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**Commented Translation**  
**of Excerpts from the Novel**  
*Cher Hugo, chère Catherine*

by

**Ellen Bertrand**

**School of Translators and Interpreters**  
**University of Ottawa**

Under the supervision of

Barbara Folkart, Ph.D.  
School of Translators and Interpreters

Thesis submitted to  
the School of Graduate Studies and Research  
of the University of Ottawa  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts (Translation)

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis is divided into two parts, the first consisting of a French to English translation of excerpts from the novel *Cher Hugo, chère Catherine*. The second part comprises a commentary of the difficulties encountered in the translation. Although the novel is a record of correspondence between four characters over a 43-year period, this work deals only with the letters exchanged between father and daughter, Hugo and Catherine.

Literary translation is often a very difficult endeavour and we discuss the challenging task of translating a rich literary text by studying the concrete textual features in which are rooted the themes of the source text. The textual features also contribute to the text's impact on the reader. The problems involved in rendering these textual features are in turn discussed in a series of five chapters devoted to pivotal translational problems:

Chapter 4 deals with the ambiguities in Hugo's writing which lead the reader to question the nature of the father-daughter relationship, and more specifically, with the issue of whether or not to render this ambiguity in English. Chapter 5 discusses the issue of authorial intrusions in Catherine's writing, i.e. if and how to reproduce this influence in the translation. Chapter 6 deals with the problem of maintaining incoherencies in the source text as an indicator of an intimate father-daughter relationship. Chapter 7 considers the difficulties of translating poetic prose and offers translation solutions based on a non-technical analysis of poetic passages. Finally, chapter 8 discusses the polyphonous voices used to convey the complexity of the characters' personalities, and of course, the solutions offered in the translation of the text.

Throughout this work, the issue of acquiring additional information from the author of

the novel is addressed in relation to its effect on the translation; in order to emphasize the need for a carefully balanced translation, this thesis closes by examining the repercussions of abusing this "privileged" information.

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## RÉSUMÉ

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Cette thèse constitue une traduction commentée d'extraits d'un roman intitulé *Cher Hugo, chère Catherine*. Quoique le roman nous livre la correspondance entretenue par quatre personnages sur une période de quarante-trois ans, la traduction ne porte que les lettres échangées entre père et fille, Hugo and Catherine.

La traduction littéraire est une entreprise difficile, que nous avons abordée en examinant les traits textuels qui engendrent la thématique du texte de départ. Dans une série de cinq chapitres consacrés aux principales difficultés de traduction, nous envisageons les stratégies traductionnelles qui nous permettront de reproduire ces traits dans le texte d'arrivée:

Le chapitre 4 discute de l'ambiguïté des lettres écrites par Hugo (ambiguïté qui soulève des questions à propos de la relation entre père et fille), et justifie la décision de transmettre cette ambiguïté. Le cinquième chapitre aborde la question de la présence de l'auteur dans l'écriture de Catherine et présente des stratégies pour reproduire cette influence dans le texte d'arrivée. Le chapitre 6 traite des difficultés posées par un texte de départ qui recourt à l'incohérence pour communiquer l'intimité de la relation père-fille. Le chapitre 7 aborde les difficultés rencontrées dans la traduction de la prose poétique du roman et offre des solutions basées sur une analyse non technique des passages poétiques. Enfin, le huitième chapitre discute de la complexité des personnages, de la "polyphonie" de leurs voix et bien sûr, des solutions traductionnelles.

A maintes reprises nous invoquons les renseignements supplémentaires que l'auteur a fournis au sujet de nombreux passages. Nous discutons aussi des répercussions éventuelles de cette information sur le processus traductionnel; nous ne manquons pas d'envisager les abus que

pourrait entraîner le recours à cette information «privilégiée».

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## Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

---

*Écrire à son père est pour Catherine une façon de dire ce qui ne se dit pas. Ses lettres la préparent à être la fille d'Hugo qui, en lui répondant, raconte une histoire pour maintenant et pour plus tard. La petite fille grandit, le père vieillit. Pendant quarante ans leurs missives seront lancées par-dessus les temps d'exils, par-dessus la vie qui les rapproche et les sépare.*

*Cher Hugo, chère Catherine suit la trajectoire intime d'êtres pour qui le silence est à la mesure de leurs aveux. Chaque lettre est un moment d'effusion, chaque mot, une étreinte, en forme de couperet ou d'écho. Si Édouard entre dans la vie d'Hugo, et si Catherine se confie à Patricia, c'est que tous apprivoisent les déchirements, les désillusions, le désarroi du quotidien.*

(From the novel's back cover)

### ● The Novel

Bianca Côté's second novel, *Cher Hugo, chère Catherine*, is an epistolary novel that spans 43 years of correspondence between four characters. The collection of letters can be likened to a family photo album, through which the reader browses and discovers family members and friends. The central characters are a father and daughter, Hugo and Catherine. Catherine exchanges letters mainly with her father, but also with Patricia, a school teacher she had when she was 7 years old. Similarly, Hugo writes many letters to his lover, Edouard, as well as one to his grandson. The letters reveal each character's traits and dispositions at various stages in their respective lives over a 43-year period.

*Cher Hugo, chère Catherine* is structured according to Catherine's age, which is reflected in the seven chapters, or chronological "ages" of this novel: 7, 13, 18, 27, 33, 42 and 50 years of age. According to the author, there may be other letters than those recorded in the novel, thus accounting for some gaps in the storyline. Yet, despite the possible "missing links", the story aptly presents many of life's significant events from a highly personal perspective. Each

chapter represents pivotal ages and events for Catherine, namely childhood, adolescence, her first love affair and broken heart, the loss of a child, the birth of a child, and the death of a loved one. Hugo is twenty years older than his daughter and, throughout the novel's 43-year period, both characters share personal experiences and details about significant events in their lives. Most important, however, is the sharing of their feelings and most intimate thoughts regarding these experiences and events.

Obviously, these letters are not merely documentation, individual accounts of relatively banal personal events or "status reports", as could normally be expected of correspondence between parent and child, but more especially, they represent an intimate exchange of feelings presented to us in the form of letters. As Côté herself has stated, "These letters are not mere descriptions of life's events. They are intimate exchanges between father and daughter."<sup>1</sup> Theirs is a relationship based on open and frank communication and their intimate letters reflect the development of this special father-daughter relationship over the course of the years.

Furthermore, these letters are written in a style that allows the reader into the characters' mind. In short, the reader is witness to the characters' innermost thoughts because in the letters, the characters find a way to express what they cannot say aloud. It is essentially this extremely intimate aspect of the letters which presents a great challenge for the translator. However, in order to understand the source text better (and logically, the translation), it is necessary to outline the novel's story.

---

<sup>1</sup>See Appendices 1 and 2 for transcripts of interviews with Bianca Côté.

- **Story Synopsis**

With the exception of the last, each chapter, or "age" begins with a letter from Catherine to Hugo, and ends with a letter from Hugo to Catherine. In between these two letters, we generally find a letter from Catherine to Patricia, an occasional letter from Patricia to Catherine, and one from Hugo to Edouard. The first chapter represents the letters written when Catherine was 7 years old. Those exchanged between Catherine and Hugo focus mainly on the reactions of both daughter and father when Hugo leaves Montreal to go to Rome on a business trip. Their correspondence serves as an introduction to both main characters and provides an important insight into the strong and intimate father-daughter relationship that will be highlighted throughout the novel. It is also in this chapter that we discover that Hugo is an architect, as well as several other important facts pertaining to Hugo's personal life. In Hugo's first letter to Edouard, we discover that they have a homosexual relationship. Catherine's mother is introduced indirectly by both Catherine and Hugo, revealing that they are both somewhat distant from her, and that the marriage is void of any passion. Interestingly, Catherine's mother is never named, nor does she play any part in the correspondence at all, save when Hugo or Catherine mention her in passing. In Catherine's letter to Patricia, her former teacher, she reveals the great admiration she feels for her.

At 13 years of age, the focus is on Catherine's entry into womanhood. She goes on her first trip without either of her parents to New York City with Patricia. At this stage, Catherine is dealing with both the physical and emotional pain of adolescence, as well as with the separation from her father. In the letter that Patricia writes to Catherine, the reader discovers that, while in New York, Catherine had her first period. As for Hugo, his rather explicit letter

to Edouard reveals that they met on Hugo's honeymoon. Hugo has refused to see him since that time (approximately eight years previous) but now wants to see him again. Finally, Hugo's letter to Catherine again illustrates how close he and his daughter are as he proceeds to tell her how much he misses her and wants her to come back home.

In the third chapter, written at the 18 year mark, Catherine's correspondence with Hugo and Patricia deal exclusively with her emotions regarding the break-up with her first lover, Sigfried. Hugo writes the letters in this chapter from Paris, where he is visiting his lover Edouard. In his letter to Edouard, Hugo explicitly tells his lover how he feels when they are together. His letter to Catherine, however, again deals with her break-up with Sigfried, but refers also to his own life and emotions. Ironically though, he tells Catherine that he is staying with his childhood friend in Paris, thus revealing that he is not yet totally frank with his daughter.

The next chapter comprises the letters written nine years later, when Catherine is 27 years old. Dominating this chapter is the fact that Catherine had a stillborn baby, whom she named Marlene. In her letter to her father, Catherine lashes out at him for the first time in her life, irrationally blaming him for the stillbirth. In the second, shorter part of her letter, written the next day when she has calmed down, Catherine describes how she had the pleasant surprise of running into Patricia at an art exhibit. Hugo writes to Edouard, who has just visited him, and talks about his grief over Catherine's loss. Catherine's letter to Patricia seems to have been written before the stillbirth of Marlene, as is the letter Hugo writes to Catherine. In his letter, Hugo reminisces about Catherine as a child as well as about his last encounter with Edouard. He also, though briefly, gives some fatherly advice to his daughter.

In the fifth chapter of the novel, Catherine is 33 years old. Her letter to Hugo reveals that she's having an affair with Patricia. However, Catherine also discusses her physical and emotional relationship with her lover, Christian, and the joy her son Frederick has brought to her life. In her letter to Patricia, she discusses the happiness their homosexual relationship has brought her, as well as her feelings of disloyalty because she is living a double passion. Hugo, in his letter to Edouard, writes briefly about his dreams in which he makes love to his daughter, and describes how he sees Catherine and Christian's relationship. Hugo also reveals in this letter that Edouard has left him, an event which has left Hugo feeling empty. In the last letter of this chapter, Hugo writes about himself and his failures in both his relationship with Edouard and with his wife. While he spends some time describing his trip to Bangkok, a time when he is projecting death on everything he sees, for the most part, he is self-absorbed and contemplates what he has left in his life, i.e. Catherine.

Writing to Hugo when she is forty-two, Catherine reminisces about her childhood, and recalls things her father has told her. She also describes Hugo and how she feels about him as she watches him sleep. In the next letter, Catherine writes to Patricia about her stay in a hotel room with her father, as well as about her need for solitude to truly remember significant things about her life. Catherine also writes to her lover, Christian; she reminisces about the relationship, then goes into a poetic, explicit description of her sexual desire for him. In Hugo's letter to Edouard, we discover that Edouard has died and that Hugo and Catherine have spent a few silent days in a Montreal hotel room, pretending to be in London, England. Hugo again briefly mentions his fantasy about making love to Catherine, but he mostly describes how he has been spending his time since Edouard has died, he reminisces a little about his relationship with

Edouard and how he is dealing with his pain. In his letter to Catherine, Hugo's stream of thoughts seems to be taking over. He watches and describes Catherine as she sleeps in the hotel room and, letting his thoughts wander, he reflects on himself and his feelings for Catherine.

The final chapter is composed of letters written when Catherine is 50 years old. The first letter is written by Catherine, and read at the church before the service for her father's funeral. It is a poetic, nostalgic and informal eulogy to the man she loved so much. Hugo has written two letters to Catherine before dying. In the first he reminisces, letting his sometimes incoherent thoughts wander. In the second, however, he is under the influence of morphine and his writing is extremely incoherent. In both letters he seems to be trying to urge Catherine to slow down and enjoy life to its fullest potential. The very last letter of the novel is a brief note from Hugo to his grandson, Frederick. Hugo describes himself a little, talks fondly about his house, and bequeaths it to his grandson.

All the intertwining stories of these characters' lives make for fascinating reading. The reader is easily drawn into the characters' lives and minds, and often feels like a voyeur spying on acquaintances. However, translating all the letters would be an enormous task and for the purpose of this work, the corpus had to be reduced. The choice was difficult because each relationship presented so many potentially fascinating challenges for translation.

#### ● **Selecting the Corpus for Translation**

As illustrated in the synopsis, there are several characters whose lives are intertwined and who affect each other quite profoundly in this novel. All these characters are of great interest, yet there is a definite focus on the father-daughter relationship, simply from the fact that they

are the only two who consistently correspond with each other throughout the novel. The exchange of letters between them reveals a great deal about their intimate relationship and about the two characters themselves. By the seemingly simple act of letter writing, Catherine and Hugo document not only personal events at different stages in their lives, but more importantly, their most intimate feelings and thoughts on these events. Although we do glimpse the evolution of other peripheral relationships, Catherine and Hugo's relationship is the most extensively documented one. Although Edouard and Hugo's relationship, for example, could also prove a fascinating exercise in translation because the relationship is seen through only one person's text, rendering it would take a great deal of interpretation on the part of the translator. Nevertheless, the main focus of the novel is on the correspondence between father and daughter, hence my decision to translate all their correspondence.

- **Beyond the Story**

This corpus of correspondence presents a great challenge for the translator. The primary concern for the translator is to render the source text in such a way that it has the same effect or impacts on the English language reader, such as those created by the evolution of the characters' voices, the multi-dimensional personalities of the characters, the dynamics of the father-daughter relationship, and perhaps most importantly, the intimacy of the letters. However, the translation is done not at the thematic level, but at the textual level. This means that the above-mentioned themes are all conveyed through specific textual features of the novel. Therefore, it is essential that the translator go beyond the superficial and impressionistic level of this literary text, and delve into its various layers in order to determine the source of the

impressions and impacts on the reader. The commentary that follows the translation discusses the problems and difficulties of rendering the novel's textual features which are often at the root of more general, less tangible thematic problems.

---

**Chapter 2**  
**SOURCE TEXT AND TRANSLATION**

---

All letters exchanged between Catherine and Hugo.

Sept ans

Seven

## LETTRE DE CATHERINE À HUGO

Papa,

Je m'ennuie beaucoup de toi. Je sais, Rome, c'est loin. Sinon, j'irais te rejoindre. Je connais le chemin. Maman a tracé un x sur le globe du salon. Je marche longtemps maintenant. Mes jambes me soutiennent bien. Maman m'a dit que tu travaillais beaucoup là-bas. As-tu le temps de penser à moi un petit peu ? Pour ces choses-là, le temps t'échappe, soupire maman. Je me tais pour ne pas lui causer de chagrin mais je suis sûre que pour moi, tu fais des exceptions. J'ai appris ça à l'école : lorsqu'on conjugue un verbe rare, il faut retenir les exceptions. Pour les verbes, je suis trop petite. Pour toi, je veux bien confirmer la règle. Quand maman s'ennuie trop, elle m'envoie jouer dehors. Elle pense toute seule dans son coin et moi aussi. Je la quitte et reviens en courant. Je ne suis pas capable de jouer avec les camarades de ma classe. Je les trouve plates. Plate, c'est pire qu'ennuyant. Pour eux, je suis muette comme une tombe. Je n'aime pas ça me faire traiter de tombe. Toi lorsque tu n'es pas en voyage tu m'appelles ta petite princesse. Heureusement, la maîtresse d'école est là ! Après la classe, elle m'accompagne jusqu'à la maison, c'est sur son chemin. C'est drôle, je lui

## CATHERINE TO HUGO

Daddy,

I miss you a lot. I know, Rome is far away. If it wasn't, I'd go and see you. I know the way. Mommy traced an X on the globe in the living room. I go for long walks now. My legs are really strong. Mom told me that you were working a lot over there. Do you have time to think of me a little bit? Mommy sighs and tells me that you don't have time for those things. I don't say anything because I don't want to hurt her but I'm sure that for me you make exceptions. I learned that at school; when you conjugate an irregular verb, you have to remember the exceptions. I'm too small for verbs. For you, I want to be the exception that confirms the rule. When mommy gets too lonely, she sends me outside to play. She thinks alone in her corner and I do too. I leave her and come back running. I can't play with the other kids in my class. They're totally boring. Totally boring is worse than just boring. They say I'm as silent as a grave. I don't like being called a grave. You, Daddy, when you're not on a trip you call me your little princess. Good thing there's the teacher! After class she walks me home, it's on her way home. It's funny, I talk to

parle et je ne reconnais pas ma voix. Ma langue me joue des tours. Je parle beaucoup avec Patricia. C'est un beau nom, hein? Si je te dis qu'elle m'aime, vas-tu me croire? Si je te dis que je t'aime, vas-tu me croire? Même à travers mes menteries, il y a des moments où je suis vraie. Quand je suis vraie, les mots sortent de travers, ça donne de drôles de phrases. Je suis gênée mais heureuse : Patricia est si belle lorsqu'elle rit, si douce lorsqu'elle prononce mon nom à l'italienne... Ca-tha-ri-na et Pa-tri-ci-a, ça rime, c'est fait pour aller ensemble comme la bonne fée et Cendrillon ! J'aimerais bien que tu m'aides à acheter un blouson en cuir noir comme le sien. Un chapeau aussi, pour me protéger du soleil. Patricia n'aime pas le soleil. Il abîme la peau, le savais-tu? Maman me l'avait caché. Elle devrait se couvrir la peau aussi. Moi, je serais sûrement belle en ayant l'air de Patricia. Tu serais fier de moi. Tu sais, quand je serai grande, je deviendrai quelqu'un de bien. En es-tu convaincu toi aussi? M'aimes-tu assez pour ça? Lorsqu'elle est dans ses bons jours, maman m'affirme que tu m'aimes gros comme un éléphant. Me feras-tu visiter le monde sur ton dos? J'apporterai un parasol pour nous protéger du soleil. Je t'apprendrai tout ce que Patricia m'a appris. Même lorsque je te tourne le dos, mon cœur vole vers toi. Il veut que tu le lèches tout autour, comme un petit chien perdu. Te rappelles-tu celui que nous avons rencontré au Jardin botanique? Il rêve de pouvoir crier

her and I don't recognize my own voice. My tongue plays tricks on me. I talk a lot with Patricia. A pretty name, eh? If I tell you that she loves me, will you believe me? If I tell you that I love you, will you believe me? Even through my lies, there are times when I'm truthful. When I'm truthful, my words come out crooked, and make up weird sentences. I'm shy but happy: Patricia is so pretty when she laughs, so gentle when she says my name in Italian... Ca-ta-ri-na and Pa-tri-cia, they rhyme, they were made to go together like Cinderella and her fairy godmother! I'd really like for you to help me buy a black leather jacket like hers. A hat too, to protect me from the sun. Patricia doesn't like the sun. It damages your skin, did you know that? Mommy never told me. She should cover her skin too. I'd really be pretty if I looked like Patricia. You'd be proud of me. You know, when I'm big, I'll become somebody important. Are you convinced of that too? Do you love me enough for that? When mommy is having a good day, mommy maintains that you love me as big as an elephant. Will you piggy-back me around the world? I'll bring a parasol to protect us from the sun. I'll teach you everything that Patricia has taught me. Even when I turn my back to you, my heart soars out to you. It wants you to lick it all over, like a little lost dog. Do you remember the one that we saw at the Botanical gardens? It

«je n'ai jamais connu un froid aussi chaud». Moi, je souhaiterais être ailleurs avec toi, là où il n'y a pas de bleu. Je ne veux plus que ma chambre soit bleue. Je supplie maman d'acheter de la peinture blanche. J'ai peur lorsque le bleu me poursuit. Le bleu, c'est comme la mort puisque c'est la joute du ciel et de la terre. Leurs deux visages fâchés se collent l'un contre l'autre jusqu'à ce que le tonnerre applaudisse. Mes toutous ne chantent plus à la journée longue. La journée est trop longue, la terre aussi. C'est bleu partout. Tu n'es pas là.

Catherine

dreams of shouting "I've never known such a warm cold place." I'd like to be somewhere else with you, a place where there isn't any blue. I don't want my room to be blue anymore. I've been begging mommy to buy white paint. I'm scared when blue chases me around. Blue, it's like death because it's the duel between the sky and the earth. Their two furious faces press against one another until the thunder claps. Now, my teddy bears stay quiet all day long. The day is too long, the earth is too. It's blue all over. You're not there.

Catherine

## LETTRE D'HUGO À CATHERINE

Chère Catherine,

Je suis arrivé à Rome. Depuis toute une semaine. Lundi, mardi, mercredi, jeudi, vendredi, samedi, dimanche. Ce qui à toi semble une évidence m'apparaît bien fragile. À Montréal, les semaines ne sont pas toujours pleines, ce ne sont pas toujours des bonnes semaines. Ici, j'ai rempli chaque journée sans exception. J'étais si content de moi que je me suis mis un A dans mon bulletin. Si lundi je pense très fort, si mardi je prends des notes, si mercredi je trace des plans, si jeudi je vais voir des expositions et discute avec des messieurs importants, si vendredi je corrige mes devoirs du mardi, si samedi je magasine pour toi et ta mère, si dimanche je mets au propre mes barbots de maisons, alors c'est une très bonne semaine. Je prie mon dieu à moi pour que ça m'arrive plus souvent. Toi, qu'est-ce que tu racontes à ton dieu ?

Tout à l'heure, je suis passé devant la statue *piazza di Spagna*. Une petite fille en robe bleue s'y agenouillait. À chaque fois que j'aperçois une gamine portant du bleu marine, je pense à toi, même si tu détestes le bleu. Comme dirait ta mère (qui doit sûrement lire derrière ton épaule), tu as

## HUGO TO CATHERINE

Dear Catherine,

I've arrived in Rome. I've been here for a whole week now. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday. What to you seems obvious appears obscure to me. In Montreal, the weeks are not always full, they're not always good weeks. Here, every single day has been full. I was so proud of myself that I put an A on my report card. If on Monday I think really hard, if on Tuesday I take notes, if on Wednesday I draw up plans, if on Thursday I go to see art exhibits and meet with some important men, if on Friday I correct Tuesday's homework, if on Saturday I go shopping for you and your mother, if on Sunday I recopy my messy sketches of houses, it has been a a very good week. I pray to my own god that this happens to me more often. And you, Catherine, what do you tell your god?

Just a while ago, I passed by the statue in the *piazza di Spagna*. A little girl in a blue dress was kneeling in front of it. Every time I see a little girl wearing navy blue, I think of you, even if you hate blue. As your mother (who must surely be reading over your shoulder) would say, you already

des goûts déjà bien définis... trop définis. Ta mère t'expliquera ce que j'entends par là. Elle trouve que tu me ressembles, côté caractère.

Ma chambre se trouve au dernier étage de l'hôtel, j'achète du regard chacune des terrasses, cette lumière, la nuit, c'est tellement beau. Avant, les invités d'un prince nommé Torlonia habitaient dans ce palais. Je suis certain que tu te découvrirais une âme de princesse ! Au restaurant, on sert des pâtes fraîches noyées de crème et de fromage *pepito*. Je t'assure qu'il n'y a plus de place pour le dessert après... sauf pour toi, bien sûr. J'aimerais avoir ton appétit. Tes dents toutes blanches mordent dans le nougat de la vie, ta langue sort de sa cachette à la moindre promesse de crème glacée, tes yeux scintillent lorsque tu prends place sur une banquette de restaurant. Moi j'ai l'appétit un peu grippé, fatigué. Chez Greco, je prends mon café debout, comme les autres. Si je ne me surveille pas, je vais devenir romain. Tant mieux. Tu riras de mon accent. J'aime t'entendre rire. Cela me fait beaucoup de bien, comme si tu me mettais un A dans mon bulletin. Ta mère, elle, ce sont ses yeux qui s'alanguissent que je souhaite surprendre. Je vais te faire une confidence. Lorsqu'elle est émue, les yeux de ta mère deviennent vert émeraude. Cela n'arrive plus très souvent. Pour retrouver ce trésor, j'ai fait une folie. Je lui acheté des baleines de chemise en or. Toi, veux-tu que je te ramène un manteau de zibeline d'amour ?

know exactly what you like -- too exactly. Your mother will explain what I mean by that. She finds that you are like me, that you have my character.

My room is on the top floor of the hotel, I look at the terraces, at this light, at the night, longing to buy them all, they are so beautiful. Long ago, the guests of a prince named Torlonia lived in this palace. I'm certain that you'd find the soul of a princess within yourself here! In the restaurants, they serve fresh pasta drowned in cream and *pepito* cheese. Believe me, there's no room left for dessert afterwards... except for you of course. I'd like to have your appetite. Your shiny white teeth bite into life's nougat, your tongue comes out of hiding at the very mention of ice cream, your eyes sparkle when you slide into your restaurant seat. As for me, my appetite is tired and under the weather. At Greco's, I drink my coffee standing up, like everyone else. If I don't watch myself, I'll become a Roman. So much the better. You'll laugh at my accent. I love to hear you laugh. It does me a lot of good, like you were putting an A on my report card. As for your mother, I'd like to take her eyes by surprise, those eyes that are growing so weary. I'll tell you a secret. When she's moved, your mother's eyes become emerald green. That hardly happens anymore. To find that lost treasure, I did something extravagant. I bought her a gold brooch. Catherine, do you want me to bring you back a sable love coat?

Te souviens-tu du film que nous avons regardé ensemble alors que ta mère était couchée? Des hommes, des femmes fêtaient sur un bateau de croisière lorsqu'un hippopotame leur vola leur barque... *Et vogue le navire!* Un bar porte le nom du capitaine du film, Fellini. Sur l'enseigne, on indique à l'intention des touristes que la sieste s'avère obligatoire et que le vin se boit en carafe. Le belvédère Torpéo donne rendez-vous aux amoureux et aux petites filles espiègles qui les suivent en faisant semblant d'observer les hirondelles.

Juste avant de t'écrire, je suis monté dans l'église *Santa Maria del Popolo*. J'ai pensé très fort à toi. Je t'aime, je te serre dans mes bras, pas un pouce de trop.

Papa

Do you remember the film we saw together when your mother was sleeping? Men and women were celebrating on a cruise ship when a rhinoceros<sup>1</sup> stole their lifeboat ... *And the Ship Sails On!* There is a bar here named after the film's captain, Fellini. There's a sign for tourists saying that the siesta is mandatory and that the wine is served in carafes. The Torpedo lookout is a meeting place for lovers and the mischievous girls who follow them while pretending to watch the swallows.

Just before writing you, I went into the church of *Santa Maria del Popolo*. I thought of you very hard. I love you, I hug you, not an inch too much.

Daddy

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In the film *And the Ship Sails On!*, it is actually a rhinoceros, not a hippopotamus.

Treize ans

Thirteen

## LETTRE DE CATHERINE À HUGO

Cher papa,

J'ai quitté la confortable maison de mes sept ans pour une première chambre d'hôtel sans toi. Je n'y étais pas bien. C'était serré serré sous mon chandail. Je ne savais plus quoi faire. Il faisait chaud. Il faisait froid. La fièvre n'était plus douce.

Je marcherai tout un siècle et lorsque je vais revenir, tu ne me reconnaîtras plus. « On embellit en voyageant », disais-tu. Pour le moment, j'embellis par en dedans. Mes treize ans m'élancent dans le ventre. Je n'arrête pas de parler. Patricia me répète qu'elle est déjà passée par là, qu'elle est contente d'être ma grande sœur. Je suis fâchée, rassurée en même temps. Je parle pour oublier les regards sans chaleur de maman et aussi parce que ton souvenir me réchauffe. Mon assurance et ma peur, c'est la parole. Je séduirais New York au complet pour que tu viennes voir ce que je deviens. Je ne comprends rien à ce que je deviens. Je ne sais pas si, de loin, tu aimes ce que je deviens. Je sais que ma mère, non. Même petite, elle ne m'a jamais touché le visage. Dans ta dernière lettre, tu m'expliques qu'elle n'était pas dans une posture pour créer des liens. Elle me regardait comme si elle regardait les yeux de quelqu'un qui n'existe pas. Encore

## CATHERINE TO HUGO

Dear Dad,

I've left my comfortable childhood home for my first hotel room without you. I wasn't very comfortable there. It was really really tight under my sweater. I didn't know what to do anymore. It got hot. It got cold. A fever that was no longer gentle.

I'll walk a century's time and when I return, you won't recognize me anymore. You said, "Travelling makes you more beautiful." For now, I'm becoming more beautiful on the inside. My thirteen years are stabbing me in the stomach. I talk incessantly. Patricia keeps telling me that she's gone through this, that she's happy to be my big sister. I'm mad and reassured at the same time. I talk so I can forget mom's cold glances and also because your memory warms me. Speech is both my comfort and my fear. I'd seduce all of New York so that you could come see what I'm becoming. I don't at all understand what I'm becoming. I don't know if, from afar, you like what I'm becoming. I know that my mother doesn't. Even when I was little, she never caressed my face. In your last letter, you explained that she wasn't in a position to get close to anyone. She used to look at me as if she were looking into the eyes of someone who doesn't exist. Even now,

aujourd'hui, lorsqu'elle me nourrit, elle me dévore.

J'espère que tu m'accueilleras sans reproche. Bien sûr, j'aurais pu faire comme d'habitude, sortir ma bicyclette, pédaler jusqu'à ce que le caoutchouc fonde. Ici, je remplis le vide, c'est une tâche, comme à l'école.

Je voudrais être différente mais l'écart entre ce que je suis et ce que je veux être n'arrête pas de grandir. Je n'arrête pas de grandir. Lorsque Patricia me jette dans mes propres bras puis dans les siens, en m'affirmant que je suis belle, je ne la crois pas. Je rêve de petites broches dans mon sexe parce que le jour les Noirs que je croise me demandent de faire l'amour avec eux en anglais. Des fois, j'ai le goût de dire oui. Patricia me suggère d'attendre, mon adolescence frappe assez fort comme ça. C'est vrai. La petite fille de mes songes ne se souvient plus de son nom. Catherine. La vie de Catherine tombe comme un château de cartes. Mon jeu de patience se mêle à New York, ses bruits, ses regards, plus fort que je ne m'entende plus.

Avec Patricia, je suis allée contempler mon idole, la statue de la Liberté, puis le pont de Brooklyn et de Manhattan. Patricia aime beaucoup les ponts, les musées aussi, c'est avec eux qu'elle se retrouve, qu'elle dit. Je comprends. Je suis restée postée quinze minutes devant le *Nu descendant*

when she feeds me, she devours me.

I hope you'll greet me without reproach. Sure I could've done like I usually do and take my bike out and pedal until I burn rubber. Here, I fill the emptiness, it's an assignment, just like at school.

I'd like to be different but the distance between what I am and what I want to be keeps on growing. I keep on growing. When Patricia makes me hug myself, and then hugs me, assuring me that I'm pretty, I don't believe her. I dream that there are pins stuck in my vagina because during the day, Black guys walking by ask me to make love with them in English. Sometimes, I feel like saying yes. Patricia suggests that I wait, says that my adolescence is hitting me hard enough as it is. She's right. The little girl in my dreams doesn't remember her name anymore. Catherine. Catherine's life is crumbling like a house of cards. My game of solitaire is being shuffled into New York, its noises, its looks, so loudly that I can't hear myself anymore.

