

A TRANSLATION FROM FRENCH TO ENGLISH OF *DANS*
LA LUMIÈRE DES SAISONS BY CHARLES JULIET

by

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A THESIS

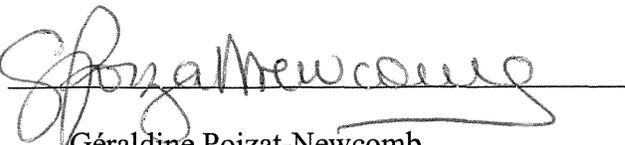
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Géraldine Poizat-Newcomb

This work is a translation project for *Dans la lumière des saisons*, a book of four letters written by Charles Juliet to his friend, preceded by an essay explaining my translation process. In this essay I attempt to outline the process and method I used for my translation, as well as explain some of the choices I made within the translation and use those explanations as a framework for explaining my translation method as a whole.

Acknowledgements

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Terminology

The following terms I took directly from *Thinking French Translation* by Sàndor G.J.

Hervey and Ian Higgins:

Source text (ST): The text to be translated.

Target Text (TT): The text which is a translation of the ST.

Source Language (SL): The language in which the ST is spoken or written

Target Language (TL): The language into which the ST is to be translated.

For my purposes, the ST is *Dans la lumière des saisons*, the TT is *In the Light of the Seasons*, the SL is French and the TL is English.

Introduction

My fascination with French stems in part from how it has made me think about English. There is a relationship between all languages, and learning a second language creates a better understanding of the first. My first translation course reinforced this fascination by giving me the beginnings of a specific method for thinking about English as it compares to French, and vice versa. Since I took that class during my junior year at the University of Oregon, I have had a fascination with translation, and I have attempted a few smaller translations for my own personal use and entertainment, but never had the opportunity to work on a large-scale project. That's why when I began thinking about my thesis for the Honors College, it did not take me long to decide to focus my efforts on a translation.

I began this process without even a book in mind—I just knew that I enjoyed translating and I wanted to put time and effort into a larger project than I had attempted before. Selecting the book was a task in and of itself. I needed something that had not been translated into English before (selecting something that had would have required an entirely different translation approach and mindset); something that was short enough that I could put a lot of work into just a few pages, instead of spreading the limited time I had out over a much longer text; something that was within my skill level to translate—not too dense, and not too light; but most of all, I needed a text that I enjoyed. If I were to choose something I didn't really enjoy reading, not only would it make the process much less enjoyable, but it would also show through in my translation. Not feeling a connection with a book would mean less understanding of it,

or at least less willingness to put in the effort to understand, and that in turn would equate to a subpar translation.

The book I chose is called *Dans la lumière des saisons*, by Charles Juliet. One of the first things that struck me about this book is its format: it is a series of four letters, written over the course of a year (presumably—there is no year given for each of the letters, only a month and day) to a friend living in the United States. Epistolary writing is a fairly rare nonfiction genre and I found it refreshing and revealing. The letter format means the book is divided into chapter-like sections, with enough time passing between each that Juliet has a chance to reconsider and expand upon his ideas from the previous writings. Letters—at least the way Juliet writes them—also offer a sort of in-between kind of personal writing: not quite a journal, but not an essay or a story, either. They are written in a stream-of-consciousness style, and as Juliet himself says, “Je ne me relis pas”—“I do not reread my writing”. That makes for a text that is connected, but also feels like a series of vignettes. Juliet has many ideas to write about in each letter, often jumping between his inner thoughts and his physical, day-to-day life, along with the interplay between these two.

These letters were originally written to only one person, a correspondent whose responses we never see. It would seem to make for a confusing narrative, but that is not the case at all. The letters are deeply personal and very intimate, and it feels as though Juliet is writing to us the reader, or that we are taking a look into his most personal thoughts. His writing is both accessible and almost impenetrable, relatable and deeply individual. All these characteristics are what initially drew me to this work.

There were other more technical reasons that made this book a good choice for me as well. First, it is short: only 47 pages from start to finish. Despite its length, however, it is not an easy translation. Juliet has a background as an author and poet—he has published over 30 works¹ and won the *Prix Goncourt de la poésie*, a prestigious French literature award for poetry, in 2013²—and this background comes through strongly in his writing style and his ideas, which are strongly poetic. His use of imagery and sparse but descriptive word choice makes it challenging to translate with his same clarity and brevity. He builds up his entire world in a very clear way in a short amount of space, and he mixes this physical description with passages about his inner life. He even includes a few pieces of his poetry in his letters, and those require a different translation strategy.

This was my first translation, and because of that, I had to develop a translation method that worked for me. Because of the length of this book, I was able to go through it several times and refine my text, and to apply what I had learned to create a better translation. As I developed a method and began to be more comfortable with it, many of the things I used to have to think about became less conscious and more automatic. After a while, the reasons for translating a phrase in a certain way did not necessarily pass through my mind while I worked. I will use some of these examples to illustrate why I subconsciously made the choices I did throughout the translation, and why the choices I made began to just sound right. Those moments of choice in the translation

¹ "Charles Juliet." *Editions P.O.L.* N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Nov. 2015.

² Schwartz, Arnaud. "Charles Juliet reçoit le prix Goncourt de la poésie." *La Croix*. N.p. 4 December 2013. Web. 6 September 2015

process are meant to be exemplary of specific aspects of my translation method as a whole, and of the wider overall strategy I used for similar moments throughout the text.

I have divided this essay into three distinct sections: meaning, sound, and structure. These sections are all inherently linked, and it is often difficult to place a translation feature into one specific category, but they are useful for separating these features in a logical order. While these three terms are very broad, I will define what they mean for my purposes here: Meaning is what the words say as a whole, i.e. what the sentences, paragraphs, chapters each communicate. Sound has more to do with word choice and overall tone. Structure has to do with both punctuation and grammatical structures, and how to convert them from French to English in a logical and faithful way. I will elaborate on these definitions and how they affect the translation in their respective sections.

All three of these categories, at their core, involve translation loss. Translation loss is the degree of sense that disappears when a text changes from the SL to the TL. “Loss” has a generally negative connotation, but it is important to note that translation loss is not something to be lamented. Rather, it is an inevitability to be mitigated as much as possible.

A basic example of inevitable translation loss is the phonic and graphic differences of French and English words. The French “lit” and the English “bed” mean the same thing—furniture to sleep on—but they are clearly not the same. The spellings are different; they have different vowel sounds (/ɛ/ in English and /i/ in French) and different consonant sounds; they have different connotations (“lit” in French can’t be used to describe “a bed of flowers,” for example.) Again, while this is technically

“loss,” it is an inevitability. As Eugene Nida says in his essay on translation: “Since no two languages are identical, either in the meaning given to corresponding symbols or in the ways in which such symbols are arranged in phrases and sentences, it stands to reason that there can be no absolute correspondence between languages.” (*The Translation Studies Reader*, 141) Such translation loss as happens when we translate “lit” into “bed” is generally perfectly acceptable in any translation, since it is something that cannot be helped.

Translation loss can also come in the form of grammatical structures, meaning, cultural references, and many other aspects. These are all aspects that are often not as inherent in the nature of translation, and thus they can be much more avoidable for a translator. I will discuss these concepts further below. All this said, translation is not all loss, it allows for some gain. As Walter Benjamin says in his important translation essay *The Translator's Task*, “In [translations] the original's life achieves its constantly renewed, latest and most comprehensive development.” (*The Translation Studies Reader*, 77) Translation allows a work to have a new life, to be experienced in a new culture, which is an inherent gain in the life of the work, even if it is not a textual gain in the work itself. In that aspect, an ST can stand to gain from all the peculiarities of the TL itself. John Green, author of *Looking for Alaska*, says about the German translation of his own book, “We always talk about how something is inevitably lost in translation, and that's true, but there can also be gains in translation—opportunities that I didn't take because I wasn't clever enough to uncover them, or else because the peculiarities of my language precluded them.” (Reddit) While I would be hesitant as a translator to take an opportunity that the original author “wasn't clever enough to uncover”, I agree

with Green that certain aspects of the TL can suit certain passages of the ST better than the SL.

