



eChapbook

Anne-Marie Derése in Translation & *The Green Parrot*

Judith Skillman

Bio

Over the past three decades Judith Skillman has written and published numerous poems for books, journals, and anthologies. She has collaborative translations from Portuguese, Italian, and French. Skillman's publications include *FIELD*, *The Iowa Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Poetry*, *The Northwest Review*, and *Midwest Quarterly*. She has ten books of poems.

From 1977–78 she held a teaching assistantship at the University of Maryland, while working towards a masters degree in English Literature. She received the King County Arts Commission's Publication Prize in 1987, judged by Madeline DeFrees. This prize enabled her to find a publisher for her first book, *Worship of the Visible Spectrum* (Breitenbush Books.). In 1991 Skillman was awarded a Washington State Arts Commission Writer's Fellowship.

Three residencies during the 90s, one from the Hedgebrook Cottages for Women Writers, and two from the Centrum Foundation, allowed her to pursue her creative work while raising three children. In addition, she received the Richard Hugo Memorial Scholarship in 1992 to attend the Centrum Writer's Conference. Other awards include the Stafford Award from the Washington Poet's Association, First Prize in the Pacific Northwest Writers Conference, and Honorable Mentions from The Journal and Kalliope.

Judith did graduate work in Romantic Literature and Translation Seminars at the University of Washington in the Department of Comparative Literature from 1994–95. She was commissioned from 1994–97 as a literary artist member of a three-person team to create an original artwork for the Kent Regional Justice Center. Her poem "The Jury" is etched in the windows of the jury waiting room.

Poems were nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 1984 and 2001. She also published two books of poems with Blue Begonia Press. The first, *Beethoven and the Birds*, was funded by the press, and the second, *Storm*, received additional support from the Eric Mathieu King Fund Award (Academy of American Poets). Her collection *Red Town*, published by Silverfish Review in 2001, received a Bumbershoot Literary Arts Award and was a finalist in the Washington Center for the Book Award. *Circe's Island*, was published by Silverfish Review Press (2003).

In 2003 she was a finalist in the David Robert Books Competition and her book, *Latticework*, the result of a collaboration with textile artist Erika Carter, was published in 2004. *New and Selected Poems: 1986–2006* was published by Silverfish Review Press in 2006, with an introduction by David Kirby.

In August of 1999, Skillman was a translator in residence at the European College of Literary Translators and Interpreters in Senefte, Belgium. She is a member of the Richard Hugo House and Associated Writing Programs (AWP). Currently, she teaches writing at the Richard Hugo House in Seattle, Washington.



Acknowledgements

Anne-Marie Derése

“The Four Doors,” “The Letter,” “One Opaque Light,” “Certain Days,” “Gentlemen,” and “I Disowned Nothing” appeared in Northwest Review,

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“Face Stolen From a Bird,” “Night Opens to the Storm,” “Forgive Me,” and “Pardon” appeared in BEACONS, SUNY, New York

†

Judith Skillman

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“Cobblestone Streets” appeared in Words and Pictures Magazine and also in Heat Lightning, New and Selected Poems 1986 – 2006.

The poems from this section were written in Mismaloya, Mexico.



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Introduction to Anne-Marie Derése

translated by Eric Dillon and Judith Skillman

The poems in this selection were taken from *Nue sous un manteau de paroles*, *Visage volé à l'oiseau*, and *La nuit s'ouvre à l'orage*. Derése's work is dense, dark, and feminist, although her fervor is not the least bit political. She combines light and shadow in these pieces, and at their intersection finds mystery, the hidden persona which masquerades at times as a bird or an animal, but always holds a uniquely human anxiety. There are betrayals of all kinds in her poetry: of nature by mankind, of woman by man, and of language by weapons.

The problems we encountered in translating these pieces were, for the most part, difficulties with specific words for which there were no English equivalents. In the poem, "You've given me a weapon," the French phrase "Tu as réveillé le feulement" means "You have woken the tiger's roar."

