort of madwoman as a neighbor, whose lost spirit was helpless under the misery that overtook her. Long ago, at the age of twenty-five, she had lost her father, her husband, and her newborn baby in the space of only a month.

Once death finds the way to your door, she’ll likely return again soon.

The poor young woman, driven mad by the grief, took to bed, and was stuck in a mad delirium for six weeks. Then, a sort of weary calm followed this violent episode. She remained motionless, barely eating, her eyes only barely stirring. Every time someone would try to get her up, she would scream bloody murder. So we learned to let her be. She would just lay there, only ever leaving her bed to relieve herself or to change the bedsheets.

An elderly maid stayed with her, making her drink something or eat some cold meat every once in a while. What was going on in her hopeless soul? No one could know; she didn’t speak anymore. Was she thinking of the dead? Was she sadly daydreaming, without any specific memory to hold onto? Or perhaps there was nothing left in her annihilated mind, leaving her thoughts as silent as still water?

For fifteen years, she stayed like this: closed-off and lifeless.

War came. In the first days of December, the Prussians invaded Corneil.

I remember it like it was yesterday. Everything was frozen over; I was stretched out on my armchair, laid up due to gout, when I heard the loud beating rhythm of their footsteps. From my window, I saw them pass.

They marched in an endless stream, all identical to each other, with the puppet-like movement unique to soldiers. Then the commanders distributed their men to stay with the residents. I had seventeen. My neighbor, the madwoman, had twelve. Among her twelve was a commander, a real brute, violent and gruff.

During the first few days, all went on as normal. We told the officer staying next door that the woman was ill, and he didn't question it. But before long, this woman who we never even saw somehow bothered him enough that he asked about her illness. We told him that his host had been laid up in bed for fifteen years following a terrible tragedy. Without a doubt he didn't believe us. In his head, the poor old fool wouldn't leave her bed as an act of protest, so she wouldn't have to see the Prussians, speak a word to them, or even brush elbows with them.

He demanded that she see him; he was shown into her room.

In a sharp tone he said:

“May I request, Matame, zat you get up and come downstairs so zat we may zee you?”

She turned towards him with her foggy eyes, her empty eyes, and gave no response.

He said:

“I do not tolerate inzolence. If you do not get up on your own, I'll find a vay to make you do it myzself.”

She didn't move at all, placid as always, as if she hadn't even seen him.

He raged, taking this silence as a mark of high contempt. He fumed:

“If you aren't downstairs tomorrow...”

Then he left.

The next morning, her distraught elderly maid, tried to dress her, but the madwoman began to howl in protest. The officer came upstairs quickly. The maid, throwing her hands on her cheeks, cried:

“She doesn’t mean it, *Monsieur*, she doesn’t mean it. Please forgive her, she’s so miserable.”

The soldier stayed back, abashed. Despite his anger, he dared not order his men to tear her from her bed. Then suddenly he began to laugh and barked out orders in German.

And soon enough we saw a detachment leave the house carrying the mattress like a stretcher. On the still-made bed lay the madwoman, calm and silent as always. As long as she could lay there in peace, she was indifferent to whatever was happening around her. A man followed the group, carrying a packet of women’s clothing.

Rubbing his hands together, the officer said:

“We’ll be all squared away if you can get yourself dressed und take a little walk”

We watched as the procession headed towards Imauville Forest.

Two hours later, the soldiers returned, alone.

We never saw the madwoman again. What had they done with her? Where had they taken her? We never found out. The snow fell that day and night, burying the fields and the forest in a blanket of frozen powder. The wolves came out that night; we could hear them howling right outside our doors.

The thought of that lost woman haunted me; I tried several times to get information from the Prussian authorities. I was almost shot for it.

Spring came. The military occupation dragged on. My neighbor’s house remained closed; dense grass grew through the walkways.

The elderly maid had died during the winter. Everybody had seemed to forget about the whole ordeal; I alone thought about it constantly.

What had they done with the woman? Had she escaped to the other side of the forest? Had someone found her and taken her to a hospital, and had simply been unable to identify who she was?

Nothing could ease my doubts, but little by little, time quieted the worries in my heart. Yet, the following autumn, the woodcocks came in droves, and as my gout had let up a bit, I dragged myself to the edge of the forest. I had already killed four or five of the long-billed birds, when one that I had just shot fell into a ditch full of branches. I was compelled to go down there and collect the creature. I found the bird lying next to a human skull. The memory of the madwoman hit me like a heavy punch to the chest. I'm sure many others died in that forest during that terrible year. But I'm not sure how, but I knew, I'm telling you I *knew*, that that day I had found the head of that wretched maniac.

And suddenly I understood, I had figured it all out. They had left her there on the mattress in the cold and deserted forest. And she, ever faithful to her one objective, had let herself die under the thick and soft blanket of snow, without so much as moving an inch.

Then the wolves had devoured her.

And the birds made their nests with the wool from her tattered bed.

I tended to her grim remains. And I pray that our children see nothing of war.

The House Overlooking the Sea

[Marie-Célie Agnant]

The windows overlook the beach. After the affair, we covered them with thick curtains that we always keep drawn. The ocean out there couldn't help with the spectacle of our pain or our deliverance. For us, it's doubtless another way of staving off the shadows that loom on the shores between the ocean and us. During the day, all is well. In the daily comings-and-goings of life, we barely have to pretend. Though as soon as night falls, in that darkness, we think of them. We also think of him, way up in Rochelle, in that little palace that he had built in the middle of the forest. The same phrase returns to me, painful and haunting; the same words: *All was finished, or rather was begun, on that New Year's Eve when he stopped to help a motorcyclist...*

Behind these closed windows, I live with Adrienne, my mother. We are two shadows, two ghosts, drifting along the shores of loss. We are the ashes of an existence that no one remembers anymore. Most families who, like us, survived the events of that New Year's Eve, have left, taking with them what shreds and scraps they still had. Were they able to forget? Or at least find peace?

We will not leave Sapotille. When I was a child, this place, its large houses with long galleries and shady courtyards, was my whole world. Our house's courtyard was my kingdom. There was the pomegranate tree, its red flowers and its fruits. It was my own wonderland. There was the pond, where the little boats sailed about, little boats that

were really only fallen leaves. And there was the breadfruit tree's great trunk with its large, parasol-like leaves. That was the king of my kingdom. There were all my subjects, too: my brothers, and of course, Philippe. Yes, Philippe, who so often occupied my thoughts back then, seated astride the branches of the pomegranate tree. That tree is still there. I pull the back curtains a crack to glance quickly at it.