As I started this project, I had to make an important decision and choose what kind of translation strategy I would use. There is a spectrum that ranges from literal to free translation. *Thinking French Translation* defines literal translation as, “where the literal meaning of words is taken as if straight from the dictionary (that is, out of context), but TL grammar is respected,” and free translation as “where there is only an overall correspondence between the textual units of the ST and those of the TT.”

(*Thinking French Translation*, 15-16) While a translation strategy was a “decision”, it is not a black and white choice. Different passages called for different types of translation, and it is sometimes hard to see exactly where on the spectrum a translation of a certain passage falls.

My overall aim with this translation was to stay faithful to the French roots of the text while also generating the same set of ideas and feelings a reader would get reading the ST. That is, I wanted to create a TT that was faithful enough to the ST that it kept elements of the French, without being so literal that it constantly reminded the reader that they were reading a translated work. I made the choice to try and translate this text as literally as possible while not being so literal it became exoticized, that is, I did not purposely cling to constructs of the French grammar and word choice in order to constantly remind the reader they are reading a translation. For example, in the opening paragraph of the book, Juliet writes “Il me vient le désir de m’entretenir un moment avec vous, bien que je n’aie pas l’impression d’avoir quoi que ce soit à vous dire.”

(*Dans la lumière des saisons*, 11) I translated this as “The desire comes to me to take a

moment with you, even though I feel that I have nothing to say.” While this is perfectly comprehensible in English, it might not sound as natural as another possibility, such as “I wanted to spend a moment with you, even though I feel like I have nothing to say.” The former translation is much more literal—it keeps a similar structure of desire coming to the author; it utilizes “take,” a verb that is less commonly used in English compared to “spend”—while the latter, which condenses the meaning of the entire first half of the sentence into a simpler and more common English phrase, is much more free. While both of these translations relate the same basic message, the way they are phrased changes the overall tone of the translation. I tried to uphold this tone throughout by keeping these literal moments where they seemed appropriate.

I made this choice knowing that, in a certain sense, I was changing the intent behind Juliet’s writing. By making the TT have a hint of foreignness in it, it reads differently than it would for a French reader reading the ST. I made this choice because I think that this is a part of reading a foreign text. No matter how fluent a reader is in the two languages, the text will always feel different in each language as compared to the other. I wanted to preserve that different feeling, the feeling of reading something that, while entirely comprehensible, is just slightly alien. Rudolf Pannwitz says in his book *Die Krisis der europäischen Kultur*, “The fundamental error of the translator is that he holds fast to the state in which his own language happens to be rather than allowing it to be put powerfully in movement by the foreign language.” (The Translation Studies Reader, 82) I am not claiming here to put English “powerfully in movement by the foreign language,” but I am trying to adhere to French constructs and Juliet’s style in order to create a unique work in the TL.

Meaning

Meaning in this essay relates solely to the information that Juliet relays, that is, the explicit messages that the words communicate. While the sound and the structure of the writing can and do impact the overall feel and understanding of the text, for this section I will try to separate meaning as much as possible from those aspects of the writing.

By that definition, meaning seems rather simple: what did Juliet write, and how can it be expressed in English? For certain passages, the meaning is not at all difficult to understand and translate. For example, when Juliet writes “Mon village est sous la neige, et depuis quelques jours, la température oscille entre moins quinze et moins vingt,” (*Dans la lumière des saisons*, 28) he is clearly communicating that it is very snowy and cold in his village, and so the more important aspects here are the sound and the structure. In other passages, the meaning is far from clear. On the first page of his first letter, Juliet writes, “Enfoui dans un état d’ineffable bien-être, les yeux le plus souvent clos, j’ai erré en moi, soumis aux intermittences du murmure.” (*Dans la lumière des saisons*, 11) One of the first concepts I learned about translation is that a text must be understood in order to be translated correctly, which made this passage, especially the last line, very difficult for me to translate. “Soumis aux intermittences du murmure” is a strange phrase in French: translated literally, it means “subject to the intermittences of the murmur,” which is what I chose for my final translation. This passage confused me for a long time, however, and when I asked my advisor, professor Poizat-Newcomb, she told me that there was no obscure French idiomatic phrase I was missing; it was just what Juliet had chosen to write.

This is a type of sentence that recurs throughout Juliet's letters: sentences that, in a certain way, make more sense the less the reader thinks about them. Juliet's writing, especially about his "inner life," has a flow that makes it easily readable, even when individual sentences can be confusing. Amidst all these confusing passages that make up the parts of a whole paragraph, the reader still comes out with a general impression of the whole of Juliet's ideas, a sense of what he means. In that respect, translating these sentences is as much about transferring the meaning as it is about making sure the sentence remains a part of the whole, in meaning and in tone. It is still important that these sentences are understandable on their own, and so a balance must be found wherein the meaning is translated faithfully and the sound and structure are such that they maintain the flow of the paragraph.

Originally, I used the same strategy that I described in the previous example that I used for many passages that were difficult, and left the decision for later. As I mentioned earlier, I translated and re-translated this book several times, and I learned a lot each time, about the text and about the translation process. The first time through, I was focused on gross meaning, that is, getting the gist of each chapter, each paragraph, each sentence, while not necessarily refining the other aspects of my TT. After going once through in this manner, I learned two important things related to meaning: the context matters, and Juliet's approach to writing matters.

I noticed that the word and idea of "murmure" are recurring themes in these letters, and Juliet mentions the concept that he often does not really create, but rather hears the words and puts them on paper. Once I noticed this, I knew that "murmure" could, and had to, be translated in a specific way. Antoine Berman, in his

essay *Translation and the Trials of the Foreign*, discusses “the destruction of underlying networks of signification,” saying that “after long intervals certain words may recur, certain kinds of substantives that constitute a particular network, whether through their resemblance or their aim, their ‘aspect,’” and adding that “If such networks are not transmitted, a signifying process in the text is destroyed.” (*Translation studies reader*, 248-249) “Murmure” is one such word in Juliet’s writing, a word that is linked to his style and approach to writing. I decided on one TL word—murmur—to use for this and all future appearances of “murmure” in the text. For this particular passage, I left it as somewhat ambiguous in the TT, since the context of this word in the overall place of Juliet’s writing is revealed as the book progresses.

Another aspect that impacted how I translated this passage, and by extent all others that were similar to it, is the approach Juliet takes when he writes his letters. As he says in his first letter, “je ne me relis pas,” (*Dans la lumière des saisons*, 18) which I translated as “I do not reread my writing.” The phrase “je ne me relis pas” is a general statement about all of his writing, and it is very telling for this entire book, and as such for my entire translation. These are letters, often written late at night, early in the morning, after long walks, with hours or days passing between paragraphs, and because he writes without rereading, they are less polished than a full-length novel or a collection of poems might be. As I have mentioned, they may have been edited before publication, but my reading of them shows that they are not meant to be refined or polished; they are meant to showcase Juliet’s writing style and ideas in a rough, but pure, manner.