I went with Patricia to contemplate my idol, the Statue of Liberty, as well as the Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges. Patricia really likes bridges, and museums too, she finds herself within them, so she claims. I understand. I stood for fifteen minutes in front of Mr. Marcel Duchamp's *Nu*

*un escalier* de monsieur Marcel Duchamp. Après, on a obtenu deux places de justesse et j'ai pleuré en voyant *West Side Story*. Je pleure toujours quand je pense à toi et que tu n'es pas là. Tu es derrière l'écran, moi devant. C'est de New York que je te regarde le mieux. Comme me suggère Patricia, je t'idéalise peut-être moins? À Montréal, je suis aussi béate devant toi qu'à New York devant l'Empire State Building.

D'habitude, du rêve-bonbon traîne au bout de mes doigts. Il n'en reste plus. J'ai commandé une salade de saison au restaurant Window of the world, il en restait mais la saison était morte. Avec le temps, mon cœur devient tendre comme un œuf à la coque. L'amour, c'est trop sérieux pour qu'on en rit comme maman le fait. Patricia rit de l'amour, mais avec amour. Lorsqu'elle ironise: «Les hommes sont des salauds exceptionnels qui tiennent une place prépondérante dans ma vie de plastique pétrifié», je la sens aussi prête à leur pardonner qu'à leur dire leur fait. Ça me donne le goût d'être en amour, de me coller au flanc d'un garçon pour n'en plus partir. Comme tu vois, je réfléchis sur moi-même. Ça risque d'être long, je suis pataude. Petite, lorsque je feuilletais l'album de famille, je ne me reconnaissais pas. En ce moment, je sais que c'est mon ombre qui écrit. Peut-être faut-il passer par là pour... s'aimer?

Catherine

*descendant un escalier.* Afterwards, we just managed to get two tickets and I cried watching *West Side Story*. I always cry when I think of you and you're not there. You're behind the screen, I'm in front. It's from New York that I see you best. As Patricia suggests, perhaps I don't idealize you as much? In Montreal, I'm as overwhelmed by you as I am in New York in front of the Empire State Building.

I usually have sugar-coated daydreams floating around in my head. There aren't any left. I ordered a seasonal salad at the Window of the world restaurant, they had some left but the season was dead. As time goes by, my heart is becoming as tender as a soft boiled egg. Love is much too serious to joke about like mom does. Patricia jokes about love, but with love. When she says sarcastically, "Men are outstanding bastards who have a preponderant place in my petrified plastic life", I feel like she's just as prepared to forgive them as she is to give them a piece of her mind. It makes me want to be in love, to be by a boy's side and never leave him. As you can see, I'm thinking about myself. It could take some time, I'm quite clumsy. When I was little and looked at the family photo album, I didn't recognize myself. Right now, I know that it's my shadow who's writing this. Maybe you need to go through that to ... love yourself.

Catherine

## LETTRE D'HUGO À CATHERINE

Catherine,

Je ne sais pas pourquoi je t'ai laissé partir. Patricia m'a dit que votre hôtel était coté quatre étoiles: j'ai choisi de la croire mais... New York! Déjà à Montréal, j'éprouve de la difficulté à te retrouver. Parfois je suis comme ta mère. Je me sens tellement menacé qu'au dernier moment je m'esquive. Tu m'as précédé, tu es partie... seulement deux semaines, c'est vrai. Mais ton absence suspend mon chant. Tu m'empêches d'être ton père, mon identité d'homme s'en trouve déracinée. La sève ne coule plus. Pourtant, lorsque tu me laisses t'approcher, je me rappelle du temps où ta mère et moi avions le séisme ravageur. Drôle de coïncidence, la lune de miel brillait à Manhattan. Dans une chambre minable, nous avons fait l'amour comme des dieux un peu perdus, avec la peur de ne pas mourir et des yeux qui se cherchent des yeux, illuminés. Nous sommes revenus piqués par les moustiques et la rage de tout comprendre. J'espère que New York t'invitera toi aussi à sortir de toi-même. Arrange-toi pour que ton mépris aboutisse à la morgue. Moi, il y a longtemps que je t'aime, jamais je ne laisserai filer la mémoire,

## HUGO TO CATHERINE

Catherine,

I don't know why I let you leave. Patricia told me that you'd be staying at a four star hotel: I chose to believe her but... New York! Even in Montreal, I have trouble reaching you. Sometimes I'm like your mother. I feel so threatened that at the last minute I escape. You've preceded me, you've left... only for two weeks, I know. But your absence silences my song. You're preventing me from being your father, and it has uprooted my male identity. The sap has stopped running. Yet, when you let me get close to you, I remember the time your mother and I moved the earth with our passion. What a bizarre coincidence, the honey moon was shining in Manhattan. In a shabby room, we made love like gods, a little lost, fearful of never dying and eyes seeking eyes, illuminated. We came back as excited as kids and furiously yearning to understand everything. I hope that New York will also entice you to come out of your shell. Make sure that you drop your contempt off at the morgue. Catherine, I've loved you for a long time, I'll never let the memories fly

même si tu me tendais l'arrache-moi. Reviens-moi vite!

Papa

away, even if you tried to wrench them from me.  
Come back to me soon!

Dad

Dix-huit ans

Eighteen

## LETTRE DE CATHERINE À HUGO

Papa,

Je voudrais écrire ce qui ne se dit pas. Je m'essaie avec toi et ne retiens que la lumière des voix, la maison plus étrangère qu'une chambre d'hôtel. On dirait qu'il n'arrête pas de pleuvoir. Avec Sigfried, j'aimais la pluie. Nos baisers faisaient de la buée sur la fenêtre. «C'est signe que l'amour durera», me murmurait Sigfried. Il mentait. J'aurais aimé perdre élégamment. À en croire maman, si j'apprends à ne rien faire subsister d'une relation, la douleur reprendra sa dimension ponctuelle. Je ne veux pas apprendre à dormir avec ma haine. La haine reconforte, on se sent posséder une existence. Sigfried savait rassurer. Je m'ennuie de ses lampes Tiffany, ses statuettes hindoues, son corps dans le noir. Là-bas, la routine disparaissait. J'étais arrivée à croire que chez lui deviendrait bientôt chez moi.

Je bois mon Coke à la cuillère, crache les bulles jusqu'à pressentir l'origine de la rupture. J'avais trop besoin de lui? Je renie mes envies, elles ne sont pas si vraies que ça. La main collée au miroir, je laboure ma chair, ne reconnais que les voix aimées. La tienne, celle de maman, un peu.

## CATHERINE TO HUGO

Dad,

I'd like to write what's not supposed to be said. I try with you and I remember only the light of voices, a house stranger than a hotel room. It seems as if it will rain forever. With Sigfried, I liked the rain. Our kisses painted the windows with fog. Sigfried would whisper, "It's a sign of lasting love." He was lying. I would've liked to lose graciously. According to mom, if I learn to forget the relationship, the pain will become intermittent again. I don't want to learn how to sleep with my hate. Hate is comforting, it makes you feel like you own an existence. Sigfried knew how to comfort. I miss his Tiffany lamps, his Hindu statuettes, his body in the dark. With him, life's little routines disappeared. I'd begun to believe that his place would soon become mine.

I spoon feed myself Coke, spit out bubbles until I think I know why we broke up. I needed him too much? I renounce my desires, they aren't as real as all that. My hand pressed against the mirror, I knead my flesh, recognize only the voices I love. Yours, mom's, well, a little. I'd like to

Je voudrais comprendre ce qui me touche, toucher ce que je comprends. Les gestes ne viennent pas. J'aurai toujours les larmes dans les yeux, née femme et dans la lune.

Sigfried l'astronaute a terminé sa visite. Sous mes pantalons, il n'y a plus que mon sexe. Maman me traite de putain. Je lui réplique que je préfère être une fille de mauvaise vie qu'une fausse vierge comme elle. Après, je la console et lui chuchote que lorsque j'irai mieux, je m'habillerai pour tous les anges de la terre. Je lui promets de gémir convenablement. À toi je ne promets rien. Je ne sens pas le besoin de mentir.

Avec Sigfried ma peau brûlait d'un feu doux. Quand je l'ai rencontré, cela faisait seulement deux ans que je regardais les gens dans les yeux. Il m'a appris à me voir. J'ai ouvert les paumes comme une envie de grandir. En me traversant du regard, il a tracé au milieu de ma main des cercles avec son pouce, j'ai compris: «J'ai le goût de toi.» Sa chair appelait la chaleur d'un je t'aime. Je me laissais atteindre. On ne m'atteint qu'en me touchant. Quand je refusais, je me sentais piteuse comme une chienne qui ne lèche pas son écuelle jusqu'au bout. Aujourd'hui son corps, lieu d'apaisement, est loin de moi mais je continue de m'y reconnaître. Seul le visage demeure clos. Mon masque tremble. Je le jette. Mes yeux tombent à la renverse. Ils ne

understand what touches me, touch what I understand. The movements don't come. I'll always have tears in my eyes, born a woman and into a dream.

Sigfried the sandman has left. Under my clothes there's nothing but desire. Mom treats me like a slut. I tell her that I'd rather be a slut than a fake virgin like her. Afterwards, I console her by telling her that when I'm feeling better my demons will disappear. I promise to moan respectably. I don't promise you anything. I don't feel the need to lie.

With Sigfried my skin was alight with a gentle fire. When I met him, I'd only been looking people in the eye for two years. He taught me to see myself. I opened my palms as a desire to grow. As his eyes looked right through me, he traced circles with his thumb in my palm, and I understood, "I want you." His flesh called out for the warmth of an "I love you". I let him affect me. You can affect me only by touching me. When I refused, I felt as pitiful as a dog who doesn't lick her bowl clean. Today, his body, a place of comfort, is far from me but I still recognize myself in it. Only the face remains obscure. My mask trembles. I throw it off. My eyes are stupefied.

savent plus qui ils sont. On n'a pas de mots pour cerner la mort, mais des morts pour cerner les mots, on en a trop. Mes yeux sont si petits. J'avance sans bottes dans un marécage aux algues fines, nauséabondes, gluantes. Je vis de métaphores et d'eau fraîche. Ah ah! Je ris de mes bévues, chatouille les lèvres de l'eau. Narcisse et toi aurez bien menti. J'embrasse mon image sans me noyer. C'est bien ça le pire.

Maman claironne: «Un de perdu, dix de retrouvés!» Si je me noyais, penserait-elle la même chose? J'aimerais tant poser mes yeux sur les récifs du désir. Peut-être qu'avec un autre, j'oublierais la mort qui descend dans mon sexe trop bien caché. Je ne m'imagine même plus l'intimité d'un autre. Mes barques sont sans quai. Je suis sèche de douleur. Sigfried est parti... toi aussi.

Catherine

They don't know who they are anymore. No words to circumscribe death, yet too many deaths to circumscribe words. My eyes are so small. I wade, bootless, into a swamp of delicate, nauseating, sticky seaweed. I live on metaphors and cool water. Ha ha! I laugh at my blunders, tease the water's edge. You and Narcissus have created a great lie. I embrace my reflection without drowning. That's the worst thing about this.

Mom trumpets "There are plenty of fish in the sea!" If I drowned, would she still think the same thing? I'd so much like to lay my eyes on the reefs of desire. Maybe with someone else, I'd forget the death descending into my well hidden flesh. I can't even imagine the intimacy of another. My ships have no ports. I'm dry with pain. Sigfried is gone... so are you.

Catherine.

## LETTRE D'HUGO À CATHERINE

Ma petite Camille,

Je t'appelle ainsi parce que je viens de parcourir le musée Rodin et qu'à travers les sculptures de la pièce arrière, je retrouvais l'élan de Camille Claudel. Son souffle a été porté loin du rivage mais parfois, j'ai l'impression qu'il revient en toi. Ton entêtement, ta fragilité, ta conviction qu'un jour tu iras loin me font penser à elle, *La Suppliante*. Tendue vers l'autre. Je suis content que Rodin — pardon Sigfried — soit parti. Il t'arrachait des morceaux. Rassure-toi, je suis triste aussi. Bien sûr, je compose trop souvent mes litanies à partir de ces débris. Les tiens, les miens ? Je ne serai pas là pour fêter tes dix-huit ans. En ce moment, je vis moi aussi des jours importants. Pour la première fois, regarder le vide m'émeut. Avant, le vide ne voulait rien dire pour moi, juste un terme à la mode, qu'il fait bien de prononcer devant des collègues... Maintenant je me tais, être touché par le vide fait partie de ces expériences si précieuses que je ne veux les partager qu'avec toi. Je parcours beaucoup de galeries d'art pour examiner la gestion de l'espace. À chaque fois, j'écris devant la dix-huitième œuvre l'incipit d'une lettre. Je l'épingle soigneusement à la première page du

## HUGO TO CATHERINE

My Little Camille,

I call you Camille because I've just visited the musée Rodin, where the sculptures in the back room attest to the fervour of Camille Claudel. Her breath has been carried far from the bank but sometimes, I get the impression that it's been revived in you. Your stubbornness, your fragility, your conviction that one day you'll go far, remind me of her, *La Suppliante*. Reaching out for the other. I'm glad Rodin - sorry, Sigfried - left. He was tearing pieces out of you. Believe me, I'm sad, too. Of course, I too often compose my litanies from such debris. Yours, mine? I won't be there to celebrate your eighteenth birthday. These days I too am going through an important period in my life. For the first time, looking into the emptiness moves me. Before, I had no idea what emptiness was, it was just a trendy term that was impressive to use with colleagues... Now I keep quiet; being touched by emptiness is one of those experiences that are so precious, I only want to share them with you. I visit a lot of art galleries to see how they use space. Every time, in front of the eighteenth work of art, I write the incipit of a letter. I carefully attach it to the first page of the

carnet des visiteurs. Tu commences ainsi ta vie, multipliée à l'infini.

À chaque voyage, je vois combien je tiens à toi, même si de plus en plus de secrets nous séparent... Je suis sûr que ces secrets portent des prénoms. J'aimerais qu'on en parle à mon retour. Ici, chez mon ami d'enfance, je dîne sur le patio, m'installant au plus près de la nuit. Les plaies lèchent la lune, se cicatrisent en un rien de temps. Je palpe mes blessures, leur existence me rassure, elles m'accompagnent lorsque j'essaie d'entrer en contact avec toi et que je n'y arrive pas. Je tourne en rond, ta lumière de femme m'éblouit. J'attends que tu jongles avec elle, même si la peur, le désir te fendent les hanches. Ne pousse pas les cris d'alarme habituels. Aie assez d'intuition pour parler de ce qui n'a pas eu lieu. Comprendre n'est pas tout. Ressentir. Même si tu ne sais pas ce que tu sens ou ce que tu sais. Cela deviendra de plus en plus semblable. L'harmonie viendra te saluer au pays de l'enfance et du pain frais. Tes nuits tourbillonneront sans Sigfried. Le dépouillement demande du temps, les accessoires ne cesseront pas d'être ce qu'ils sont, ils t'apparaîtront simplement moins nécessaires. Tu te déplaceras plus lentement : allegretto. Tu sculpteras, Catherine.

Papa

visitor's registry. Thus you begin your life, multiplied to infinity.

Each time I travel, I realize just how much I'm attached to you, even if more and more secrets separate us... I'm certain that these secrets have first names. I'd like to talk about them with you when I return. Here, at my childhood friend's, I eat on the patio, settling in as close to the night as possible. The wounds lick the moon, heal in no time at all. I touch my wounds, their existence reassures me, they accompany me when I try to make contact with you and don't succeed. I go round in circles, the glow of your womanhood makes me dizzy. I'm waiting for you to play with this light, even if fear and desire slash through your hips. Don't protest in the usual loud way. Have enough intuition to talk about what didn't happen. Understanding is not the be all and end all. Feel. Even if you don't know what you're feeling or what you know. It'll all become increasingly similar. Harmony will come greet you in the land of childhood and fresh bread. Your nights will reel without Sigfried. Shedding takes time, accessories will always be just that, accessories, they'll just appear less essential. You'll move more slowly: allegretto. Catherine, you will sculpt.

Dad

Vingt-sept ans

Twenty-seven

## LETTRE DE CATHERINE À HUGO

Cher père,

Je ne t'écris pas d'Amsterdam. Je ne suis pas rendue à mon nouveau port d'attache. Je survole le monde de haut, papa, et ma vie aussi. Je redeviens pimbêche, absolue, une vraie petite fille. Je n'ai pas dit ta petite fille.

Mes paupières se gonflent de mémoire. Est-ce que j'étais une enfant laide, je veux dire, fermée? Moi je ne m'en souviens plus ou peut-être trop. Celle qui a écrit: «On ne peut pas à la fois savoir et ne pas savoir» a bien menti. Je n'en suis plus à une contradiction près. Adolescente, je récitais ma prière chaque matin pour plaire à maman et faisais dialoguer Simone de Beauvoir avec Jean-Paul Sartre le soir devant une télésérie. Maintenant... Ratée, la petite enfance. Ne pousse pas de grands cris, même si j'exagère. Comprends que pour la première fois de ma vie, je me permets d'être en colère. Contre toi, avec toi. À la naissance de Marlène, lorsque j'ai réalisé que la petite était, j'ai encore de la difficulté à l'écrire, mort-née, ce n'est pas à la terre entière que j'en ai voulu mais à toi. Ce n'était pas le destin, c'était toi. J'ai toujours été convaincue que je me suis séparée de Patricia

## CATHERINE TO HUGO

Dear Father,

I'm not writing from Amsterdam. I haven't reached my new home base. I'm viewing the world from high up, Dad, and my life too. I'm once again becoming haughty, absolute, a true little girl. I didn't say your little girl.

My eyelids are swelling with memories. Was I an ugly child, I mean, uncommunicative? As for me, I don't remember anymore, or maybe I remember too much. The woman who wrote, "It's impossible to know and not know at the same time" was really lying. One contradiction more or less. As a teenager, I said my prayer every morning to please mom and staged conversations between Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre at night while I watched miniseries on TV. Now... My childhood, botched. Don't yell, even if I'm exaggerating. Understand that for the first time in my life, I'm letting myself be angry. Angry at you, angry with you. When Marlene was born, when I realized that she was, I still have trouble writing it, stillborn, I didn't resent the whole world, just you. It wasn't fate, it was you. I was always convinced that I separated from Patricia

à cause de ta désapprobation insidieuse, en forme de silence. Je ne te l'ai pas pardonné. Et cette femme en devenir, tu me l'enlevais aussi, par ricochet. «Une petite fille? Tu n'es pas faite pour avoir des enfants.» Comme si tu étais jaloux du rapport privilégié que j'entretenais avec certaines femmes. Comme si le danger de me perdre se trouvait là. C'est peut-être vrai. Ce sont des femmes qui m'ont ouvert les yeux. Peut-être que, ce faisant, elles m'ont séparée de l'image-signet que j'avais de toi. Tu te glissais à l'intérieur de chacun de mes livres de chevet.

Je n'ai pas déchiré de rideaux, je n'ai pas cassé d'assiettes, je n'ai pas renversé de lampes, je n'ai pas jeté de photos de nous deux, je n'ai pas reproché à mes amants d'être si différents de toi, si pareils au fond, je n'ai pas détruit ces cartes postales qui ne disaient rien en voulant trop m'en dire, je n'ai pas poussé les hauts cris lorsque tu m'as parlé d'Édouard, je n'ai pas accepté le poste de consultante en architecture que l'on m'offrait à Boston, je ne me suis pas éloignée de toi, non. Mais je t'ai éloigné de moi : j'ai mis la distance qui manquait. Non seulement tu chassais la même proie mais tu me voulais pareille à toi. Toute différence te dérange. Tu m'as volé ma mère en la rendant absente à ses propres envies. C'est trop. Édouard, qu'a-t-il éveillé chez toi? De la frime, ton désir pour ma mère? Et pour moi? Mieux que ma mère tu

because of the insidious disapproval conveyed by your silence. I never forgave you for that. And this woman to be, you were taking her away from me as well, though indirectly. "A little girl? You weren't made to have children." As if you were jealous of the privileged relationships that I had with certain women. As if the danger of losing me lay therein. That may be true. They were women who opened my eyes. Maybe in so doing, they weaned me from the bookmark image I had of you. You, who always wound up between the pages of every book I had on my night table.

I didn't rip the curtains, I didn't break any plates, I didn't knock over any lamps, I didn't trash any pictures of the two of us, I didn't reproach my lovers for being so different from you, yet fundamentally so similar, I didn't destroy the post cards that said nothing while trying to tell me too much, I didn't protest when you told me about Edouard, I didn't accept that position as an architectural consultant in Boston, I didn't distance myself from you, no. But I distanced you from me: I created the distance that was missing. Not only were you chasing the same prey but you wanted me to be the same as you. Any differences disturb you. You stole my mother from me by rendering her unconscious of her own desires. You went too far. What did Edouard arouse in you? Was it all just an act, your desire for my mother? And for me? Better than my mother you were all

étais tout elle plus toi, mon père. Je sais que rien ne t'aurait fait plus plaisir que de me montrer comment intégrer l'Esthétisme avec un grand E au banal plan d'une usine. Tu te serais révélé un fort bon pédagogue... J'aurais eu l'impression de n'avoir rien pu penser sans toi. Une vraie petite fille.

Mes vingt-sept ans chavirent. Sous ton regard, les fautes se multiplient dans ma dictée, j'entends une autre que moi se dire: «Rentre ton ventre, la voix que tu détestes va sortir sinon, le cri d'horreur va dépasser l'entendement, ça jaillira en tous sens puis ça va mourir.» Marlène. Avant d'accoucher, je pensais pouvoir terrifier mes monstres, être sous protection ailleurs que dans l'étouffement. On en pense des choses avant de mettre au monde plus grand que soi, d'être ravie, inquiète de ces yeux qui fixent tout ce qui tremble. Même morte, les yeux de la petite me regardaient. En dedans. Comme toi seul sais le faire.

Jamais je n'aurais imaginé que le pire de mes rêves se déroulerait ici-bas. J'ai craché l'enfant comme on crache le lait, en pure perte. L'enfant: un vitrail, des morceaux de couleurs dispersés. La chasse d'eau a été tirée. Mon ventre est un pichet vide. J'ai soif. Je lèche le vomi de ma voix... Oh! Pourquoi suis-je si dure? Toi qui sais si bien faire les nœuds coulants, dis-moi ce qui, entre Marlène

of her plus yourself, my father. I know that nothing would've pleased you more than to show me how to integrate Aestheticism with a capital A into the banal blueprint for a plant. You might've proved to be a great pedagogue... I might've had the impression that I couldn't think without you. A true little girl.

My twenty-seven years, in a tailspin. Under your watchful eye, I keep making mistakes in my dictation, I hear a woman who is not me saying to herself, "Suck in your stomach, or else the voice you loathe will escape, the shriek of horror will surpass comprehension, it will spew out everywhere, then die." Marlene. Before giving birth I thought I could terrify my demons, find protection in something other than repression. Lots of things go through your mind before bringing something bigger than yourself into this world, before being overjoyed, and worried about those eyes that follow everything that moves. Even as she lay dead, her eyes were looking at me. Seeing inside me. Like only you can do.

I'd never have imagined that the worst of my dreams would take place in this world. I spat the child out like you spit out milk. Pure loss. The child: a stained glass window, fragments of scattered colours. Everything down the drain. My stomach is an empty pitcher. I'm thirsty. I'm licking the vomit of my voice... Oh! Why am I so harsh? Dad, you know how to tie slipknots so well, tell me what it was between Marlene and me

et moi aujourd'hui, entre moi et Patricia autrefois,  
n'a pas tenu.

### *Le lendemain*

Ma colère est épuisée. Je lèche le miroir à  
grands coups d'enfance. Mon image se fait si douce  
que pour la première fois depuis bien des regards,  
j'ai envie de me caresser.

Je profite de cette trêve pour te dire que la  
magie existe. J'ai revu Patricia juste avant  
Amsterdam et l'accouchement. Je vais te raconter  
le hasard à ta manière. Tu sais, tes longues histo-  
res ensommeillées m'habitent encore...

Patricia dessinait beaucoup. Elle y croyait.  
Bien des pique-niques ont eu lieu puis, plus de  
rêves, l'herbe était coupée. Il y a eu cette exposi-  
tion. Patricia est entrée. Je l'ai reconnue à sa cu-  
rieuse façon de poser ses mains sur mes paupières.  
Elle m'a dit: «Tu vois le blanc de mes yeux? Il était  
triste. Maintenant que tu es là, il s'enroule de joie.»  
Nous avons partagé un coussin. J'ai compris pour-  
quoi elle ne dessinait plus. Tout rêve se refusait à  
elle. Elle a changé, Patricia. D'une voix d'élève  
timide, elle m'a demandé: «Reste un peu plus  
longtemps...» J'ai ouvert un livre de rosé pour qu'on

now, between me and Patricia back then, that snapped.

*The Next Day*

I've exhausted my anger. I lick the mirror with the loving strokes of childhood. My image looks back at me so softly that for the first time in a long while of looking, I feel like caressing myself.

I'm taking advantage of this respite to tell you that there is such thing as magic. I saw Patricia again just before Amsterdam and the delivery. I'll tell you about the chance meeting in your own way. You know, your long sleepy stories still live on within me...

Patricia used to draw a lot. She believed in it. There were many picnics and then, no more dreams, the grass was cut. There was that art exhibit. Patricia walked in. I recognized her by her curious way of covering my eyes with her hands. She said to me, "See the whites of my eyes? They were sad. Now that you're here, they're alight with happiness." We shared a cushion. It became clear why she wasn't drawing anymore. Dreams refused to come to her. Patricia has changed. In a little girl's timid voice she asked me, "Stay a little longer..." I opened a litre of rosé

puisse boire le rose usé de nos vies, mettre du blanc mousseux, mousseux dedans...

P.-S.: J'aimerais qu'à mon retour nous parlions de nos griefs respectifs. Ce sera maladroit mais ce sera dit. T'as intérêt à t'enrager contre moi d'ici là! Moi je suis prête.

Catherine

so we could drink the wilted roses of our lives, mix  
in some sparkling white, sparkling inside...

P.S. When I return, I'd like to talk about our  
respective grievances. It'll be awkward but it'll be  
out in the open. You'd do well to get good and  
mad with me between now and then! I'm ready for  
it.

Catherine

## LETTRE D'HUGO À CATHERINE

Chère Catherine,

Comme toujours avant de t'écrire, je regarde une photo de toi. Ta nuque fait si bien ressortir ta beauté qu'elle efface celle des autres. Tu irradies. Je ne te l'ai jamais dit mais j'aurais voulu que tu aies un frère. Peut-être pour me rapprocher de ta mère, à nouveau assister pendant neuf mois à l'emprise du corps sur son esprit. J'ai attendu longtemps. Hugo II n'est pas venu. Puis tu as été pour nous tout ce que nous espérions. Oui, pour nous. Ta mère aussi. Pour moi, tu étais le premier témoin. Tu savais inventer la complicité. J'improvisais des mauvais coups pour que tu me fasses les yeux doux. Plus tard, tu m'as appris à tirer partie du doute plutôt qu'à le déjouer. Peu à peu j'ai pris mes rêves au sérieux.

Un jour, je t'écrirai l'histoire d'Édouard, cet homme très beau qui me hantait la nuit et venait me retrouver dans mon lit à cinq heures du matin. Un homme de rêve, si doux lorsque je le nommais, si attirant lorsqu'il se sentait menacé. Il disait : « La création permet de se sentir moins menacé. » Pour l'instant, mon sens de la pudeur m'empêche de te raconter ce conte des *Milles et Une nuits*. Parfois, je

## HUGO TO CATHERINE

Dear Catherine,

As usual before writing you, I look at a photo of you. The curve of your neck brings out your beauty so wonderfully, cancelling out any other beauty. You're beaming. I've never told you this, but I would've liked you to have a brother. Maybe it was so that I could get close to your mother, and once again see her body possess her soul for nine months. I waited a long time. Hugo junior never came. And you were everything we'd hoped for. Yes, we. Your mother too. To me, you were the first accomplice. You knew how to create complicity. I came up with pranks so that you would give me that sheepish look. Later on, you taught me how to take advantage of doubt rather than getting around it. Little by little, I began taking my dreams seriously.

One day, I'll write you about my affair with Edouard, that very handsome man who haunted my nights and crawled into my bed at five o'clock in the morning. A dream man, so tender when I called his name, so appealing when he felt threatened. He used to say, "Creating makes you feel less threatened." For the time being, my sense of modesty prevents me from telling you that story right out of the *Arabian Nights*. Sometimes, I

me demande combien de personnages-tabous contient notre inconscient. Pour les découvrir, toi et moi avons décidé de créer. «Créer, c'est pour qu'il en reste quelque chose, s'aimer soi-même», affirmait le passager du petit matin. «Si tu ne t'aimes pas à travers ton œuvre, c'est simple, tu ne crées pas!» Je tiens à te dire que cela vaut la peine que tu crées car moi, même si je le souhaite très fort, je ne peux pas t'aimer pour deux.

Papa

wonder how many taboo characters live in our subconscious. In order to discover them, you and I have decided to create. "You create so you leave something behind, love yourself", used to say the passenger arriving at dawn. "If you don't love yourself through your work, you're simply not creating!" I want you to know that it's worth the effort for you to create because, even though I want to very much, I can't love you for two.

Dad

Trente-trois ans

Thirty-three

## LETTRE DE CATHERINE À HUGO

Papa,

Je n'arrive pas à dormir. Cette chambre est un four et je cuis subito presto. J'ai décidé de t'écrire, je sens que c'est toi qui me devineras le mieux. J'ignore comment te parler de mon amie Patricia... mon amante. Oui, tu as bien lu, j'ai découvert le tendre de l'intérieur de sa peau, les petites surfaces dures aussi. J'ai peur. T'en parler me gêne mais je n'arrête pas de penser à elle. Le flot ne s'arrête que lorsque je tiens mon petit garçon entre mes bras, que j'apprête des légumes avec de nouvelles épices ou que je me balance dans l'escarpolette du jardin d'un mouvement vif, vif... Je m'envole. Pour un moment je ne pense plus. Autrement, je me sens si vulnérable. Si on m'avait prédit que je vivrais une histoire semblable il y a six ans, j'aurais protesté vivement. Il ne fallait pas que cela m'arrive. Moi, endosser les mêmes choix amoureux que toi?! Je ne suis plus aussi fière maintenant. Je me laisse basculer mais j'ai encore peur. J'ai beau m'être soustraite aux regards, m'être choisie moi et advienne que pourra... Je ne veux pas perdre Christian.

Christian. Une demande dans les yeux, parfois une offrande, tellement triste. Christian. Son regard

## CATHERINE TO HUGO

Dad,

I can't sleep. This room is an oven and I'm baking *subito presto*. I've decided to write to you, I feel like you're the one who can best figure me out. I don't know how to talk to you about my friend Patricia... my lover. Yes, you read it right, I've discovered the tender inside of her skin, as well as the small hard surfaces. I'm scared. Talking to you about it is embarrassing but I can't stop thinking about her. The waves stop only when I'm holding my little boy in my arms, when I'm preparing vegetables with new spices or when I'm swinging in the backyard, with quick, quick motions...I'm flying. For a moment I don't think anymore. Otherwise I feel so vulnerable. If I'd been told six years ago that I'd be experiencing such a thing, I'd have protested wildly. This couldn't happen to me. Me, taking the same route in love as you?! I've swallowed some of my pride now. I let myself be bowled over but I'm still scared. However much I've tried to escape the looks of others, to put myself first, come what may... I don't want to lose Christian.