When I was a child, my whole world was the Sapotille church and its steeple that crowned Jacob's Hill and overlooked the ocean. Sapotille: the place where the sea salt eats away at the houses and the high tides erode the hillsides. Sapotille, this place I never left, is still my everything. It's still the place that I gave all the love, hate, and passion that my heart could hold.

Mom and I don't have anything left to cherish, not even letters carved in stone in a cemetery. For us, the trashed streets and the endless murmur of both the tides and our memories are all that remain for us; we cannot leave it behind. Our memories are our dreadful jailkeepers and hateful tyrants. They torment us, follow us, and dictate our very existence. Since that day, we belong to them. Because of them, Mom and I have become mute like stones, not knowing any language other than the one they allow.

Sometimes Mom writes. She had once dreamed of becoming a writer. But in this country where there is only room made for those in power and their madness, Adrienne had to learn quickly to reign in her love for words. So she wisely put away her notebooks and pencils. But when the pain becomes overwhelming, she pulls them out, dusts them off, and writes to stave off the grief that has taken over her whole existence like a malignant fever. *All was finished, or rather was begun, on that New Year's Eve when he stopped to help a motorcyclist...*

Behind our closed windows, Adrienne and I are two little islands drifting slowly away from the great isle of Sapotille. The city continues to live on and breathe by some

means that we can't understand. For a long time we tore ourselves apart trying to figure out how all this could have happened, and above all, how we could find the strength to go on. How could a human being, we asked ourselves, survive such horrors? We don't want to go there anymore. Thinking about it is useless. The only thing left for us is to *be*. The desire for an end that would deliver us from all this is the only thing that's alive in this house that overlooks the sea. That desire is there, pulsing in us, huddled with us like a child who we carry with us everywhere.

All the others, those who aren't dead, have left. They abandoned Sapotille to this never-ending season of fear and chaos. In silence, they tiptoed away from Sapotille. The last to leave was Guy, the youngest in our family, who had been spared by accident: that day he had been asleep in the attic. He left and crossed the border, hastily dressed in women's clothing. A long peasant skirt covered his hairy calves. He had tried to hold out, to stay with us. But in the end, he too made the terrible choice to leave. Because we didn't know how to kill the past, to banish it, because all the others were dead and he was there, yes, he was up there with his guards and his dogs, his swimming pool and his horses, because nothing could be done, because there was nothing left to do but to flee. Those were the last words Guy spoke to us before he pressed into the night, into oblivion, those thirty years ago.

Him, up there on the hill, his name is Philippe. Philippe Breton. I say his name to you so that you, like me, will remember. He was my fiancé, he grew up with my brothers, Carl, Jacques, Guy and the others, and with me, me who had loved him since... I don't even know anymore. All I remember now, thirty years after it all was finished, is what will remain with me to my last day, felt in the deepest depths of my soul: that stubborn wave that rose up in me as Philippe covered me with his breath in the attic. Already as a child, I dreamed of him in the branches of the pomegranate tree. At eighteen years old, I loved Philippe, with that special eighteen-year-old love that you can't quite name.

As a child, Philippe skinned his knees playing marbles on the same rocks as my sons, my mother writes. Marisa's brothers, there were six of them, compared themselves to him on the way to school. Together, they would run on the beach, lost in the white foam of the waves, splashing and laughing. He often ate at our table for lunch, beside my sons. He spent entire evenings reading in the attic with my eldest son, Jacques. Exhausted, with heavy eyelids, they were often surprised when sleep fell upon them...

How many times I had looked over them before deciding to wake them, to surprise Philippe. He would wake, dazed and confused in the middle of the pile of all the books that he wanted to read at the same time. This library, in the attic, belonged to my father. Only Jacques and Philippe were allowed up there. At the time, Philippe was a sweet boy: respectful, self-assertive and hard-working, qualities that my father, as an attentive teacher, knew how to appreciate.

“That boy will go far,” father would say, full of admiration, giving me a secret glance. “It’s such a shame that Guy and Antoine aren’t more like him,” he would continue. He always hated the free-spirited nature of his two eldest sons. My father, Daniel Saint-Cyrien, had been a lawyer, but he had stopped practicing because he had realized, as he so often liked to repeat, that things weren’t going to be the same, neither in Sapotille nor in the country as a whole. Those who had decided to take control of everything were also resolved to transform the inhabitants of the country into spectators of their own existence.

All was finished, or rather was begun, on that New Year's Eve. I had just turned nineteen, and Philippe was twenty-four. Returning from an appointment, my father, while passing through the Quatre-Chemins intersection, came across a motorcyclist and his broken-down bike and stopped to help.

“Philippe, what... what are you doing at this hour?”

“Don’t come any closer, Mr. Saint-Cyrien!” Philippe exclaimed, his voice cold and sharp with defiance.

Despite the darkness, my father realized that Philippe not only had bloodshot eyes, but his hands and his clothes were also covered in deep crimson smears. He clumsily tried to hide his revolver, but my father saw the glint of the hilt in the darkness. He couldn’t find the face of the intelligent and hard-working Philippe that he had always known. Some steps away from him, Philippe was a being disfigured by hate, ready to fire at him.

“You too, Philippe?”

“Now that you know, Mr. Saint-Cyrien, what are you going to do?”

My father turned on his heel and left, his heart heavy with sorrow and disgust.

The following day, he got up earlier than usual, and spoke at length to my brothers and me. Mom already knew. She looked like someone who was sentenced to death, eyes sunken and red from a sleepless night.

My father told us directly about Philippe and people like him who are recruited from all over and trained to kill. He explained to us their role in this season of terror that had fallen over Sapotille and over the whole country. “The stench of corruption, countless crimes and betrayal has now invaded our homes,” he told us to conclude. “There will come a day when these guys will not hesitate to devour their own mothers.”

It had already been a while that Philippe, under the pretense of preparing for his exams, had nearly stopped coming over to our house altogether. “I knew,” my father went on, “that this sudden absence was hiding something strange, but I prayed to heaven with a foolish hope that all the whispering going on about it was just slander...” He looked at me right in the eyes as he spoke. We told each other everything.