The admittance by Juliet that he does not reread his writing affected my translation strategy as well. Each time I encountered a confusing passage or one that seemed to be alluding to an idea that never materialized, I left it as it was instead of trying to make sense of it. That is the idea of “clarification” that Berman again talks about in his essay. He states that while “clarification is inherent in translation...in a negative sense, explication aims to render ‘clear’ what does not wish to be clear in the original.” (Translation Studies Reader, 245) It was important for me, as much as I worked and reworked a tricky word or confusing sentence, not to overwork it, not to try to render it ‘clear.’ Juliet’s writing comes to him spontaneously, which can lead to moments of confusion for the reader, and it was important for me to remember that these moments are an integral part of the text and should be maintained as they are, not explicated and not enhanced.

Overall I found this approach to meaning—translating as literally as possible while still being comprehensible and readable, identifying key phrases to create an underlying network of meaning, and maintaining moments where Juliet consciously or unconsciously is ambiguous— to create an effective method of translation. Balanced with sound and structure, I think it led to a faithful translation of the ST into an accurate TT.

Sound

In this essay, sound relates to the word choice and tone in the ST and the TT. By word choice, I mean the use of one word or combination of words over another word or combination that could be equally viable in the context. Tone is essentially word choice on a larger scale. Where word choice involves trying to maintain a similar word in the TT as was in the ST for a specific section, tone involves maintaining the register that all of the words in the essay fall into, and the feeling that these words convey when combined. This work has a somewhat elevated register, and I have tried to maintain this elevation by choosing higher-register words throughout. Sound also involves any other phonic features, such as alliteration, assonance and consonance, rhyme, etc.

Juliet's poetic writing style and the sparse nature of this text made these considerations much more important than they may otherwise be in a longer, more detailed text. In his descriptions of the environment or scenery, for example, he often only writes one passage describing his environs, that is, one chance to describe his setting. Unlike a text that may go into greater detail, or have familiar settings that are described multiple times throughout the text, it was important to choose exactly the right word to accurately communicate what aspect of the setting Juliet was trying to describe. This is one of the many places where the meaning and sound sections overlap, as utilizing a slightly inaccurate word in this case could arguably change the meaning of the text.

To try to mitigate this loss as much as possible, my strategy for word choice often involved identifying equivalences in French and English. For example, let's take

the French term “ce que.” In my first, rough translation of this text, I mistranslated it most often as “that which.” I say mistranslated because this translation, while technically accurate in meaning, is not accurate in tone, and because it recurs so often, it changed the overall tone of the text. For example, I initially translated the sentence “Ce que j’étais, ce qui me concernait me paraissait dénué d’intérêt” (*Dans la lumière des saisons*, 20) as “That which I was, that which concerned me now seem to be devoid of interest.” While not incorrect, using “that which” here is rather unnatural in English, and led to a stilted and overly formal sentence. I later changed it to “Who I was, the things I was concerned with, now seem to be devoid of interest.” This is a moment I often encountered in translating, where the meaning of the sentence would be communicated both ways, but the latter choice is a more logical and more accurate translation as far as tone is concerned.

Word choice also involved choosing the right word because it sounded right. Often times, after searching for a right word in the TL for a long time, I simply borrowed a word in French that, although it is used in English, might be less common than another synonym. I struggled to find an English equivalent for “plénitude,” in the phrase “cette plénitude du fruit qui s’est fortifié de tout ce qui lui fut contraire,” (*Dans la lumière des saisons*, 14) trying out “abundance” and “richness,” before I realized that plenitude is a perfectly acceptable, if seldom-used, choice. I felt that Juliet’s writing and word choice and the readers who might choose to read this text justify using a word that may be slightly disused or archaic in English. These words do not feel out of place in relation to other ones that he uses, and as such they do not detract from the overall flow and readability of the book.

Another difficulty with sound was deciding how much I wanted to try and maintain the alliterations or rhymes in Juliet's text. Where a choice had to be made, I normally sacrificed sound for meaning. For example, one sentence in his second letter reads, "Où rien ne vient s'opposer à ce que je me love en ma pénombre." (*Dans la lumière des saisons*, 28) This sentence is rich with rhyme ("rien ne vient" and "Je me love...ma pénombre"), assonance ("me love en ma pénombre"), and alliteration ("s'opposer à ce que"). My translation of this line ended up as "When nothing comes to stop me from curling up in my darkness." While it does not match the sonority of Juliet's sentence, I had a very difficult time communicating the meaning of this passage alone. I tested a few different translations trying to match Juliet's sound elements, but I found it to be worse to end up with a phrase that sounds like it is trying to have these elements without succeeding. I am not trying to imitate Juliet's writing in my translation, and that kind of attempt could cheapen the final product.

Sound also goes in the opposite direction. There were times when I had to avoid alliteration or rhyme in the TT because it was not present in the ST, and it made the TT sound forced. These were moments when I would occasionally sacrifice meaning for sound. One example of this was translating the phrase "Je crois que mon besoin de lire..." (*Dans la lumière des saisons*, 18) This is a rather simple phrase, and it means "I think that my need to read..." but I found the rhyme of "need" and "read" to distract in a way that the original didn't, so I changed "need" to "urge." While this does not entirely change the meaning, it does have a slightly different message. "Need" is much more insistent and pressing than "urge," and the former creates a more forceful message. A need is something necessary for survival; an urge is something one wants

to do. I had difficulties with this because there is not a synonym for the verb “to read,” and not an entirely equivalent synonym for “need” that communicates the intensity of the word. However, urge communicates essentially the same thing, and because I found that the rhyme was too glaring to leave in, I opted for the slightly less accurate urge to maintain the overall sound of the text.

Sound is not as obvious as meaning. It is much less difficult for a reader who only reads the TT to recognize a mistranslation of meaning because it often comes with a loss of understanding. Loss of sound, however, can be more difficult to pick up on. If a passage does not uphold the same sound elements in the TT as in the ST, a reader will most likely go right past it without a pause. Even if the overall tone of the book is changed, a reader who only reads the TT could not discern this loss. Some loss of sound—as in my previous example, “Où rien ne vient s’opposer à ce que je me love en ma pénombre”—is not damaging to the text and is, like all forms of loss, inevitable at a certain level. When loss of sound begins to extend to many or all passages of an ST, however, it has the capability of changing the overall tone of the work, and therefore damaging the text.

Structure

Structure involves the punctuation and grammatical structures in the ST and TT. Like sound, it is difficult for a TT reader to notice a mistranslation of structure because it often only equates to a loss of style, and not a confusing or unreadable TT. In some cases, structure can simply require a logical reordering of a sentence, as certain TL grammatical structures *must* be respected for the TT to make sense. Like sound again, however, there are moments when a choice about word or sentence order can change a lot in terms of meaning or sound, and these changes can build up to affect the whole tone and style of the text.

As with most of the text, I aimed to translate the sentence structure faithfully to how Juliet wrote it. However this was not always possible. For example, I translated the line “Je doute que comme moi ces derniers temps, vous ayez ramassé des noix et des châtaignes” (*Dans la lumière des saisons*, 20) as “I doubt that you have been gathering walnuts and chestnuts as I have recently.” While I do want to maintain textual and grammatical features of the French to a certain extent, a literal translation of the structure as “I doubt that like me lately, you have been collecting walnuts and chestnuts” would be jarring in English. That translation again would maintain the meaning, but it is not a logical or common phrase in English and it feels awkward to read.

This slight change of structure does not result in a huge change of feeling for the passage, but it does change it some. In my TT, the “I,” that is, Juliet, becomes the more central subject of the sentence. It also sounds almost accusatory, with “I doubt” directly before the subject that it applies to. In the context of the paragraph, both these

differences are more minute, and the overall translation loss from this change in structure is minimal, but I had to keep these concepts in mind when fitting the ST phrases to the TL structure.