"Feulement" has this precision of meaning. We settled for "You have woken the tiger," not wanting to add any extra weight to the line.

Similarly, in "La nuit s'ouvre à l'orage," the end of the poem presented some difficulty, as the word "déchirure" means literally, to tear, or rip up. Because of the use of a definite first person voice who "hopes for the tear," or "wants to be torn apart," we decided on: "And I, standing here/in the anxious wind,/I hope for a tear."

A team of two is optimal for doing translation. Eric is a native speaker with an extensive knowledge of French culture and language, and Judith is a confirmed Francophile. These translations came about through successive drafts of the poems, meetings for lunch, and discussions of sound, form, and meaning.

About Anne-Marie Derése

Anne-Marie Derése was born in 1938. She is French-Belgian, and has written many books of poems. The poems in this collection are taken from:

- *Nue sous un manteau de paroles*, Bruxelles, Maison Internationale de la poésie, 1980.
- *Un pays de miroirs*, Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve, Dieu Brichart, 1982.
- *Visage volé à l'oiseau*, Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve, Dieu Brichart, 1985.
- *La nuit s'ouvre à l'orage*, Paris, Le Cherche-Midi, 1990.



I. I Am



Je Suis

Je suis le fer rouge
sur l'épaule du condamné,
le gibet et la corde,
la hache et le billot,
le fouet et la croix.

Je suis la dent du lion
dans la chair de la gazelle.
J'ai dans mes veines
le sang de négriers.

Bourreau,
j'ai mérité la faim des loups.

Les victimes ne m'ont laissé
que leur mort.



I Am

I am the red brand
on the shoulder of the condemned,
the gallows and the rope,
the ax and the block,
the whip and the cross.

I am the lion's tooth
in the flesh of the gazelle.
In my veins I have
the blood of the slave trader.

Hangman,
I have deserved the hunger of the wolves.

My victims have left me nothing
but their deaths.



Visage volé à l'oiseau

Je ne sais qui tu caches
sous ton visage inventé,
ton visage volé à l'oiseau,
emprisonné de cendre rouge.

Je vais t'aimer comme on meurt.

Je vais te garder
pour les années à venir.
Tu seras si apprivoisé,
si incroyable,
mon étrange animal,
avec tes lèvres ouverte
sur un sourire perdu.

Je boirai ton haleine
et je saurai qui tu caches.



Face Stolen From a Bird

I don't know who you're hiding
behind your mask,
your face stolen from a bird,
imprisoned by red ashes.

I will love you the way one dies.

I will keep you
for years to come,
you will be so tame,
so unbelievable,
my strange animal,
with your lips opening
on a lost smile.

I'll drink your breath
and I'll know who you are hiding.



La nuit s'ouvre à l'orage

La nuit s'ouvre à l'orage,
accouplement mauve,
boursouflure.

Le ciel chargé
comme un bateau marchand
jette l'ancre.

Le danger plus lourd
à chaque instant
distille une moiteur
de serre.

Miroitante de mercure,
la vallée des sept Meuses
souffle la brume
par ses narines grises.

La vallée a rejoint la nuit,
deux femelles humides
que l'orage pénètre.

Et moi, debout,
dans le vent anxieux,
j'espère la déchirure.



Night Opens to the Storm

Night opens to the storm,
a mauve coupling,
swollen.

The sky, laden
like a merchant ship,
throws off its anchor.

Danger, heavier
each instant,
exudes the mugginess
of a greenhouse.

Shimmering like mercury
The Valley of the Seven Muses
breathes mist
through its gray nostrils.

The valley of has rejoined the night,
two humid females
the storm penetrates.

And I, standing here
in the anxious wind,
I wait for the tearing apart.



Pardon

Pardon si j'ai ri
dans vos chapelles,
pardon si j'ai claqué
la porte de l'hôpital,
pardon pour le bruit,
pour la vie,
pour l'amour auquel
je n'avais pas droit.