From that moment, despair and rage mixed together and replaced the blood in my veins. I lived with a heavy shadow eclipsing my heart. My brothers would nervously

tiptoe into my room to give me any updates. We spoke in low voices. They had already lost many of their friends. Not a soul knew if those who had already disappeared were in prison or dead. They simply weren't there anymore. Their frightened parents, if they too hadn't been taken, barricaded themselves inside, not knowing where to go or whom to turn to. Like us, they waited in their houses, trembling each time a truck passed by in the night.

They came in the middle of the night, armed to the teeth. Some wore black ski masks. Was one of them Philippe? I didn't even want to know. I will never forget Mom's helpless look and the handkerchief that she had stuffed in her mouth to keep herself from screaming. They took Jacques, Daniel, Carl, Victor and Antoine, and of course, Dad. "We're only going to take you to the station, ask you some questions." We knew that no one they took away returned, yet we hung onto the captain's words.

How many days and nights passed? Day after day, they didn't return, until *that* day...the crowd that gathered on the shore, the shredded clothes floating on the water, the puffed-up, unrecognizable bodies that the sea spat up. Sapotille residents and crying mothers ran down to the beach to try and identify the bodies.

Adrienne and I, we stayed at the window. That day, the sun glistening on the water was the color of blood.

How to describe the turmoil and the cries that rose from the beach? How to describe the chaos that has become a part of our life since that day?

Late that night, the last women returned to their houses. Silent, they climbed back up Jacob's Hill and left with the voice of the sea in their heads ringing like an alarm. Everything stopped: the hours, the days... Mom and I settled into the dizzying haze of loss for the remainder of our lives, overlooking the sea from which we stopped looking for answers.

During the day, while the sounds of the market and echoes of life stream up from the city, they all pretend to have forgotten it all. During the day, in the hustle of daily life, we also pretend. But as soon as evening falls, especially as December approaches and as New Year's draws near, we are reminded in every sound, in every movement, in every beam of light, of this infernal circus of living dead and ghosts that forever haunt Spotille and our house overlooking the sea.

Appendix A: Translator's Notes

1. *Demain dès l'aube/Tomorrow at dawn*

This poem has long been my favorite, and since reading it for the first time I have pondered over what an English translation would look and feel like. As it's a well-known poem, there are numerous English translations that exist. I've searched through them in an attempt to find one that I felt accurately communicated the message and artistry of the poem. However, the translations that I found either did not preserve the rhyme of the poem, were simple word-for-word translations, or were translations that did not preserve the musicality of the work. This inspired me to do my own translation in an attempt to produce a translation that maintained the rhyming scheme and artistic imagery while minimizing changes to the original text. Translating a poem while maintaining the rhyme scheme is very difficult, and some changes to the original wording of the text is necessary in order to reproduce viable rhyming. Here are some notes on my creative decisions in the translation of this text.

Title. The first element to review is the title of the poem. In French, the word “*dès*” most closely means “as soon as” in English. The title suggests a sort of urgency with this word choice. There is no single word in English that carries the same connotation; the best way to highlight this was to choose “at” instead of “during” or some other word that suggested a longer duration.

Stanza 1; line 2. Hugo carries over the phrase “*Je partirai*” (I will depart) onto the second line in an enjambement. Though this breaks traditional poetry rules, he likely did this to emphasize the act of leaving. As the poem is centered around the poetic “I”'s journey to visit the grave, his departure marks the beginning of this action and is an important moment. I chose not to carry the phrase over onto the following line as Hugo did, but instead placed the phrase at the end of line 2 in order to give it a place of prominence. I believe this placement helps it stand out in the way Hugo intended, without compromising the rhyme scheme of the stanza.

Stanza 1; line 3. I chose to translate “J’irai par la forêt, j’irai par la montagne,” (literally “I will go by the forest, I will go by the mountain”) as “to my feet the mountains and forests will yield”. This was done both to maintain the rhythm of the line as well as to emphasize the active action of the French phrase. In English, “go by” can have a passive undertone, whereas the tone of the French text emphasizes the strong intent and decisiveness of the narrator’s actions. I believe that how I chose to translate this line emphasizes that same objective-driven tone of the poetic “I”’s journey.

Stanza 2; line 6. Hugo’s original line “Sans rien voir au dehors, sans entendre aucun bruit” would literally translate to “without seeing anything outside, without hearing any sound”. The original French line underscores the poetic “I”’s passivity to the world around him. This passivity is likely not voluntary; the poetic “I” is so lost in his pain and has such tunnel-vision towards his objective that he *cannot* see anything around. His lack of senses is not completely his choice; the loss has taken over. My translation of “Quite deaf and blind to the world I pass by” hints at this. Deaf and blind is not a choice but rather a state that is imposed on a person, just like the pain that is overtaking the narrator.

Stanza 2; line 7. The original French “Seul, inconnu, le dos courbé, les mains croisées,” would word-for-word be “alone, unknown, back bent, hands crossed”. My translation “A hunched-over stranger with my hands crossed” not only eliminated the descriptor of “alone” but also changed the adjective “unknown” into the noun “stranger”. One of the reasons for this is, of course, to maintain the rhythm and rhyming of the stanza. Another reason is that “inconnu” in French can mean both the adjective “unknown” and the noun “stranger.” In English, I felt that “unknown” did not carry the same meaning as it does in French, where the connotation of “stranger” lingers. For this reason, I chose to use “stranger” to simulate the link that exists in French. The structure of the line is changed as well to better reflect English grammar, as a direct translation (“back bent, hands crossed”) does not make the same sense that it does in French.

Stanza 3; line 10. The original French mentions the sails descending towards a particular French town, Harfleur. This was changed simply to “the bay” in my translation. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, Harfleur would be somewhat difficult for the average English-speaker to pronounce, and the rhyme might become distorted with an incorrect pronunciation. “The bay” simplifies this while still providing the same imagery of ships sailing in to a port. Secondly, the musicality of the word is still different in English. In French, the ending sounds of “eur” is a gentle, pleasant sound and adds to the musicality of the poem. However, this musicality is lost in English as it

likely becomes pronounced like the “er” in “burger.” In an attempt to preserve the flow of the poem, I made the change to “bay,” which is a more pleasant sound in English.