Christian. A pleading look in his eyes, sometimes an offering, so sad. Christian. A look

du ventre au cœur. Christian perd souffle et je perds souffle avec lui. Il lape la lumière de mes yeux, son éclipse me tire par en dedans. Je me sens pleine et la faim me saisit. Il vit de mon affection immédiate, m'entraîne dans sa belle débâcle. Dans l'azur de mon sexe il se cherche... me trouve. Mon cri rejoint sa jouissance.

Parfois, sans savoir pourquoi, nous sommes bien des journées entières. Entre nous, jamais rien de prévu sauf le calme qui n'en finit pas de se dérouler. Et l'enfant. Notre enfant. Christian a tout de suite adoré Frédéric. Moi, je l'ai aimé moins facilement que mes rêves le croyaient. Maintenant, être sa mère me comble. Je suis heureuse que Christian en soit le père. Sur la route je veux prendre mon temps pour lui dire combien je chéris les cailloux qu'il frôle.

Lorsque Christian aime, il en inscrit partout les signes: de l'établi au salon, de la cuisine à la salle de gymnastique en passant par mes cuisses. Par un geste du bras, un regard, il sait rendre la vie simple... un instant. Ces secondes sont précieuses puisque complètement liées au bonheur. Même si je dois apprendre à sculpter un quotidien à quatre mains dans de la terre si dure qu'elle en devient friable une fois cuite, même si ce rite fête chacune des figurines, c'est avec Christian que j'ai le goût de... Le goût, voilà. J'ai retrouvé le goût d'être moi.

that goes straight to my heart. Christian loses his breath and I lose mine with him. He laps up the light of my eyes, his eclipse draws me in. I feel full and hunger takes hold. He lives on my immediate affection, draws me into his fine disaster. In the azure of my body he seeks himself... finds me. My cry greets his rapture.

Sometimes, without knowing why, we're happy together for entire days. Just the two of us, nothing planned save the calm that never stops unfolding. And the child. Our child. Christian loved Frederick right away. My love for him did not come as easily as I had dreamed. Now being his mother overjoys me. I'm happy that Christian is the father. On the road I want to take my time to tell him how much I cherish the pebbles his foot touches.

When Christian loves, he leaves its mark everywhere: from the workbench to the living room, from the kitchen to the workout room and my thighs. With the motion of an arm, a look, he knows how to make life simple... for an instant. Those seconds are precious... completely linked to happiness. Even if I have to learn to sculpt my daily life with four hands and out of clay so hard that it crumbles in the kiln, even if this ritual cracks every single figurine, it's with Christian that I feel like... Feel, that's it. Feel like being myself, once again.

Alors pourquoi Patricia, si je n'ai plus le goût d'être elle? Cette incartade me fait douter de l'amour. Papa, raconte-moi mon histoire, j'en ai perdu des bribes. Je me suis égarée... Recolle mes morceaux.

Catherine

Then why Patricia if I don't feel like being  
her anymore? This escapade makes me doubt love.  
Daddy, tell me my story, I've lost pieces of it.  
I've lost myself... Put me back together again.

Catherine

## LETTRE D'HUGO À CATHERINE

Très chère Catherine,

Je suis dans un cycle de ruptures. Tout y passe. Je recense jusqu'aux bruits du vide. Il fut un temps où je me ramassais en morceaux mais au moins je me ramassais. Un père se relève toujours. Aujourd'hui que tu as un fils, je dérive. Il me rend vieux, ton gamin, je n'ai plus d'énergie et il faudrait s'inventer autre...

Bangkok: un gigantesque bazar, une musique rancinante. Bangkok: un talisman oublié sur une chaise de liège, un turban à gauche du plateau d'oranges. Bangkok: te le décrire ne suscite pas nécessairement l'émotion même si cela en témoigne alors je recommence la première phrase... Je ne voudrais pourtant pas ressasser d'arcs-en-ciel souffreteux devant toi.

Je laisse mon torse éloquent, ravageur, s'approcher du soleil et y retrouver son ardeur. À Bangkok comme dans les ghettos, les corps brûlent bien, les esprits beaucoup moins. Dans la lumière drue, les Thaïlandais marchent vers la mort, sans jouissance.

## HUGO TO CATHERINE

Dearest Catherine,

I'm in a cycle of ruptures. Nothing is spared. I inventory everything right down to the noises of emptiness. There was a time when I picked myself up in pieces but at least I picked myself up. A father always gets back on his feet. Now that you have a son, I'm at loose ends. He makes me feel old, your little boy, I don't have any energy and I'd have to reinvent myself...

Bangkok's a gigantic bazaar, penetrating music. Bangkok's a talisman forgotten on a chair made of cork, a turban to the left of a platter of oranges. Bangkok. Describing it to you doesn't necessarily evoke the emotion even though this proves it so I'll start the first sentence again... Yet, I wouldn't want to keep dragging out the same sickly rainbow stories for you.

I let my eloquent, my overwhelming torso, approach the sun and regain its ardour. In Bangkok, as in the ghettos, bodies burn hot, souls much less. In the dense light, the Thais march towards death, joyless.

Toi, qu'as-tu à m'apprendre de neuf? Tu m'as déjà tout révélé de moi, toute ma tête et presque mon cœur. Des pensées passent sous le ciel-écran, l'idée de la mort vient s'accrocher aux yeux de ceux que j'aime. Est-ce moi qui provoquc le deuil?

Déjà avec ta mère, je désirais éliminer ce qui trouble le miroir, que l'autre ne soit pas l'autre. Je ne contemplerai qu'un bel objet, pas une femme mais un culte. Toi qui n'es pas une déesse, montre-moi comment monter les œufs en neige dans une relation... sans que le souffle ne s'écrase. Avec ta mère, je m'étais bâti un nid. C'était une vraie dame, cette femme sans sexe. J'oubliais ma peur. Sous sa peau, le langage ne passait pas. Sous sa peau, je n'ai pas su trouver les étoiles. L'amour vient après la passion mais il n'y a pas eu de passion. Un père ne devrait pas dire cela à sa fille. Seulement ces temps-ci, j'ai le goût d'avoir trois ans comme Frédéric et de crier non, non, non à tout... pour que tes bras me disent oui. Aujourd'hui, je me sens père-fils. Hier, je faisais semblant de construire un couple. Je n'ai su ni créer un climat ni soutenir la tension. Le cygne s'était aventuré hors de l'étang, il se sentait vilain petit canard sous les jupes de ta mère. Maintenant, j'ai de moins en moins l'énergie de cacher que je suis un cygne. Si je poursuivais une relation aussi intense qu'avec Édouard, je me ficherais des regards... sauf du tien.

Catherine, what do you have to teach me anymore? You've already shown me everything about me, all my mind and almost my heart. Thoughts flash across the sky-screen, the idea of death pierces the eyes of those I love. Is it I who provoke mourning?

Before, with your mother, I wanted to banish whatever troubled the mirror, so that the other would no longer be the other. I'd only contemplate a beautiful object, not a woman but a cult. You who are not a goddess, show me how to beat the egg whites stiff in a relationship without crushing the breath. With your mother, I'd built myself a nest. She was a real lady, that sexless woman. I forgot my fear. Language didn't penetrate her skin. Under her skin I found no stars. Love comes after passion but there wasn't any passion. A father shouldn't say that to his daughter. But lately, I wish I were three years old like Frederick and screaming no, no, no to everything... so that your arms would say yes to me. Today, I feel like a father-son. Yesterday, I pretended to be part of a couple. I didn't know how to create an atmosphere, or how to bear the tension. The swan ventured out of the pond, he felt like a bad little duckling clinging to your mother's skirts. Now I have less and less energy to hide that I'm a swan. If I pursued a relationship as intense as mine and Edouard's, I wouldn't give a damn about the stares... except yours.

J'ai envie de dire: «Partez, le spectacle est terminé, la faillite se renouvelle sur demande seulement.» Veux-tu d'un père en faillite? Je t'ai élevée, j'ai cru aimer ta mère, suis-je un perdant pour autant? Je possède pour unique bagage l'instant présent. Mais je sais ce qui ne sera plus. Je veux t'atteindre droit dans ta différence, sans fausse pudeur. C'est nouveau, ne plus craindre ton regard de fille-femme. Descendre dans ce ventre d'enfant qu'est la mort demande de l'humilité. J'y retrouve l'amazone qui jouit dans mes côtes, les cisaille. À petits pas de peur, la femme est sortie de l'enfant. Elle n'en pouvait plus de gémir gentiment, ses rêves fermentaient. Je le comprends maintenant. Ta mère s'est simplement arrêtée de mourir. Ta mère: mieux armée et désarmée, différente. Ta beauté vient d'elle, rappelle-t'en.

J'étais venu à Bangkok dans l'espoir de recommencer à dessiner. J'ai vu des corps laids qui se regardaient, des corps superbes qui évitaient soigneusement les miroirs. Des corps avec trop de peau, pas assez de présence. Les ventres rebondissaient, s'ahurissaient d'être si bombés. J'ai tenté de deviner mon profil à travers cette foule. Une fois au restaurant, tu m'avais répliqué alors que nous discussions du voilement-dévoilement inscrit dans le décor d'une maison: «Ton corps ne regarde pas les autres corps, il est tourné vers lui-même, tu schématisses des meubles par compensation. Les

I've the urge to say, "Leave, the show is over, failure is renewable only upon request." Do you want a father who is bankrupt? I raised you, I thought I loved your mother, do I lose out for having thought so? The only baggage I carry is the moment at hand. But I know what will never come back. I want to affect you right in your difference, with no false modesty. It's new that I've stopped fearing your girl-woman eyes. Descending into death's womb requires humility. There I find the Amazon delighting inside my ribs, hacking away at them. With little, fearful steps, the woman has come out of the child. She couldn't stand moaning gently anymore, her dreams were fermenting. I understand it now. Your mother simply stopped dying. Your mother: better armed and disarmed, different. You got your beauty from her, don't forget it.

I came to Bangkok hoping to start drawing again. I've seen ugly bodies looking at themselves, superb bodies carefully avoiding mirrors. Bodies with too much skin, not enough presence. Stomachs protruding, astounded at being so round. I tried to grasp my profile in that crowd. Once in a restaurant, while we were discussing how the decor of a house is both revealing and camouflaging, you replied, "Your body doesn't look at other bodies, it's focused on itself, you design furniture to compensate. Furniture looks

meubles regardent vers la lumière, ils sont fiers d'être là. Tu es exhibitionniste par procuration.» Je dois t'avouer que si j'ai d'abord trouvé cette réflexion sentencieuse, juvénile même, je suis de plus en plus d'accord... à quelques nuances près. Après tout, «la vérité sort de la bouche des enfants» et tu demeures mon enfant, Catherine. C'est tout ce qui me reste, te croire.

Papa

towards the light, it's proud to be there. You're an exhibitionist by proxy." I must admit that although at first I found this reflection pretentious, juvenile even, now I agree with it more and more... except for a few minor details. After all, "truth is in the mouths of children" and you remain my child, Catherine. That's all I have left, believing you.

Dad

Quarante-deux ans

Forty-two

## LETTRE DE CATHERINE À HUGO

Hugo,

Ma lettre est une demande. Prends-moi par la main. Emmène-moi loin de mes rêves manqués. Que je redevienne petite. Même si tu n'as pas ce pouvoir, c'est bon de faire semblant. Juste au moment où je commençais à l'appivoiser, la voix de la petite Catherine s'est enfouie... entre les grains de sable, dans les filets de l'abreuvoir, sous les grincements de dents de Frédéric?

Je rêve d'un lieu à la surface claire. Dans cette énième ville d'exil, je me souviens d'un hamac en soie brute que nous partagions près de la mer. Nous travaillions couchés sur le tissu rêche. Pour la première fois, la paix était bonne à respirer. J'ai vu beaucoup de plages par la suite. Au retour de chacune, le vide s'agrandissait. J'étais resplendissante du dehors mais les sensations me parvenaient de loin en loin dans mon ventre. «Si je m'accroche, je risque de trébucher.» Maintenant, je ne m'accroche plus, il n'y a plus de si. Cela ne m'empêche pas de trébucher.

Tu te rappelles? Un jour tu m'avais raconté que dans ton adolescence, tu avais fréquenté les

## CATHERINE TO HUGO

Hugo,

My letter is a request. Take me by the hand. Take me far away from my broken dreams. So I can become little again. Even if you don't have the power to do it, it's nice to make believe. Just as I was beginning to tame it, little Catherine's voice disappeared... into the grains of sand, into the trickle of the water fountain, under the grinding of Frederick's teeth?

I'm dreaming of a place with a bright surface. In this umpteenth city of exile, I remember a raw silk hammock that we shared by the sea. We worked lying down on its rough fabric. For the first time, it was wonderful breathing in peace. I've seen many beaches since. Upon my return from each one, the void got bigger. I was radiant on the outside but every now and then I felt the sensations in my stomach. "If I hang on, I might trip." I don't hang on anymore now, there is no if. But that doesn't stop me from tripping.

Do you remember? One day you told me that when you were a teenager, you hung out in art

bars art déco et les cafés d'artistes, persuadé que le génie était dans l'air et se transmettait comme un virus. « Tout cuit dans la bouche », pas besoin de penser... Ta faim a séduit ma mère. C'était du temps où elle avait un nom. Toi, tu aimais le vin, ton amour était d'une telle abondance que tes carnets en étaient tachés. Aujourd'hui, le papier est neuf, tu as peur.

Je t'écris en te regardant rêver... peut-être de moi. Tu replies le coude, les yeux fermés... au désir? Le dos courbé par le poids des valises, tu portes un peignoir à doublure jaune et capuchon rouge. Tu deviens très pudique ou peut-être est-ce moi qui, l'étant moins, le remarque davantage. Tu penses, tu rêves, tu dors, tu manges, tu parles avec discrétion. Ta religion, c'est le vide. Tu rabats les draps sur ton corps pour ne pas sentir la mort qui rôde autour. Dans ton sommeil, tu rejoins l'amertume des grands ciels, implores le soleil. Un frisson te parcourt, tu poses tes mains sur tes cuisses, on dirait que tu n'as plus de sève. Vas-tu te réveiller? L'ombre de ma mère t'accuse du regard. Ses épées évitent tes plaies, ta faim ne la séduit plus. Tes dents hésitent trop.

Ta journée: des consignes que tu tiendras ou ne tiendras pas. Donner les pantalons trop lâches à la taille, cirer les chaussures. Polir les cadres, nettoyer les roulettes russes. Non. Donner tout. La

deco bars and artsy cafes, convinced that genius was in the air, as contagious as a virus. "Conversation was easy as pie", no need to think... Your hunger seduced my mother. That was when she had a name. And you, you loved wine, your love was so plentiful that it stained your notebooks. Today the page is blank, you're afraid.

I'm writing while I watch you dream... perhaps of me. You bend your arm in, your eyes closed... to desire? Your back is rounded by the weight of suitcases, you're wearing a yellow-lined bathrobe with a red hood. You're becoming overly modest or maybe it's that I, being less so, notice it all the more. You think, you dream, you sleep, you eat, you speak discreetly. Your religion is emptiness. You pull the sheets over your body so you can't feel death prowling about. In your sleep, you encounter the vast, bitter skies, implore the sun. A shiver runs through you, you place your hands on your thighs, there seems to be no sap left in you. Are you going to wake up? My mother's shadow accuses you with its eyes. Her daggers avoid your wounds, your hunger seduces her no longer. You hesitate too long before biting.

Your day: orders that you may or may not follow. Donating pants too loose around your waist, shining shoes. Polishing frames, cleaning out the Russian roulettes. No. Giving all. You're

chaleur te manque, je ne peux pas te soutenir. Il y a moi, c'est déjà tout un poids. Je m'efforce de calmer mes mains. Elles souhaitent t'agripper, habituées qu'elles sont de se détacher d'elles-mêmes pour mieux te protéger. Je voudrais que sans te réveiller tu m'ouvres les bras. Des bras chauds, accueillants, c'est simple, c'est vrai. C'est surtout apaisant... lorsqu'on a six fois sept ans.

Catherine

lacking warmth, I can't hold you up. I've already got myself, and that's a heavy enough weight. I do my best to still my hands. They want to grip you, so used they are to detaching themselves from one another to better protect you. I'd like you to open your arms to me without waking up. Warm, welcoming arms, how simple, how real. How soothing... especially when you're six times seven years.

Catherine

## LETTRE D'HUGO À CATHERINE

Ma Catherine,

Me voilà t'écrivant, isolé du jour pluriel par cette singulière nuit. Je tourne autour de toi jusqu'à me sentir assez bien pour crier... Mon cri ne vaut rien, tu dors. Tes mains imitent le vent dans le noir. Tu as sept ans. Tu m'applaudis. Je t'aurais décroché toutes les lunes si tu avais voulu en partager une avec moi. Entre toi et moi, pour que nous acceptions de déballer les cadeaux que nous nous sommes offerts, peut-être fallait-il que les liens soient d'une autre texture.

Aujourd'hui, lorsque je pense à toi, je mélange les époques; cette robe de communiant, ce décolleté d'il y a dix ans. Cela t'allait bien de la dentelle aux seins. Les odeurs aussi s'entrelacent. Ici rôde cette odeur de femme que j'aime seulement en toi. Là-bas, beaucoup d'hommes ont passé, pas un n'est resté. Des courants d'air incapables de me garder au chaud. Comme si ma maladresse n'émouvait qu'à court terme. Je collectionne les peignoirs, n'ose pas les laver de peur que les vapeurs de chair s'envolent. À quarante-deux ans, ta peau chante toujours autant, avec moins d'allegro bien sûr. Cela ne gâche rien, au contraire. Je redeviens

## HUGO TO CATHERINE

My Catherine,

Here I am writing you, isolated from the plural day by this singular night. I pace around you until I feel well enough to scream... My scream is useless, you're sleeping. Your hands imitate the wind in the dark. You're seven years old. You're applauding me. I would've brought you back every last moon if you'd wanted to share one with me. The ties between us would have had to have another texture for us to be willing to unwrap the presents we gave each other.

When I think of you today, I mix up the years; your communion dress, the low cut dress you wore ten years ago. Lace covered breasts suited you well. The smells, too, mingle. This place is haunted by that womanly odour I like only in you. So many men have come and gone down here, not one has stayed. Drafts unable to keep me warm. As if my awkwardness were only moving in the short term. I collect bathrobes, don't dare to wash them for fear that the scent of flesh will evaporate. Your forty-two year old skin still sings just as much, though with less allegro of course. That doesn't spoil a thing, quite the contrary. I'm

beau de me savoir presque en toi... J'ignore si cette chimère que nous formons durera. Je me suis usé à « mériter » ton âme. Je voudrais me reposer pendant que le temps le permet. Avec toi, il me semble plus facile de souligner l'essentiel... sans pour autant m'appesantir. Crie « sésame ouvre-toi » et je... Plutôt que de te toucher, je refermerai les bras, gémirai. Si je me trompe, je me tromperai tel que je suis, vulnérable, avec mes éclats de ruptures, mes kaléidoscopes de jouissance. Absorbé par mes pleurs je me sentirai presque vivant, inutile mais vrai. Tu me fais du bien, je ne te le dis pas, devines-tu mes ravages inavoués ? À soixante-deux ans, je ne sais pas encore prendre sans détruire. Cela ne s'apprend pas : construire se passe d'artifices. Dis, ma grande, y arriverons-nous ensemble ?

Je prie mon siècle pour que le désir advienne. Ici, la vie se passe à regarder les vitraux, errer dans les musées. J'aurais voulu t'offrir d'autres lunes que celles-là. T'accorder les prières que tu formulais en soufflant sur tes bougies d'anniversaire. Mais tu gardais précieusement tes secrets ; la Catherine souriante cachait une autre Catherine et cette dernière portait dans son ventre la douleur d'une plus fragile encore... Cette petite poupée russe, qui est-elle maintenant ? Te voir différemment m'impliquerait trop. J'appartiens à la race des conquérants sans en être un. À cloche-pied dans le danger, je stagne.

handsome once again knowing that I exist almost in you... I don't know if this illusion we've created will last. I've worn myself out trying to "deserve" your soul. I'd like to rest while time permits. When I'm with you, it seems easier to focus on the essentials... without, for all that, weighing myself down. Cry out "open sesame" and I... Rather than touch you, I'll fold my arms, and moan. If I'm mistaken, then I'll be mistaken as I am, vulnerable, with my outburst of broken relationships, my kaleidoscopes of visceral pleasures. Absorbed by my tears I'll almost feel alive, useless, but real. You're good for me, need I tell you, do you suspect my unconfessed ravages? At sixty-two years of age, I still don't know how to take without destroying. It's not something you can learn: building needs no artifices. Tell me, my sweet, will we be able to make it together?

I pray this world to let desire come into its own. Here, life is spent admiring stained glass windows, wandering through museums. I wanted to offer you other moons than those. To make your birthday wishes come true. But you guarded your secrets precious; my smiling Catherine was hiding another Catherine who carried within her the pain of an even more fragile one... Who is that little Russian doll now? Seeing you differently would involve me too much. I belong to the race of conquerors, without being one. Staggering through danger, I stagnate.

L'aube claque, vouloir la retenir ne sert à rien.  
Réveille-toi, Catherine.

Hugo

Dawn is knocking, wanting to keep it out is  
useless. Catherine, wake up.

Hugo

Cinquante ans

Fifty

LETTRE DE LA FILLE AU PÈRE, LUE À  
L'ÉGLISE, AVANT LA CÉRÉMONIE

Notre père,

Hugo est mort. Papa, non. Parfois tu m'écrivais des phrases où j'avais le sentiment d'être en mission sur la terre, reliée à ce qui palpète près de la lumière et qu'on appelle la beauté. Chaque personne ici présente sait de quel bonheur il s'agit, papa écrivait des lettres à tous ceux qu'il aimait. Papa ne disait jamais «je t'aime bien» ou «je t'aime beaucoup» mais «je t'aime». À part lui, qui faisait de l'amour un absolu? Je me suis toujours demandé si une même phrase circulait d'un destinataire à l'autre. Ainsi, cette formule incantatoire: «certains accomplissent mieux leur plaisir que d'autres, puissiez-vous les accompagner», combien d'entre-vous la gardez en mémoire? Papa, tu m'as transmis le sens du plaisir, moi qui, enfant, avais davantage le sens de la douleur. Je n'apprendrai rien à cette assemblée en mentionnant que tu as aimé des hommes dans ta vie. Je n'ai pas cessé de t'appeler papa, ni maman de t'apprécier. Tu étais le baromètre de notre humeur. Si tu allais bien, nous savions que pour nous aussi, le soleil brillerait. C'est cela un père.

DAUGHTER TO FATHER, READ AT THE  
CHURCH, BEFORE THE SERVICE

Our Father,

Hugo is dead. Not Dad. You used to write me sentences that made me feel like I had a mission on earth, connected to whatever flutters near the light and is called beauty. Every person here knows the joy I'm talking about, Dad used to write letters to everyone he loved. Dad never said "I really love you" or "I love you very much" just "I love you". Who other than him made love an absolute? I've always asked myself if the same sentence was transmitted between one person and another. Like the incantation "certain people fulfil their desires better than others, may you be one of them", how many of you cherish it? Dad, you made me sensitive to pleasure, I, who as a child, was more sensitive to pain. It won't be news to anyone here to say that you've loved men in your lifetime. I never stopped calling you Dad, and Mom never stopped appreciating you. You were the measure of our moods. If things were going well with you, we knew that the sun would shine for us too. That's what a father is.

Je te revois rire aux éclats et lancer : «Que vais-je faire pour ce siècle usagé, lui mettre des bâtons dans les roues peut-être?» Je te... me revois. Incroyable, la mémoire. Je vous raconte l'histoire de papa mais je m'en souviens comme si c'était la mienne! J'aimerais qu'avant de repartir, nous déposions sur la tombe de papa notre plus belle nostalgie.

Nous avons tout partagé: poids des jours, maux de tête, maux de cœur, quelques clefs magiques. Sous la morphine il ressassait : «La musique est une glissade, laisse venir... les araignées naissent des toiles, non le contraire.» Je voudrais peindre une toile avec vos silences. Ils sont précieux. Près des vagues, il entendait ce bruissement des origines. Le percevoir devenait sa principale occupation. Vous, vos cadeaux de Rois mages déposés sur le lit, vous repartiez. Comme si le cancer rongerait vos mots. Tant de peur. Moi aussi, je gardais le silence. Il s'impatientait : «Le silence a le ventre vide et le cœur gros, dépêche-toi!» Au bout de vos silences il y a autant de place pour la vie que pour la mort. La maison de papa vous est grande ouverte. Venez. Il sera là.

Catherine

I can see you roaring with laughter and commenting, "What am I going to do for this exhausted century, push a stick through its spokes?" I see you... myself again. Memory, what an incredible thing. I'm telling you Dad's story but I remember it as if it were mine! Before we leave, I'd like us all to place our most beautiful recollections on Dad's grave.

We shared everything: heavy days, heavy heads, heavy hearts, a few magic keys. Filled with morphine, he kept repeating, "Music is a slide, let it come... spiders come from webs, not the contrary." I'd like to spin a web with your silences. They're precious. By the sea, he heard the murmur of our origins. His main preoccupation became trying to perceive it. All of you, having placed your Magi gifts on the bed, you left. As if the cancer was eating up your words. So much fear. I too, kept silent. He became impatient, "Silence has an empty stomach and a heart full of pain, hurry up!" After your silences there is just as much room for life as there is for death. Dad's house is wide open. Come. He'll be there.

Catherine

## LETTRE D'HUGO À CATHERINE

Ma fille,

Je t'ai toujours parlé comme à une femme, même quand tu avais huit ans. Pour tes cinquante ans, je vais te parler comme à une petite fille. Ma petite fille.

Aujourd'hui, je me suis levé tôt pour jongler avec le soleil. On apprend beaucoup en marchant au matin, lorsqu'on ne rencontre que des arbres. La rosée glisse dans mes plaies, je revois le parc de mes huit ans, je croyais que les chaînes des balançoires étaient amovibles. On ne change rien en fin de compte. On signe des pactes avec la mort parce qu'on ne sait pas se sentir. J'ai lu d'immenses détresses sur les âmes affichées en vue du recensement. Toi, est-ce que tu t'aimes? Il te va bien ce foulard bigarré. Ne serre pas trop, détends. Tenir et tendre ne devraient former qu'un seul verbe. Difficile de conjuguer je au singulier... Tu n'as que huit ans alors tu peux essayer, ma petite princesse. Je vais te dicter quelques mots pour plus tard, écris-les près des étoiles de ton cartable, j'irai lentement, n'aie pas peur. «Deux lucarnes, sept lucioles, une dépression à découper...» La dépression? C'est lorsque tu n'as plus le goût

## HUGO TO CATHERINE

Dearest Daughter,

I've always spoken to you as if you were a woman, even when you were eight years old. For your fiftieth birthday, I'll speak to you as if you were a little girl. My little girl.

Today, I woke up early to play with the sun. You learn a lot walking in the morning, when all you meet are trees. The dew slides into my wounds, I see the park where I played as an eight year-old, I used to think that the chains on the swings were removable. In the end, nothing changes. We sign pacts with death because we have no sense of ourselves. I've read immense distress on the souls bared for the census. You, Catherine, do you love yourself? That colourful scarf suits you. Don't squeeze too tight, let go. Hold onto and hold out should form a single verb. It's difficult to conjugate I in the singular... You're only eight years old so you can try, my little princess. I'll dictate a few words to you for later, write them close to the stars on your notebook, I'll go slowly, don't be afraid. "Two skylights, seven fireflies, one depression to cut out..." Depression? It's when you don't feel like

d'enfourcher ta bicyclette, que tu pédales de moins en moins vite et t'enfarges de plus en plus souvent. S'il y a des diachylons? Non mais si tes désirs en rencontrent d'autres, tu arrives à te souffrir. Il ne te reste qu'une étoile? N'attends pas d'être grande pour goûter le souffle. On ne devient jamais grand, en fin de compte. On peut juste se rapprocher de nos tendresses. Je te donne mon foulard en guise de nounours. Ne le mets pas sur tes yeux, ouvre-les grand... comme tes bras.

Hugo

getting on your bike anymore, you pedal slower and slower and bump into things more often. Are there any bandages? No, but if your desires encounter others, you can live with yourself. You only have one star left? Don't wait until you're big to taste the breeze. In the end we never really grow up. All we can do is get closer to our affection. I'm giving you my scarf as a teddy bear. Don't cover your eyes with it, open them wide... like your arms.

Hugo

## LETTRE D'HUGO À CATHERINE

Petite,

Plus je change, plus je suis pareil à moi-même. Seulement moi-même... Enfin. À soixante-dix ans, j'ai encore la naïveté de croire en la lucidité... « On ne devient jamais grand en fin de compte. On peut juste se rapprocher de nos tendresses. » Jeune, je voulais tellement être touchant. Le petit coin noir n'a pas valeur d'échange. Pourtant, je voudrais que vous pensiez à moi comme un être qui émeut.

Devant la mort, ma vie se déguise en dragée. Suspendue. Je la convoite, essaie de la rattraper, y renonce. La mort aboie: « Viens mon doux bébé maman va t'amener près du glacier tu ne sentiras plus rien. » Rentrer au paradis, rentrer chez maman, ne plus rien sentir, je le souhaite lorsque la douleur engourdit jusqu'au désir de vivre. Du haut de mon ciel, je vous offrirai à toi et à Christian les aubes dont vous garnirez vos draps. Vous n'aurez qu'à fournir les auréoles. Prenez-en soin. La fatigue vient à qui sait attendre et ne pas désirer.

Catherine, n'attends pas la mort pour sentir un vrai besoin: t'arrêter. Quelle importance si tu perds ton temps? Tu sentiras l'urgence d'une autre

## HUGO TO CATHERINE

My Little Catherine,

The more I change, the more I'm like myself. Just myself... Finally. At the age of seventy, I'm still naive enough to believe in lucidity... "In the end we never really grow up. All we can do is get closer to our affection." When I was young, I so wanted to be touching. Our little dark corners have no exchange value. Yet, I'd like for you to think of me as someone who moves others.

Faced with death, my life is disguised as a candy. Dangling. I covet it, jump up to catch it, give up. Death barks out, "Come my sweet child mommy will bring you to the ice-cream parlour you won't feel a thing." Entering paradise, going home to mommy, no longer feeling anything, that's what I wish for when the pain numbs even the will to live. From atop my sky, I'll offer you and Christian the dawns with which you'll decorate your sheets. You'll only have to supply the halos. Take care of them. Fatigue comes to those who know how to wait without wanting.

Catherine, don't wait until you're dying to recognize the real need to stop. So what if you waste your time? You'll feel the urgency in

manière. Moi, mes soleils se parent de lunes aujourd'hui seulement. Ma mémoire dérape, elle voudrait revenir à son point de départ. Ma gare s'est évanouie, ses nuits d'aquarelle coulent pour rien, mes bras ne savent pas retenir. Sur mes épaules, je porte des rails douces pour qu'on ne s'effraie pas, qu'on vienne me consoler des ravages lorsque je chante a cappella aux passants sans ombre.