As well as sentence structure, I also tried to adhere to Juliet's use of punctuation: how he used commas, parentheses, etc. and how he broke up his sentences. Juliet's writing often includes long run-on sentences, separated and ordered only by commas. One such sentence reads,

“Parfois, je suis accablé, et mon espoir vacille de voir un jour notre triste humanité non pas s'employer à soigner les maux que depuis des millénaires elle ne cesse de sécréter, mais vaincre enfin ses effroyables démons, se réconcilier avec elle-même, vivre en paix, vivre en paix, mettre au service du bien commun les inépuisables énergies qu'elle consacre à multiplier les destructions, répandre la misère et malheur, faire sauvagement couler le sang.”

(Dans la lumière des saisons, 15)

My translation: “Sometimes, I am overwhelmed, and my hope flickers, the hope of seeing our sad humanity one day stop working to cure the injuries that for millennia it has unceasingly secreted and finally defeat its dreadful demons, to reconcile with itself, to live in peace, to live in peace, to utilize for the common good the inexhaustible energies that it consecrates to multiplying the destructions, spreading misery and misfortune, savagely causing blood to flow.”

While this is not an especially difficult sentence to translate when it comes to meaning, the structure can get a bit awkward simply because of the length. For the most part, I tried to keep the structure as close to Juliet's as possible. I had to repeat “hope” and add a comma in the beginning to reinforce that subject, as the only other way for that section to be grammatically correct in English without changing more of the structure would have been to place “flickers” at the very end of the passage, which would be very

confusing for a reader, e.g. “Sometimes, I am overwhelmed, and my hope of seeing our sad humanity one day stop working to cure the injuries that for millennia it has unceasingly secreted...spreading misery and misfortune, savagely causing blood to flow, flickers.” At this point, “flickers” has lost all connection to “hope” and is bizarrely out of place. While technically correct, this option is not a realistic one.

In the last part of this sentence, I would have liked to use “for the common good” at the end of the phrase, i.e. “to utilize the inexhaustible energies that it consecrates to multiplying the destructions, spreading misery and misfortune, savagely causing blood to flow, for the common good.” I think it would have created a smoother English reading without changing the meaning or structure too much. At this point, however, “the common good” is so disconnected from “utilize” that it renders the sentence much more confusing. The context also affects this: in the text, the paragraph ends with “savagely causing blood to flow,” and after a line break, the first words of the next line are “One month ago was my birthday.” This sudden shift in subject matter and tone would be lessened if the paragraph were to end with “for the common good,” and some of the despair that this paragraph communicates may be lost. I decided for the slightly more awkward English phrasing in order to maintain the clarity and tone of the passage.

Another translation loss that I had trouble choosing how to mitigate was the knowledge of Juliet’s correspondent as a female, which comes from the gendered nature of many French words. In the ST, we know from the very beginning that the person he is writing to is feminine: “Amie chère,” with an “e” at the end of both words, indicates that he is speaking to a female. This is reinforced time and time again throughout the

text, as every opening to a letter has some form of “amie,” and each time he speaks directly to her, each adjective and verb must agree with her gender, e.g. “vous voici maintenant installée au Texas.” (*Dans la lumière des saisons*, 37) Here the extra “e” at the end of “installée” again indicates that he is speaking to a woman.

English does not have a specific grammatical way of communicating the gender of a character through the formation of adjectives and verbs. There is one reference to her womanhood early in the first letter: “I have always associated this season that represents to me the woman, the mother, with what is carried in so many of you, something man is so far from.” I did not want to be too blatant about this fact, so I did not include any other references to her gender, as there were not any logical places to put such a reference. I think it is enough that the information is there for the reader to find, even if it is much less pronounced than in the original.

English is also ill suited to communicate Juliet’s use of “vous” throughout the text. French has two forms of the pronoun “you”: “tu” and “vous.” The difference between these forms has many nuances and contextual influences, but the basic idea relevant to this discussion is that “vous” is used in more formal situations, whereas “tu” is used with friends and in informal contexts. Juliet addresses his correspondent as an “amie chère” (a dear friend), but he uses “vous” when speaking to her directly. Essentially, this choice of pronoun indicates two things: that their relationship is likely not very intimate, and that they are both of a more elevated social class. This usage is not a fact, not something that can be spoken. Rather, it is a subtlety of their relationship, and as such it is not information that can be slipped in somewhere like gender. Instead, it simply had to be something that affects the overall tone of the TT.

There are many such examples of nuances that cannot be expressed in English but can determine the overall tone of the text. The French negation “ne...pas” is one such example. In normal speech, the “ne...pas” is placed around a conjugated word, for example “je ne sais pas,” which translates to “I don’t know.” In written French, however, one can also negate simply with “ne,” so “je ne sais” means again in English, “I don’t know.” Vinay and Darbelnet use this example in their work *Comparative Linguistics of French and English*, stating, “In principle, therefore, the nuance of ‘je ne sais’ is untranslatable.” (*Comparative Stylistics of French and English*, 147) They continue, however, by stating that it can have equivalences in certain contexts, and one can make up for this lack of English nuance in the tone of the TT.

I did notice that Juliet often used this literary form of negation, as in “ne cesse de sécréter” (*Dans la lumière des saisons*, 15), so I tried to create an equivalence in several ways: sometimes by separating negative contractions (for example, “I don’t” becomes “I do not”) where it seemed appropriate, and also by elevating the tone of a passage or even by adding a word not present in the ST to reflect this literary tone.

Much of the translation loss that comes from structure is inevitable, as we must adhere to the grammar rules, but I still had to find those places where Juliet had the possibility to structure a sentence in a different way but chose not to. Those moments, moments of options where he chose one order over another, are stylistic moments in the work, and it was those structures that I had to find a way to recreate in the TT.

Conclusion

It is hard to step back and look objectively at a work that one has put so much time into and been so close to for so long. There were times when I felt that I was too close to the text to be able to see if what I was doing was what I wanted to do, or that I was obsessing too much about a single sentence or a single word that was a good translation the first time, before I convinced myself that it wasn't. However, I was able to combine the ideas contained within these three sections to create an effective translation method that worked for me and for this text. It eventually became easier to apply all of these considerations to the ST without thinking, and in the end I was able to do many parts of the translation without needing to justify the choices I made.

I would not claim for this translation to be definitive, even for myself. I know that with any translation I may do, no matter how big or small, I could go back every day and find something to change, a word that might sound better, a punctuation that might make a paragraph sound more accurate. This is only *a* translation of Charles Juliet's work. This translation was as much a process in finding my own methodology and strategy for translations in general as it was an attempt to render *Dans la lumière des saisons* by Charles Juliet into *In the Light of the Seasons* by Charles Juliet, translated by Tony Banchemo, and in that regard it was a success.

Walter Benjamin says that "translation, although it cannot claim that its products will endure, and in this respect differs from art, does not renounce its striving toward a final, ultimate, and decisive stage of all linguistic development." (*The Translation Studies Reader*, 79) It is this striving that pushed me to improve the translation every time through, and this striving is what allows a translation to be

pushed. The ideal of a “final, ultimate, and decisive” translation, although it is an ideal, is something worth working towards, and it will be something I will have in mind as I continue my life as a translator.

Translation

October 30

My dear friend,

It is one o'clock in the morning. I am in my attic, surrounded by my books and by the canvasses that my painter friends have given me. Night, profound silence, sleep for men and nature. The desire comes to me to take a moment with you, even though I feel that I have nothing to say.

In the four hours I have been at this table, I've neither written nor read. Buried in a state of ineffable serenity, eyes most often closed, I let my thoughts wander, subject to the intermittences of the murmur. I should have written something down, but picking up my pen seemed beyond my strength. I was in such a state of passivity that I could not move my hand, and I knew from experience that the smallest motion would have ruined all. I also made sure to avoid the slightest movement, for fear of being torn from what I was enjoying, and what was so fragile, so precious, so intense.