2. *Le pont Mirabeau / Mirabeau Bridge*

The reasons for choosing this poem to translate are similar to the reasons stated above for *Tomorrow at Dawn*. It is a well-known poem, but many translations are only word-for-word technical translations. To me, the beauty of this poem is in the rhythm, something that I hoped to preserve in my own translation.

Seine. One of the first issues I came across when drafting a translation for this work was the word “Seine” (the name of the river that flows through Paris). Oftentimes in English the name is pronounced as /seɪn/, /sɪn/, or even /sīn/, whereas the correct French pronunciation is /sɛn/. As the word Seine appeared in the end of some stanzas and would therefore be rhymed with, I needed to pick which pronunciation I would use for the rhymes. As the English pronunciations differ greatly from speaker to speaker, I chose to preserve the French pronunciation of /sɛn/. This pronunciation is still easy to pronounce for the average English-speaker and ensures a more uniform rhyme scheme through the poem and across different readers.

Refrain (Stanza 2). The order of the original first line “Vienne la nuit sonne l’heure” (night comes and the hour rings) was swapped in my version to “the hour rings and night fades.” Of course, “fades” is different than the original “comes,” but both evoke movement and the passing of time, so I thought that my word choice was still appropriate.

Stanza 5; line 13. The original “eau courante” (running water) becomes “flowing tide” in my translation. I felt that the literal translation of running or flowing water didn’t carry the lyricism of the original, and that my substitution better preserved the feel of the original French.

Stanza 5; line 16. The original “et comme l’Espérance est violente” (and how Hope is violent) at first glance is a bit different to my translation of “and Hope is violent and not at all kind”. Of course, my version adds in a few extra words. Though this was primarily done to preserve the rhyme scheme of the original, I believe that it does not compromise the original feeling of the text, as “not at all kind” aligns well with

“violent.” Granted, it does add in a descriptor that was not originally there, but I don’t feel that it infringes on the sentiment of the line.

Stanza 7; line 19. The original “Passent les jours et passent les semaines” (days pass and weeks pass) is “Minutes, days, and weeks come and go” in my version. Adding in “minutes” and “come and go” instead of simply “pass” was done to preserve the cadence and syllable count of the original. In my opinion, these substitutions don’t compromise the original meaning.

3. *La Folle / The Madwoman*

Title. “La folle” can translate to either “the madwoman” or “the freak” or even “the lunatic”, “the maniac”, or “the queen”. I chose the simplest and most direct translation of “the madwoman.” I felt that “the freak” or “the lunatic” carried a heavy connotation of almost circus-like madness, while “the madwoman” has a bit more of a clinical tone.

“...dont l’esprit s’était égaré sous les coups du malheur”. Literally in English: “whose spirit had wandered under throngs of misery.” The word-for-word translation sounds a bit clumsy. I opted for “whose lost spirit was helpless under the misery that overtook her”. I believe this preserves the most of the original wording while sounding a bit more natural in translation. Though the “helpless” imagery was added, it is within the bounds of the original phrase, as “wander” already implies listlessness or helplessness.

“Quand la mort est entrée une fois dans une maison, elle y revient presque toujours immédiatement, comme si elle connaissait la porte”. Literally in English: “Once death has entered into a house, she almost immediately returns, as she knows the door.” Again, this word-for-word translation sounds clunky in English, which makes the imagery less powerful. My version of “Once death finds the way to your door, she’ll likely return again soon” is quite simplified, but eliminates the clumsiness of the literal translation. I believe it gives the same idea of death returning, albeit in a more concise manner.

“elle criait comme si on l’eût tuée”. Literally in English: “she would cry out as if someone had killed her”. The English idiom “she would scream bloody murder” seemed to fit the original meaning quite well. Of course this changes the wording but better carries the meaning than a literal translation.

“Ou bien sa pensée anéantie restait-elle immobile comme de l’eau sans courant?” Literally in English: “Or perhaps her annihilated thoughts stayed unmoving like still

water?” My version “Or perhaps there was nothing left in her annihilated mind, leaving her thoughts as silent as still water?” is lengthier than the original, but I believe this extension is necessary to sound more natural in English. “Nothing left in her mind” is a relatively common phrase in English and makes the phrase “annihilated thoughts” sound a bit more normal.

“Puis les chefs distribuèrent leurs hommes aux habitants”. Literally in English: “Then the leaders distributed their men to the residents.” My version of “Then the commanders distributed their men to stay with the residents” adds a couple clarifying words to specify that the soldiers are staying at the residents’ homes, as there’s a chance it wouldn’t be clear in the word-for-word English translation.

“...la pauvre insensée ne quittait pas son lit par fierté”. Literally in English: “the poor fool wouldn’t leave her bed out of pride/honor.” My version is “the poor old fool wouldn’t leave her bed as an act of protest.” The original suggests that her motives are a protest against the Prussian occupation, and that it’s not her own pride that she is defending, but rather her national pride. This doesn’t come across in the literal translation, so I reworded the translation to suggest this.

Officer’s accent. In the original French, the Prussian officer speaks in an accent that is noted by modified spelling in his quotations. The accent is closest to a Germanic accent. I carried this orthographic accent over to my translation, changing in some instances “s” to “z”, “w” to “v”, and “d” to “t”. In another instance, “and” becomes “und”.

“Elle ne veut pas Monsieur, elle ne veut pas.” Literally in English: “She doesn’t want to sir, she doesn’t want to.” This is better translated to “she doesn’t mean it,” as the maid is suggesting that the madwoman should not be held responsible for her actions. Here, the maid is trying to explain her motive, which better fits with the wording I chose. I also chose to preserve the French “Monsieur” in the translation, as “sir” doesn’t carry the same weight, and most English reader should know the meaning of “Monsieur”.

“Les loups venaient hurler jusqu’à nos portes”. Literally in English: “The wolves came to howl up to our doors.” My version “The wolves came out that night; we could hear them howling right outside our doors.” adds some phrases that I found were necessary to clarify the sentence and make it have a more natural feel. I separated the actions of the wolves coming and them howling to give the sentence the same weight and meaning it has in French.