Proche de l'adieu, je chante sans partition autre que la mienne... Enfin. Avant, je regardais les autres pour savoir comment faire. Les indications que j'espérais trouver dans les films, je les ai trouvées dans la vie. Elle m'a montré à me choisir. Je ne monte plus sur la croix. Les clous ne s'enfoncent plus dans ma mémoire blême. Souvent à genoux j'ai retenu les échelles. Je me revois imprimer un signe de croix à mon sexe. Le corps délivré, en offrande, j'ai aimé. Vite, beaucoup, longtemps. J'ai appris tard à recevoir l'amour. Je t'en supplie, ne te mets pas au diapason d'une nomenclature désuète. N'aie pas peur de gifler ces mots : récompense, mériter, dévergondée. Rapproche-toi des couleurs promises. Invente un scénario à l'envers de la séduction. Dévoile tes failles comme si tu tendais ta plénitude vers l'autre. N'oublie pas Christian.

Je n'ai plus d'argent. Les à-côtés du traitement m'ont coûté plus que la peau du cœur. Toi, ta mère,

another way. It's only today that my suns are adorned with moons. My memory is reeling, it would like to return to its starting point. My station has disappeared, its watercolour nights flow for naught, my arms don't know how to hold it back. I carry the tender rails on my back to calm the frightened, to be consoled for the ravages when I sing a cappella to the shadowless passerbys.

On the point of saying farewell, I sing with no score save my own... Finally. Before, I used to watch others to find out what to do. The clues that I'd hoped to find in films I found in life. Life has taught me how to choose myself. I no longer mount the cross. The nails no longer pierce my pale memory. On my knees I anchored my ladders. I can see myself marking my groin with the sign of the cross. My body delivered, as an offering, I have loved. Long, fast, often. It took me a while to learn how to receive love. I beg you not to go along with an obsolete morality. Don't be afraid to slap the words reward, deserve, shameless. Bring yourself closer to the promised colours. Invent a scenario on the flip side of seduction. Reveal your weaknesses as if you were offering your fullness to another. Don't forget Christian.

I have no more money left. The little extras of treatment cost me more than an arm and a leg.

mes amis de moins en moins nombreux, partagez les objets de la maison, votre maison. Ils sont tous précieux. En les touchant, vous me sentirez un peu vôtre...

Papa

You, your mother, my friends - the few that are left - I want you to share the things in the house, in your house. They're all precious. When you touch them, you'll feel that I'm yours a bit...

Dad

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### Chapter 3

## GENERAL TRANSLATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

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- **Translation Approach**

It is important to point out that my translation of the letters from *Cher Hugo, chère Catherine* is not informed by a specific and well-defined theoretical framework. The translation is a highly personal endeavour and consequently, the commentary that follows reflects my personal experience with the text. Yet, such a subjective approach does not preclude textual analysis; my translation is based on very concrete textual features and reflects a very definite way of viewing literature and literary translation.

First and foremost, I view the literary text as an end unto itself and not as a vehicle for cognitive content or an ideology (whether political or religious -- although some such ideologically motivated texts, like the Bible, could stand alone as pieces of literature, with important textual features of their own). Also, literary texts become "motivated" in that sounds, rhymes, structures and images contribute to the "meaning" of a text. Often, as with poetic prose for example, there is an intense association between form and meaning, with the form often embodying or echoing the thematic content of the text.

Initially, I was not concerned with precisely defining my target audience in terms of extra-textual considerations such as the social and educational background of the "typical" reader. Yet, as I began translating, I realized that there was indeed a target reader to be considered: the reader to be inscribed in the text itself. In the case of the novel *Cher Hugo, chère Catherine*, this target reader would be a person who would properly process the text, be perceptive enough to pick up on aspects such as the ambiguities and Catherine's evolving voice.

Therefore, my main concern with the target audience was to program into the translation much the same reader reaction as was programmed into the original text. I sought to recreate this potential for "impact" by preserving the textual features that give rise to many questions and impressions in the mind of the reader about the text at hand.

A case in point is my treatment of the many incoherent passages in the text. A theoretician such as Eugene Nida has argued in the past that it is justifiable to make such passages more coherent in the translation for a specific and well-defined target audience (e.g. a younger, adolescent target audience). However, the incoherency of these passages is an integral and essential aspect of this novel because it conveys one of the novel's most important elements: the intimacy of the father-daughter relationship. Therefore, clarification is not an option for me. If we take the issue of the nature of the father-daughter relationship, my aim is not to clarify so as to convince the reader that there is or is not an incestuous relationship between father and daughter. I only wish to raise the same doubts as the source text does because the source text deliberately entertains this ambiguity. My approach is therefore very much "text-oriented". I have attempted to reproduce the textuality of the letters because I want to elicit the same reactions from my reader as were originally elicited by Côté's novel. As we will see further in the commentary, reader reactions are triggered by highly concrete textual features that I aim to preserve in the translation.

- **Meschonnic and Nida**

In order to clarify and support my approach, I will look briefly at two translation theoreticians who at one time held opposing views of literary translation, Henri Meschonnic and

Eugene Nida.

Meschonnic believes that the audience of a text is defined in the text itself and explicitly states so in *Pour la poétique II*: "Le pour qui (le lecteur) est structurellement inscrit dans le texte, et dans la traduction-texte".<sup>2</sup> He also views the literary text as an end unto itself and not as a vehicle for a particular message. More importantly though, Meschonnic views form and content as being inseparable and opposes translation approaches that "add on"<sup>3</sup> style to a word-for-word translation. Essentially, his view is that the translator must re-enunciate the text.<sup>4</sup> Meschonnic's approach to translation is therefore similar to the one that I have taken because as mentioned above, I view the source text as an end unto itself, and consequently, my focus is on the textuality of the letters.

A second theoretician of interest here is Eugene Nida, whose earlier work runs counter to my approach, but whose recent work serves to support it. Nida is very involved in Bible translation and in his earlier work, had a strongly instrumental view of the biblical text: message was all important, and style he considered an ornamental "add-on". Nida's aim is to convert readers (i.e. African peoples having an objective existence outside the text). It is this conversion to Christianity that constitutes his desired impact or "similar effect" on the reader. Because he felt that message transcended the text, Nida was willing to introduce adjustments so that he could preach his message, whether it be to a different society or a different "tier" of a given society. For Nida, textuality thus became secondary. This position is clearly demonstrated in Nida's

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<sup>2</sup>Henri Meschonnic, *Pour la poétique II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973) 320.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 315.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p.308.

earlier writings.

In one of his relatively early works in translation theory, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Nida illustrates the above-mentioned view of translation. In this work, he discusses "equivalent response" of the reader when faced with the text, but we must remember that Nida envisions a "real-world" reader whom he is trying to convert to Christianity. Nida states outright that in order to "preserve the content of the message, the form must be changed"<sup>5</sup> and that "style is secondary to content".<sup>6</sup> For his religiously motivated purpose of eliciting the same or similar response (i.e. faith in Christ), Nida defines three types of audiences, namely:

- traditional church audiences (receptors in a liturgical setting);
- a "well-educated constituency"; and
- "common people".<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, Nida's view of translation was that the translated text will and must vary in style in order to reach the targeted audience. He therefore argued that there are various approaches to rendering a literary text (as the Bible is a great literary text) according to the specified target audience and the "message" being rendered. This overall approach is contrary to the one I have adopted for the translation of *Cher Hugo, chère Catherine*: I assumed no well-defined, "real-world" audience and focused my approach on text-level phenomena rather than on the overall "message". To counter Nida's early views, I would therefore argue that one can perhaps "adapt" a text for various audiences, but in order to truly translate a literary text, the only

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<sup>5</sup>Eugene Nida, and Charles Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*. (Leiden: J. Brill, 1974), 5.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p.13.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 31.

approach can be to attempt to render the target text so that the reader reaction programmed by the target text approximates the reader-reaction "built into" the source text.

As committed as Nida is to Bible translation, his views on language and translation have evolved substantially since the 1960s. This shift in perspective is well-illustrated in his 1990 article, "The role of rhetoric in verbal communications". In his article, he again discusses form and content, but not as separate elements of a text. Nida defines rhetoric as "that level of structure which combines in unlimited and intricate ways both form and content."<sup>8</sup> By this simple statement, Nida demonstrates how his thought has evolved with regard to the "separation" of form and content: he no longer believes that form and content can and should be isolated, but now feels that they are intrinsically linked. He begins his article by addressing various functions of discourse, one of which is the "expressive function", which may "involve ... deep-seated drives for aesthetic expression"<sup>9</sup>, such as various forms of literature. Nida states that rhetoric "determines the selection and arrangement of the phonological, lexical, and syntactical features"<sup>10</sup> of a text. In other words, form and content are linked by the way various rhetorical functions are arranged in a text.

More importantly though, a text must have both "impact" and "appeal". Consequently, the translator must attempt to preserve the same "impact" and "appeal" of the text for the target language reader.<sup>11</sup> In other words, any text, or translation, must "both 'hit' the audience and

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<sup>8</sup>Eugene Nida, "The role of rhetoric in verbal communications", *Babel* 36 (1990): 143.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p.143.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p.145.

<sup>11</sup>Helen German, *Discourse in Eugene Nida's Translation Theory*. unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Ottawa, 69.

'draw' them."<sup>12</sup> This goal is achieved by the selection and arrangement of form and content in a text. Ironically, this view greatly differs from Nida's earlier writings and is much like the one I adopted when translating *Cher Hugo, chère Catherine*. Rather than go into a detailed analysis of Nida's recent writings on discourse and rhetorical functions, I will highlight a few of Nida's principles and rhetorical techniques (or as I have labelled them, "textual features") which apply to the translation approach I have taken.

The first principle for selection and arrangement of form and content is "novelty", which Nida describes as consisting of "unusual content or unexpected arrangements of sounds, words, and grammatical constructions."<sup>13</sup> Throughout *Cher Hugo, chère Catherine*, there are in fact many unusual arrangements, as well as unusual content, which I have tried to preserve in the translation. Nida's fourth principle for selection and arrangement of the form and content is "wholeness", which he defines by stating that "a text should include all that is necessary to complete a story or theme"<sup>14</sup>. This principle is of particular pertinence to the approach I have taken with my translation, especially with respect to the issue of rendering the ambiguity of Hugo's writing. If I had chosen to eliminate the ambiguity of Hugo's writing, thus letting the reader of my translation believe that there is no incestuous relationship between father and daughter, the story would be incomplete due to the removal of a textual feature which gives rise to the theme of the father-daughter relationship.

Nida's principle of "coherence" is one of special interest for my translation approach.

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<sup>12</sup>*Op. cit.*, p.146.

<sup>13</sup>*Op. cit.*, p.146.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 147.

He describes this principle as "the manner in which the author or speaker consistently and accurately reflects the real or imagined world of the discourse."<sup>15</sup> He states, however, that this principle is not limited to "setting, actions, and participants", but that the "emotive tone of a text is particularly dependent upon coherent features."<sup>16</sup> He then maintains that "an author may wish, for the sake of impact, to violate the principle of normal coherence by introducing symbolic thematic non sequiturs" and illustrates this statement by briefly discussing Kafka's *The Castle* in which "there are startling, dream-like shifts in setting and seemingly meaningless cause-effect sequences."<sup>17</sup> This type of incoherence is also a salient feature of *Cher Hugo, chère Catherine*. In my translation, I have attempted to preserve the incoherence of the source text since it reflects both characters' worlds, and relates a great deal about their emotions and relationships.

Finally, Nida's exception to the principle of "clarity" also coincides with various aspects of my translation approach. This principle is described as "the readiness with which an intended audience can comprehend the meaning and functional intent of a text".<sup>18</sup> According to Nida, however, this principle may be breached in certain types of literature, as in Jackson Mac Low's poetry. The obscurity found in *Cher Hugo, chère Catherine* is one feature that I attempted to reproduce in the translation since it, along with other aspects, conveys the intimacy of the father-daughter relationship, contributes to the poetic prose and helps to mark the various voices of the

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<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p.147.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p.147.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p.148.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p.149.

two main characters.

Nida also lists a variety of rhetorical techniques that enhance the impact and appeal of a text, such as deletion, nongrammaticality, use of figurative language, purposeful ambiguity and polar contrasts. Many of these devices are employed in the translated excerpts of *Cher Hugo, chère Catherine*. These devices are discussed throughout the commentary in terms of their significance in the source text, and their relevance to the translation. However, as Nida states in the conclusion of the article, "rhetorical functions and techniques are never ends in themselves, but only the means of marking subtle and complex relations between propositions and people."<sup>19</sup> This statement is particularly relevant to the approach I have taken in my translation because, as I will illustrate in my commentary, the textual features I discuss are important markers of relationships and personalities found in *Cher Hugo, chère Catherine*. This intimate relationship between form and content therefore highlights the need to focus on the textuality of the letters rather than some external goal.

#### ● Translational Considerations

As briefly mentioned above, the complex relations between the characters of this novel are marked by textual features, many of which make for challenging translational problems. These difficulties range from rendering a child's writing style, to dealing with poetic prose. However, before discussing such pivotal considerations, there are some minor issues that should be highlighted.

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<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p.153.

- **Achieving Realism in the Target Text**

The letters create the impression that the reader has almost direct access to the characters' "stream of consciousness", even though the source text at times can be quite opaque. Since the style and tone of the novel are generally informal and create an atmosphere of intimacy, one of the first, though minor, translational considerations was to ensure that the characters' voices, as they manifested themselves through their letters, came across as being "natural" or "realistic". One device used to avoid unnatural or stilted style was the consistent use of contractions throughout the target text. This marker serves to make the reading smoother and helps to maintain a relationship of intimacy between the characters. Furthermore, the reader gains a sense of familiarity with the characters. The following two examples show the difference in style when contractions are employed.

Daddy,  
I miss you a lot. I know, Rome is far away. If it wasn't, I'd go and see you. (p.9)<sup>20</sup>

vs.

Daddy,  
I miss you a lot. I know, Rome is far away. If it was not, I would go and see you.

● ● ●

That doesn't spoil a thing, quite the contrary. I'm handsome once again knowing that I exist almost in you... I don't know if this illusion we form will last. I've worn myself out trying to "deserve" your soul. I'd like to rest while time permits. When I'm with you, it seems easier to focus on the essentials... (p.102-103)

vs.

That does not spoil a thing, quite the contrary. I am handsome once again knowing that I exist almost in you... I do not know if this illusion we form will last. I have worn myself out trying to "deserve" your soul. I would like to rest

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<sup>20</sup>All page numbers in parentheses refer to page number of the original text.

while time permits. When I am with you, it seems easier to focus on the essentials...

These examples demonstrate that without the use of contractions, the target text becomes heavy and acquires a formal tone, whereas the source text displays an intimate relationship between father and daughter.

Another minor aspect of the source text that figured in the translation of the letters was rendering "*papa*" and "*maman*". The French language has only one informal form of "père" and "mère" whereas in English, there is a differentiation between "mommy/daddy" and "mom/dad". Although both sets of English equivalents are diminutive, "mommy/daddy" are less formal and are associated with young children addressing their parents. Consequently, a choice had to be made between these forms in the target text. The main factor in this decision was the fact that Catherine's character starts out as 7 year-old and grows up over the course of the novel. Therefore, in the first chapter, when Catherine is 7 years old, "mommy" and "daddy" are used by both Catherine and Hugo to highlight Catherine's young age (*When mommy gets too lonely, she sends me outside to play.*)

In the second chapter, "*maman*" and "*papa*" become "mom" and "dad" to mark Catherine's growth and her evolving voice (*I talk so I can forget mom's cold glances and also because your memory warms me.*) At 13 years of age, her voice would have come across as being too childish if "mommy" and "daddy" were used.

Although the choice of equivalences for "*maman*" and "*papa*" is only a minor lexical consideration, it is also of interest in another respect as well. As we will see later on, the characters are multi-dimensional and consequently their voices are polyphonous: in the letter written by Catherine at 33 years of age, the voice fluctuates between her "adult" voice and her

"child" voice, which is marked by her use of "*papa*", among other things. In this case, the choice between "dad" and "daddy" becomes relevant at more than just the "terminological" level.

Indeed, there are many more substantial issues and difficulties than just those at the level of the lexicon. The novel relates the lives of a handful of characters, and the letters disclose a great deal about the characters' emotions and relationships. The text, which often reflects the state of the characters' lives and emotions, is by no means composed of simple, straightforward, transparent prose; therein lie many of the more substantial translation difficulties encountered in this text.

- **Turning Impressionistic Generalizations into Translation Solutions**

This novel is easily analyzed along thematic lines, as the source text creates a multitude of vivid impressions on the reader. An entire discussion could be devoted to the psychology of the intimate and somewhat unusual father-daughter relationship, or to the issue of homosexuality and unfaithfulness. Although these types of discussions and analyses might help the translator to situate the source text, to analyze and acquire a deeper understanding of the novel's characters, they alone do not contribute to solving the many translational difficulties associated with this text. These impressions do, however, lead the translator back to the text in order to study it closely to see just how the thematic impressions are triggered by the text and how that information can be used to resolve a number of translation difficulties and generate discussion on these problems.

My analysis of text-level phenomena makes it possible to correlate a number of

impressionistic generalizations with specific textual features that immediately strike the reader. These textual features, in turn, serve a purpose at the thematic level, creating diverse effects that the translation strives to recreate for the target text reader. One of the first impressions conveyed by the source text is that of an intimate father-daughter relationship. One of the most important textual features that leads the reader to sense this intimacy is the frequent incoherency of the letters, such as the following excerpt, which will be discussed in chapter 6:

Ma gare s'est évanouie, ses nuits d'aquarelle coulent pour rien, mes bras ne savent pas retenir. Sur mes épaules, je porte des rails douces pour qu'on ne s'effraie pas, qu'on vienne me consoler des ravages lorsque je chante a cappella aux passants sans ombre. (p.114)

From the outset of the novel, there is also a suspicion of an incestuous relationship between father and daughter. Closer study of the text reveals that Hugo's use of ambiguous and sexually charged language is the feature that creates this impression in the reader:

Tu m'empêches d'être ton père, mon identité d'homme s'en trouve déracinée. La sève ne coule plus. Pourtant, lorsque tu me laisses t'approcher, je me rappelle du temps où ta mère et moi avions le séisme ravageur. (p.36)

Aujourd'hui lorsque je pense à toi, je mélange les époques; cette robe de communiant, ce décolleté d'il y a dix ans. Cela t'allait bien de la dentelle aux seins. Les odeurs aussi s'entrelacent. Ici rôde cette odeur de femme que j'aime seulement en toi. (p.102)

(These examples, too, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.)

Catherine's writing also has an impact on the reader, who witnesses Catherine's development over a 43-year period, and inevitably, the evolution of her voice. Part of this evolution is marked by the gradual disappearance of the author's presence, which manifests itself at the textual level in various inconsistencies in style (a full analysis is given in chapter 5):

"Lorsqu'elle est dans ses bons jours, maman m'affirme que tu m'aimes gros comme un éléphant." (p.10)

Mon assurance et ma peur, c'est la parole. Je séduirais New York au complet pour que tu viennes voir ce que je deviens. Je ne comprends rien à ce que je deviens. Je ne sais pas si, de loin, tu aimes ce que je deviens. (p.23)

Another textual feature which poses problems is the translation of the sometimes poetic prose that appears in many of the letters. Chapter 7 deals with this specific problem, as exemplified by the following excerpts:

Aujourd'hui son corps, lieu d'apaisement, est loin de moi mais je continue de m'y reconnaître. Seul le visage demeure clos. Mon masque tremble. Je le jette. Mes yeux tombent à la renverse. Ils ne savent plus qui ils sont. On n'a pas de mots pour cerner la mort, mais des morts pour cerner les mots, on en a trop. Mes yeux sont si petits. J'avance sans bottes dans un marécage aux algues fines, nauséabondes, gluantes. (p.42)

"J'ai ouvert un litre de rosé pour qu'on puisse boire le rose usé de nos vies, mettre du blanc mousseux, mousseux dedans..." (p.58-59)

Finally, as mentioned above, the characters' personalities are multi-faceted, a fact that the letters clearly illustrate. As we follow the characters' intimate thoughts throughout the letters, we see their voices shift, highlighting various dimensions of their personality. In chapter 8, we will discuss how various textual features are employed to mark the characters' polyphonous voices.

- **Translator as Author?**

It is evident that these translational problems present a wide variety of challenges. Perhaps the most challenging are those that surface because of the incoherent text. Fortunately, the author of the novel was more than willing to provide clarification on specific excerpts of various letters and on her vision of Catherine, Hugo, and their relationship. This supplementary information, information that was not evident from an analysis of the source text, puts the

translator in an interesting position: how is this information to be used? Should the translator translate blindly, and thus, fairly literally, ignoring the additional insights provided by the author? Does she become a writer working parallel to the original author? Should she use the information to make the target text more explicit and in some cases more coherent?

These are extremely relevant questions for the translator. In my discussion of the above-mentioned pivotal translational problems, I will attempt to answer them.

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**Chapter 4**  
**MAINTAINING THE AMBIGUITY OF THE SOURCE TEXT:**  
**THE FATHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP**

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● **The Issue**

Over the novel's 43-year period, Hugo communicates many of his most intimate thoughts to his daughter through his letters. These letters are frank, and provide information about the father-daughter relationship. One of the textual indicators of their relationship is the increasingly sexual overtones of his letters to Catherine, communicated through ambiguity or double entendre. In his first few letters, there is some ambiguity as to the interpretation of potentially sexually charged words or phrases and these ambiguities leave the reader, and hence the translator, unsure of the nature of the relationship between father and daughter.

This question of an incestuous relationship is raised after only a few letters and presents difficulties for the translator who, as the author of the target text, must have an overall idea of Hugo as a person. Although Hugo is at times strong, he can also be quite weak, and constantly needs attention from others, especially from his daughter. He also has a difficult time deciding what he wants from life<sup>21</sup>, as demonstrated by his relationship with Edouard. When writing to his daughter, Hugo is generally open about his and Catherine's respective sexualities, which sometimes creates problems of interpretation for the translator. Should the translator skew the text to remove any hint of sexuality in the early letters? Should the translator go as far as making the target text such that the English reader will certainly perceive an incestuous relationship?

The answer is neither. Because the reader of the source text is left uncertain, so must

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<sup>21</sup>See Appendices 1 and 2 for more discussion on the author's view of her characters.

the reader of the target text. Furthermore, this difficulty is compounded when it is impossible to maintain the same degree of ambiguity found in the source language because the translator must choose between "innocent" and sexually charged renderings.

There must be enough ambiguity in the translation to cause the reader to have the same doubts as the reader of the source text. Thus, the translation strives to employ words and turns of phrases that also leave the interpretation up to the reader. The translator's role here is not to clarify the text, despite the fact that she may know more about the father-daughter relationship from the outset because of the information provided by the author. Although it may seem to be essentially a question of vocabulary, there are many other factors to be taken into consideration in the choice of equivalences.

#### ● Some Solutions

One of these factors, aside from the ambiguity found in the early letters, is Hugo's letters to Edouard (which always precede his letters to Catherine). The letters to Edouard are highly ambiguous, with sexually charged passages in which Hugo discusses his daughter and his relationship with Edouard. This knowledge, although not presented in the translated corpus, certainly influences the translator's interpretation of the excerpts to be translated. The following passage, which illustrates how Hugo's correspondence with his lover adds to the double entendre of the letters to his daughter, is relevant to the translation because such passages increase both the reader's and translator's doubt. Hugo is writing this letter while taking a bath and his intensely sexual thoughts about Edouard are interspersed with thoughts of 13 year-old Catherine.

La première fois que les flammes du désir m'ont fait naître, tu m'as serré très fort... Les secondes du silence ne servent à rien, c'est ça qui me fait jouir. Cette

chaleur venue de la gratuité. Comme les minutes passées avec ma fille. Avec elle, le verbe s'abandonner existe. Mais voilà, j'ai perdu ma meilleure partenaire pour jouer aux vaisseaux de guerre. ... J'entends encore ma fille renchérir qu'elle joue à ce jeu-là uniquement pour me faire plaisir. ... Dans cette mémoire où Catherine n'est pas, il y a ce oui à fendre le ventre, un cri d'argile que tu as fait jaillir. Les jambes écartées, je me savonne le sexe... (pp. 33-34)

In relation to the translated corpus, the letters written when Catherine is 13 and 18 contain passages which leave the reader uncertain of the nature of the father-daughter relationship, thus creating translation problems:

Tu m'empêches d'être ton père, mon identité d'homme s'en trouve déracinée. La sève ne coule plus. Pourtant, lorsque tu me laisses t'approcher, je me rappelle du temps où ta mère et moi avions le séisme ravageur. (p.36)

The problem with this example is the potential sexual interpretation of "*approcher*", which is followed by Hugo describing how he and his wife consummated their love. Does Hugo mean he makes advances to Catherine, or is it an innocent way of saying that Catherine lets him get close to her on an emotional or spiritual level? These are the types of questions the reader of the translation should also ask. Two possible solutions would be to render "*t'approcher*" by "when you let me draw near" or "when you let me in". However, because the first possibility emphasizes the physical aspect, and the second emphasizes the emotional aspect, the reader would not likely question the nature of the relationship. The translation must not be as definitive as the two aforementioned possibilities and therefore, the preferred solution was to render "*t'approcher*" by "let me get close to you". This rendering still leaves the issue open to interpretation since the translation could be interpreted in terms of both physical and/or emotional closeness, thus maintaining the ambiguity more than the two other possibilities:

You're preventing me from being your father, and it has uprooted my male identity. The sap has stopped running. Yet, when you let me get close to you, I remember the time your mother and I moved the earth with a devastating

passion.

Another passage that presents some ambiguity on Hugo's part is the following:

Moi, il y a longtemps que je t'aime, jamais je ne laisserai filer la mémoire, même si tu me tendais l'arrache-moi. Reviens-moi vite! (pp.36-7)

Although this passage is not terribly problematic, the last sentence warrants a brief comment, mainly because of the temptation to translate it with the highly idiomatic "Come home soon!". However, Hugo's exclamation stresses his need that Catherine return to him, again suggesting a very intimate and special relationship. Hence the following translation:

Catherine, I've loved you for a long time, I'll never let the memories fly away, even if you tried to wrench them from me. Come back to me soon!

In the third chapter, when Catherine is 18 years of age, Hugo's letter also contains a segment which is erotic in nature and leads the reader to suspect a sexual relationship between father and daughter. Furthermore, this letter is again preceded by his letter to Edouard, which alludes to some sexual desire for her:

Pour dire je t'aime à Catherine, je lui écris des lettres où je me mets à nu, sans peignoir ni dictionnaire, comme enfant j'avais le désir de le faire. ... Plus le soir approche, plus les lettres sont belles, percutantes, des agates. Plus il me coûte de ne pas les lui envoyer. ... Je jouis lorsque j'arrive à la dernière page, elle seule autorise de nouvelles sorties dans Paris. L'imprimante s'agite, l'enveloppe s'encre, je la porte à mes lèvres, dessine autour de l'adresse des maisons blanches, des coeurs d'enfants légers, légers... Peut-être y aura-t-il du courrier pour Catherine. (pp.46-47)

The following passage presents translational difficulties because there is again the possibility of interpreting Hugo's sentiments as incestuous since some of this passage is ambiguous and sexually suggestive.

... elles m'accompagnent lorsque j'essaie d'entrer en contact avec toi et que je n'y arrive pas. Je tourne en rond, ta lumière de femme m'éblouit. J'attends que tu jongles avec elle, même si la peur, le désir te fendent les hanches. Ne pousse

pas les cris d'alarme habituels. Aie assez d'intuition pour parler de ce qui n'a pas eu lieu. (p.36)

One of the first problems is rendering "*d'entrer en contact avec toi*". The first inclination might be to translate it by "get in touch with". Yet, this solution would imply that Hugo is simply trying to communicate with Catherine, when the source text is more ambiguous than that, especially in view of the following sentences. This ambiguity arises from the polysemy of the source text expression. According to the *Petit Robert*, "entrer en contact" is analogous to "entrer en relation" and the word "contact" in both French and English may mean both "the state or condition of touching or communicating"<sup>22</sup>. Hugo writes this letter from Paris and he could conceivably be trying to reach her by phone; on the other hand, he could be using the expression metaphorically as in trying to reach her on an emotional level, or he may even be referring to physical contact. In order to avoid the more explicit rendering of "getting in touch" and to depict the ambiguity inherent in the French text, the expression "to make contact" was employed.

Another difficulty in rendering this passage was interpreting "*ta lumière de femme m'éblouit*". The reader is left wondering whether Hugo is being figurative and fatherly, or whether there is something a little more sensuous to his thoughts. In other words, has he just realized that his daughter has become an adult and is in awe of that fact, or is he referring to her physique in a more personal way that goes beyond just plain wonder (i.e. perhaps desire)? Regardless of the answer to these questions, the translator must strive to recreate this same effect on the target language reader by carefully rendering the word "*éblouit*". This word relates more

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<sup>22</sup>*Petit Robert; Concise Oxford*

than just a single idea; it is somewhat ambiguous as it refers to the idea of a physical impact, and to a sense of wonder at the same time. For this reason it is necessary to render the idea of Hugo being physically affected by Catherine in some way as well as his state of bewilderment. The suggested translation in the *Collins Robert*, "to dazzle", implies astonishment yet conveys no physical affectation, and was passed over for a rendering that conveyed both the idea of bewilderment and physical effect. "Dizzy" embodies an ambiguity similar to the source text expression (i.e. physical impact and astonishment) and thus recreates the effect of the original text. These difficulties and solutions result in the following translation:

... they accompany me when I try to make contact with you and don't succeed.  
I go round in circles, the glow of your womanhood makes me dizzy. I'm waiting  
for you to play with this light, even if fear and desire slash through your hips.  
Don't protest in the usual loud way. Have enough intuition to talk about what  
didn't happen.

As the years go by, Hugo's letters become marked by even stronger sexual overtones, thus keeping the reader in doubt as to the nature of the relationship between father and daughter. Furthermore, Hugo also writes to Edouard and admits to fantasizing about his daughter. These letters add to the overall suspicion of an incestuous relationship. For example, in the chapter written when Catherine is 27, Hugo writes to Edouard about his reaction to a letter from Catherine:

Edouard,

Je relis pour la énième fois la lettre de Catherine sans savoir si d'ici une demi-heure, lorsqu'à nouveau je la sortirai de l'enveloppe, la photo qui l'accompagne *Catharina -- 27 cierges -- en deuil* sera imprégnée de larmes ou de sperme. Je ne sais plus si je dois pleurer avec mon coeur ou mon sexe. (p.64)

This type of allusion on Hugo's behalf certainly increases the suspicion of an unusual parent-child relationship and colours the interpretation of subsequent passages, such as the following

written to the 33 year-old Catherine:

Je possède pour unique baggagge l'instant présent. Mais je sais ce qui ne sera plus. Je veux t'atteindre droit dans ton indifférence, sans fausse pudeur. C'est nouveau, ne plus craindre ton regard de fille-femme. (p.84)

The problem with this excerpt is twofold; the first dilemma is how to render "*t'atteindre*" and the second is how to deal with the extremely ambiguous expression "*fille-femme*".