At the state I am in, life flows calmly, washes over me, fills me with confidence, ardor, expands my love for beings and my faith in life. Guilt, impatience, torments, fears have disappeared, and I am nothing more than this flow, a peaceful and endless slide that tells me life is good, simple, immeasurably rich. Cut off from time, I am unaware that the hours continue to pass, and when I emerge from this state, returning to everyday life is no longer a challenge. Before, you'll have understood, it was one, and I dreaded it. But now, the transition is made smoothly. Existence resumes its normal

course, and everything suddenly becomes easier, more appealing, all is charged with new meaning.

I spent my day walking through the hills. Scarves of mist hung in the plains, but on the uplands, a golden light shone on the ocher, the browns, the reds of the vines and the trees that blazed in the motionless air.

If you only knew how much I love autumn, how much I feel at ease in this season. The fervors of summer have come to an end, and with them the tensions, sometimes the unease that they bring. A pain is there, present in the air, the lights, the fading skies. The threat of decline is outlined in it, and perhaps it's this threat that gives so much importance to the splendor of these days where life spreads its last fires.

Season of fruits, of harvests, of overabundance. Maturity. I have always associated this season that represents to me the woman, the mother, with what is carried in so many of you, something man is so far from.

From this autumn I pass to that of human existence. For us also throughout the years there come nights of frost, devastating winds, implacable days of heat wave, torrential rains, and all of this finishes by producing the wealth of a life, the beauty of a face. (A face is never so beautiful, so moving, as in its autumn.) We must know, then, that we all receive from an equal heart, and steer our lives toward the plenitude of fruit that has become strong from all that was set against it.

I left the vines, and climbing on the tallest hills, sank down into the woods. The brown vault of foliage filtered down a hot, red light that responded well to what prevailed in me. I walked for one or two hours, tasting the silence, inhaling the humid

air where the odor of mushrooms floated, observing the effects of the beams of sun on the trunks and the leaves. Walking in this light was pure enchantment.

This enchantment didn't last. Each time I am in communion with nature, there comes a moment where I rediscover how much of it is foreign to us, and the thought that our preoccupations, our troubles, our anguishes, our incurable misery, find no echo in it, pains me, makes me feel rejected, extinguishes immediately the pleasures that it had given.

If, like me, you have been browsing the newspapers, you must have learned that evil forces are everywhere. In many countries, on nearly all continents, there are nothing but crises, tyrannies, upheavals, famines, wars, horrors of all kinds. Since the depths of time, history has done nothing but repeat itself. But the rapacity, the need for power and domination, the violence that this need provokes, when will it end? Never has the future not of a country, or even a continent, but of the planet itself, been so dark. From racism to religious intolerance, from economic gangsters to the madness of tyrants, from tribal rivalries to increased nationalism, it is always that same need to subdue the other, to rob them, humiliate them, erase them. Sometimes, I am overwhelmed, and my hope flickers, the hope of seeing our sad humanity one day stop working to cure the injuries that for millennia it has unceasingly secreted and finally defeat its dreadful demons, to reconcile with itself, to live in peace, to live in peace, to utilize for the common good the inexhaustible energies that it consecrates to multiplying the destructions, spreading misery and misfortune, savagely causing blood to flow.

One month ago was my birthday, and this section of my life seems to mark the start of a new stage for me. Until now, I was glad to grow old, to see my childhood and youth fade, to go and meet this maturity that I wished would come for so long. But today, it seems to me that things have changed. I became aware of this in noticing that my connection to reading and to books is not what it was.

Along with writing, the great passion of my life was, is still, reading. At home, in cafés, busses, even in the street, or during a sleepless night, as soon as I could, I would bury myself in a book. I sometimes passed entire weeks doing nothing but reading, engulfing myself in a work, not letting go without having absorbed it in its entirety. This passion for books and reading frequently found itself in conflict with my work, and it also often did not leave me time to listen to music. At the least free moment, the urgency was undeniable. I had to pick up a book and hurriedly thumb through several pages. Hurriedly but not without great attention.

Collection of poems, essay, novel, work of philosophy, memoirs, autobiography, letter, religious texts... I would devour them all with the same avidity.

Certain books caused me sharp and lasting emotions, others profoundly moved me. To the extent that sometimes, when I finished reading, I would feel as though I'd been drugged. The surrounding reality appeared distant to me, I had great difficulty stepping back into my existence, and everything that occurred in my inner life bore the mark that the book had left on that private haven. I was living under the influence, torn between the everyday and what had taken possession of me. Those days have left me with only the memory of a constant malaise. In the course of hours, of days, so much of

life as I was received was unraveling, diluting, leaving me faced with a gloomy reality, struggling with a self that was difficult to return to.

I've read hundreds of books, but my readings have nothing systematic in them. I would go towards this or that work at the whim of my moods and attractions, often only guided by the search to find anything that would shake this region where I wait for a greater, more impassioned life. This is why a number of important works have undoubtedly remained unknown to me.

These hundreds of volumes, whose substance I wanted so ardently to absorb within myself, have they truly enriched my life? It is difficult to know. Sometimes, I was inclined to respond in the negative. The reason being that the few ideas that determine what I think, I found them to be inside of me from the moment I reached conscious life.

I think that my urge to read was fed by my doubts and questions, by my lack of confidence in myself, by my appetite for knowledge, by my desire to learn to write, to possess my profession as a writer. But most often, I was missing a critical eye. I had too much humility and naïveté, and that was not a good thing.

I do not reread my writing, and I don't know if I have managed to clarify for you the reasons that reading becomes less necessary for me. In any case, the fact is there: I intend to break away from this internal attitude where my insatiable demand to read was based. After that, I can only be pleased. Reading less, I will be less encumbered and I will have more time to write.

Nevertheless I am surprised to not be experiencing the decline of this passion that has held such a place in my life as though it were a small tragedy. And I surprise myself even more to not be overwhelmed by this evidence that I must resign myself to: from this point on, I will no longer have the time to discover these piles of works that are here, near me, close at hand, and which I have barely flipped through. Before, their titles were present in my mind, my gaze frequently lingered on their spines, and I sometimes would await the happy moment when I would be carried off by one of them. Now, without regret or heartbreak, I move away, give up, accept letting go, living in ignorance of what I wanted so badly to know, and what a relief it is to no longer be tormented by that hunger.

I was in the woods until night fell, and with it, a sudden coolness. The silence seemed to deepen, and a dull melancholy gripped me. Feelings stirred in my limbs. The feeling of solitude, vague anguish, the return of my childhood fears, the sensation of the few things that represent all life, the fear of those threats that surround us, black thoughts that see the dark time of the year approach... It was autumn that had suddenly burst in on me with its subdued suns, its mists, its lifeless days, its rotting leaves...

When I arrived in the village, it was already empty. Deserted streets, houses with closed shutters, a cone of silence. I carried within myself the longing for a turtleneck sweater, for a chimney fire, for long, quiet evenings spent meditating and dreaming. A pounding rain that beats against the windows, and you relish being sheltered, warm, busy with nothing but journeying within yourself, tasting life from its source.

More than two hours that I've been writing to you and I've done nothing but talk about myself. I'm ashamed. Since I was young, it has been impossible for me to write letters. Who I was, the things I was concerned with, now seem to be devoid of interest, and I prefer not to speak of them. Have I now changed so that I am scattered, no longer knowing how to control myself? If that were the case, I would be deeply frustrated.