“Et je fais des vœux pour que nos fils ne voient plus jamais de guerre”. Literally in English: “And I make wishes so that our sons never again see war.” This, of course, as the last line of the piece, is very important and must carry a certain weight. My version “And I pray that our children see nothing of war” makes some changes. First, I changed “make wishes” to “pray.” In English, pray can have a non-religious connotation, and can mean “to make a wish very deeply,” which I felt was appropriate in this context. I also changed “our sons” to “our children,” as “our children” is more often used to represent the coming generation than “our sons.” “Never again” is reworded to “see nothing of” in my translation, which could seem a bit odd. However, “never again see” sounds a bit clumsy in English, and this last sentence must sound clean. “See nothing of” is often used in serious contexts and I felt it worked well for this sentence. It carried the same absolutism of “never again,” and sounds as serious and solemn as the original.

4. *La Maison face à la mer / The House Overlooking the Sea*

Title. Though many perceive that “face à” would translate to “facing”, it rather more directly means “across from” or “in front of”. In order to preserve the imagery of a beachside house whose windows have an ocean view, I chose “overlooking.” I believe this best gives the idea of a house with an ocean view as described in the short story.

General sentence structure. In French, it’s possible to have longer, running sentences with multiple phrases and clauses without confusing the meaning. In English, this is much more difficult. Longer sentences can easily distort the meaning and cause confusion for the reader. If I were to translate the sentences in French leaving them in the original structure, the resulting English sentences would be convoluted and difficult to follow. For this reason, many of the longer French sentences have been broken up into smaller, clearer sentences in my translation. Of course, I have done my best despite these changes to maintain as much of the original wording and structure as possible and have only broken up sentences when clarity and comprehension are at risk.

Maman. In the original French, Marisa refers to her mother as both Adrienne and *Maman*. In French, there are two primary words for one’s mother. *Mère*, which best translates to “mother,” is more formal and today is rarely used to address one’s mother. *Maman* is much more informal and is the word children use to refer to their mother, much like “mom,” “mum,” or even “mommy”. This carries a certain familiarity and comfort. With this in mind, I translated *maman* to “mom” as I felt it better fit than “mother,” which felt too formal in this context.

C'était mon palais des merveilles. Literally in English: "It was my palace of marvels." Though this sentence still makes sense in the literal English and carries a similar fanciful effect, it sounds a bit clunky and not very natural. I chose to substitute "palace of marvels" for "wonderland," which sounds much more natural and more easily brings imagery to mind because of its use in fairy tales in English.

"Comment, Philippe, toi, à cette heure?" Literally in English "How, Philippe, you, at this hour?" The use of commas and a broken up sentence gives off the level of Mr. Saint-Cyrien's surprise at encountering Philippe here. I added a sort of stutter to the sentence in my version to give this same effect of utter surprise: "Philippe, what... what are you doing at this hour?" Though I made the sentence a bit more complete and clear, adding in the stutter and ellipses preserves the original broken nature of Mr. Saint-Cyrien's question.

"Viendra un jour où ces types mangeront sans hésiter la chair de leur propre mère." Literally in English: "There will come a day when these guys will, without hesitating, eat the flesh of their own mother." Certainly the literal translation carries over the gruesome tone of the original, but also sounds a bit choppy. My version, "There will come a day when these guys will not hesitate to devour their own mothers," changes the wording a bit but sounds more natural. Though "devour" and "eat the flesh" are different, with flesh-eating sounding more gruesome, I believe the weight of what this sentence is saying is still preserved.

Appendix B: Original Texts

Demain dès l'aube

[Victor Hugo]

Demain, dès l'aube, à l'heure où blanchit la campagne,
Je partirai. Vois-tu, je sais que tu m'attends.
J'irai par la forêt, j'irai par la montagne.
Je ne puis demeurer loin de toi plus longtemps.

Je marcherai les yeux fixés sur mes pensées,
Sans rien voir au dehors, sans entendre aucun bruit,
Seul, inconnu, le dos courbé, les mains croisées,
Triste, et le jour pour moi sera comme la nuit.

Je ne regarderai ni l'or du soir qui tombe,
Ni les voiles au loin descendant vers Harfleur,
Et quand j'arriverai, je mettrai sur ta tombe
Un bouquet de houx vert et de bruyère en fleur.

Le pont Mirabeau

[Guillaume Apollinaire]

Sous le pont Mirabeau coule la Seine
Et nos amours
Faut-il qu'il m'en souviene
La joie venait toujours après la peine

Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure
Les jours s'en vont je demeure

Les mains dans les mains restons face à face
Tandis que sous
Le pont de nos bras passe
Des éternels regards l'onde si lasse

Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure
Les jours s'en vont je demeure

L'amour s'en va comme cette eau courante
L'amour s'en va
Comme la vie est lente
Et comme l'Espérance est violente

Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure
Les jours s'en vont je demeure

Passent les jours et passent les semaines
Ni temps passé
Ni les amours reviennent
Sous le pont Mirabeau coule la Seine

Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure
Les jours s'en vont je demeure

La Folle

[Guy de Maupassant]

Tenez, dit M. Mathieu d'Endolin, les bécasses me rappellent une bien sinistre anecdote de la guerre.

Vous connaissez ma propriété dans le faubourg de Corneil.

Je l'habitais au moment de l'arrivée des Prussiens.

J'avais alors pour voisine une espèce de folle, dont l'esprit s'était égaré sous les coups du malheur. Jadis, à l'âge de vingt-cinq ans, elle avait perdu, en un seul mois, son père, son mari et son enfant nouveau-né.

Quand la mort est entré une fois dans une maison, elle y revient presque toujours immédiatement, comme si elle connaissait la porte.

La pauvre jeune femme, foudroyée par le chagrin, prit le lit, délira pendant six semaines. Puis, une sorte de lassitude calme succédant à cette crise violente, elle resta sans mouvement, mangeant à peine, remuant seulement les yeux. Chaque fois qu'on voulait la faire lever, elle criait comme si on l'eût tuée. On la laissa donc toujours couchée, ne la tirant de ses draps que pour les soins de sa toilette et pour retourner ses matelas.

Une vieille bonne restait près d'elle, la faisant boire de temps en temps ou mâcher un peu de viande froide. Que se passait-il dans cette âme désespérée ? On ne le sut jamais ; car elle ne parla plus. Songeait-elle aux morts ? Rêvassait-elle tristement, sans souvenir précis ? Ou bien sa pensée anéantie restait-elle immobile comme de l'eau sans courant ?