The verb "*atteindre*" that Hugo employs in the third sentence is again polysemous, thus rendering the source text initially somewhat ambiguous because "*atteindre*" can mean to physically touch, to reach someone (figurative use), and to trouble or move someone. It is obvious, even from the first few letters exchanged, that Hugo and Catherine have a very close relationship and that Hugo has had a profound effect on his daughter's life. Yet one thing that remains unknown is whether or not there is any sexual element to their relationship -- hence the ambiguity of Hugo's sentence. Interestingly enough, one of Catherine's letters may provide some clarification on the use of this verb "*atteindre*". The 18 year-old Catherine writes Hugo about her break-up with Sigfried and comments, "*On ne m'atteint qu'en me touchant*" (p.42). She is alluding to the fact that her physical relationship with Sigfried has a profound effect on her and this detail therefore fuels our suspicions about Hugo's letter. Could he be trying to say, metaphorically, that he would like to touch her? Might he be trying to reach her at a more intellectual level? Again, whatever the answer, the reader of the translation must also ask these same questions. In order to recreate this ambiguity in the target text, "to make direct contact" was employed since it conveys the idea of Hugo trying to reach his daughter on an emotional or intellectual level, while still leaving open the possibility of physical contact.

The second problem is with Hugo's reference to Catherine as a "*fille-femme*". Because

the French is ambiguous, the translator must choose between several possibilities, "girl-woman", "daughter-woman", "daughter-wife", all of which are plausible given the fact that their relationship may have a sexual side to it. This is admittedly a problematic passage because of the inadequate knowledge about Hugo's view of Catherine. In fact, a choice was not made between the various possibilities until the author clarified her intention concerning this particular excerpt. According to Côté, Hugo emphasizes here the diametric opposition between child and adult: he sees Catherine as both his offspring and as a grown woman; hence, the following translation:

The only baggage I carry is the moment at hand. But I know what will never come back. I want to make direct contact with your indifference, with no false modesty. It's new that I've stopped fearing your girl-woman eyes.

Finally, the last excerpt which poses problems because of the possibility of interpreting some passages in a sexual light is the following passage, which Hugo writes to Catherine when she is 42 years old. The translational problem in this example stems from the opaque quality of this ambiguous and overtly sexual passage:

Entre toi et moi, pour que nous acceptions de déballer les cadeaux que nous nous sommes offerts, peut-être fallait-il que les liens soient d'une autre texture. Aujourd'hui lorsque je pense à toi, je mélange les époques; cette robe de communiante, ce décolleté d'il y a dix ans. Cela t'allait bien de la dentelle aux seins. Les odeurs aussi s'entrelacent. Ici rôde cette odeur de femme que j'aime seulement en toi. (p.102)

It is obvious that Hugo is being metaphorical in this first sentence, yet the reader is unaware of the reference. What are these gifts? If the relationship has to be different, what is it like at the time when he is writing the letter? Is it an incestuous relationship? This last question stems principally from the sexually charged passage that follows the first sentence; it seems very unusual that a father would comment on his daughter's breasts and the way she smells.

Furthermore, the last part of the text is highly sexual and it would be easy to "sanitize" it somewhat so that the target text would not come across as being so strongly sexual. For example, it would be simple to render the second part of the passage as follows:

When I think of you today, I mix up the years; your communion dress, that v-neck dress you wore ten years ago. You looked pretty in lace blouses. The air too is filled with smells. This place is filled with that womanly perfume I like only in you.

Admittedly, this highly desexualized solution ignores some elements of the source text and again raises the question of whether or not the translator should skew the text to remove any hint of sexuality in the letters. As discussed earlier though, the translator's role is not to eliminate the ambiguity of the source text, but to render it, insofar as possible. The translation of the last excerpt therefore attempts to render Hugo's ambiguity:

The ties between us would have had to have another texture for us to be willing to unwrap the presents we gave each other.

When I think of you today, I mix up the years; your communion dress, the low cut dress you wore ten years ago. Lace covered breasts suited you well. The smells, too, mingle. This place is haunted by that womanly odour I like only in you.

## ● Conclusion

The question of a possible incestuous relationship is an extremely relevant issue and sometimes creates difficulties for the translator. Throughout the novel, Hugo's letters exhibit ambiguities that lead the reader to question the nature of the father-daughter relationship. This doubt is often fuelled by sexually suggestive passages in Hugo's letters to both Catherine and his lover Edouard.

Initially, I assumed it was a question of interpreting these passages and then rendering

them as I deemed appropriate, i.e. choosing between "sanitizing" or "sexualizing" them accordingly. Yet, as I read, re-read, and attempted to translate the novel, the same questions were repeatedly raised, leading me to the conclusion that regardless of the true nature of their relationship, it is essential to have the reader of the translation raise the very same questions.

Adding to the difficulty of rendering the ambiguity of Hugo's letters was the fact that the author clarified the nature of the father-daughter relationship. Côté revealed that the relationship was not incestuous: Hugo only fantasizes about his daughter. With this knowledge, the question becomes that of striking a balance between letting the information provided by the author be helpful, and having it influence the translation to the extent that it skews the effect on the reader. For example, the information provided by Côté could have been used to justify "sanitizing" sexually charged passages with the result of eliminating any ambiguity. The initial translation suggested for the passage on page 102 of the novel and introduced on page 124 of this chapter, constitutes one example of this type of rendering. However, this type of solution ("desexualization") fails to recreate the effect of the original text and thus compromises the quality of the translation, which must raise the same doubts and questions as the French text, regardless of the fact that the translator knows the father-daughter relationship is not incestuous.

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**Chapter 5**  
**ARTIFICIALITY TO AUTHENTICITY:**  
**THE DIFFICULTIES OF TRANSLATING CATHERINE'S EVOLVING VOICE**

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● **Authorial Presence**

Perhaps one of the most interesting features of the source text, and consequently a very challenging one from a translational standpoint, is the evolution of the characters' voices. In the last chapter, my discussion focused on how Hugo's often ambiguous writing raises frequent questions about his relationship with his daughter. Catherine's voice, too, was challenging to deal with in translation: the source text exhibits the author's imprint on Catherine's voice early on in the novel, but Catherine eventually acquires an "author-free" voice. We must of course bear in mind that the author is ultimately behind Catherine in all the letters. This is again a case of a general impression rooted in describable textual features, a number of which will be analyzed in this chapter. Even when Catherine eventually acquires a voice that creates an impression of greater authenticity, this impression is still derived from the textual features of her letters.

The novel is structured so that we witness Catherine's development over a 43-year period. The reader follows along as she deals with significant milestones in her life, from childhood to adulthood. The letters are supposedly written at various ages, and needless to say, her writing style, or voice, changes over the years. The problem is that Catherine's voice in her early letters is not truly that of a 7 year-old, a 13 year-old or even an 18 year-old. Various features of the text lead the reader to suspect there is someone manipulating, or at least influencing young Catherine's writing. This influence is actually the authorial voice showing

through the "cracks" in the character's voice. Although there is a strong influence in these three ages, it is the translator, writing or recreating the text parallel to the original author, who must ultimately decide what voice Catherine will have and what traits are the most important to render... Her age? Her naivety? The fact that the author is working her like a puppet?

The easiest solution might be to simplify Catherine's voice, to be as self-effacing as possible and render the letters in as natural a "kidspeak" and "teenspeak" as possible. However, the question arises as to whether or not this is in fact possible. Another question that arises is whether the author intended to let her own hand show through, or if the presence felt in the source text is just the result of the innate difficulty of an adult trying to write as both a child and a teenager. The author admitted that reproducing a child's writing was a difficult endeavour<sup>23</sup> thus revealing that this "authorial presence" was unintentional. As a result, one of the main issues facing the translator is whether or not to "improve" the text by editing it and attempting to produce an authentic kidspeak. However, the translator's main consideration is that regardless of whether or not the presence is intended, the text does in fact exhibit the imprint of the author in the first three chapters. This presence is an aspect that cannot be ignored, since it strikes the reader almost immediately. For this reason, the translation renders the both Côté's presence in the early letters, and the gradual disappearance of her influence as Catherine ages.

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<sup>23</sup>See Appendix 2 for Côté's comments.

- **The 7 Year-Old Voice**

At first glance, Catherine's initial letter seems to accurately represent the language level of a 7 year-old. The source text is made up of short, simple sentences and the author appears to be attempting to reproduce kidspeak. Other textual features that demonstrate the writing of a young child include the use of questions and a vocative style. Furthermore, the content of the letter helps to convince the reader that this is actually a letter written by a 7 year-old. As far as the translation is concerned, there are no obvious difficulties. The general style of the first half of Catherine's letter to Hugo is straightforward, and similar textual features are used to render the superficial simplicity of Catherine's writing. The passage below is one example of this style:

Ma langue me joue des tours. Je parle beaucoup avec Patricia. C'est un beau nom, hein? Si je te dis qu'elle m'aime, vas-tu me croire? Si je te dis que je t'aime, vas-tu me croire? (p.10)

My tongue plays tricks on me. I talk a lot with Patricia. A pretty name, eh? If I tell you that she loves me, will you believe me? If I tell you that I love you, will you believe me?

This example serves as a point of reference for subsequent excerpts since it is relatively uncomplicated and shows the author's attempt to have Catherine write like a 7 year-old. However, two types of inconsistency in this letter lead the reader and the translator to suspect that someone is manipulating Catherine's writing, thus rendering Catherine's voice highly artificial.

The first inconsistency is at the level of the vocabulary and the second is at a stylistic level. The most obvious textual feature that leads the reader to sense the artificiality of Catherine's voice is the mix of language levels in the same passage, sometimes even in the same

sentence. The following examples illustrate this inconsistency:

"Normal kidspeak":

*Maman m'a dit, un petit peu, trop petite, les trouve plates, c'est drôle, (c'est un beau nom,) hein?, Maman me l'avait caché, quelqu'un de bien, gros comme un éléphant.*

Slightly formal vocabulary, turns of phrase, constructions, etc:

*j'irai te rejoindre, me soutiennent bien, chagrin, confirmer la règle, muette comme une tombe, convaincu, m'affirme.*

It is tempting to edit the translation in order to make Catherine's voice completely consistent with authentic kidspeak. However, this mix of language levels is a salient feature of the source text that cannot be ignored. It is therefore important to recreate this combination of language levels in the translation of Catherine's first letters in order to produce a similar impression on the reader of the target text. The following excerpt from the source text demonstrates how this inconsistency manifests itself within a single sentence:

"Lorsqu'elle est dans ses bons jours, maman m'affirme que tu m'aimes gros comme un éléphant." (p.10)

Here the irregularity lies with the use of the word "*m'affirme*", a word that is somewhat formal for a 7 year-old, especially in view of the child-like expression "*gros comme un éléphant*" which immediately follows. In order to recreate this anomaly, the verb "to maintain" was employed since in English it is also unlikely that a 7 year-old child would use it.

"When mommy is having a good day, mommy maintains that you love me as big as an elephant."

Another textual feature that shows the author's presence is a poetic and lyrical style that is not consistent with the writing of a 7 year-old. In contrast with the last example, the following excerpts display a more sophisticated style of writing which, despite an apparently simple sentence structure, manifests poetic subtleties that reveal the presence and influence of

the author.

- "Même à travers mes menteries, il y a des moments où je suis vraie." (p.10)
- "Patricia est si belle lorsqu'elle rit, si douce lorsqu'elle prononce mon nom à l'italienne..."(p.10)
- "Même lorsque je te tourne le dos, mon coeur vole vers toi."(p.10)
- "Leurs visages fâchés se collent l'un contre l'autre jusqu'à ce que le tonnerre applaudisse. Mes toutous ne chantent plus à la journée longue. La journée est trop longue, la terre aussi. C'est bleu partout. Tu n'es pas là." (p.11)

In the last example, the source text has become lyrical, poetic, and full of imagery. Also, the letter ends with a rhythmic "wind-down" which echoes Catherine's acute sense of loneliness. This example is certainly not representative of a 7 year-old's writing and thus shows the author's hand through the veneer of kidspeak. The imagery and the poetic quality of this part of the source text must also manifest itself in the translation, inasmuch as possible:

Their two furious faces press against one another until the thunder claps. Now, my doggies stay quiet all day long. The day is too long, the earth is too. It's blue all over. You're not there.

This example, along with others from this letter, will be analyzed and discussed in more detail in chapter 7, which deals with the inherent difficulties of translating poetic prose.

The presence of the author in Catherine's voice is a salient feature of this letter that the target text has attempted to recreate. In this letter, the author becomes visible through textual inconsistencies of the source text, as well as through the poetic and lyrical passages; the target text also contains these fluctuations of language level and style. Catherine's voice is not the only one to exhibit such fluctuations, as we will see in chapter 7.

- Catherine at 13

Although Catherine's voice in this chapter is slightly more realistic, Côté's presence still manifests itself. As with the previous letter, there are still variations and inconsistencies in the voice as well as poetic passages juxtaposed with what comes across as normal teenspeak. The following excerpts from the source text, with the poetic passages in **bold**, illustrate these inconsistencies of style and language level.

The first example shows a fairly lyrical and complex sentence immediately followed by three simpler, shorter sentences which more realistically echo the thoughts of the 13 year-old Catherine:

**J'ai quitté la confortable maison de mes sept ans pour une première chambre d'hôtel sans toi.** Je n'y étais pas bien. C'était serré serré sous mon chandail. Je ne savais plus quoi faire. (p.23)

Due to its lyrical form, the first sentence was the hardest to render. However, the shorter sentences that follow it must still recreate Catherine's 13 year-old voice with all its variations:

**I've left my comfortable childhood home for my first hotel room without you.** I wasn't very comfortable there. It was really really tight under my sweater. I didn't know what do to anymore.

The next passage also shows the author's presence. The passage begins with an awkward sentence ("*et aussi parce que*"), then continues with a highly poetic passage. The poetic quality of this excerpt juxtaposed with parts of the text that seem to more accurately reflect how a 13 year-old would write gives the reader the impression that Catherine's voice sounds a little artificial:

Je parle pour oublier les regards sans chaleur de maman et aussi parce que ton souvenir me réchauffe. **Mon assurance et ma peur, c'est la parole. Je séduirais New York au complet pour que tu viennes voir ce que je deviens. Je ne comprends rien à ce que je deviens. Je ne sais pas si, de loin, tu aimes**

ce que je deviens. Je sais que ma mère, non. (p.23)

The translation aims to recreate this overall impression of authorial intrusion by recreating both the slightly awkward first sentence and the poetic quality of the original passage:

**I talk so I can forget mom's cold glances and also because your memory warms me. Speech is both my comfort and my fear. I'd seduce all of New York so that you could see what I'm becoming. I don't at all understand what I'm becoming. I don't know if, from afar, you like what I'm becoming. I know that my mother doesn't.**

Finally, the following passage again illustrates the authorial voice coming through Catherine's in the form of lyrical and metaphorical segments:

**Patricia me suggère d'attendre, mon adolescence frappe assez fort comme ça. La petite fille de mes songes ne se souvient plus de son nom. Catherine. La vie de Catherine tombe comme un château de cartes. Mon jeu de patience se mêle à New York, ses bruits, ses regards, plus fort que je ne m'entende plus.**  
(p.24)

Recreated in the translation, the imagery and lyricism give the reader of the target text the impression that someone is manipulating Catherine:

**The little girl in my dreams doesn't remember her name anymore. Catherine. Catherine's life is crumbling like a house of cards. My game of solitaire is being shuffled into New York, its noises, its looks, so loudly that I can't hear myself anymore.**

The most important issue with regard to translating these passages is to maintain the inconsistencies in language level and style so that the effect on the reader of the target text will be the same as the effect on the reader of the original text.

- **Catherine at 18**

The voice of 18 year-old Catherine still seems somewhat artificial. Côté continues to manipulate Catherine to some extent because the writing is very self-consciously poetic and

emotional, even more so than in the first two chapters. The text is extremely lyrical in some places, and this is where the author's hand is most felt. Although Catherine has aged and her writing has undoubtedly improved, the images and the poetic license seem those of the author herself. The reader is left wondering if a relatively average 18 year-old could actually produce such poetic and lyrical writing.

Although much of this letter is extremely poetic and metaphorical, it is interspersed with more realistic parts conceivably written by an 18 year-old who has just broken up with her first serious boyfriend. These types of passages do not pose any particular difficulty in translation and can be contrasted with the subsequent examples from this letter. For example:

"A en croire maman, si j'apprends à ne rien faire subsister d'une relation, la douleur reprendra sa dimension ponctuelle. Je ne veux pas apprendre à dormir avec ma haine." (p.41)

"According to mom, if I learn to suffocate everything from a relationship, the pain will become intermittent again. I don't want to learn how to sleep with my hate."

However, the following two examples from this letter illustrate just how poetic 18 year-old Catherine's writing has become, a textual feature that leaves the reader with a strong sense of authorial presence:

La main collée au miroir, je laboure ma chair, ne reconnais que les voix aimées. La tienne, celle de maman, un peu. Je voudrais comprendre ce qui me touche, toucher ce que je comprends. Les gestes ne viennent pas. J'aurai toujours les larmes dans les yeux, née femme et dans la lune. (p.41-2)

My hand pressed against the mirror, I knead my flesh, recognize only the voices I love. Yours, mom's, well, a little. I'd like to understand what touches me, touch what I understand. The movements don't come. I'll always have tears in my eyes, born a woman and into a dream.

• • •

Aujourd'hui son corps, lieu d'apaisement, est loin de moi mais je continue de m'y reconnaître. Seul le visage demeure clos. Mon masque tremble. Je le jette. Mes yeux tombent à la renverse. Ils ne savent plus qui ils sont. On n'a pas de mots pour cerner la mort, mais des morts pour cerner les mots, on en a trop. Mes yeux sont si petits. J'avance sans bottes dans un marécage aux algues fines, nauséabondes, gluantes. (p.42)

Today, his body, a place of comfort, is far from me but I still recognize myself in it. Only the face remains obscure. My mask trembles. I throw it off. My eyes are stupefied. They don't know who they are anymore. No words to circumscribe death, yet too many deaths to circumscribe words. My eyes are so small. I wade, bootless, into a swamp of delicate, nauseating, sticky seaweed.

Both translations strive to recreate the poetic quality so evident in the source text.

- **Catherine at 27**

It is at this age that Catherine seems to acquire her own, authentic voice; the text is extremely lyrical and emotional, yet with good reason because her first child was stillborn. In the first half of her letter, Catherine's writing is fast-paced and vehement, with her thoughts flowing easily; the reader can feel the anger building up inside her, and sense the emotional momentum that is allowing her to spew out all of the built up resentment. The expression of her emotions in this highly lyrical text indicates that Catherine finally seems to have developed her own style; her own "author-free" voice. The awkward juxtaposition of child write and poetic text has been eliminated and is replaced with a more believable style through which Catherine, the adult, finally seems able to express herself without the reader sensing the author's presence.

In this letter, the reader experiences all the emotions of a Catherine who is not just describing her anger, but rather living it. Catherine's writing is extremely emotional, and her anger and vehement tone must be rendered in English in order to ensure that her voice in the

target text comes across as being more authentic than in the three previous chapters. The first example of such intensely emotional passages is very rhythmic and genuinely echoes Catherine's anger toward her father:

Je n'ai pas déchiré de rideaux, je n'ai pas cassé d'assiettes, je n'ai pas renversé de lampes, je n'ai pas jeté de photos de nous deux, je n'ai pas reproché mes amants d'être si différents de toi, si pareils au fond, je n'ai pas détruit ces cartes postales qui ne disaient rien en voulant trop m'en dire, je n'ai pas poussé les hauts cris lorsque tu m'as parlé d'Edouard, je n'ai pas accepté le poste de consultante en architecture que l'on m'offrait à Boston, je ne me suis pas éloignée de toi, non. (p.56)

The rhythmic and lyrical quality of the passage must be rendered in the translation:

I didn't rip the curtains, I didn't break any plates, I didn't knock over any lamps, I didn't throw out any pictures of the two of us, I didn't be reproach my lovers for being so different from you, yet fundamentally so similar, I didn't destroy the post cards that said nothing while trying to tell me too much, I didn't protest/object when you told me about Edouard, I didn't accept that position as an architectural consultant in Boston, I didn't distance myself from you, no.

This passage is just one example that highlights how the author has finally "disappeared" into Catherine: Côté's presence is no longer felt because Catherine's emotions and her way of expressing them seem plausible. The emotions and writing of this 27 year-old woman now seem more natural. Catherine seems to have gained her own voice now; the artificiality has subsided.

## ● Conclusion

Catherine's voice initially displays the author's presence through various textual features such as inconsistencies in language level and style, and the juxtaposition of poetic text with kidspeak or teenspeak. The formal vocabulary, turns of phrase, and constructions in the original letters are incompatible with the writing of a 7 and 13 year-old child. These textual features create an impression of artificiality through their awkwardness, an impression that the translation

recreates by maintaining the various inconsistencies. Moreover, the poetic quality of the source text is probably the most difficult aspect of Catherine's evolving voice and will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 7, which deals specifically with this challenging facet of the novel. Suffice it to say that the target text endeavours to recreate the poetic text in English so that these types of passages also strike the reader as signs of the author's presence. However, what concerns us in this chapter is the fact that this poetic text was often combined with passages which, for the most part, accurately depicted the writing and style of a young girl and teenager.

When Catherine emancipates herself from Côté, lyricism is the trait that marks her voice; however, given her age (27) and the fact that she is grieving for the child she has lost, the poetic text actually lends her voice more authenticity. The translation recreates the poetic quality of her letter in order to give the reader of the target text the impression that Catherine has acquired her own "author-free" voice.

In fact, from this point on, another feature surfaces in the source text: much of the poetic effect arises from the deliberate incoherency of the text. In addition to the ambiguity of Hugo's letters discussed in the previous chapter, the often incoherent passages of both Catherine and Hugo's later letters constitute another element which reflects the intimacy of the father-daughter relationship.

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Chapter 6  
TEXTUAL INCOHERENCY AS EVIDENCE OF INTIMACY:  
RELATED TRANSLATION DIFFICULTIES

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- **General**

Throughout *Cher Hugo, chère Catherine* the reader senses that the relationship between Hugo and Catherine is very special, that there is an extremely close bond between father and daughter. One of the reasons for this impression is the often cryptic or seemingly incoherent writing in the letters: although incoherency is not a necessary result of intimacy, the reader can feel the closeness between father and daughter because there are passages that she does not fully understand. This is due to the fact that father and daughter share a background and history which make it unnecessary for them to refer explicitly to certain parts of their past, which the reader, on the other hand, knows nothing about. This potential lack of comprehension makes it difficult to translate such passages. Yet, it is essential to recreate the source text's effect on the reader, i.e the impression of intimacy conveyed through incoherent and cryptic passages.

In the first two chapters, the experience shared by father and daughter is made obvious by a generally straightforward writing style. References are made quite directly to things Hugo and Catherine have shared or experienced together, or to previous conversations or correspondence. The examples below, like other passages that make direct, clear reference to shared experience, pose no problem for the translation. The straightforward and direct style of reference is easily reproduced in the target text. In the first chapter (*Sept ans*), there are several references to common experiences by both Catherine and Hugo:

**Catherine to Hugo**

"Toi lorsque tu n'es pas en voyage tu m'appelles ta petite princesse." (p.9)

"You Daddy, when you're not on a trip you call me your little princess."

• • •

"Te rappelles-tu celui que nous avons rencontré au Jardin botanique?" (p.9)

"Do you remember the one that we saw at the Botanical gardens?"

• • •

#### **Hugo to Catherine**

"Te souviens-tu du film que nous avons regardé alors que ta mère était couchée?" (p.19)

"Do you remember the film we saw together when your mother was sleeping? "

Again in the second chapter, both characters make clear references to past experience:

#### **Catherine to Hugo**

"'On embellit en voyageant', disais-tu." (p.23)

"'You said, "Travelling makes you more beautiful.'"

• • •

"Dans ta dernière lettre, tu m'expliques qu'elle n'était pas dans une posture pour créer des liens." (p.23)

"In your last letter, you explained that she wasn't in a position to get close to anyone."

• • •

#### **Hugo to Catherine**

"Je ne sais pas pourquoi je t'ai laissé partir. Patricia m'a dit que votre hôtel était coté quatre étoiles: j'ai choisi de la croire mais... New York!" (p.36)

I don't know why I let you leave. Patricia told me that you'd be staying at a four star hotel: I chose to believe her but... New York!

While these simple, easily comprehensible passages pose no great difficulty in translation, they are of interest to us here because they contrast with the more enigmatic and cryptic segments, which, in many letters, highlight the degree of intimacy between Catherine and Hugo.

- **Knowledge is Power**

Paradoxically, one of the problems with this source text is that the author has clarified many of the incoherent and obscure passages in the novel by answering a multitude of questions put to her (see Appendices 1 and 2). This clarification of many enigmatic and seemingly incoherent passages by the author has improved the translator's understanding of such passages, given her a comprehensive understanding of the direction and meaning of the source text, and put her in approximately the same position as the novel's author. The translator must make some decisions with respect to how much information she is willing to give the general reader of the target text.

With this extra knowledge in hand, it is easy to be tempted into making the target text more explicit and thus clarifying some, if not all of the obscure passages, in an attempt to render the target text meaningful and to avoid any literal and consequently farcical translations. This was the main difficulty or challenge with this aspect of the source text and its translation: how to achieve a delicate balance between the need to make the target text readable and the need to render the effect of the source text on the reader of the translation. In other words, the translation must retain some of the incoherence and obscurity found in the original letters in order to truly reflect the intimacy that exists between father and daughter, while remaining comprehensible enough for the reader to feel that intimacy through a sort of literary voyeurism.

The main textual markers of the intimacy that manifests itself through incoherency are interrupted threads, in which the character constantly jumps from one field of images to another, and blatantly incomprehensible passages. These features reflect the fact that the two characters have a great deal of common experience, and show us that they have a sort of private code that

remains unrevealed to the reader.

- **Catherine at 18**

The letters of the 18 year-old Catherine start to become somewhat cryptic, thus indicating that she and Hugo have developed an intimate relationship. There is less of a need for her to be explicit, since Hugo will most likely automatically understand what she is trying to convey. In her letter to Hugo, Catherine discusses her break-up with Sigfried, her first serious lover. In the first two chapters of the novel, the reader realizes that Hugo is very close to his daughter; Hugo therefore understands her pain and realizes that she feels as if she has lost part of herself.

The following excerpt from Catherine's letter to Hugo is a perfect example of a highly incoherent text which creates the impression of an intimate father-daughter relationship precisely because the reader is not privy to their private code and shared experience:

J'aurai toujours les larmes dans les yeux, née femme et dans la lune.  
Siegfried l'astronaute a terminé sa visite. Sous mes pantalons, il n'y a plus que mon sexe. Maman me traite de putain. Je lui réplique que je préfère être une fille de mauvaise vie qu'une fausse vierge comme elle. Après, je la console et lui chuchote que lorsque j'irai mieux, je m'habillerai pour tous les anges de la terre. Je lui promets de gémir convenablement. (p.42)

It would be easy to fall into a very literal translation of this passage, given its incoherence. The following, rather literal translation demonstrates how a lack of understanding of the source text leads to a literal, stilted and nonsensical rendering:

I'll always have tears in my eyes, born a woman, with my head in the clouds.  
Siegfried the astronaut has ended his visit. In my pants, there is nothing but my vagina. Mother treats me like a slut. I tell her that I prefer being a woman of ill repute than a fake virgin like her. Afterwards, I console her by telling her that I'll dress to please the angels. I promise to moan properly.

There are a number of problems with such an uninformed translation. Although it may be as

incoherent as the source text, with its lack of related ideas and interrupted threads of thought, it loses its idiomatic quality and impresses the reader as being somewhat gallic and stiff; worse still, "vagina" could easily appear ridiculous and pull the reader out of the text.

This entire letter is one that Bianca Côté was able to clarify by answering questions on specific excerpts. The information she supplied about various excerpts makes for a better interpretation of the source text, which in turn helps to improve the translation. The first clarification she provided was on the first sentence, more specifically on the expression "*dans la lune*". The expression alludes to a person temporarily escaping reality by daydreaming. Although there initially appears to be no problem with a rendering such as "born a woman, with my head in the clouds" or "born a woman, into a daydream", the difficulty lies in rendering the metaphorical first sentence of the next paragraph. In French the link between "*lune*" and "*astronaute*" creates a powerful imagery and works extremely well, yet in English, the literal translation is extremely unidiomatic and therefore loses the lyrical quality of the source text. The question that was put to Côté was whether the interpretation of "*dans la lune*" as analogous to "*dans un rêve*" was accurate. She confirmed that this was a correct interpretation and as a result, the translation of both sentences was improved:

I'll always have tears in my eyes, born a woman and into a dream.  
Siegfried the sandman has left.

With the use of "into a dream", the image in the next sentence was changed to "sandman" in order to maintain the same type of metaphorical relationship that exists in the French text. The result is a much more idiomatic translation that retains the lyrical quality and metaphorical imagery of the source text.

The challenge with respect to the remaining passage again lies in the obscurity of the text

because the reader is not entirely sure of its overall meaning. Again, the author's assistance elucidated how Catherine was feeling and the general direction of the text. Without this information, it remains difficult, though not impossible, to arrive at a comprehensible and meaningful translation. First it is necessary to understand that Catherine is feeling extremely lonely after her break-up with her first love and lover, Sigfried. According to Côté, she feels empty on both an emotional and physical level, and that is why she makes references to "*il n'y a plus que mon sexe*" and later on in the letter, "*la mort qui descend dans mon sexe trop bien caché*".

The second sentence of the second paragraph (*Sous mes pantalons...*) is an explicit way of conveying Catherine's acute sense of loneliness without her lover. However, there is a great difficulty in translating the word "sexe" into English. The choices in English are "vagina", "genitals" and "sexual organs", all of which are very anatomical and perhaps somewhat vulgar for this lyrical passage. By comparison, the French "sexe" is more neutral and definitely less anatomical. Therefore, it is helpful to refer to the information provided by Côté in order to render the general impression of the source text.

The dominating idea of this sentence is Catherine's loss of her lover, which leaves her feeling sexually destitute, a feeling she conveys by commenting on herself on a purely physical level. This idea of carnality must remain in the English version, but as mentioned earlier, the two dominating choices leave much to be desired. The first step in this solution was to find an alternative to "vagina", "sexual organs" and "genitals" that still conveyed a carnal impression to the reader. The selected equivalent is "desire"; a metonymical rendering of "*sexe*", it conveys the carnal aspect of Catherine's statement while avoiding the vulgar. This choice almost

imposed the choice of another metonym to make the sentence more idiomatic. Instead of using "pants", "clothes" was used instead. This solution renders the overall impression of the carnal loneliness Catherine expresses in the source text sentence.

The last two sentences also pose problems for the translator because of their incoherence. The information Côté has provided again plays an important role in recreating the source text. Catherine is trying to tell her mother in a highly metaphorical way (*je m'habillerai pour tous les anges de la terre*) that when she is feeling better, things will be different, she will be prettier. However, Catherine's text does not make this obvious, though the reader does get a sense that something will improve when she is feeling better. The French text is therefore not a reference to how she dresses (like a slut) and cannot therefore, be translated literally. Since the metaphor is not directly transferable, the solution opted for in this passage was to employ an antithetical image of "*anges*" and an associated metaphor. The rendering, "my demons will disappear" conveys an idea of change, or improvement, and is still somewhat cryptic.