What does late fall look like in the region of Texas where you live? I doubt that you have been gathering walnuts and chestnuts as I have recently. I've been looking at the map again. Austin, Houston, Dallas, Wichita Falls, Georgetown... I have fun repeating these names of Texan towns, and without any reason, I see gentle, bare hills, a few trees with wilted leaves, and you, solitary, walking at the close of day on a road that is white and straight. It's there that I would like to join you, at this hour, in a similar autumn evening, and we would have so much to say.

C.

January 10

My friend,

I've just reread your letters. To find you again, reanimate your presence in myself, retie the thread of our dialogue that is too often cut off.

Winter is then the best season where you are. Clear sky, mild and dry weather. I understand that you wanted to take advantage of these weeks where you're not bothered by the heat, to work on your thesis. You are now at the halfway point. A few more months of work and you will be free. But after having put the final period on this burden that you have held for several years, and before starting on the novel that you

told me about in your last letter, a transitional time will undoubtedly be necessary for you. Don't hurry anything. Let the book ripen inside you. And when you will begin to write it, everything will be easier.

In your letter before last, you were surprised that I could claim that all these books I've read had not enriched me. I'm happy that you've given me the chance to come back to this point. After sending you the letter where I said that, I could not stop thinking of it, and I am sorry to have written you something so unreasonable, so incongruous with what was.

First of all an explanation, which will respond to a thought that may have come to you, but that you preferred to leave aside out of friendship: I am not someone who believes that they can do everything themselves and needs nothing from others. I have never had this type of attitude and have never understood those who do.

While I wrote the incriminating lines, I wasn't aware that by trying to respond to the question that was posed, I had stopped myself at a point of view where I took into consideration only these values and ideas that guide me in my existence and govern my work. These values were engrained in me from adolescence, in a time when I had not yet read anything, and so I wanted only to say that they could not have been transfused to me by books.

For the rest, it goes without saying that my readings have brought me an incredible amount. During these past years, they have been the IV that has dripped my survival and my growth into my blood and my mind.

It is by frequenting certain leading works with great attention, by creating an intense dialogue with them, that I formed myself, I learned to think and to write. How

could one imagine that I would have spent hundreds and hundreds of hours devouring books, if I had not gained the greatest benefit from these readings?

In my letter, by only limiting myself to one very particular aspect that implied the question, I was brought to write the opposite of what I should have said. More proof, if there was need, of the enormous difficulties we encounter when we write!

I've also just touched on what I will call one of the flaws of humanity: The incapacity for us to express ourselves with clarity and precision, and in such a way that what is expressed can't be understood. A man tells his story, looks to give what he is, what lives in his heart and his head, but what of him is passed from the words that he employs? So much incomprehension, sufferings, dramas, are born from this gap that exists between what a person is and the words that they use, words that give the illusion of helping to make one understood.

My village is under the snow, and for several days, the temperature has fluctuated between zero and negative ten degrees. I am alone. I appreciate these winter days when the outdoors rejects me. When nothing comes to stop me from curling up in my darkness. So I go to meet those instants where life has a chance to converge, to offer itself with words that it will have collected. By the bay window, I see nothing but the surface of blinding white. Earlier, on the stiff branch of a young ash tree, two jays landed, and now, a chickadee is pecking the crumbs of bread and lard that I placed this morning in the hollow of a tulip. This meadow surrounded by high walls is a haven of calm, of silence, and the trees here shelter numerous birds in all seasons. Yesterday, I had forgotten to fill the tulip, and after several vigorous pecks of a beak against the window, a robin came to remind me of my duty.

The afternoon is starting, and I particularly enjoy this moment: a long span of free time in front of me, and a nascent emotion, fringed with a fine anxiety, knowing I will soon be immersed in this silence where, contemplative, devoted to slowness, I will wait until the murmur rises. Movements of approach and withdrawal. Tidal emotions of coming and going, ebbing and flowing. Gradually, the inner temperature rises by a few degrees. What words will suddenly surge that will restore the harmony, that will open me to what I am, will make this region and what crosses it a part of me, this core of life broadened by the solemn joy of being present to yourself?

Burn of waiting. Eagerness to be nearing something that, I know, only reveals itself by irregularity. Fear of the disappointment that can follow. Despite this burning, I am peaceful and I don't lose sight of the fact that today, I will have the strength to be patient. I know now that dread is no longer appropriate, that I will surmount the disappointment if it comes, that I will not imagine that all is lost if nothing is granted to me. Still, I no longer let myself be stopped by the fact, painful to admit, that the instruments of prehension that I have will allow the greater piece of what emerges to escape, and will distort the little that they manage to grasp. I am no longer in conflict with the conditions that are made for us. I've finally understood that we win nothing by rebelling, that life does not force itself, that it only offers itself to the humble, to those who do not refuse to submit.

Silence is life's promise, and that is why, to become aware of what prevails here, I feel taken by a profound well-being, a confidence, the sense that full hours will be granted to me. Some abrupt swerves appear, and we find ourselves traveling great

distances inside ourselves in the span of a few seconds. A mystery of this unknown that presents itself and from which the changing figures drive me from surprise to wonder.

I had started intending to say something else entirely, and I let myself drift. And if my letter is lacking coherence, I will regret sending it. I have too often wanted to introduce an order, a clarity and a logic to areas that exclude them. Innumerable times I've created an artificial order, wanted to make clear what was not known to be so, to impose a logic on something that could not tolerate it. Foolish requirements of the mind. To obey them, I disrupted my perceptions, falsified what I was receiving. I no longer want to commit the same errors. From now on, one sole objective: progressing in myself like a miner in his lode, employing myself to see what is, then translating it with a maximum of precision and simplicity, to ensure it is not too much deformed.

A flock of sparrows appeared, and their sudden arrival nearly made me jump. Then a bullfinch took off, which they chased. I watched him several seconds, and that was enough for me to lose my train of thought. I'll go on. Without looking to find it.

Slowness of time that brings richness. Short of words, the smallest interior movement is ecstasy. Because deep down within myself currents of energy continue to mix, embrace, enter in exultation, smooth and round is the joy that is born, blossoms, soon rolls me to the interior of its sphere.

For years and years, my hunger for the true life reduced to cinders what my lips offered, and I had only been waiting, exile, boredom. Boredom for seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months. For interminable insomnias. In the grip of this tension, this suffering, I harassed this starving being who I was, and for whom an intense hunger was cutting life away. Threatened with dying from starvation, because nothing met my

expectations, no food was tolerable. And if I disregarded the vapidness, forced myself to accept what was presented, the disappointment was such that it only exacerbated my hunger. Infernal circle. Torment of every instant. In this emptiness, this absence, thought, crucified, I mean to say that in this state that had never been life and that would be death, powerless thought was frantically busy, fought, abused, and devoured itself, sought to defeat the most living part in me that held me in agony. Over and over repeated, infuriated, I stabbed at this thing that nothing could satisfy, but I could not kill it. In desperation, I resolved to leave it to its suffering, and it was this suffering that, by gnawing at it, eroding it, slashing it to pieces, ended up defeating it. But for all that, I was not saved. With this corpse inside me, to live was a trial. I thought that I had been a coward, that I had abandoned my convictions, that I was going to have to content myself with nourishment too poor to keep me alive. To this point, I still don't know what it was, what it is. In this domain, it seems that extreme hunger does not cost more than weak hunger. Neither one nor the other can drive life.

Turned towards the inside and entirely taken by the flow of writing, I did not see the light obscuring, becoming this grayness that darkens from minute to minute. The birds have disappeared and I feel a little more alone. In my next letter, I will answer your questions. Especially the ones that concern the obstacles that I've overcome and my connection with the weather. I think that I am quite changed from the course of these last few months, and I will try to tell you what this evolution consisted of.

And you? What do you think of what I've revealed to you in these pages? And how do you live your hunger? And do you manage to find the type of nourishment that it demands?