Pendant quinze années, elle demeura ainsi fermée et inerte.

La guerre vint ; et, dans les premiers jours de décembre, les Prussiens pénétrèrent à Corneil.

Je me rappelle cela comme d'hier. Il gelait à fendre les pierres ; et j'étais étendu moi-même dans un fauteuil, immobilisé par la goutte, quand j'entendis le battement lourd et rythmé de leurs pas. De ma fenêtre, je les vis passer.

Ils défilèrent interminablement, tous pareils, avec ce mouvement de pantins qui leur est particulier. Puis les chefs distribuèrent leurs hommes aux habitants. J'en eus dix-sept. La voisine, la folle, en avait douze, dont un commandant, vrai soldat, violent, bourru.

Pendant les premiers jours, tout se passa normalement. On avait dit à l'officier d'à côté que la dame était malade ; et il ne s'en inquiéta guère. Mais bientôt cette femme qu'on ne voyait jamais l'irrita, il s'informa de la maladie ; on répondit que son hôtesse était couchée depuis quinze ans par suite d'un violent chagrin. Il n'en crut rien sans doute, et s'imagina que la pauvre insensée ne quittait pas son lit par fierté, pour ne pas voir les Prussiens, et ne leur point parler, et ne les point frôler.

Il exigea qu'elle le reçut ; on le fit entrer dans sa chambre.

Il demanda d'un ton brusque.

- Je vous prierai? Matame, de vous lever et de descendre pour qu'on vous voie.
Elle tourna vers lui ses yeux vagues, ses yeux vides, et ne répondit pas.
Il reprit :

- Je ne tolérerai pas d'insolence. Si vous ne vous levez pas de votre volonté, je trouverai bien un moyen de vous faire descendre toute seule.

Elle ne fit pas un geste, toujours immobile comme si elle ne l'eût pas vu.
Il rageait, prenant ce silence calme pour une marque de mépris suprême. Et il ajouta :

- Si vous n'êtes pas descendue demain...

Puis, il sortit.

Le lendemain, la vieille bonne, éperdue, la voulut habiller ; mais la folle se mit à hurler en se débattant. L'officier monta bien vite ; et la servante, se jetant à ses genoux, cria :

- Elle ne veut pas, Monsieur, elle ne veut pas. Pardonnez-lui ; elle est si malheureuse.

Le soldat restait embarrassé, n'osant, malgré sa colère, la faire tirer du lit par ses hommes. Mais soudain il se mit à rire et donna des ordres en allemand.
Et bientôt on vit sortir un détachement qui soutenait un matelas comme on porte un blessé. Dans ce lit qu'on n'avait point défait, la folle, toujours silencieuse, restait

tranquille, indifférente aux événements, tant qu'on la laissait couchée. Un homme par derrière portait un paquet de vêtements féminins.

Et l'officier prononça en se frottant les mains :

- nous ferrons bien si vous pouvez bas vous habiller toute seule et faire une bêtise broménate.

Puis on vit s'éloigner le cortège dans la direction de la forêt d'Imauville.

Deux heures plus tard les soldats revinrent tout seuls.

On ne revit plus la folle. Qu'en avaient-ils fait ? Où l'avaient-ils portée ! On ne le sut jamais. La neige tombait maintenant jour et nuit, ensevelissant la plaine et les bois sous un linceul de mousse glacée. Les loups venaient hurler jusqu'à nos portes. La pensée de cette femme perdue me hantait ; et je fis plusieurs démarches auprès de l'autorité prussienne, afin d'obtenir des renseignements. Je faillis être fusillé.

Le printemps revint. L'armée d'occupation s'éloigna. La maison de ma voisine restait fermée ; l'herbe drue poussait dans les allées.

La vieille bonne était morte pendant l'hiver. Personne ne s'occupait plus de cette aventure ; moi seul y songeais sans cesse.

Qu'avaient-ils fait de cette femme ? s'était-elle enfuie à travers les bois ! L'avait-on recueillie quelque part, et gardée dans un hôpital sans pouvoir obtenir d'elle aucun renseignement.

Rien ne venait alléger mes doutes ; mais, peu à peu, le temps apaisa le souci de mon cœur. Or, à l'automne suivant, les bécasses passèrent en masse ; et, comme ma goutte me laissait un peu de répit, je me traînai jusqu'à la forêt. J'avais déjà tué quatre ou cinq oiseaux à long bec, quand j'en abattis un qui disparut dans un fossé plein de branches. Je fus obligé d'y descendre pour y ramasser ma bête. Je la trouvai tombée auprès d'une tête de mort. Et brusquement le souvenir de la folle m'arriva dans la poitrine comme un coup de poing. Bien d'autres avaient expiré dans ces bois peut-être en cette année sinistre ; mais je ne sais pas pourquoi, j'étais sûr, sûr vous dis-je, que je rencontrais la tête de cette misérable maniaque.

Et soudain je compris, je devinai tout. Ils l'avaient abandonnée sur ce matelas, dans la forêt froide et déserte ; et, fidèle à son idée fixe, elle s'était laissée mourir sous l'épais et léger duvet des neiges et sans remuer le bras ou la jambe.

Puis les loups l'avaient dévorée.

Et les oiseaux avaient fait leur nid avec la laine de son lit déchiré.

J'ai gardé ce triste ossement. Et je fais des vœux pour que nos fils ne voient plus jamais de guerre.

La Maison face à la mer

[Marie-Célie Agnant]

Les fenêtres donnent sur la plage. Après le drame, nous y avons mis des rideaux très épais qui sont tombés à tout jamais. La mer elle-même n'assistera plus au spectacle de notre malheur ni à celui de notre délivrance. Pour nous, c'est sans doute une autre façon d'atténuer les ombres qui, obstinément, se dressent sur la grève entre la mer et nous. Le jour, tout va bien. Dans le va-et-vient du quotidien, il est moins nécessaire de faire semblant. Cependant, dès que vient le soir, dans l'obscurité, nous pensons à eux. Nous pensons aussi à lui, là-haut à Rochelle, dans ce petit palais qu'il s'est fait construire au milieu des bois. Me revient alors la même phrase, pénible et lancinante, avec les mêmes mots : Tout s'est terminé ou plutôt tout a débuté en cette veille de la Saint-Sylvestre où il s'arrêta pour venir en aide à un motocycliste...