Finally, the last sentence also causes problems for the translator. Catherine is again being cryptic, and although her father is sure to understand her, the reader is left wondering what Catherine means by "*gémir convenablement*". As we discover later on in the novel, Catherine's mother is quite distant from both her daughter and husband, and according to Hugo, she is virtually uninterested in a sexual relationship. We almost get the impression that she suppresses her emotions, and this is reflected in Côté's comment on this particular passage because when Catherine promises her mother to "*gémir convenablement*", Côté explains that Catherine's mother would like her to be less expressive and for Catherine to quell her tantrums. This piece of information, along with all the other details Côté provided about this particular

excerpt has helped to shape and improve the remaining translation of the passage at hand:

Under my clothes there's nothing but desire. Mom treats me like a slut. I tell her that I'd rather be a slut than a fake virgin like her. Afterwards, I console her by telling her that when I'm feeling better my demons will disappear. I promise to moan respectably.

This passage was one I had great difficulty translating because the incoherence, or fragmentation of the text, makes it opaque for the reader while full of meaning for both Catherine and Hugo. It is, in fact, this obscurity that the translation strives to recreate; however, the recreation would have been extremely difficult without a proper idea of Catherine as a person and of the direction in which the text was intended to move. Thus, the information the author provided on this excerpt proved to be crucial to the translation. Ironically, this type of information is also potentially "dangerous" since it would be easy to "overtranslate" in order to make the target text clearer than the French text. It is vital for the translator to bear in mind the dominating impression of the source text while using the explanations provided by the author.

Hugo's letter to Catherine in this chapter displays the same incoherence; the text is dislocated, choppy and opaque. The following excerpt warrants comment because of its difficulty in translation:

Comprendre n'est pas tout. Ressentir. Même si tu ne sais pas ce que tu sens ou ce que tu sais. Cela deviendra de plus en plus semblable. L'harmonie viendra te saluer au pays de l'enfance et du pain frais. Tes nuits tourbillonneront sans Sigfried. Le dépouillement demande du temps, les accessoires ne cesseront pas d'être ce qu'ils sont, ils t'apparaîtront simplement moins nécessaires. (p.51)

The first problem arises with the sentence that begins, "*L'harmonie viendra te saluer...*". This sentence is very cryptic and initially does not make sense. The reader comes away with a vague notion that Hugo is giving advice to his daughter about her break-up with Sigfried and that this specific reference might be a secret code between the two of them. Here, again, the author was

able to clarify the meaning of the sentence. By "*pays de l'enfance*" Hugo means a beautiful place where life is simple; hence he is trying to tell Catherine that she will find peace and harmony in simplicity and beauty. However, the source text is metaphoric, a feature that should be recreated in the target text. The next problematic aspect of this passage is the last sentence. The source text is again obscure and the reader senses that this sentence is linked to the advice Hugo is trying to impart to his daughter. When the author was asked to clarify this sentence, she explained that Hugo was telling Catherine that eventually she will need fewer and fewer things to be happy. Based on these explanations, my translation is:

Understanding is not the be all and end all. Feel. Even if you don't know what you're feeling or what you know. It'll all become increasingly similar. Harmony will come greet you in the land of childhood and fresh bread. Your nights will reel without Sigfried. Shedding takes time, accessories will always be just that, accessories, they'll just appear less essential.

The solution for the first problem in this excerpt is quite close to the source text because the original seems somewhat nonsensical as well. Furthermore, the verb "shedding" was chosen over "discarding" and "casting aside" to emphasize the idea of a slow process of eliminating the superfluous things in life. Nonetheless, the translation remains as elusive and incoherent as the source text.

#### ● Catherine at 27

The letters in this chapter become even more obscure and incoherent. The following excerpt from Catherine's letter to Hugo reflects the intimacy between father and daughter:

...j'entends une autre que moi se dire : "Rentre ton ventre, la voix que tu détestes va sortir sinon, le cri d'horreur va dépasser l'entendement, ça jaillira en tous sens puis ça va mourir." Marlène. Avant d'accoucher, je pensais pouvoir terrifier mes monstres, être sous protection ailleurs que dans l'étouffement." (p.57)

The text is not very luminous. It is not so much the linguistic structure that creates the problem, but rather the lack of coherent ideas. Most likely, this part of her letter is very representative of how Catherine is feeling: she has just lost her baby and is confused, angry and embittered. Yet since she and Hugo are close, she does not necessarily have to detail her every emotion; hence the incoherent, fragmented text. According to Côté, Catherine feels she must hold everything inside her, repress her emotions, or she will explode. Also, she would like to protect herself in some other way than by just bottling up her emotions. While this explanation helps clarify the passage for the translator, the text remains obscure for the reader and should remain so for the reader of the translation. However, the obscurity of the source text must not render the target text cumbersome; the following translation strives to render the incoherence by keeping the images harsh and the text choppy:

I hear a woman who is not me saying to herself, "Suck in your stomach, or else the voice you loathe will escape, the shriek of horror will surpass comprehension, it will spew out everywhere, then die." Marlene. Before giving birth I thought I could terrify my demons, find protection in something other than repression.

In addition to the excerpts already discussed, there are a great many more incoherent passages in this letter. However, the last two chapters provide a few excellent examples that reinforce the impression of intimacy between the two main characters and present a great challenge for the translator due to their incoherency and obscurity.

- **Catherine at 42**

The letters in the sixth chapter are sometimes incoherent and seemingly illogical. The text often does not seem to hold together well for the reader. For example, in Catherine's letter to Hugo the text is very opaque, and Catherine keeps interrupting her flow of thought, changing

fields of images with almost every sentence, and thus somewhat losing the reader:

Dans ton sommeil, tu rejoins l'amertume des grands ciels, implores le soleil. Un frisson te parcourt, tu poses tes mains sur tes cuisses, on dirait que tu n'as plus de sève. Vas-tu te réveiller? L'ombre de ma mère t'accuse du regard. Ses épées évitent tes plaies, ta faim ne la séduit plus. Tes dents hésitent trop. (p.90)

The text is very metaphorical and cryptic, and the reader can only assume that Hugo will understand what Catherine is trying to tell him about himself, whereas the reader is left questioning her first sentence, whether or not her mother is in the room with her, and the meaning of the last, metaphorical sentence. This passage is a good candidate for comical sounding translations because of its opaqueness. The following translation was initially produced without any clarification from the author:

In your sleep, you meet up with the bitterness of the skies, implore the sun. A shiver runs through you, you place your hands on your thighs, it's like there's no sap left in you. Are you going to wake up? My mother's shadow throws you an accusing look. Her daggers miss your wounds, your hunger seduces her no longer. Your bite is too slow.

Although it is possible to edit this first version to make it more idiomatic and less gallic, the result is still less meaningful than the source text. Fortunately, the author was able to provide much needed clarification on this excerpt. Catherine is in a hotel room in Montreal with her father, and they are pretending to have escaped to London for a weekend. Hugo is mourning the death of his lover, Edouard, and Catherine's letter is partially her description of him while he sleeps. Her first sentence is a metaphorical way of saying that Hugo is experiencing a great deal of sadness in his dreams and is praying for help. Another problem with this excerpt is the sentence that begins "*L'ombre de ma mère...*". It is obscure and metaphorical, exemplifying the shared experience of the characters to which the reader is not privy. According to Côté, Catherine is remembering her mother throwing her father accusing

looks out of resentment for him. The last sentence also needs clarification because the reader, and hence the translator, only gets the vague impression that Hugo is too slow at something. The author explains this sentence by commenting that Hugo has lost his decisiveness in life.

Nonetheless, this sentence remains very challenging for the translator. In fact, even with the author's explanations, the entire passage remains difficult to recreate. For this reason, it is important for the translator to bear in mind the overall, dominating impression of the source text, which is that of a metaphorical and obscure description by Catherine of experiences she has shared with her father.

In your sleep, you encounter the vast, bitter skies, implore the sun. A shiver runs through you, you place your hands on your thighs, there seems to be no sap left in you. Are you going to wake up? My mother's shadow accuses you with its eyes. Her daggers avoid your wounds, your hunger seduces her no longer. You hesitate too long before biting.

This version strives to maintain the metaphorical quality without making the text too explicit. The target text is opaque and conserves the constantly shifting focus by avoiding the temptation to link the sentences with logical connectors in an effort to make it more readable.

There is also an interesting incoherent passage in Hugo's letter to Catherine in this chapter:

"Te voir différemment m'impliquerait trop. J'appartiens à la race des conquérants sans en être un. A cloche-pied dans le danger, je stagne." (p.103)

This passage is written in the context of Hugo pondering his daughter's identity. The problem lies in deciphering the text. Hugo's sentences seem unrelated and enigmatic. His daughter likely understands him, but the reader can only guess at his meaning. The author provided some interesting background that clarifies this cryptic passage. Hugo has received a "male" education and should therefore be a leader and powerful conqueror. Throughout the novel, however, we

discover that he is not, if only from the fact that he fails to live up to his role in the societal institution of marriage by taking on a homosexual lover. This explains his last sentence, in which he describes how he feels in situations of danger. According to the author, he is immobile and uncomfortable in such situations. With this information in hand, the following translation strives to recreate a sense of obscurity and thus, intimacy, through an equally incoherent text:

"Seeing you differently would involve me too much. I belong to the race of conquerors, without being one. Staggering through danger, I stagnate."

In English, the metaphor of failing to be conqueror is appropriate since it also relays the somewhat cryptic quality of Hugo's writing. The last sentence poses more of a problem however, mainly because of the two ideas Côté is trying to convey by "*A cloche-pied*". Normally, this expression is used to depict someone hopping, and regardless of Côté's intention, at least part of that image comes through in the source text, along with the element of awkwardness (which is closer to Côté's intended use of the expression). The solution involved finding an expression that relayed as much the image of the source text expression, as the idea of immobility and discomfort or awkwardness. The word "staggering" conveys as much of these three elements as possible: there is an impression of slow and erratic movement or progress because of awkward maneuvering. Other possibilities such as "paralyzed" or "immobile" would have excluded two of the aforementioned elements (discomfort/awkwardness and the image of someone hopping) and perhaps required a supplementary adjective to compensate. This solution would have done exactly what the translation should avoid: employ the information provided by the author in order to make an obscure passage more explicit and thus more comprehensible.

- The Last Chapter

Finally, the last letter Hugo writes to Catherine in the chapter *Cinquante ans* is perhaps the most difficult text from a translational point of view because it is extremely cryptic. The reason for the almost complete incoherency of this letter is that he is writing it while under the influence of morphine. He drifts from one thought to another, not making any clear links, and produces seemingly nonsensical text. Even with this highly incoherent text, Catherine still seems to understand him. In her last letter, which she reads to the congregation at her father's funeral, she explains something he said while he was under the influence of morphine, "*Sous la morphine il ressassait...*" (p.108) This continued communication bears witness to their intimate relationship, because they seem to understand each other's extremely obscure passages, such as the following excerpt:

Ma gare s'est évanouie, mes nuits d'aquarelle coulent pour rien, mes bras ne savent pas retenir. Sur mes épaules, je porte des rails douces pour qu'on ne s'effraie pas, qu'on vienne me consoler des ravages lorsque je chante a cappella aux passants sans ombre. (p.114)

The difficulty of translating this passage (and others like it) lies in recreating nonsensical, incoherent text that is still meaningful to the target text reader (meaningful in the sense that the effect of disorientation and wonder is transmitted by the translation). Bianca Côté explained this passage by saying that the anchors in Hugo's life, the things to which he is most attached, are disappearing; the colours too are fading as he nears death. He does not know how to stop this from happening. Furthermore, he would like to shoulder the pain his illness is causing those he loves, in order to ease their burden. The last part of this passage refers to him using his real voice with the strangers he encounters. Although Côté has elucidated this segment, a more explicit translation would not have the same impact on the reader of the target text. The

impression of the source text remains that of a dying man letting his thoughts ramble, so there is no justification for the target text to be any different. The French text is incomprehensible on its own; it lacks coherence and seems meaningless without the author's explanations. Yet, although this information gives the translator a better idea of the direction of the passage and puts her in virtually the same position as the author, she must do what the author has done, and create a poetic, metaphorical and opaque text for the reader:

My station has disappeared, its watercolour nights flow for naught, my arms don't know how to hold back. I carry the tender rails on my back to calm the frightened, to be consoled for the ravages when I sing a cappella to the shadowless passerbys.

Ironically, a literal translation for this type of passage is virtually what is needed to recreate the morphine-induced incoherency.

#### • Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with how the increasingly incoherent and cryptic text conveys the intimacy of close father-daughter relationship. The incoherent and cryptic passages sometimes perplex the reader; often we have an instinct about what Hugo and Catherine are saying to each other, yet the details and precise meaning remain unknown. The opaque examples often pose problems for the translator because of an initial lack of comprehension. Generally speaking, in the first two chapters of the novel, the background shared by Hugo and Catherine is made explicit and presents no great difficulties for the translator. For most other incoherent passages though, the translations were initially overly literal, verging on the farcical because I lacked a suitable understanding of the source text. Clarification from the author was needed on many occasions in order to acquire a better understanding of the meaning and direction of many

passages.

The information provided by Bianca Côté was helpful, if not essential, for translating some passages of her novel. However, it would have been very easy to use the newly acquired knowledge to clarify incoherent segments of Hugo's and Catherine's letters. It was important to study the passages carefully, keeping in mind the information provided by Côté so that the incoherence and opaqueness evident in the source text also showed through the target text. Without an appropriate level of incoherence, the translation would fail to render one of the most important aspects of the novel: the intimate nature of Hugo and Catherine's relationship.

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## Chapter 7

### DEALING WITH POETIC PROSE IN TRANSLATION

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- **Introduction**

The difficulty and complexity of literary translation are due to the complexity of literary texts themselves, which are self-focused and as with most other art, constitute an end unto themselves. Literary texts sometimes tend to be opaque, as is the case with many parts of *Cher Hugo, chère Catherine*. Many passages in this novel are poetic in nature, with some passages deriving their poetic qualities from incoherent, disjointed text. Both Catherine and Hugo's letters to each other often exhibit poetic, sometimes surrealistic qualities. These surrealistic passages generally manifest themselves when the characters fall into a highly reflective or semi-conscious state. As discussed in the previous chapter, their writing is often incoherent and opaque due, in part, to their intimacy; this incoherency and obscurity also produce sometimes highly poetic prose.

It is notoriously difficult to translate poetry: poetic language ceases to be arbitrary since it creates a real relationship between structure, sound and the "meaning" of the text. Literary texts, and especially poetry, become "motivated". That is, sounds, rhymes, structures, and images contribute to the "meaning" of a text. Often, in poetic prose, the meaning is no longer single-valued and clear-cut as there is an intense association between form and meaning, with the form often embodying or echoing the message of the text. This is often the case with the novel at hand. The text makes frequent use of poetic prose and the translator must recreate the relationship between form and meaning inherent in the source text by finding the salient textual features of the poetic passages and endeavouring to recreate those features in the target language.

This is not always an easy task, given the fact that the translator is neither a literary author nor a poet. The analysis of the passages presented in this chapter will not be of a technical nature (i.e. employing semiotics, phonostylistics and the like), but will focus on particular difficulties in specific passages and on translation strategies for each example.

- **Catherine's Early Letters**

Catherine's voice is highly poetic, even in her early letters. A few examples were discussed briefly in chapter 5 in the context of the artificial quality of Catherine's young voice. The poetic subtleties of the following examples from Catherine's first letter to her father warrant a more detailed analysis. The melodic quality of the following example is an intrusion by the author into the text, and brings out the artificiality of 7 year-old Catherine's writing. Although a seemingly minor feature, the anaphoric structure renders the sentence melodic and is easily recreated in the target text to give it a poetic quality:

"Je suis gênée mais heureuse: Patricia est si belle lorsqu'elle rit, si douce lorsqu'elle prononce mon nom à l'italienne..." (p.10)

"I'm shy but happy: Patricia is so pretty when she laughs, so gentle when she says my name in Italian..."

The next excerpt is also an example of a poetic intrusion into young Catherine's voice. In this case, the metaphorical imagery emphasizes how much Catherine loves her father. This textual feature is rendered in the English text in order to give the reader of the translation the impression of authorial presence through poetic text:

"Même lorsque je te tourne le dos, mon coeur vole vers toi." (p.10)

"Even when I turn my back to you, my heart soars out to you."

To render the poetic imagery Côté has given Catherine's writing, "soars" was chosen over "flies" as it creates a more powerful image.

Catherine's letter provides a particularly striking poetic passage which was briefly discussed in chapter 5:

Leurs visages fâchés se collent l'un contre l'autre jusqu'à ce que le tonnerre applaudisse. Mes toutous ne chantent plus à la journée longue. La journée est trop longue, la terre aussi. C'est bleu partout. Tu n'es pas là. (p.11)

As mentioned in chapter 5, this passage certainly does not typify the writing of a 7 year-old. Catherine's acute loneliness for her father comes through a rhythmic, poetic text which is full of imagery. The letter ends with a rhythmic "wind-down" that reflects her sadness. These features must be preserved in the target text:

Their two furious faces press against one another until the thunder claps. Now, my teddy bears stay quiet all day long. The day is too long, the earth is too. It's blue all over. You're not there.

The translation aims to reproduce many features of the source text, but where it does not match the source text feature for feature, compensation is used. The above translation attempts to render several elements of the source text which contribute to its poetic feel, including the successively shorter sentences, the rhythmical linking of the sentences through the repetition of the words "*journée*" and "*longue*", and the phonetic aspect of the last sentence. The last syllable of the letter is a low vowel sound which emphasizes Catherine's sadness. In English, "there" was used instead of "here" to avoid an acute vowel which would have somewhat distorted how the source text echoed the character's dark mood.

In the second chapter, Catherine's writing is again commandeered by authorial poetry. This characteristic, which contributes to the fluctuations in Catherine's voice, must be

maintained by recreating poetic passages such as the following excerpt:

"Je marcherai tout un siècle et lorsque je vais revenir, tu ne me reconnaîtras plus." (p.23)

This sentence exhibits a slightly sophisticated structure and creates a strong image which emphasizes Catherine's love for her father. Although initially this sentence appears straightforward for translation, the first clause is problematic because of the graceful style. Translations such as, "I'll walk a whole century", "I'll walk for an entire century" come across as stilted, and lose the poetic quality of the original. The following solution avoids the stiltedness of these possibilities and strives to reproduce this rather refined style:

"I'll walk a century's time and when I return, you won't recognize me anymore."

The last sentence of the next passage also shows displays qualities:

"Je parle pour oublier les regards sans chaleur de maman et aussi parce que ton souvenir me réchauffe. Mon assurance et ma peur, c'est la parole." (p.23)

The lyrical nature of the last sentence is due to the structure and elevated language level. One translation option for the last sentence is to render "parole" by "talking". This choice however, would recreate a more authentic teenspeak where the source text exhibits a more sophisticated use of the French language. Rather than translate the sentence by, "I find comfort and fear in talking", the word "speech" was employed in order to maintain the somewhat elevated language level and thus render the sentence poetic:

"I talk so I can forget mom's cold glances and also because your memory warms me. Speech is both my comfort and my fear."

The next passage is again lyrical:

Je séduirais New York au complet pour que tu viennes voir ce que je deviens.  
Je ne comprends rien à ce que je deviens. Je ne sais pas si, de loin, tu aimes ce que je deviens. (p.23)

This example, like a few others in this chapter, is meant to illustrate that not all the poetic prose in this novel is excessively difficult to translate. Here again the use of an anaphoric structure ("*Je... deviens, je... deviens*") creates a rhythmic and poetic effect which was easily maintained in English:

I'd seduce all of New York so that you could come see what I'm becoming. I don't at all understand what I'm becoming. I don't know if, from afar, you like what I'm becoming.

The next passage, again taken from Catherine's letter in the second chapter, is highly metaphorical and the imagery contributes to the poetic quality of the passage. Furthermore, it is also very rhythmic:

La petite fille de mes songes ne se souvient plus de son nom. Catherine. La vie de Catherine tombe comme un château de cartes. Mon jeu de patience se mêle à New York, ses bruits, ses regards, plus fort que je ne m'entende plus. (p.24)

Catherine's reflections in this excerpt are very lyrical, far too poetic to be representative of a young teenager's writing. However, the images and metaphors of the source text work well in English, perhaps even better with the idea of Catherine's cards being "shuffled" into New York. Although the verb "mixed" is an acceptable equivalent for "mêler", the resulting image would not be as strong as that of the source text. It is far less idiomatic and strays from Catherine's metaphors of her life being as fragile as a house of cards, and of New York taking away her solitude. Such considerations result in the following translation:

The little girl in my dreams doesn't remember her name anymore. Catherine. Catherine's life is crumbling like a house of cards. My game of solitaire is being shuffled into New York, its noises, its looks, so loudly that I can't hear myself anymore.

- Catherine at 18

In the third chapter, many passages continue to be poetic, but in addition to devices such as vivid imagery and rhythm, incoherency begins to be used as a poetic device. The passage below, with its disjointed sentences, unrelated ideas, and incongruous imagery illustrates how incoherent Catherine's writing can be:

La main collée au miroir, je laboure ma chair, ne reconnais que les voix aimées.  
La tienne, celle de maman, un peu. Je voudrais comprendre ce qui me touche,  
toucher ce que je comprends. Les gestes ne viennent pas. J'aurai toujours les  
larmes dans les yeux, née femme et dans la lune.  
Sigfried l'astronaute a terminé sa visite. (p.41-2)

This incoherence, emphasized by the missing personal pronoun *je* in the first sentence, and of a verb in the second sentence, is presumably intended to reflect Catherine's emotional state. It creates an impression of surrealism which the translation strives to recreate:

My hand pressed against the mirror, I knead my flesh, recognize only the voices  
I love. Yours, mom's, well, a little. I'd like to understand what touches me,  
touch what I understand. The movements don't come. I'll always have tears in  
my eyes, born a woman and into a dream.  
Sigfried the sandman has left.

The omission of the pronoun *je* in the first sentence and the verb *reconnaître* in the second sentence are simple solutions; however, the translator must resist the temptation to reconstruct this passage so that it flows better and becomes more coherent. Also, maintaining the same shifts in ideas and images reproduces the incoherent and poetic effect of the original. As discussed in chapter 6, the link between "*lune*" and "*astronaute*" creates a powerful image in French, but the literal translation in English is unidiomatic and loses the lyrical quality of the source text. The result of clarifying this passage with Côté is a translation of the last sentence that renders the metaphorical imagery beautifully in the target text.

The next example creates an even more strikingly surrealistic effect because its incoherency seems to be reflecting Catherine's unconscious mind. The reader gets the impression of a fragmented stream of thoughts in the following passage:

Aujourd'hui son corps, lieu d'apaisement, est loin de moi mais je continue de m'y reconnaître. Seul le visage demeure clos. Mon masque tremble. Je le jette. Mes yeux tombent à la renverse. Ils ne savent plus qui ils sont. On n'a pas de mots pour cerner la mort, mais des morts pour cerner les mots, on en a trop. Mes yeux sont si petits. J'avance sans bottes dans un marécage aux algues fines, nauséabondes, gluantes. (p.42)

This fragmentation is the result of missing experiential and logical connectors: we are left wondering how Catherine's ideas relate, especially between the sixth, seventh and eighth sentences. She does not link them with any logical or experiential connectors (i.e. we do not specifically know what experiences would lead her thoughts to flow as they do). The entire passage is composed of images that constantly and abruptly change throughout the string of short, simple sentences that begin with "*Seul le visage*". The rapid succession of brief, narrative and seemingly nonsensical sentences, with their powerful and incoherent imagery, conveys Catherine's pain. In other words, her confusion and pain are reflected in the form of the text, something the target text must strive to maintain:

Today, his body, a place of comfort, is far from me but I still recognize myself in it. Only the face remains obscure. My mask trembles. I throw it off. My eyes are stupefied. They don't know who they are anymore. No words to circumscribe death, yet too many deaths to circumscribe words. My eyes are so small. I wade, bootless, into a swamp of delicate, putrid, sticky seaweed.

The abrupt change of images is maintained by keeping the sentences short and concise in order to render the sense of confusion expressed by Catherine. Furthermore, the translation of the sentence, "*On n'a pas de mots...*" is abbreviated by eliminating the verb at the beginning of the sentence in order to recreate the surrealistic, dream-like effect of the source text. This

construction avoids the awkward, heavy construction "There aren't any words..." and emphasizes the abrupt change of focus. Finally, the last sentence of the passage is extremely metaphorical and creates a powerful image reflecting Catherine's state of existence. The metaphorical image of struggling through a morass evokes Catherine's emotional state and is reproduced by using equally strong adjectives and images in the target text.

- **Catherine at 27**

The poetic quality of the novel is not limited to Catherine's early letters. Catherine's letter to Hugo in the fourth chapter of the novel provides two incoherent passages that are poetic in nature. The first is written as she is raging about the loss of Marlene:

Jamais je n'aurais imaginé que le pire de mes rêves se dérouleraient ici-bas. J'ai craché l'enfant comme on crache le lait, en pure perte. L'enfant : un vitrail, des morceaux de couleurs dispersés. La chasse d'eau a été tirée. Mon ventre est un pichet vide. J'ai soif. Je lèche le vomi de ma voix... Oh! Pourquoi suis-je si dure? (p.57)

This passage stresses Catherine's fragile emotional state. The text is very incoherent, mainly because Catherine is completely letting go of her emotions, letting them take over her writing. Consequently, the ideas and images are extremely incongruous, and the text is truncated, with extremely short sentences (one of which is verbless) that create a fast-paced rhythm. The poetry of the text is reflected in the English translation:

I'd never have imagined that the worst of my dreams would take place in this world. I spat the child out like you spit out milk. Pure loss. The child: a stained glass window, fragments of scattered colours. Everything down the drain. My stomach is an empty pitcher. I'm thirsty. I'm licking the vomit of my voice... Oh! Why am I so harsh?

A few segments of the above passage merit comment because of their translational

difficulties. Catherine's verbless sentence (*L'enfant: un vitrail...*) creates a wonderful paradoxical image, likening her dead baby to a stained glass window: the immediate image is that of a splendid work of art immediately countered by a more symbolic and less aesthetically pleasing image. This contrast is easily maintained in the target text by leaving out any verbs and employing "fragments" as an equivalent for "morceaux". Another difficulty is that of translating "*La chasse d'eau a été tirée.*" The danger in translating this sentence lies in using too vulgar an expression that would render the text comical. The initial translation was, "The toilet has been flushed", and was subsequently changed to "The water has been flushed." Both solutions preserve the general idea of the baby being flushed out of Catherine's body, yet, they come across as far too crude. Consequently, the solution opted for in the above translation (*Everything down the drain.*) solves two problems at once: it maintains Catherine's striking imagery without sounding overly crude. The rhythm is also a very important textual feature of this passage since it echoes Catherine's state of mind. As noted above, the passage is very fast-paced due to the truncated, short sentences. Without a comprehensive understanding of Catherine's character, it would be easy to string a few of the sentences together and link some of the clauses together to create more comprehensible sentences. For example:

The child is like a stained glass window comprised of pieces of dispersed colour.  
The water has been flushed out and my stomach is an empty container. I'm  
thirsty so I lick the vomit of my voice.

Although such a rendering generally communicates Catherine's thoughts, it flows better and thus lacks the emotional thrust and incoherence of the French text. In the second example from Catherine's letter, the rhymes, repetitions and metaphorical imagery create a poetic effect:

"J'ai ouvert un litre de rosé pour qu'on puisse boire le rose usé de nos vies,  
mettre du blanc mousseux, mousseux dedans..." (pp.58-59)

"I opened a bottle of rosé so we could drink the wilted roses of our lives, mix in some sparkling white, sparkling inside..."

Although the translation does not match the source text rhyme for rhyme, there is still a comparable sound play (*rosé/rose; white/inside*) and rhythm (repetition of *sparkling*) that aims to recreate the poetic feel of this passage.

### ● Catherine at 33

In this chapter, Catherine's writes poetically to Hugo about her relationship with Christian:

Christian. Une demande dans les yeux, parfois une offrande, tellement triste.  
Christian. Son regard du ventre au coeur. Christian perd souffle et je perds souffle avec lui. Il lape la lumière de mes yeux, son éclipse me tire par en dedans. Je me sens pleine et la faim me saisit. Il vit de mon affection immédiate, m'entraîne dans sa belle débâcle. Dans l'azur de mon sexe il se cherche... me trouve. Mon cri rejoint sa jouissance. (p.72)

The text is very rich, with its metaphorical imagery, which is easily maintained in English since the metaphors are not language-specific. The juxtaposition of many polar images emphasizes the range of emotions Catherine experiences with Christian and renders the source text poetic (*demande/offrande, lumière/éclipse, pleine/faim*). The omission of pronouns and verbs, and the somewhat disjointed structure of a number of sentences combine to create a rhythmic effect which has been carefully maintained in the translation.

Finally, there is a difficulty in translating two words of this poetic passage: *sexe* and *jouissance*. Although individually they do not contribute to the poetic quality of the original passage, they must be carefully and thoughtfully translated into English so the translation does not skew the poetic quality of the French. The first word creates difficulties because it is part

of a metaphor which renders the source text poetic (*Dans l'azur de mon sexe...*). As discussed in chapter 6, the equivalents for *sexe* are very anatomical and somewhat vulgar for this passage. As with the solution discussed for the passage on page 42 of the novel, a metonym of "vagina" is used. In this case, the choice is "body" since it fits in with the logic of Catherine's description and preserves the metaphor, thus maintaining the poetic effect. The word *jouissance* is also notoriously difficult to translate because of its polysemy. The nuances inherent in the word would not be communicated by words such as "orgasm", "climax", "ecstasy" or "rejoicing". The first three options focus only on the sexual nuance of the word, and are consequently too limited as equivalents. The last possibility centres around the idea of happiness but is devoid of any sexual nuance. Even worse, the word is also used in religious contexts. After considerable thought, the word "rapture" was selected because it encompasses at least two of the inherent nuances, namely, the idea of overwhelming emotion, and the manifestation of ecstasy or passion. The following translation is the result of the above-mentioned considerations:

Christian. A pleading look in his eyes, sometimes an offering, so sad. Christian. A look that goes straight to my heart. Christian loses his breath and I lose mine with him. He laps up the light of my eyes, his eclipse draws me in. I feel full and hunger takes hold. He lives on my immediate affection, draws me into his fine disaster. In the azure of my body he seeks himself... finds me. My cry greets his rapture.

#### ● Hugo's Poetic Prose

Côté's poetic prose is not limited to Catherine's letters. This particularly challenging aspect of the source text is also found in Hugo's later letters to Catherine. In his letter to his daughter in the chapter "Forty-two", Hugo is fixated on death and his writing exhibits a poetic

quality that is challenging to translate. The second paragraph of his letter is very rhythmic and filled with imagery as Hugo describes Bangkok:

"Bangkok: un gigantesque baazar, une musique lancinante. Bangkok: un talisman oublié sur une chaise de liège, un turban à gauche du plateau d'oranges." (p.82)

In this example, the poetic quality is derived in large part from the rhythm (the sentences scan almost like syllabic verse) and the "snapshot" imagery which is emphasized by the lack of verbs: the existence of the objects is emphasized since Hugo leaves out any associated action. However, the rhythmically balanced clauses of the second sentence were somewhat challenging to maintain. One of the initial translations was:

"Bangkok's a talisman left on a cork chair, a turban to the left of a platter full of oranges."

From a simplistic and purely numerical standpoint, the above rendering does not reproduce the melodic balance of the source text, since the second clause is longer than the first by four syllables: the result is a clumsy and awkward sentence that fails to approximate the 11/12 count of the two clauses following the colon in the source text. Therefore, some manipulation is necessary to create a stronger balance between the two clauses that will reproduce the rhythmical quality of the original:

"Bangkok's a gigantic bazaar, penetrating music. Bangkok's a talisman forgotten on a chair made of cork, a turban to the left of a platter of oranges."