I remind you that I eagerly await your letters. Warmly,

C.

March 26

Friend,

You are now settled in Texas. This transplantation must have disturbed you. It will without a doubt take you several months to acclimatize. What is now your state of mind? And where are you, not in your research, as that isn't the right word, but in your progression?

Write me at length. I will be happy to learn about your new existence and the effect it has on your inner life.

For weeks, I have not touched a pen. But I'm not at all worried. I can only write what is more or less given to me. Most of my time is now spent waiting. Before, when the source would dry up, I was alarmed, thinking that it would not run again, that nothing again would come from me. Now, I know that I can stay confident. One day or another, the soft murmur makes itself heard. I simply need to be ready, to be listening, to capture whatever it babbles or dictates to me in a clean and clearly audible voice.

Unable to do anything, I spend entire days walking on the hills. They are covered in woods, in meadows, in fields and vineyards. Near these places stretch long piles of grey stones that were removed from a cold and wild earth, unsuitable for crops and farming. But generation after generation, for centuries, the farmers have striven to domesticate it, to work it, to force it to produce what they need. They slaved away on this soil like prisoners, opening paths, carrying rocks, moving the earth back to the top

of the vineyards with their baskets constructing walls and stairways, building those little houses called “grangeons”, where they stored their tools, and where they occasionally had to stay for one or two days. Often, when I consider the scope of what they have accomplished, I admire these men. These past years, however, I thought of them with compassion, sadness. What they had created through the efforts of traditional work was on its way to being erased, reduced to nothing. The walls collapsed, the wilderness gained ground, the bushes spread, and everything led one to believe that nature was going to retake its rights. But very fortunately, a new generation of farmers has taken up the challenge. The bushes were eliminated, grapevines were planted, walls were reconstructed, and now, I am happy thinking that the work of these elders is no longer threatened to disappear, to be swallowed by the undergrowth and the brambles.

Yesterday, I met an old wine-grower who I’ve known since my childhood. I passed a long moment speaking with him, seated on a stone bench, his back pushed against the wall of his “grangeon”. Before us stretched the vast panorama that I love to gaze at whenever I am up there. Meadows, fields, vineyards, foothills covered in woods, a plain where a large river flows, more hills followed by a plateau that sparkles with small ponds. This panorama, I’ve seen it under many different lights, in all seasons, in all weather. It is linked with my history, with my most inner life, and as soon as I behold it, an emotion takes hold of me, and I feel once again the force of the relationship that ties me to this country.

The air had a softness to it, and next to this old wine-grower, I was happy. He is poor, clothed in shapeless, worn, colorless garments, and in town you might take him for a homeless person. But in his voice and his gaze there is such

innocence, such generosity. He is a man who is enough for himself. Do you understand? He is enough for himself. He speaks little, but what he says is always rich in meaning, in life, and I like to listen. Sometimes, when I think of Saint Francis of Assisi — a figure of great importance for me — I think of him with the traits and the appearance of this man.

Each spring, when the time comes to prune the vines, I am afraid that I won't find him, that I will have to convince myself that he is no longer of this world.

Have I already told you that I compose most of my poems while walking? Today, I must have wandered kilometers through the woods, deaf to the bird song, seeing almost nothing of what surrounded me. I was struggling with a poem that was giving me trouble. Curiously, this poem spoke of empty days, of worry, of shadows, even though I was in a calm state of mind, and just before the first words began to hum, I had been taking pleasure in my stroll, in everything that gave me this beautiful spring day.

After I finished this text, out of fear of losing it, I repeated it to myself the entire way home. Sometimes, words escaped me, or I confused myself with lines I had eliminated, and I would have to make an effort to find what belonged in the finished version.

Arriving at the house, I immediately recorded it in a notebook, but my brain could not part with it. It continued to dwell on it. I had to absorb myself in reading a page of a novel to escape it. I'm going to let this poem rest and I will send it to you later. Today, to give you an idea, I'll settle for recopying the last lines:

I wait
for light
to burst

for time
to die

for the water I thirst for
to spring forth

Waiting.

Have you known, do you know of waiting? This waiting that for years has unceasingly eaten away at me, stopped me from taking part, struck things that should have contented me with a sense of inanity. If you only knew the desert that it made me live in. Nothing that was offered to me was commensurate to what I thirsted for. And what could I really wait for? I could not have defined it. Without a doubt I was waiting for the marvel that could quench the thirst for what is missing in all life. But it is no marvel, and I understand now that I do not have to lament it. What can answer this waiting only comes to us in the moment — the moment that is here, lying in our path, and that offers itself up to our greed. But often, we find it too grey, too banal, and because it doesn't seem worthy to carry what we hope will satisfy us, we pass by without trying to collect what it holds. How we are mistaken. At all times life abounds, flows, irrigates an everyday that we cannot know how to stop. It is more common than

the water that filters from the source. But there is so much to clear away before even being able to understand it, to admit it.

The greed that lay beneath this waiting, I understood that it was excessive, and I exhausted different methods of trying to moderate it, but nothing had the slightest effect. In us are hungers, fears, attachments, anxieties... that we cannot control, despite whatever intellect, determination and self-knowledge we employ to dominate them. Boredom, a boredom that nothing can distract, is the consequence of this waiting that exists as if to inevitably be disappointed from its origin. From adolescence, I have known to read this form of boredom on faces and in expressions where the pain of a fundamental absence expresses itself.

Waiting and fear. Fear and waiting. Do you not think that both define a large part of the human being?

Two days ago, I had left off there with my letter. I'll pick it up again now.

Spring is here. The temperatures are milder and milder and the little meadow beside my house is now sprinkled with violets and primroses. In the woods, the tips of the branches, after being covered in mauve velvet, are starting to turn blond.

Yesterday, after a walk in the hills, I lay down in a meadow. Above me, a lark indulged in its curious, immobile flight, and twittered eagerly. Below, in the vineyards, men were at work, and sounds reached me that blend with the coming of spring.

Sap is beginning to move, new hungers are reviving the blood, and the body is roused, awakened by a stirring of desire. Sometimes, I have a crazy urge to flee, to strike out on the road, to go meet a passionate life that I have a nagging nostalgia for.

But it does not last, because I know well that I will not have the chance to come nearer to what I long to achieve by aimlessly adventuring on the road. The only paths that are worth taking are those that lead to the interior. And as soon as we penetrate into our night, the first thing we discover is that we are imprisoned in a jail. Can we live there for our whole existence? Or will we succeed in escaping?

Whoever wants to make themselves free by any means has to suffer and fight. But if one day they succeed in knocking down the walls of their dungeon, then coming out into full daylight, they are given access to a certain knowledge, and in them, the fear, the self-hatred, the anxiety and the guilt gives way to a peace, a strength, a faith in life that will ensure that its circle will always be growing. So their hand, where the fingers were like talons ready to suffocate their prey, that hand relaxes, opens, and they understand that it will now only be used to caress, to offer.

The being that has unified with itself is no longer separated. They live in agreement and harmony with themselves, others, and the world. They are a part of everything and they see the unity in everything. They no longer try to possess or dominate. They are no longer on the side of aggressiveness, of violence, of whatever demeans, humiliates, inflicts death—a death of the soul that is no less fatal than that of the body. They know that one sole task falls to them and that they must consecrate all their energy to it: to make life grow. In themselves and around themselves.

Tell me where your trails lead you. Those that have brought you to discoveries. Tell me if a glimmer is starting to pierce your night, or if you already walk on solid ground, in the light of day. Whatever we have to endure or suffer, don't lose sight of the fact that everything is life, and because of this, everything is good to live.

I will leave you there, reluctantly. You remain in my thoughts.