Derrière les fenêtres closes, je vis avec Adrienne, ma mère. Nous sommes deux ombres, deux fantômes, dérivant sur des rives de l'absence. Nous sommes les cendres d'une existence dont nul ne se souvient plus. La plupart des familles qui, comme nous, ont vécu ce qui s'est passé en cette veille de la Saint-Sylvestre sont parties, emportant avec elles ce qui leur restait de lambeaux et de miettes. Ont-elles pu oublier ? Du moins, trouver la paix ?

Nous ne quitterons pas Sapotille. Lorsque j'étais enfant, le monde pour moi se résumait à cette ville, ses maisons aux grandes galeries et leurs cours ombragées. La nôtre, la cour de notre maison, c'était mon royaume. Il y avait le grenadier, ses fleurs rouges et ses fruits. C'était mon palais des merveilles. Il y avait le bassin où naviguaient des bateaux qui n'étaient rien d'autre que les feuilles des arbres. Et le grand pied de fruit à pain avec ses feuilles en parasol. C'était le roi de mon royaume. Il y avait tous mes sujets, mes frères, et bien sûr, Philippe, à qui je pensais, assise à califourchon sur les branches du grenadier. Le grenadier est toujours là. J'écarte le rideau pour y jeter un coup d'oeil furtif.

Lorsque j'étais enfant, le monde c'était l'église de Sapotille et son clocher qui domine la butte Jacob et surplombe l'océan. Sapotille, dont les maisons sont rongées par le sel de la mer qui, lors des grandes marées, écorche leurs flancs. Sapotille que je n'ai jamais quitté demeure encore pour moi le monde à qui j'ai donné tout ce que mon cœur pouvait contenir d'amour, de haine et de passion.

À maman et à moi, qui n'avons plus rien à chérir, même pas des initiales gravées sur une pierre dans un cimetière, les rues défoncées, le murmure infini de la grève et les souvenirs, c'est tout ce qu'il nous reste, nous ne pouvons les abandonner. Les souvenirs sont d'affreux geôliers et d'ignobles tyrans. Ils nous tenaillent, nous poursuivent, nous possèdent et règlent notre existence depuis ce jour. À cause d'eux, maman et moi, nous sommes devenues muettes, comme des pierres, ne sachant d'autre langage que celui qu'ils nous dictent.

Quelquefois maman écrit. Elle avait rêvé jadis d'être écrivain. Mais dans ce pays où il n'y a toujours eu de place que pour les puissants et leur démente, Adrienne avait dû enterrer très tôt ce désir des mots. Elle avait sagement rangé ses cahiers et ses crayons. Mais quand la douleur devient trop crue, elle les sort, en chasse la poussière et écrit pour essayer d'atténuer ce chagrin qui, comme une fièvre maligne, a pris possession de toute son existence. Tout s'est terminé ou plutôt tout a débuté en cette veille de la Saint-Sylvestre où il s'arrêta pour venir en aide à un motocycliste...

Derrière les fenêtres closes, Adrienne et moi, deux îlots à la dérive de la grande île, Sapotille, cette ville qui continue à vivre, à respirer, nous ne savons trop comment. Longtemps, nous nous sommes interrogées, longtemps nous nous sommes demandé comment tout cela a bien pu arriver, et surtout comment avons-nous pu trouver la force de continuer. Comment l'être humain, nous demandions-nous, peut-il survivre à tant d'horreurs ? Nous ne voulons plus aller au fond des choses désormais. C'est inutile. Il ne nous reste plus qu'à être. Le désir d'une fin qui nous délivrerait de tout est la seule chose vivante dans cette maison qui regarde la mer. Il est là, palpitant, blotti en nous, tel un enfant que nous ne finissons plus de porter.

Tous les autres, ceux qui ne sont pas morts, sont partis, abandonnant Sapotille à cette saison interminable de peur et de déraison. Ils s'en sont allés sur la pointe des pieds. Le dernier à partir, Guy, le benjamin, celui qu'ils ont épargné par mégarde, parce que ce jour-là il s'était endormi dans le grenier, a traversé la frontière, dans des habits de femme enfilés à la hâte. Une longue jupe de paysanne pour cacher ses mollets velus. Il avait essayé de tenir avec nous. Mais il a fini lui aussi par faire ce choix terrible: partir. Puisqu'on ne saurait exorciser le passé, puisque tous les autres étaient morts et qu'il

était là, lui, là-haut avec ses gardes et ses chiens, sa piscine et ses chevaux, puisqu'on n'y pouvait rien, il ne restait plus qu'à fuir. Voilà les derniers mots que Guy nous avait dits avant de s'enfoncer dans la nuit de l'oubli, il y a trente ans déjà.

Lui, là-haut, il s'appelle Philippe. Philippe Breton. Je vous dis son nom afin que, comme moi, vous vous souveniez. Il a été mon fiancé, il a grandi avec nous. Avec mes frères, Carl, Jacques, Guy et les autres, et avec moi, moi qui l'aimais depuis... je ne sais plus. Tout ce dont je me souviens aujourd'hui, trente ans après que tout soit fini, c'est ce qui jusqu'au dernier jour de ma vie remontera en moi, du plus profond de moi, cette houle têtue qui me soulevait lorsque dans le grenier Philippe me couvrait de son souffle. Enfant, je rêvais déjà à lui dans les branches du grenadier. À dix-huit ans, j'aimais Philippe, de cet amour des dix-huit ans que l'on ne sait point nommer.

Enfant, jouant aux billes, Philippe s'était écorché les genoux sur les mêmes cailloux que mes fils, écrit encore ma mère. Les frères de Marisa, ils étaient six, s'étaient mesurés à lui sur le chemin de l'école. Ils avaient ensemble couru sur la plage, plongé dans la mousse blanche des vagues, s'éclaboussant et riant. Souvent, il avait mangé à notre table, le midi, à côté de mes fils. Avec mon aîné, Jacques, il avait passé des soirées entières à lire dans le grenier. Combien de fois le sommeil les avait-il surpris tous les deux, épuisés, les paupières lourdes...