The balance was achieved by lengthening the first clause (*cork chair --> chair made of cork*) and shortening the second (*platter full of oranges --> platter of oranges*).

- The Concluding Letters

The final chapter of the novel also contains many poetic passages, some of which owe their poetic quality to their incoherence. Côté's imaginative and striking juxtaposition of images, and the text's rhythm create poetic passages and evoke specific emotional responses from the reader of the source text. The two chosen passages below are taken from Hugo's last letter to Catherine. Overall, this is a difficult text to translate because, according to Côté, Hugo is writing under the influence of morphine. His letter seems nonsensical, incoherent, yet somewhat poetic in places. The poetic effect arises from the seemingly bizarre images, the choppy constructions and abrupt changes of images. The first such passage has Hugo writing about his impending death:

Devant la mort, ma vie se déguise en dragée. Suspendue. Je la convoite, essaie de la rattraper, y renonce. La mort aboie: "Viens mon doux bébé maman va t'amener près du glacier tu ne sentiras plus rien.". Rentrer au paradis, rentrer chez maman, ne plus rien sentir, je le souhaite lorsque la douleur engourdit jusqu'au désir de vivre. (p.113)

This excerpt is highly incoherent and poetic; the metaphorical imagery is vivid, as is the effect of juxtapositioning *la mort aboie* and *Viens mon doux bébé*. Furthermore, there are missing grammatical connectors (pronouns, verb) and experiential links (these thoughts do not seem to relate to any of Hugo's previous experience as described in the letters). These aspects of Hugo's incoherent writing create a surrealistic impression on the reader, an impression the translation attempts to maintain:

Faced with death, my life is disguised as a candy. Dangling. I covet it, jump up to catch it, give up. Death barks out, "Come my sweet child mommy will bring you to the ice-cream parlour you won't feel a thing." Entering paradise, going home to mommy, no longer feeling anything, that's what I wish for when the pain numbs even the will to live.

As in the source text, pronouns and verbs are omitted in order to recreate the disjointed and incoherent structure of Hugo's letter which gives rise to a surrealistic impression. Furthermore, the metaphors are not language-specific and are used equally well in the English language.

The next passage is very obscure and incoherent: the ideas do not seem compatible, and the abrupt sentences and shifts in focus add to this incoherence. Yet, these are the same features that also give the passage a surrealistic and poetic effect.

Je ne monte plus sur la croix. Les clous ne s'enfoncent plus dans ma mémoire blême. Souvent à genoux j'ai retenu les échelles. Je me revois imprimer un signe de croix à mon sexe. Le corps délivré, en offrande, j'ai aimé. Vite, beaucoup, longtemps. (p.114)

The reader is left with just a general impression of Hugo reminiscing about his life and how he lived it. The meaning easily escapes the reader as it did the translator. Fortunately, the author has clarified this passage somewhat, explaining that Hugo has finally learned to put himself first. He has an image of himself holding the "tools" that helped him advance through life, and another image of how he loved: with his body. This information does not, however, change the fact that the dominant characteristics of this poetic passage are the rhythm created by the sequence of short sentences and the highly metaphorical imagery of this passage. As discussed in previous chapters, it is tempting to clarify the target text with the information provided by the author. However, it is important for the translation to maintain the incoherent and rhythmic quality of the source text so that it will create the same response from the reader of the translation. This is achieved by keeping the images and the length of the sentences the same:

I no longer mount the cross. The nails no longer pierce my pale memory. On my knees I anchored my ladders. I again see myself marking my groin with the sign of the cross. My body delivered, as an offering, I have loved. Long, fast, often.

- **Conclusion**

The examples presented here are meant to illustrate how challenging it is to translate the literary prose found throughout the novel. The fact that many passages are opaque is a challenge in itself for the translator; however, to translate segments that are both obscure and highly poetic calls for a more profound strategy than just an unimaginative, word-for-word approach. Poetic prose does not just happen... it is comprised of very concrete textual features which can be scrutinized to deepen the translator's understanding of the text and assist her in recreating a target text worthy of the original.

The strategy of scrutinizing poetic passages for concrete textual features was an invaluable tool for solving the innumerable difficulties encountered in this highly poetic novel. Both Catherine and Hugo's writing give rise to a great number of poetic passages, many dominated by rhythm and metaphorical imagery. Also, the juxtaposition of powerful and sometimes bizarre images, as well as the often dislocated text creates an often surrealistic effect. The novel's poetic prose demonstrates the intense relationship between the meaning and form of the text which is not always easy to maintain in English. Yet, just because literature and poetry are ends unto themselves does not mean that they are impossible to translate, it only means that translating such passages is more difficult than translating regular prose, and thus requires creative solutions on the part of the translator.

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## Chapter 8

### DEALING WITH POLYPHONY IN THE SOURCE TEXT

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- **Multi-dimensionality and Polyphony**

Catherine and Hugo are very complex characters and this complexity manifests itself in their writing, through their "voices". In her letters to Hugo, Catherine displays many dimensions. Throughout the novel, she is very much her father's daughter and as she ages, she takes on other dimensions -- professional architect, loving mother and sensual bisexual woman. Catherine often displays her various "identities" within the same letter. Hugo's letters also display the complex nature of his personality: he is a very loving father to Catherine, an extremely sensual lover with Edouard; at the same time, he sees himself as a failed father and failed husband. The characters use the medium of letter writing to reveal their most intimate thoughts and emotions, and hence, various aspects of their personality, to the reader. The characters are letting the reader of the novel into their minds and in so doing, display their multi-dimensionality. The voice corresponding to each multi-dimensional character is polyphonous. This polyphony manifests itself through shifts in writing styles, the use of poetic language, and incoherency. With these text-level markers, Côté succeeds in bringing to life complex and fascinating characters, whose multi-faceted nature is sometimes difficult to render.

- **The Early Letters**

Overall, the letters in this first chapter are fairly coherent; there is a relatively straightforward flow of thoughts in both Catherine and Hugo's letters, as they describe their daily activities. Hugo tells about various aspects of his trip to Rome and Catherine recounts her

activities while Hugo is away. The two characters employ a writing style that reflects a smooth flow of thoughts, which is easily understood. This descriptive narration constitutes a banal dimension common to both characters in this chapter as they carry on with their daily life.

Inevitably for Catherine and Hugo though, these types of descriptions lead to revelations of their feelings, and thus, to what could be dubbed their "basic" dimensions: Hugo the doting, loving father, and Catherine, "daddy's little girl". These dimensions are marked by a variety of textual features. For example Catherine often asks her father questions throughout her letter, seeking his approval (*As-tu le temps de penser à moi un petit peu?; Si je te dis que je t'aime, vas-tu me croire?; En es-tu convaincu toi aussi? M'aimes-tu assez pour ça?* (pp. 9-10)). Hugo's doting-father dimension is conveyed through the straightforward style in which he affectionately tells Catherine how he feels about her (*Je suis certaine que tu te découvrirais une âme de princesse!; J'aime t'entendre rire. Cela me fait beaucoup de bien...; J'ai pensé très fort à toi. Je t'aime, je te serre dans mes bras...* (pp.18-20)). Generally speaking, neither Catherine's questions nor Hugo's style poses any great problems for translation. Catherine's questions are easily maintained, as is Hugo's straightforward style. However, another textual feature that helps to convey this dimension is slightly more challenging: the use of vocatives and reinforcing pronouns by both Hugo and Catherine:

**Catherine to Hugo**

"Toi lorsque tu..." (p.9)

**Hugo to Catherine**

"Toi, qu'est-ce que tu racontes..." (p.18)

"Moi j'ai l'appétit..."(p.19)

"Ta mère, elle, ce sont..."(p.19)

"Toi, veux-tu que..."(p.19)

Since such constructions would be stylistically clumsy in English, other solutions have been

found, such as using the addressee's name, or the construction, "as for". This strategy produces the following translation of the aforementioned excerpts:

**Catherine to Hugo:**

"You Daddy, when..."

**Hugo to Catherine:**

"And you, Catherine, what do you tell..."

"As for me, my appetite is..."

"As for your mother,"

"Catherine, do you want me to..."

In English, these markers serve to recreate the emphatic and vocative feature of the source text and highlight the respective and unique roles of both characters within an intimate father-daughter relationship.

Catherine's letter to her father in the second chapter (*Treize ans*) seems to be a window into her mind. We follow her train of thoughts and, through her writing, we again perceive two sides to her character: that of a 13-year old away from her father for the first time, and that of a highly contemplative young woman. This bi-dimensionality is reflected in her voice. The first dimension is conveyed by the teenspeak discussed in chapter 5 (*C'était serré serré sous mon chandail. (p.23); Ça me donne le goût d'être en amour, de me coller au flanc d'un garçon pour n'en plus partir. (p.25)*). The second dimension of introspection dominates the letter as Catherine reflects on herself and her relationships with her mother, Patricia and Hugo. Overall, this aspect of Catherine's personality creates no real problem for the translator; however, there are some poetic passages which underscore this dimension:

"Je parle pour oublier les regards sans chaleur de maman et aussi parce que ton souvenir me réchauffe. Mon assurance et ma peur, c'est la parole." (p.23)

"I talk so I can forget mom's cold glances and also because your memory warms me. Speech is both my comfort and my fear."

• • •

Je séduirais New York au complet pour que tu viennes voir ce que je deviens. Je ne comprends rien à ce que je deviens. Je ne sais pas si, de loin, tu aimes ce que je deviens. (p.23)

I'd seduce all of New York so that you could come see what I'm becoming. I don't at all understand what I'm becoming. I don't know if, from afar, you like what I'm becoming.

• • •

La petite fille de mes songes ne se souvient plus de son nom. Catherine. La vie de Catherine tombe comme un château de cartes. Mon jeu de patience se mêle à New York, ses bruits, ses regards, plus fort que je ne m'entende plus. (p.24)

The little girl in my dreams doesn't remember her name anymore. Catherine. Catherine's life is crumbling like a house of cards. My game of solitaire is being shuffled into New York, its noises, its looks, so loudly that I can't hear myself anymore.

These passages were discussed in chapter 5, in the context of the author intruding into Catherine's young voice, as well as in the context of translating poetic prose in chapter 7. Suffice it to say then, that the poetic aspect, apart from indicating the presence of the author, also accentuates Catherine's contemplative dimension and should therefore be recreated in order to reproduce the same effect on the target reader.

#### • Catherine at 27

Catherine's letter to Hugo in this chapter represents a very powerful and emotional insight into this woman's most intimate feelings: her first child, Marlene, was stillborn. Although the voice that conveys this emotional state dominates the first part of the letter, we also see another side to Catherine in the second part of the letter, which she writes the following day.

This letter thus reveals two distinct dimensions of Catherine's character: that of a grieving mother, and that of a serene woman reminiscing about a chance encounter with an old friend. Both voices are poetic to a certain extent, obscure and metaphorical; what distinguishes them from one another is the nature of the imagery and the rhythm of the text.

The grieving dimension is conveyed through powerful writing that lets the reader experience Catherine's emotions, including an acute sense of loss and intense anger. The writing here is emotionally intense, fast-paced and vehement. The first passage that exemplifies these features is one in which she lashes out at Hugo:

Je n'ai pas déchiré de rideaux, je n'ai pas cassé d'assiettes, je n'ai pas renversé de lampes, je n'ai pas jeté de photos de nous deux, je n'ai pas reproché mes amants d'être si différents de toi, si pareils au fond, je n'ai pas détruit ces cartes postales qui ne disaient rien en voulant trop m'en dire, je n'ai pas poussé les hauts cris lorsque tu m'as parlé d'Edouard, je n'ai pas accepté le poste de consultante en architecture que l'on m'offrait à Boston, je ne me suis pas éloignée de toi, non. (p.56)

This fast-paced excerpt owes its emotional momentum to the accumulation of short clauses repeating the same syntactic pattern over and over again. The rhythmical and emotional quality of this passage is rendered by maintaining the same structure and avoiding the temptation to divide the long sentence into shorter ones:

I didn't rip the curtains, I didn't break any plates, I didn't knock over any lamps, I didn't throw out any pictures of the two of us, I didn't be reproach my lovers for being so different from you, yet fundamentally so similar, I didn't destroy the post cards that said nothing while trying to tell me too much, I didn't protest when you told me about Edouard, I didn't accept that position as an architectural consultant in Boston, I didn't distance myself from you, no.

Another passage that expresses the dimension of grief is one that acquires its intensity from incoherent, disjointed text, and sometimes grotesque imagery:

Jamais je n'aurais imaginé que le pire de mes rêves se dérouleraient ici-bas. J'ai

craché l'enfant comme on crache le lait, en pure perte. L'enfant : un vitrail, des morceaux de couleurs dispersés. La chasse d'eau a été tirée. Mon ventre est un pichet vide. J'ai soif. Je lèche le vomi de ma voix... Oh! Pourquoi suis-je si dure? (p.57)

This passage is discussed in more detail in chapter 7 (in the context of rendering its poetic quality); suffice it to say here that the lyrical quality, the disjointed text and powerful imagery must all be maintained in the translation in order to portray Catherine's grief:

I'd never have imagined that the worst of my dreams would take place in this world. I spat the child out like you spit out milk. Pure loss. The child: a stained glass window, fragments of scattered colours. Everything down the drain. My stomach is an empty pitcher. I'm thirsty. I'm licking the vomit of my voice... Oh! Why am I so harsh?

The second dimension, or "voice", that Catherine takes on in her letter is that of a woman at peace with herself, reflecting on more pleasant moments. The features that mark this dimension are poetic and metaphorical text, filled with imagery. Although Catherine's grief is also conveyed in this letter by poetic and metaphorical text, the writing is softer in the second part of the letter, and the images are devoid of unpleasantness. The following metaphorical passage illustrates how these features give rise to a different, more serene Catherine:

"Bien des pique-niques ont eu lieu, puis plus de rêves, l'herbe était coupée."  
(p.58)

The images in the above passage are much more euphoric and the resulting tone is a lighter one, yet it poses some problems with respect to the translation. My first impression was that Catherine was referring to an experience shared by herself and Patricia. This impression led to a translation that did not capture the essence of the source text because it failed to bring out Catherine's serenity:

"We'd shared many picnics, but we ran out of dreams, they'd cut the grass."

Fortunately, the author clarified this excerpt and explained that it is metaphorical, referring to happier, more carefree times. The above translation transformed a metaphoric passage into a concrete event. Therefore, in the following translation, no reference is made to any shared experience, and the metaphorical quality of the passage is preserved in order to express the second dimension revealed by Catherine in this letter:

"There were many picnics and then, no more dreams, the grass was cut."

The following sentence is a recollection that takes a highly poetic, metaphorical form and conveys a pleasant impression to the reader, an impression quite antithetical to the harsh, quasi-grotesque images used earlier to convey Catherine's anguish and sense of loss. The passage stresses Catherine's composure, as she reminisces about her chance meeting with Patricia.:

"J'ai ouvert un litre de rosé pour qu'on puisse boire le rose usé de nos vies, mettre du blanc mousseux, mousseux dedans..." (p.59)

This is an extremely difficult passage to translate because of its poetic qualities. This difficulty was addressed in chapter 7, yet it is important to underline that the poetic aspect of Catherine's voice must come through in the target text in order to properly render the more serene side of her personality:

"I opened a litre of rosé so we could drink the wilted roses of our lives, mix in some sparkling white, sparkling inside..."

Despite its brevity, Hugo's letter to Catherine in the chapter *Vingt-sept ans* also illustrates how various dimensions of one character's personality manifest themselves within one letter. Hugo's multi-faceted personality is reflected in writing that is parallel to his train of thought. We see both dimensions of his personality through his polyphonous voice: both the father and the gay lover are shown reminiscing here. In both instances, Hugo begins by directly addressing

Catherine and then slips into reminiscence, recalling past memories. The first of Hugo's dimensions, that of a fond father reminiscing about Catherine as a child, is marked by a largely straightforward style. By contrast, the second dimension, that of a wistful lover, is marked by a somewhat more poetic style. The following excerpt demonstrates this polyphony:

Puis tu as été pour nous tout ce que nous espérions. Oui, pour nous. Ta mère aussi. Pour moi, tu étais le premier témoin. Tu savais inventer la complicité. J'improvisais des mauvais coups pour que tu me fasses les yeux doux. Plus tard, tu m'as appris à tirer partie du doute plutôt qu'à le déjouer. Peu à peu j'ai pris mes rêves au sérieux.

Un jour, je t'écrirai l'histoire d'Edouard, cet homme très beau qui me hantait la nuit et venait me retrouver dans mon lit à cinq heures du matin. Un homme de rêve, si doux lorsque je le nommais, si attirant lorsqu'il se sentait menacé.

Hugo's reminiscence about Catherine is reflected in a straightforward narrative style. However, when he briefly lapses into a memory about his lover Edouard, his writing is more descriptive and somewhat lyrical. This is especially true of the last sentence of the above passage, which contains an anaphoric structure that renders the sentence melodic. This change in writing style (from largely narrative to lyrical) distinguishes his fatherly dimension from his sexual dimension in this particular letter. Both dimensions must be maintained in the translation:

And you were everything we'd hoped for. Yes, we. Your mother too. To me, you were the first accomplice. You knew how to create complicity. I came up with pranks so that you would give me that sheepish look. Later on, you taught me how to take advantage of doubt rather than getting around it. Little by little, I began taking my dreams seriously.

Someday, I'll write you about my affair with Edouard, that very handsome man who haunted my nights and crawled into my bed at five o'clock in the morning. A dream man, so tender when I called his name, so appealing when he felt threatened.

The lyrical second paragraph in English marks Hugo's lapse into reminiscence and distinguishes the dimension of the lover from that of the father.

- Catherine at 33

Catherine's letter to Hugo in this chapter again reveals the multiple dimensions of her personality. At times, her voice is that of a young, vulnerable girl; at other times, it is that of a frank, open adult. There seems to be a constant shifting back and forth between the voices that express the different aspects of Catherine's personality: Patricia's lover, Frederick's mother, Christian's lover and Hugo's little girl. This polyphony is an inherent feature of the source text that the target text must attempt to recreate.

Catherine's letter begins with a fairly direct style that is reminiscent of her writing as a 13 year-old: she addresses her father with short, simple and straightforward sentences. Generally speaking, the first paragraph presents no great difficulty for the translator, although the considerations discussed in chapter 5 with respect to Catherine's childspeak and teenspeak must be kept in mind when rendering this dimension of Catherine's personality. For example, the first paragraph of the letter is mostly comprised of short, simple sentences (*J'ai peur. T'en parler me gêne mais je n'arrête pas de penser à elle. ... Je m'envole. Pour un moment je ne pense plus.* (p.71)). The first shift in her voice occurs in the second paragraph when Catherine begins describing her lover, Christian. At this point, she falls into a dream-like state, which is reflected in the lyrical quality of the following passage:

Christian. Une demande dans les yeux, parfois une offrande, tellement triste.  
Christian. Son regard du ventre au coeur. Christian perd souffle et je perds  
souffle avec lui. Il lape la lumière de mes yeux, son éclipse me tire par en  
dedans. Je me sens pleine et la faim me saisit. Il vit de mon affection  
immédiate, m'entraîne dans sa belle débâcle. Dans l'azur de mon sexe il se  
cherche... me trouve. Mon cri rejoint sa jouissance. (p.72)

The lyrical quality of this excerpt and its impact on the translation is discussed in detail in chapter 7, yet it is important to stress that the lyrical quality of this passage serves two purposes:

it marks Catherine's "lover" dimension as well as her dream-like state. For these two reasons, it is essential that the target text recreate the poetic quality of the above excerpt:

Christian. A pleading look in his eyes, sometimes an offering, so sad.  
Christian. A look that goes straight to my heart. Christian loses his breath and I lose mine with him. He laps up the light of my eyes, his eclipse draws me in. I feel full and hunger takes hold. He lives on my immediate affection, draws me into his fine disaster. In the azure of my body he seeks himself... finds me. My cry greets his rapture. (p.72)

In the next paragraph of the letter, Catherine exhibits yet another dimension of her personality; that of a mother. She expresses her affection for her son in a relatively straightforward manner, although she is still in a pensive state which, overall, poses no problem for the translator (*Moi, je l'ai aimé moins facilement que mes rêves le croyaient. Maintenant être sa mère me comble* (p.72)).

Finally, the last paragraph of the letter illustrates one final dimension of Catherine's personality, that of "daddy's little girl":

"Cette incartade me fait douter de l'amour. Papa, raconte-moi mon histoire, j'en ai perdu des bribes. Je me suis égarée... Recolle mes morceaux." (p.73)

The most obvious marker of the shift in voices here is the use of *Papa*, which initially seems to be but a minor lexical consideration. Nevertheless, the choice of the English equivalent is important here because these last few sentences show just how attached Catherine is to her father. One tempting solution might be to keep her voice consistent and use a more formal, adult-like voice when translating this passage. For example, the following translation was initially considered:

"This escapade makes me doubt love. Dad, remind me of who I am, I've forgotten parts of my history. I've lost myself... Help me pick up the pieces."

However, the recourse to a child-like voice emphasizes Catherine's existential disorientation and

her deep attachment to her father. In order to recreate this child-like voice, and consequently emphasize this facet of her personality, I employed "daddy" rather than "dad". Furthermore, the last few sentences of this passage are simple and the language level is informal, echoing young Catherine's voice. To recreate this impression, the sentences in the translation are also short and a very simple language level is employed:

"This escapade makes me doubt love. Daddy, tell me my story, I've lost pieces of it. I've lost myself... Put me back together again."

In this letter, Catherine's voice shifts from her "adult" voice to her child-like voice, which is marked by her use of *papa*, among other things. The various dimensions of Catherine's personality are rooted in textual features such as wistful imagery and disparate language levels.

Hugo's letter to Catherine in this same chapter also reveals different facets of his personality. Hugo's writing very much follows his train of thought and his voice shifts often. The various aspects of his personality that manifest themselves in this letter are those of a failed family man, and an introspective and reflective man. These various dimensions are marked by distinct textual features: lyrical and sometimes obscure and incoherent text characterizes Hugo's reflective dimension, and a more direct style characterizes the failed family man dimension. As challenging as these shifts are to recreate, they are an integral aspect of the source text, and the translator must endeavour to render them.

The following three excerpts, for example, illustrate how Hugo conveys his failed fatherhood using straightforward writing style, sometimes addressing Catherine directly:

"Il fut un temps où je me ramassais en morceaux mais au moins je me ramassais. Un père se relève toujours. Aujourd'hui que tu as un fils, je dérive." (p.82)

● ● ●

"L'amour vient après la passion mais il n'y a pas eu de passion. Un père ne devrait pas dire cela à sa fille." (p.83)



J'ai envie de dire: "Partez, le spectacle est terminé. la faillite se renouvelle sur demande seulement." Veux-tu d'un père en faillite? Je t'ai élevée, j'ai cru aimer ta mère, suis-je un perdant pour autant? (p.84)

These examples are relatively straightforward and pose no great problem for translation. Their importance, however, lies in serving as a contrast between this dimension of Hugo's voice and the introspective and pensive dimension conveyed by textual features that are more challenging to render.

The following poetic and lyrical passages show us an introspective Hugo slipping into a description of the trip he took to Bangkok at a time when he was confronting his own mortality:

"Bangkok: un gigantesque baazar, une musique lancinante. Bangkok: un talisman oublié sur une chaise de liège, un turban à gauche du plateau d'oranges." (p.82)

J'ai vu des corps laids qui se regardaient, des corps superbes qui évitaient soigneusement les miroirs. Des corps avec trop de peau, pas assez de présence. Les ventres rebondissaient, s'ahurissaient d'être si bombés. (p.84)

Hugo's writing is very lyrical and conveys the contemplative side of his personality. Both excerpts are very rhythmic, and their imagery is striking. The first example is examined in detail in chapter 7, and the main constraints in translating this passage were rendering the rhythm and the imagery. The second example creates a striking image of Hugo's perception and recollection of the people of Bangkok. This striking physical portrayal of the Thai makes use of lexical contrasts (*regardaient/évitaient; laids/superbes; trop de peau/pas assez de présence*) and vivid images which are rendered fairly easily in English. The following translation of the second set of passages preserves the poetic quality of the source text, a feature which marks

Hugo's pensive side:

I've seen ugly bodies looking at themselves, superb bodies carefully avoiding mirrors. Bodies with too much skin, not enough presence. Stomachs protruding, astounded at being so round.

Hugo is obsessed with dying in his letter to Catherine. According to the author, he is facing his own mortality for the first time, and is consequently projecting death on everything he sees, including the Thai (*Dans la lumière drue, les Thaïlandais marchent vers la mort, sans jouissance.* (p.82); *Descendre dans ce ventre d'enfant qu'est la mort demande de l'humilité.* (p.84)). This fixation is a manifestation of his introspective side, and his voice reflects this aspect on one occasion in an obscure, almost incomprehensible passage:

"Des pensées passent sous le ciel-écran, l'idée de la mort vient s'accrocher aux yeux de ceux que j'aime. Est-ce moi qui provoque le deuil?" (p.83)

The difficulty with this passage lies in dealing with the obscurity of Hugo's expression "ciel-écran". Until the author clarified this passage, my inclination was to "correct" the source text and render the expression with something a little more idiomatic: "*Thoughts flash across the sky.*" Côté explained that "*ciel-écran*" was a hybrid of the sky and a movie screen; in other words, it is a metaphorical way of describing the magnitude of Hugo's thoughts. Coupled with the information provided by the author on Hugo's frame of mind (i.e. his obsession with dying), the metaphoric image makes sense: Hugo is projecting death on everything he sees, obsessing on a grand scale. In order to retain the imagery and obscurity of the source text, the same metaphor must be employed in English:

"Thoughts flash across the sky-screen, the idea of death pierces the eyes of those I love. Is it I who provoke mourning?"

Hugo's contemplative side is emphasized through his writing, which is sometimes poetic,

sometimes obscure. When he manifests this dimension, he appears to be in a dream-like state, but when he reveals his failure as father and husband, he does so in a more direct manner. This shift in voices is important to render because it reveals essential information about the character, information that must be passed on to the reader of the translation.

- **Conclusion**

The polyphony of this text is the result of the complex and sometimes enigmatic personalities of the novel's characters. Their respective voices are not monolithic; there is no one dominating voice per character. Consequently, the various voices manifest themselves through shifts in writing styles, i.e. shifts between narrative, poetic, vocative, and incoherent passages. The passages cited are not the only illustrations of Catherine and Hugo's polyphonous voices; the novel contains a plethora of additional examples, but the goal of this discussion is to provide substantial rather than exhaustive evidence of this polyphony and of the problems it creates for the translator.

The principal consideration in translating these passages is to ensure that the reader of the target text perceives the various dimensions displayed by both characters in the source text. Whether it be Catherine exhibiting intense anger on one page and serenity on the next, or Hugo shifting between thoughts of his homosexual lover and thoughts of his daughter, the complexity of the characters must come through in the translation. In some cases the solutions are straightforward, while in others, much more thought is required to achieve a proper level of polyphony in the target text. Interestingly, many of the markers of the various dimensions have been discussed in other contexts throughout this work, especially the passages comprised of

poetic prose. The aim here is not to be repetitive, but to demonstrate the level of complexity of the source text, and the innumerable features the translator must take into consideration when rendering such a rich text.

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## Chapter 9

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

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- **Impressions to Solutions**

Although at first glance *Cher Hugo, chère Catherine* might appear to be no more than a few people writing letters to each other, it is in fact a rich piece of literature. The novel is very complex: it spans forty-three years and focuses on the evolution of two principal characters and the development of their intimate father-daughter relationship. These two characters, Hugo and Catherine, are enigmatic and highly complex individuals; much of their correspondence revolves around highly personal events and their deepest emotions. The combination of complex personalities, the emotional content of the letters, and the fact that they span forty-three years makes for very sophisticated correspondence, which in turn makes for challenging translation.

The translation difficulties initially seemed to be thematic in nature. Originally, preoccupied with the difficulty of ensuring that the "intimate relationship" was conveyed to the reader of the target text, I thought only in terms of the contents, or subject matter, of the letters. I also wondered how best to reproduce each character's voice, and quickly realized that the issue was more complex than at first I had assumed. Upon closer study of the source text, I found that the complex thematic issues were rooted in very concrete and describable textual features. This study of text-level phenomena revealed itself to be very fruitful for solving numerous translational difficulties. These text-level solutions were in turn used to discuss strategies for ensuring that the target text makes the same profound impression on its reader as the source text.

Textual analysis thus became a tool for replacing vague thematic impressions with specific translation strategies. A case in point is the "relationship" theme, analyzed in two

separate chapters: chapter 4 dealt with the difficulty of interpreting the nature of the father-daughter relationship, while in chapter 6, I considered the intimacy between Catherine and Hugo. These two discussions are not, however, based on vague impressions: they begin with a general impression and deal with the difficulties of rendering these impressions by examining the text-level phenomena that convey these impressions. Thus, the discussion of interpreting the nature of the father-daughter relationship revolves around Hugo's ambiguous writing, and the consideration of the intimate relationship focuses on incoherent text as the marker of this intimacy.

The issue of the characters' "voices" is also dealt with in several chapters. Hugo's voice is characterized by ambiguity; even more striking markers are the authorial influence on Catherine's voice, as discussed in chapter 5, and the polyphonic quality of Catherine and Hugo's voices (chapter 8). The inconsistencies in style and the use of poetic text in the original creates the impression of someone (i.e. the author) manipulating Catherine's writing. Shifts in Catherine and Hugo's writing styles (i.e. from narrative to lyrical, from descriptive to incoherent) give the reader an impression of very complex personalities. All these text-level markers are discussed in terms of their relevance to the translation. Also, the poetic prose is discussed in terms of the specific textual markers that are necessary for recreating a similar poetic effect in English.

As illustrated in several chapters, the individual textual features do not work in isolation to convey a single, specific impression on the reader of the source text. Often, a particular feature contributes to many aspects of a given passage. For example, Catherine's sometimes incoherent writing is discussed in relation to the disappearance of her artificial voice (chapter

5), as a marker of her intimate relationship with Hugo (chapter 6) and also with respect to the poetic qualities it exhibits (chapter 7). This multi-functionality of the various textual features illustrates the level of analysis the translator must undertake in order to thoroughly understand the text.

- **Authorial Influence of a Different Kind**

A text-level approach to solving translational difficulties is not always sufficient, however. As discussed on various occasions in this thesis, many passages in the source text are singularly opaque, whether it be because of incoherent, highly metaphorical or poetic writing. Fortunately, the author of the novel was more than willing to clarify many of the passages in question; Côté's assistance was invaluable, as illustrated by the many references to her comments in virtually all chapters of this thesis. In fact, many translated passages remained in their initial, stilted version until Côté elucidated the original for me. The information she provided enabled me to gain a firm idea of the meaning and direction of such passages. This knowledge, combined with the analysis of textual features, helped to improve upon highly literal (and sometimes farcical) translations.