C.

April 4

My dear friend,

Impossible to sleep. The walls give off the heat that they have absorbed during the day, and it is suffocating. I had had enough sighing, tossing and turning on my pillow, and I have just gotten up to write this letter that I owe to you. But will I manage to? In the state of deliquescence I find myself in, it seems that to mobilize my thoughts and formulate sentences demands a superhuman effort.

In winter, when we suffer the fog, the cold, the snow, we dream of summer. But when it is here, with its nights where sleep refuses to come, its exhausting heat, the restlessness it causes us, we take to cursing it.

In adolescence, my relationship with this season was already contradictory. During the last trimester, before summer vacation, I waited for it with a fierce eagerness. In my mind, it was a promise of light, of freedom, of life offered in abundance, it would allow me to satisfy all the hungers that I had accumulated, it would open trails before me that would bring me towards unforgettable meetings. My imagination was fevered, and through ideas, I passionately lived what my desires showed to me. Then it was vacation. It obviously accorded me small pleasures, joys, moments of fervor. But after a little time, I had to accept this painful evidence: what I had so madly waited for would never be given to me. So the light hid itself, and these

interminable days that should have brought me so much, were nothing more than disappointment, boredom, solitude.

But you too, you tell me, you have also suffered from oppressive heat, and I understand that you have gone to Canada to seek a little greenery and some cooler weather. I hope that you are having an enjoyable trip. At your return you will find my letter, and I like thinking that it will be there to welcome you.

A newspaper asked me to write several brief pages where I would talk about the summer, and tomorrow, I would like to begin on the text. But will I succeed? I am doubtful. If I haven't slept enough one night, the next day, I have a heavy head, I am lacking energy, and reluctant to pick up my pen. Moreover, summer is not a cooperative season for me to work in. I feel the call of the outdoors too deeply, the nice weather encourages me to leave, to go take a walk, to meet with so and so and have a drink. What's more, I have this need to feel aligned with what happens around me, to put myself in unison with all these people who are on vacation, to abandon myself to the carefree atmosphere that is so easy to be taken by. For both these reasons, during the months of summer, I have trouble entering into the concentration and the solitude of writing.

It is a heavy handicap to be so dependent on the weather, the southern wind, the seasons, the vibrations that come to me from what surrounds me, even from some tragic event that comes arises here or there. The incapacity to protect myself from these ravages has considerably damaged my work. You understand now why I admire your aptitude in preserving a certain autonomy, to not let yourself be *dévarié* (a word I

learned in Cévennes— a region in the South of France — one that is lacking in the French language), by everything that distracts me incessantly.

I had just written the above words, and as I was about to start on my next sentence, I started mindlessly leafing through one of my notebooks. I rediscovered there a collection of notes that I had forgotten about. I'm recopying some of them for you.

Perhaps you will tell me what you think.

To keep from bruising
this silence where my words sprout
wherever I am
I speak softly

All intention all will
Prevents the unknown from revealing itself

There are so many refuges
so many ways
to flee to elude
to desert life

Those who hate their self
but cannot be liberated from it

Wild tumultuous unpredictable life

For fear that it pulls us away

where we fear to go

stops us from living

I wanted too much

to not want

what I live

is not fully lived

unless I put it into words

Sometimes an entire existence is necessary to travel

the path that leads from fear and anguish to

the consent of oneself. The bond with life

Know to abandon the project

that becomes attached to abandonment

Love love

This word touches on so many lips

but who is great enough

to live what they name

Just like your eye
your hunger is clear
And it sees better
what might satisfy it

The sap that flows
in my trunk and my branches
it comes now
from my roots

Drink drink
with full mouth
and feel the sharpening
of my thirst

Liberty and love
Their iron law

The other night, during a bout of insomnia, I thought of this text that I must write. I think that I'll quite simply recount a childhood memory, then connect it with an adventure that it has many points in common with.

I was ten years old. On this summer day, it was swelteringly hot and difficult even to breathe. I was tending some cows on the flank of a mountain. Below me

stretched a forest that rapidly descended towards some unknown depths. Dense, compact, it was populated with menacing threats and it scared me. An old carpenter had told me that at the end of these ravines, three immense beech trees, several hundred years old, rose up, and he assured me that they were even more beautiful than a cathedral. That day, on an impulse, I resolved to go find them.

My dog knew the limits of the field and knew to stop the cows from crossing them. So I left my meager herd under his guard and, heart beating, sunk into the shadow. I was afraid of losing myself, of never again seeing the day. I was afraid of being attacked by the ferocious beasts that lay at the end of the woods. I was afraid of seeing the lumberjacks suddenly appear, who work to make the woods into coal, live in cabins, and have the look of kidnappers.

I fell several times, I crossed thickets where a near total darkness reigned, I opened my knee by slipping on a rock, but I did not stop. The silence was absolute, and when I stepped on a branch that cracked, I jumped, wild with fear.

I did not find the three beech trees. But at the base of the mountain, after a blind descent that seemed to me to last hours and made me a stranger to who I had been before, I came out in a clearing. Instantly, I experienced a sensation of intense well-being. I was delivered, liberated, I had found the light, escaped the night, the threats, the dangers, and I was not concerned with how I would get back. The joy that possessed me erased all else.

A little later, I sensed a very quiet noise, a muffled whisper. I walked in its direction. A spring was there, and at the foot of a rock, the water that slowly flowed

gleamed in the sunlight. I kneeled, plunged my fiery face in the chill of the clear water, and with large mouthfuls, I drank for a long time.

I knew straightaway that I had just lived a crucial experience, and thereafter, often, very often, I looked back on that peculiar moment. But it was only later, after a very long journey and some decisive discoveries, that this descent through a forest towards an unknown, appeared to me to be a foreshadowing of a whole different adventure.

This adventure, one lives it when they are searching for themselves and working to explore their own night. But before a certain glimmer pierces, before the lips can offer themselves to the spring, there are distances to cover, there are crises to overcome, there are obstacles to defeat.

This forest crossing, one can only do it alone, abandoning all landmarks, all support, all hope of returning, and that is why it is nothing but anguish, suffering, distress, inexorable solitude. But once the crossing is accomplished, for whoever had the courage to continue without knowing what was going to happen, what strength, what richness, what instant bond with life.

No, I believe that I was about to go the wrong way. By exposing to you what I told myself I would say in this short text, I've realized that I should choose another subject. To really explore this one, so vast, complex, important, and otherwise so near to my heart, I must arrange a space that is less cramped than what I am allowed.

Have I already told you that each morning, well before daybreak, I am awoken by a concert of birds? It is very pleasant, but really, I would prefer if they were more

reserved. The magpies are the noisiest. Sometimes they have nasty accounts to settle. Just like humans, it seems that they are more ready for confrontation than mediation.

Yesterday evening, stretched out on the lawn, I was watching the stars and thinking of you. Where are you in your forest crossing? Do not give in to the discouragement that sometimes takes hold of you. Do not refuse what is required of you. Do not fear to go towards the unknown. One day that I hope is near, you will have to admit quite unexpectedly that you are lucky.

I am very surprised to have been able to scribble these few pages for you. But now sleep is taking me. I will leave you there, my friend, not without reminding you that my affection accompanies you, you who continues to wander, driven by the burnings of thirst.

C.

If you go this autumn to New Mexico and pass by Albuquerque, please do me a favor and send me some postcards from that town. One day, in a novel, I read the name Albuquerque. For some reason I'm not sure of, it pleased me and gave much to my dreams. But I also read interviews with jazz musicians who seemed to say that it was a city without character, without soul, crushed by heat and boredom. It is possible then that these postcards would jeopardize my dreams, ruin my desire to leave one day and discover the town of that state.

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