Combien de fois je les avais contemplés avant de me résoudre à les réveiller, pour surprendre Philippe, l'air hébété et confus au milieu des bouquins qu'il voulait lire tous en même temps. Cette bibliothèque, dans le grenier, appartenait à mon père et seuls Jacques et Philippe avaient ainsi le droit de s'y installer. À l'époque, Philippe était un garçon doux, respectueux, empressé et bûcheur, qualités que mon père, professeur attentif, savait apprécier.

« Ce garçon ira loin », disait papa, plein d'admiration et me jetant un regard à la dérobée. « Quel dommage que Guy et Antoine ne soient pas comme lui ! » poursuivait-il, lui qui sans cesse déplorait la bohème de ses deux plus jeunes fils. Mon père, Daniel Saint-Cyrien, était aussi avocat, mais il avait cessé toute pratique, car il avait compris, comme il aimait à le dire, que les jours n'allaient plus être les mêmes, ni à Sapotille ni dans aucune autre région du pays ; ceux qui avaient décidé de tout contrôler étaient ainsi résolus à transformer les habitants du pays en spectateurs de leur propre existence.

Tout s'est terminé ou plutôt tout a débuté en cette veille de la Saint-Sylvestre. Je venais d'avoir dix-neuf ans et Philippe, vingt-quatre. Revenant d'une visite, mon père, qui débouchait du carrefour des Quatre-Chemins, tomba sur un motocycliste en panne.

- Comment, Philippe, toi, à cette heure ?

- N'approchez pas, monsieur Saint-Cyrien ! laissa tomber Philippe, d'une voix froide et pleine de défi.

Malgré l'obscurité, mon père se rendit compte que Philippe avait non seulement les yeux injectés de sang, mais que ses mains et ses vêtements étaient aussi couverts du rouge le plus vif. Il essayait maladroitement de dissimuler un revolver dont mon père aperçut l'éclat de la crosse dans la pénombre. Il ne pouvait retrouver le visage de ce Philippe intelligent et bûcheur qu'il connaissait depuis toujours. À quelques pas de lui, se tenait un être défiguré par la haine, prêt à lui tirer dessus.

- Toi aussi, Philippe ?

- Maintenant que vous savez, monsieur Saint-Cyrien, que comptez-vous faire ?

Mon père tourna les talons et s'en fut, le coeur soulevé de tristesse et de dégoût.

Le lendemain, il se réveilla plus tôt que d'habitude, et nous parla longuement à mes frères et à moi. Maman savait déjà. Elle avait la tête d'un condamné à mort, les yeux cernés et rougis par une nuit sans sommeil.

Sans détours, papa nous parla de Philippe et des gens comme lui que l'on recrutait partout et que l'on dressait à tuer. Il nous expliqua leur rôle dans ce climat de terreur qui s'était abattu sur Sapotille et le pays tout entier. « L'odeur fétide de la corruption, du crime et des trahisons sans nombre a désormais envahi nos demeures », nous dit-il pour terminer. « Viendra un jour où ces types mangeront sans hésiter la chair de leur propre mère. »

Il y avait longtemps déjà que Philippe, prétextant préparer des examens, ne venait plus que rarement à la maison. « Je savais, poursuivit mon père, que cette désertion cachait quelque chose d'étrange, mais je priais le ciel, avec l'espoir idiot que tout ce qu'on chuchotait à son sujet n'était que calomnies... » Il me regarda droit dans les yeux. Nous nous étions tout dit.

De ce moment, détresse et rage confondues remplacèrent dans mon corps le sang. Je vivais avec la sensation d'une ombre épaisse s'étalant sur mon coeur. Mes frères, nerveux, venaient dans ma chambre à pas de loup, m'apporter les nouvelles. Nous parlions à voix basse. Ils avaient déjà perdu plusieurs de leurs amis. Personne ne savait si ceux qui disparaissaient étaient en prison ou s'ils avaient été tués. Ils n'étaient plus là,

simplement. Leurs parents, lorsqu'ils n'avaient pas été emmenés eux aussi, se barricadaient, effrayés, sans savoir où aller ni à qui s'adresser. Tout comme nous, ils attendaient chez eux en tremblant à chaque fois que passait un camion dans la nuit.

Ils arrivèrent au milieu de la nuit, armés jusqu'aux dents. Certains portaient des cagoules noires. Philippe était-il parmi eux ? Je ne voulais pas le savoir. Je n'oublierai jamais le regard désespéré de maman, le mouchoir qu'elle s'enfonçait dans la bouche pour ne pas hurler. Ils emmenèrent Jacques, Daniel, Carl, Victor et Antoine, et bien sûr, papa. « Nous allons simplement vous conduire au poste, vous poser quelques questions. » Nous savions qu'aucun de ceux que l'on emmenait ne revenait, mais nous nous sommes accrochées à cette phrase du commandant.

Combien de jours et de nuits passèrent ? Ils ne revinrent ni l'un ni l'autre, jusqu'à ce jour... cet attroupement sur la grève, ces lambeaux de chemises qui flottaient, ces corps bouffis et méconnaissables que la mer vomissait. Des habitants de Sapotille, des mères en pleurs, descendirent en courant jusqu'à la plage, pour essayer d'identifier les corps. Adrienne et moi, nous sommes demeurées à la fenêtre. Le soleil sur la mer avait ce jour-là couleur de sang.

Comment dire le tumulte et les cris qui s'élevaient de la plage ? Comment dire ce chaos qui depuis lors s'est installé dans notre vie ?

Tard dans la nuit, les dernières femmes retournèrent chez elles. Silencieuses, elles remontèrent la butte Jacob et s'en furent avec dans la tête la voix de la mer, comme un tocsin. Puis tout s'arrêta, les jours, les heures... et nous nous sommes installées pour toujours, maman et moi, dans le tournis de l'absence, face à la mer que nous avons fini d'interroger.

Le jour, lorsque du bas de la ville nous arrivent les bruits du marché et les échos de la vie qui joue à faire semblant d'avoir oublié, le jour, dans le tumulte du quotidien, nous jouons aussi à faire semblant. Mais dès que vient le soir, surtout à l'approche de décembre, quand revient la Saint-Sylvestre, nous retrouvons dans chaque son, dans chaque geste, chaque éclat de lumière, ce carrousel infernal de morts-vivants et de spectres qui hanteront à jamais Sapotille et notre maison face à la mer.