Although the knowledge acquired from the author was extremely helpful, if not essential for translating many difficult passages, it also raises other important issues. This comprehensive understanding of the direction and meaning of the source text puts the translator in approximately the same position as the author. Indeed, this position is frequently difficult because the translator, as author of the translation, must decide what amount of information she is willing to give the reader of the target text. Should the translator ignore the information, and

translate blindly and literally (thus withholding information from the reader), or should she use the information to make the target text more explicit and in some cases more coherent (thus providing additional information to the reader)? As discussed on several occasions, the answer is neither; the translator must strive to render the various impressions of the source text for the reader of the translation.

- **Tempting Solutions**

With such a challenging text, it is very tempting to use the supplementary information provided by the author to clarify incoherent, opaque and highly metaphorical passages. This could be achieved by "correcting" young Catherine's voice in English, adding the missing grammatical and logical connectors to make passages more coherent, and desexualizing problematic and ambiguous passages in Hugo's letters. These "temptations" are very real and it is important to consider what effect such "corrections" would have on the translation of a source text characterized by incoherence, poetic passages and ambiguity.

To illustrate the extreme effect the use of supplementary information provided by the author could have on the translation, I will look at the repercussions of eliminating any suggestions of sexuality in Hugo's letters to his daughter. As discussed in chapter 4, Hugo's writing makes it quite difficult to interpret the nature of the father-daughter relationship. The author revealed that the relationship was not incestuous, and it is therefore very tempting to desexualize specific passages. This would be a relatively easy task. For example, the passage on page 36 of the novel which is discussed in chapter 4 of this thesis, presents a non-sexual solution to translating "*ta lumière de femme m'éblouit*" ("to dazzle", as in "the light of your

womanhood dazzles me"). If this solution had been chosen, the passage could be interpreted as Hugo simply being astonished that his daughter has grown into a beautiful young woman. Thus, the remainder of the passage would follow this innocuous tone and could be interpreted as Hugo telling Catherine that she should find a way to enjoy her adulthood even though she is suffering because of her break-up with Sigfried.

- **The Broader Consequences**

This type of solution could be applied to most of the passages which were discussed in chapter 4, yet we must remember that for the purposes of this thesis, only the letters exchanged between father and daughter were translated. From this perspective, I will examine how the decision to make the father-daughter relationship more explicit would affect the translation of the rest of the novel. Since the lives of all the characters are intertwined, it is important to ensure that the translation of the entire novel is coherent, not only in terms of individual letters, but also in terms of the overall story. This leaves us with a critical question: to what extremes should the translator go in order to achieve an overall non-sexual rendering?

The answer to this question is relatively easy to predict: if any hint of sexuality were removed from Hugo's letters to Catherine, this father-daughter sexuality would also have to be removed from Hugo's letters to Edouard. The reader's (and translator's) interpretation of Hugo's letters to his daughter is heavily influenced by Hugo's fantasies about his daughter in his letters to Edouard. Therefore, in order to achieve a coherent storyline, the translator would need to eliminate virtually all suggestive passages that arouse any suspicion of a sexual relationship between father and daughter in Hugo's letters to both Catherine and Edouard. The

translator could eliminate such sexually charged passages in one of two ways. The first would be to cut out substantial passages of Hugo's letters to Edouard. Although at first this may seem like a simple solution, it would create gaps in the coherence and logic of Hugo's letters, and would thus necessitate the reworking of the translation to varying degrees. For example, if the translator eliminates the sexual references in the excerpt presented on page 122 (chapter 4), the passage would need to be manipulated to read something like:

*Edouard,*

*I'm reading Catherine's letter for the umpteenth time, not knowing whether within the next half-hour, when I take out the accompanying picture Catharina--27 candles--mourning the picture will again be soaked with tears. I don't know if I can cry with my heart anymore.*

The second solution would be to radically transform such passages by replacing sexually explicit segments with highly innocuous references. To illustrate this option, the above-mentioned excerpt could be translated as follows:

*Edouard,*

*I'm reading Catherine's letter for the umpteenth time, not knowing if within the next half-hour, when I take out the accompanying picture Catharina--27 candles--mourning the picture will be soaked with tears or vomit. I don't know anymore if I should cry with my heart or my insides.*

The result of both translation strategies which aim to eliminate all sexually suggestive references, is an excessively sanitized version of Hugo's letters to Edouard. The translation is transformed into a text that vaguely resembles the source text, but that is devoid of many of the impressions, reactions, and emotions that Hugo exhibits in the original. In sum, we would be left with a complete distortion of the source text. If the translator chooses this route, it would create extremely serious problems since Hugo's letters to Edouard are laden with explicit sexual references, many of them in juxtaposition with references to Catherine. This strategy would

force the translator to eliminate a good portion of many letters, thus distorting much of the novel.

In the context of the novel as a whole, the decision to remove any suggestions of a sexual father-daughter relationship in Hugo's letters to his daughter has a significant ripple effect on Hugo's other letters, as illustrated by the above renderings. This digression is not intended to focus on the particular issue of the nature of the relationship, but rather to emphasize the importance of thoughtfully using information provided by the author, or for that matter, by any other source. There is no question that each translator brings to a work a highly individual perspective. However, there is a difference between bringing one's cultural and personal "baggage" to a translation, and producing a text that blatantly distorts the source text, which a decision to alter the perception of the father-daughter relationship would certainly do. It is therefore of extreme importance to use the information provided by the author in a manner that will not distort the source text. In an even broader context, this digression illustrates the importance of dealing with poetic, ambiguous or incoherent passages thoughtfully, so that the translation does not distort the source text. Instead, the translation should be written so that the reader raises the same questions with respect to the nature of the father-daughter relationship, wonder about the same metaphorical passages, speculate on the same incomprehensible segments, and feel that she is reading poetic prose.

Indeed, the main challenge with translating letters from Côté's novel is achieving a delicate balance between the need to make the target text readable and the need to render the effect of the source text on the reader of the translation. It is a great challenge to put oneself in the place of the author when translating a literary text, when one is neither a literary writer

nor a poet. It is relatively easy to analyze the text on various levels, but even this does not guarantee a satisfactory translation. This is where the author's assistance was essential; in many cases it was important to know where a given passage was headed in order to end up with a serious and comprehensible translation. Along with my own close study of the text, Côté's insights allowed me the privilege of seeing the novel and the characters through her eyes; a perspective that perhaps enabled me to work with less than stellar literary skills, and find creative solutions to very challenging passages of her novel.

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Appendix 1  
TRANSCRIPT OF GENERAL INTERVIEW WITH BIANCA COTE

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(May 6, 1993)

**Est-ce que la relation entre Hugo et Catherine est incestueuse?**

En réalité, non. Par contre, Hugo se livre à des fantasmes sur sa fille.

**Y a-t-il d'autres lettres que celles qui se trouvent dans le roman, ou est-ce juste une sélection?**

Ces lettres ont été écrites et envoyées aux destinataires, mais il peut y en avoir d'autres.

**Cela vous a pris combien de temps à rédiger ce roman?**

A peu près un an et demi. Au début, c'était prévu que trois femmes le rédigeraient (chacune d'entre nous prenant un personnage). Ensemble on a décidé des divisions des chapitres, c'est-à-dire les restrictions d'âge. Les chapitres représentent des âges charnières pour Catherine (adolescence, entrée dans le monde social, etc.)

Au commencement, il n'y avait que deux personnages, mais plus tard Edouard et Patricia sont "nés" aussi.

**Avez-vous basé les personnages sur des gens que vous connaissez? Représentent-ils une accumulation de traits de plusieurs personnes que vous connaissez?**

Non, ni un ni l'autre. Ils sont des personnages de l'imagination.

**Comment voyez-vous Hugo et Catherine?**

Hugo est parfois fort, parfois faible. Il a constamment besoin du regard des autres, surtout de sa fille. Il a aussi de la difficulté à choisir.

Catherine est plus forte qu'Hugo, mais il y a beaucoup de zones inexplorées dans sa vie. Elle fréquente les lieux sûrs et n'hésite pas à régresser lorsque nécessaire (par exemple, lorsque la vie devient trop intense/agitée).

**A quel moment avez-vous découvert qu'Hugo était homosexuel?**

Je l'ai su très tôt. Je venais juste de relire quelque chose qu'Hugo a écrit et ça m'a frappé qu'il était homosexuel. Donc, j'ai dû retravailler quelques lettres afin de les rendre plus cohérentes (c'est à ce moment qu'Edouard a été créé.)

**Croyez-vous que le fait qu'Hugo est homosexuel affecte sa relation avec sa fille?**

C'est très difficile à dire. Peut-être qu'il avait moins peur de se rapprocher à elle, mais je suppose qu'on le saura jamais.

**Que voulez-vous dire par l'expression "rêve-bonbon"?**

C'est une expression inventée. L'expression "quelque chose bonbon" est employée lorsqu'on veut minimiser quelque chose, montrer que c'est kétaine, niaiseux. Ici l'expression veut dire des "petits rêves doux", ou des rêves sans conséquence, des rêves sucrés, agréables.

**Accord: p.114 "rails douces"**

Il y a eu une erreur à l'impression... "douces" devrait s'accorder avec "rails" (rails d'une voie ferrée).

**La référence faite au film de Fellini dans la première lettre de Hugo à Catherine dit qu'un hippopotame a volé le bateau; j'ai regardé le film et c'est en fait un rhinocéros.**

Lorsque j'ai écrit la lettre, j'ai pensé que c'était un hippopotame (ou je m'en souvenais pas). "Rhinocéros" ne changerait pas le sens du texte.

**Autres commentaires:**

Les lettres ne sont pas que des descriptions d'événements dans la vie des personnages. Elles constituent des échanges intimes entre père et fille.

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Appendix 2  
TRANSCRIPT:  
QUESTIONS TO AND ANSWERS PROVIDED BY BIANCA CÔTÉ

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7 ans

(Hugo à Catherine)

p.19 Quand Hugo écrit, "Toi, veux-tu que je te ramène un manteau de zibeline d'amour?", parle-t-il d'un manteau de zibeline qu'il rapportera en signe d'amour, ou y a-t-il une autre signification?

**C'est un terme affectueux ("d'amour" qualifie "manteau de zibeline"). Il n'y a pas d'autre signification.**

J'ai remarqué que dans les deux premiers chapitres, la "voix" de Catherine semble être marquée par la présence de l'auteur. C'est-à-dire que le lecteur détecte l'influence, ou la main d'une autre derrière l'écriture de Catherine en raison des passages poétiques et lyriques. Il m'est difficile à croire qu'une fille de 7, 13 et même 18 ans aurait pu écrire ces passages elle-même. Est-ce intentionnel (vouliez-vous que le lecteur ressente cette présence) ou est-ce le résultat de la difficulté de reproduire de façon authentique l'écriture d'une jeune fille?

**En effet, l'influence qu'on sent résulte de la difficulté de reproduire la voix d'enfant. Il vaudra mieux pas montrer l'influence dans la traduction...**

Le mot "toutous" veut-il signifier "peluches" (teddy bears)?

**Oui.**

13 ans

(Hugo à Catherine)

p.24 Il s'agit du passage écrit par Catherine à 13 ans à la page 24: «Je rêve de petites broches dans mon sexe parce que le jour les Noirs que je croise me demandent de faire l'amour avec eux en anglais.» Que veut-elle dire par «petite broches»? Est-ce une sensation physique, ou veut-elle dire qu'elle voudrait vraiment se brocher le sexe? **Elle a peur (elle rêve) qu'on lui fasse mal (d'où les petite broches qui "symbolisent" la douleur).**

p.36 Quand Hugo se souvient de sa lune de miel à Manhattan et dit que lui et sa femme sont revenus "piqués par les moustiques", est-ce au sens figuratif?

**L'expression est une métaphore.**

18 ans

La lettre de Catherine à Hugo m'a posé beaucoup de problèmes. J'ai le sentiment que Catherine souffre d'une grande douleur en raison de la rupture avec Sigfried et que cette douleur se manifeste dans son écriture métaphorique, une écriture qui rend le texte un peu obscur par endroits. J'ai donc plusieurs questions qui portent sur cette lettre.

- p.41 Quand Catherine écrit que sa mère lui dit que "la douleur reprendra sa dimension ponctuelle", veut-elle dire que la douleur diminuera ou que la douleur ne reviendra que de temps en temps (de façon intermittente)?  
**La douleur reviendra de temps en temps; elle sera une douleur reliée à sa peine actuelle, mais pas causée par celle-ci.**
- p.42 Qu'est-ce que Catherine veut dire quand elle dit qu'elle est "née femme et dans la lune"? J'ai interprété "dans la lune" comme voulant dire "dans un rêve". Est-ce une mauvaise interprétation?  
**L'expression est employée dans le sens d'être dans un rêve.**
- p.42 Il s'agit d'une question au sujet de la phrase, "Sous mes pantalons, il n'y a plus que mon sexe." Je l'ai interprété en voulant dire qu'il ne lui reste plus que son organe sexuel (qu'elle est vidée d'amour étant donné que Sigfried l'a quittée). Par contre, ma directrice de thèse a pensé qu'il y avait peut-être une référence aux publicités pour les jeans Calvin Klein dans lesquelles Brooke Shields énonce, "There's nothing between me and my Calvins."  
**C'est bien dans le sens de "organe sexuel". Elle se sent seule sans Sigfried.**
- p.42 Quand Catherine dit à sa mère "je m'habillerai pour tous les anges de la terre", est-ce une référence à la manière dont elle s'habille (comme une putain??).  
**Non. C'est plutôt: je serai belle lorsque j'irai mieux, les choses seront différentes.**
- p.42 Qu'est-ce que Catherine veut dire au juste quand elle écrit, "Je lui promets de gémir convenablement"?  
**Sa mère veut qu'elle soit moins démonstrative, qu'elle cesse de crier, qu'elle arrête d'être petite fille. Catherine doit ressentir les émotions que la mère veut.**
- p.42 Quand Catherine rappelle qu'avec Sigfried, elle a ouvert "les paumes comme une envie de grandir", est-ce en fait un geste physique qu'elle a posé afin de communiquer à Sigfried qu'elle était prête à s'ouvrir à lui (suite à quoi, "il a tracé au milieu de [sa] main des cercles avec son pouce")? Ou, est-ce dans un sens métaphorique?  
**Avec ce geste, elle dit à Sigfried qu'elle est prête à faire l'amour.**
- p.43 Quand Catherine écrit, "Peut-être qu'avec un autre, j'oublierais la mort qui descend dans mon sexe trop bien caché", est-ce qu'elle veut dire son vagin? Et, qu'est-ce qu'elle veut signifier par "trop bien caché"? Ce paragraphe en général m'a causé des problèmes car, étant donné que je ne suis pas certaine du vouloir dire, ma traduction est plus ou moins littérale et ainsi maladroite.  
**En effet, elle veut dire son sexe. Elle se sent seule et elle a oublié qu'elle a un sexe.**

(Hugo à Catherine)

p.50 Quand Hugo dit à Catherine, "Ne pousse-pas les cris d'alarme habituels", est-ce au sens de "crier", ou au sens de "protester", ou de "protester en criant"?  
**Dans le sens de "protester en criant".**

p.50 Serait-il possible d'élucider les deux phrases suivantes.  
"L'harmonie viendra te saluer au pays de l'enfance et du pain frais."  
**Au pays de l'enfance veut dire: au pays de la beauté, là où tout est simple.**

"Le dépouillement demande du temps, les accessoires ne cesseront pas d'être ce qu'ils sont, ils t'apparaîtront simplement moins nécessaires."

**Le père de Catherine lui dit qu'elle aura besoin de moins de choses pour être heureuse.**

27 ans

(Catherine à Hugo)

p.55 Qui est-ce que Catherine cite dans la phrase, "Celle qui a écrit: 'On ne peut pas à la fois savoir et ne pas savoir' a bien menti"?  
**Marguerite Duras (La vie matérielle (chroniques) c. 1980-81). Par contre l'auteur n'a pas voulu que le lecteur le sache.**

p.55 Quand Catherine demande si elle était une enfant "fermée", veut-elle dire "indifférente", "peu communicative", ou autre chose?  
**Peu communicative, en retrait.**

p.55 Dans la référence aux "dialogues" entre Simone de Beauvoir et Sartre, est-ce Catherine qui lit à haute voix devant la télé?  
**Oui.**

p.56 Est-ce la "femme en devenir" Catherine ou Marlène?  
**C'est Marlène.**

p.56 La phrase "je n'ai pas poussé les hauts cris lorsque tu m'as parlé d'Edouard" : est-elle au sens de "crier", ou au sens de "protester", ou de "protester en criant"?  
**Protester en criant.**

p.56 Lorsque Catherine dit, "Tu m'as volé ma mère en la rendant absente à ses propres envies. C'est trop.", veut-elle dire que Hugo est allé trop loin en ce faisant, ou que l'émotion qu'elle vit en ce moment est trop pour elle?  
**Hugo est en effet allé trop loin.**

p.57 Pourriez-vous élucider le passage "'Rentre ton ventre... être sous protection ailleurs que dans l'étouffement."  
**Catherine doit se retenir, sinon tout va sortir (exploser).**

p.57 Pourriez-vous élucider la phrase "Avant d'accoucher, je pensais pouvoir terrifier mes monstres, être sous protection ailleurs que dans l'étouffement." Vous avez déjà mentionné que Catherine essayait de se retenir, sinon elle allait "exploser", mais est-ce que cette phrase est reliée à cette idée? Comment se protégeait-elle dans "l'étouffement"... Retenait-elle tellement ses émotions, ses peurs, qu'elle s'étouffait émotionnellement?  
**Elle voulait être sous protection sans avoir à se retenir.**

p.57 A quoi réfère Catherine quand elle dit "ici-bas" dans la phrase, "Jamais je n'aurais imaginé que le pire de mes rêves se déroulerait ici-bas"? J'ai interprété la phrase comme voulant dire son utérus, ses entrailles. Est-ce que j'ai tort?  
**Ici-bas : sur la terre, dans sa vie à elle.**

p.58 Pourriez-vous aussi élucider le passage suivant : "Bien des pique-niques ont eu lieu puis, plus de rêves, l'herbe était coupée." Réfère-t-elle à des événements partagés entre les deux femmes ou est-ce métaphorique pour expliquer pourquoi Patricia ne dessine plus?  
**Non, ce ne sont pas vraiment des événements partagés. C'est plutôt métaphorique pour décrire des événements heureux, un temps plus léger.**

(Hugo à Catherine)

Quand Hugo écrit cette lettre, sait-il que Catherine a fait une fausse couche? Si oui, pourquoi n'en parle-t-il pas dans cette lettre?

**Lorsque Hugo écrit cette lettre, il ne sait pas encore que Catherine a fait une fausse couche.**

p.67 Quand Hugo dit que Catherine lui a appris "à tirer partie du doute plutôt qu'à le déjouer", est-ce qu'il veut dire qu'elle lui a montré comment en profiter plutôt que d'essayer de l'éliminer, de l'esquiver?  
**OUI.**

33 ans

(Catherine à Hugo)

p.71-2 "Christian. Son regard du ventre au cœur." Que veut Catherine dire par cette expression. Que le regard de Christian la pénètre?

**Oui, le regard de Christian pénètre Catherine.**

p.72 Quand Catherine dit que l'éclipse de Christian la "tire par dedans", est-ce dans le sens de "tirailleur", ou veut-elle signifier que Christian l'attire vers/en lui?  
**C'est que Christian l'attire vers/en lui.**

p.72 Quand Catherine écrit, "Moi, je l'ai aimé moins facilement que mes rêves le croyaient", veut-elle dire qu'elle avait pensé/espéré aimer son fils très facilement, mais que ce n'était pas le cas?  
**Tout à fait. Ca lui a pris plus de temps qu'elle avait pensé à aimer son fils après l'accouchement.**

p.72 Quand Catherine dit "Lorsque Christian aime" emploie-t-elle le verbe "aimer" dans le sens physique (c.-à.-d. faire l'amour), ou est-ce plutôt dans le sens sentimental?  
**Oui, c'est dans le sens sentimental.**

Ce qui me pose des problèmes dans cette phrase est l'idée d'inscrire des signes... ont-ils fait l'amour dans tous ces endroits?· D'ailleurs, quand Catherine utilise "en passant" dans cette phrase, est-ce dans le sens de "incidemment", ou est-ce vraiment qu'il est physiquement passé par ses cuisses.

**Ce n'est pas dans le sens de "incidemment"... on pourrait aussi dire "... et aussi mes cuisses".**

(Hugo à Catherine)

Pourquoi est-ce qu'Hugo semble être fixé sur la mort dans cette lettre... "les Thaïlandais marchent vers la mort", "l'idée de la mort vient s'accrocher aux yeux de ceux que j'aime. Est-ce moi qui provoque le deuil?", "Descendre dans ce ventre d'enfant qu'est la mort demande de l'humilité." Pourriez-vous élucider brièvement ces trois passages?

**Hugo se trouve dans une période où il craint sa propre mort et projette donc la mort sur tout ce qu'il voit. Il vit une grande dépression.**

p.82 A quoi réfère "cela" dans la phrase "Bangkok: te le décrire ne suscite pas nécessairement l'émotion même si cela en témoigne..." (le fait de décrire Bangkok?).  
**Oui, le fait de décrire Bangkok ne suscite pas la même émotion chez Catherine.**

p.82 Lorsque Hugo écrit, "Je suis dans un cycle de ruptures. Tout y passe", que veut-il dire au juste? Qu'absolument tout dans sa vie passe par ce cycle?  
**Oui, tout passe par ce cycle et les événements y sont reliés.**

p.83 Que veut dire l'expression "voilement-dévoilement inscrit dans le décor dans une maison"? Est-ce une expression d'architecture? Est-ce la manière que le décor d'une maison peut à la fois révéler et cacher?  
**Ce n'est pas un terme d'architecture... Il y a des coins dans une maison qui voilent, d'autres qui dévoilent.**

p.83 Que veut Hugo dire par "Des pensées passent sous le ciel-écran"?  
**C'est le ciel, mais en même temps, une sorte d'écran de cinéma.**

- p.83 Y a-t-il un jeu de mots dans la phrase "montre-moi comment monter les oeufs en neige dans une relation... sans que le souffle ne s'écrase", ou il y a-t-il une faute de frappe (soufflé??).  
**Il n'y a pas de faute de frappe... c'est un jeu de mots. En fait, c'est l'air qu'on respire, (l'idée d'un trajectoire?).**
- p.83 Pourriez-vous élucider ce qu'Hugo veut dire: "Sous sa peau, le langage ne passait pas." Je l'ai interprété comme voulant dire qu'il n'y avait pas de communication.  
**En effet, il n'y a pas eu de communication et d'ailleurs pas de rencontres de plaisir non plus.**
- p.83 Le couple dont Hugo parle ("Hier, je faisais semblant de construire un couple.") est-il celui du mariage ou de sa relation avec Edouard?  
**Se réfère au couple du mariage.**
- p.84 Pourriez-vous élucider la pensée de Hugo lorsqu'il écrit, "J'ai envie de dire: 'Partez, le spectacle est terminé, la faillite se renouvelle sur demande seulement.'  
**Jeu de mots car d'habitude, les profits ou les succès se renouvellent, pas les faillites. Il est en train de dire qu'il n'a plus rien à voir, qu'il est mauvais père, mauvais amant. Il a tout raté.**
- p.84 Quand Hugo emploie l'expression "fille-femme", veut-il dire "enfant-épouse" (daughter-wife) ou "gamine-adulte" (girl-woman). En français, c'est très ambigu...  
**était-ce votre intention?  
 GAMINE-ADULTE.**
- p.84 Qui est cette "amazone" dont Hugo parle ("J'y retrouve l'amazone qui jouit dans mes côtes")? Est-ce Catherine? Plus jeune, faisait-elle de l'équitation? Aussi, est-ce une allusion à Eve, née d'une côte d'Adam?  
**Hugo fait allusion à sa femme... il la voit juste comme une dame sans sexe.**

42 ans

(Catherine à Hugo)

- p.90 Que veut Catherine dire quand elle dit à son père, "Dans ton sommeil, tu rejoins l'amertume des grands ciels, implores le soleil"?  
**Dans ses rêves, il rencontre beaucoup de tristesse et il prie donc pour de l'aide, d'être éclairci.**
- p.90 Quand Catherine dit "L'ombre de ma mère t'accuse du regard", est-ce que sa mère est là, ou est-ce figuratif?  
**Elle n'est pas là, mais c'est Catherine qui a le souvenir du regard accusteur de sa mère en tête (la mère de Catherine en veut à son père).**

- p.90 Est-ce que Catherine veut dire que son père manque de vitalité quand elle dit "Tes dents hésitent trop"?  
**Hugo manque d'esprit de décision.**
- p.90 La phrase "Donner les pantalons trop lâches à la taille" veut-elle signifier que Hugo envoie ses pantalons au tailleur?  
**Hugo faisait le (grand) ménage et donne ses pantalons à l'armée du salut (ou un organisme du genre).**
- p.91 Que veut Catherine dire quand elle dit que ses mains sont "habituées... de se détacher d'elles-mêmes pour mieux" protéger Hugo?  
**Catherine est tellement habituée de se couper d'elle même pour prendre soin de son père. Elle s'oublie et elle est trop généreuse envers son père.**
- (Hugo à Catherine)
- p. 102 Quels sont les cadeaux qu'ils se sont offerts dans la phrase "Entre toi et moi, pour que nous acceptions de déballer les cadeaux...". Est-ce un emploi figuratif?  
**C'est dans un sens figuratif; les cadeaux pourraient être des dons, des sourires...**
- p.102 A quoi réfère "là-bas" dans la phrase "Là-bas, beaucoup d'hommes ont passé, pas un n'est resté." Est-ce que Hugo parle de lui-même ou de Catherine? Que veut signifier "Des courants d'air" dans la phrase qui suit? Parle-t-il des hommes qui sont passés en coup de vent dans sa vie à lui?  
**Oui, Hugo parle de lui-même... des hommes de passages dans sa vie.**
- p.102 Quand Hugo prie "que le désir advienne", veut-il dire que le désire lui vient sans effort de sa part?  
**Oui, il prie qu'il puisse à nouveau désirer.**
- p.102 Pourriez-vous élucider le passage "J'appartiens à la race des conquérants sans en être un. A cloche-pied dans le danger, je stagne." Est-ce que l'expression dans la dernière phrase est employée dans le sens de "sauter à cloche-pied"?  
**Hugo a reçu une éducation d'homme... il n'est pas vainqueur comme il devrait l'être selon son éducation.**  
**L'expression "à cloche pied" veut dire qu'il est immobile, inconfortable.**
- p.103 42 ans  
Lorsque Hugo emploie le mot "chimère", est-ce dans le sens de "monstre mythique / hybride" ou dans le sens de "rêve"?  
**Employé dans le sens de "rêve".**

p.103 Qu'est-ce "l'essentiel" pour Hugo? ("Avec toi, il me semble plus facile de souligner l'essentiel... sans pour autant m'appesantir.") Aussi, que veut-il dire par "m'appesantir" (s'appesantir avec quoi? ... des mots, des émotions?).  
**L'essentiel est ce qui est important pour Hugo. Il ne s'appesante pas avec trop de mots, il ne se plaint pas trop.**

50 ans

p.107 D'où Catherine a-t-elle pris la "formule incantatoire" : "certains accomplissent mieux leur plaisir que d'autres, puissiez-vous les accompagner"? Est-ce une phrase que Hugo a écrit?  
**C'est une phrase qu'il a écrit.**

p.108 Est-ce le mot "glissade" est employé dans le sens musical?  
**Non. C'est plutôt dans le sens qu'on se laisse porter par la musique.**

**Est-ce que Hugo écrit ses deux dernières lettres à Catherine sous l'influence de la morphine? On dirait qu'il tombe dans une sorte d'incohérence, et que son écriture est parfois incompréhensible.**

**La lettre à la page 111, non. La lettre à la page 113, oui.**

p.111 Est-ce le verbe "se sentir" dans la phrase "On signe des pactes avec la mort parce qu'on ne sait pas se sentir." utilisé dans le sens de se détester soi-même, ou de ne plus savoir qui on est (ne plus se connaître)?  
**C'est une question de ne plus se sentir avec le corps; on peut bien avec la tête et avec les émotions, mais pas avec le corps.**

p.111 Pourriez-vous expliquer la phrase de Hugo, "J'ai lu d'immenses détresses sur les âmes affichées en vue du recensement." (se réfère-t-il aux autres malades dans l'hôpital qui attendent aussi la mort)?  
**C'est plutôt toute l'humanité.**

p.111 Quand Hugo utilise le mot "cartable" ("écris-les près des étoiles de ton cartable"), veut-il dire un sac d'écolier ou une chemise à ranger les feuilles à trois trous?  
**Sac à écoliers; étoiles dans la marge de travaux d'élève qui a réussi.**

p.113 Qu'est-ce que Hugo veut dire: "Le petit coin noir n'a pas valeur d'échange."  
**"Le petit coin noir" est l'inconscient, l'ombre en nous, ce qu'on cache.**

p.113 Est-ce le mot "aubes" dans la phrase "Du haut de mon ciel, je vous offrirai à toi et à Christian les aubes dont vous garnirez vos draps" est employé dans le sens liturgique ou dans le sens de "petit matin"?  
**Petit matin.**

- p.113 Est-ce la phrase, "La fatigue vient à qui sait attendre et ne pas désirer" un proverbe et que voulait dire Hugo par cette phrase?  
**Le moins on désire, plus on se fatigue car on attend toujours les autres de tout nous apporter.**
- p.113 Dans la phrase, "Tu sentiras l'urgence d'une autre manière", est-ce que "urgence" réfère au "vrai besoin: t'arrêter" dont Hugo parle?  
**L'urgence est un vrai besoin, mais pas forcément celui de s'arrêter; ça pourrait être d'autres essentiels.**
- p.114 Le passage qui débute, "Moi, mes soleils se parent..." et qui se termine avec "lorsque je chante a cappella aux passants sans ombre" est très obscur... Pourriez-vous l'élucider un peu?  
**L'ombre rejoint la lumière. Il ne fait plus juste jour et nuit, noir et blanc, les deux se confondent car il vieillit et s'approche de la mort. Ses points d'attache, les choses auxquelles il tient s'en vont, les couleurs aussi; Hugo ne sait pas comment l'arrêter. Il veut endosser les peines de sa maladie afin de les rendre plus légères pour ceux qu'il aime. Il chante avec sa vraie voix aux gens qu'il côtoie et ne connaît pas.**
- p.114 Pourriez-vous éclaircir la phrase, "Souvent à genoux j'ai retenu les échelles". J'ai interprété les deux phrases qui la précèdent comme voulant dire que Hugo ne se sacrifie plus, qu'il pense à lui-même d'abord. Cependant la phrase ci-haut me paraît un peu obscur.  
**Il retenait ses outils qui l'aidaient à grimper.**
- p.114 J'ai aussi de la difficulté à interpréter les phrases : "Rapproche-toi des couleurs promises. Invente un scénario à l'envers de la séduction. Dévoile tes failles comme si tu tendais ta plénitude vers l'autre."  
**Il dit à Catherine de se rapprocher de ses désirs, de ses rêves sans tenir compte de ce que les autres pensent d'elle (est-ce que je plais? Est-ce que je ne plais pas?). Elle devrait aussi révéler ses failles en tant que qualités.**
- Pourquoi Hugo est-il tellement attiré à sa fille (sexuellement), mais il n'aime pas les femmes en générale?  
**L'attirance n'est pas que sexuelle. Il aime tellement sa fille qu'il voudrait l'aimer de toutes manières. Cependant, les autres femmes qui sont son égales, ne l'intéresse pas.**

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