Pardon de ne pas vous ressembler.



Forgive Me

Forgive me if I have laughed
in your chapels,
forgive me if I have slammed
the hospital door,
forgive me for the noise,
for life,
for the love to which
I have no right.

Forgive me for not resembling you.



Tu m'as donné une arme

Tu m'as donné une arme

Dans le troupeau humain,

tu as lancé tes mots

comme des pierres.

Les blessures furent

bonnes à lécher.

Tu as réveillé le feulement.

Tu t'es donné comme on prend.



You've given me a weapon

You've given me a weapon.

you've flung your words

into the human herd

like stones.

The wounds were

good to lick.

You have woken the tiger.

You've given as one takes.



La détresse s'enroule

Le volcan en attente au fond de nous
ronge, creuse, tremble,
souponne ses chances.

La détresse s'enroule,
se tasse comme une bête malade.
Nous sommes méconnaissables,
uniques,
avec la certitude de notre férocité.



Distress Coils

The waiting volcano inside us
gnaws, digs, trembles,
weighs its chances.

Distress coils up,
shrinks silent like a sick beast.
We are unrecognizable,
unique
in the certainty of our ferocity.



Messieurs,

Vous m'avez condamnée par contumace.

Le couperet est tombé.

Vous m'avez répudiée,
coupable de ne pas marcher
aux pas de vos rites ancestraux.

Pourtant, Messieurs, je suis
la favorite de l'herbe
qui éclabousse de chaleur
mes douceurs secrètes.

J'ai pour le vent
des faiblesses d'amante.

Nue, j'aurais pu vous parler
de mes vallons,
de mes chemins ombreux,
de mes jambes qui emprisonnent,
de mes bras qui se tendent.

Mes lèvres, Messieurs, auraient
pu vous dire des mots de silence.

Je ne vous parlerai
que de mes tristesses.

Vous ne saurez rien de mes danses de minuit.

Je suis l'invitée de l'arbre,
il a pour moi des tendresses
mâles et rugueuses.

L'orage me réserve des jouissances
qui me fouillent.

La poésie me fait crier
de plaisir et de douleur.

Vous auriez pu être ma poésie.

Vous auriez pu être le vent,
l'herbe et l'arbre dans l'orage.



Gentlemen,

You have condemned me in my absence.

The blade has fallen.

You have repudiated me,
found me guilty of not following
the pace of your ancestral rituals.

Yet gentlemen, I am
favored by the grass
spattering warmth
on my secret sweetnesses.

I have, for the wind,
the weakness of a lover.

Naked, I could have told you
about my valleys,
about my shaded roads,
my imprisoned legs,
my reaching arms.

My lips, Gentlemen, could have whispered
words of silence.

I will only tell you
about my sadness.

You will know nothing of my midnight dances.

I am the one invited by the tree,
it has for me a tenderness
both male and rough.

The storm gives me pleasures
that scour me.

Poetry makes me cry
with pleasure and pain.

You could have been my poetry.

You could have been the wind,
the grass, and the tree in the storm.



Certains jours

Certains jours, me me sens
un pouvoir de femelle.

Je veux toutes les parades
nuptiales.

Je veux des cris et des danses,
des combats à mort.

Ils attendront autant
que j'ai attendu.
Jamais je n'avouerais.

Ils ne sauront de moi
que ce qui est en eux.



Certain Days

Certain days I feel

a womanly power.

I want all the nuptial

parades.

I want moods and dances,

fighths to the death.

They will be waiting

as long as I have waited.

I will never confess.

They won't know anything about me

except that which is in them.



Pardon

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dans vos chapelles,
pardon si j'ai claqué
la porte de l'hôpital,
pardon pour le bruit,
pour la vie,
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Forgive me for not resembling you.



Tu m'as donné une arme

Tu m'as donné une arme
Dans le troupeau humain,
tu as lancé tes mots
comme des pierres.
Les blessures furent
bonnes à lécher.
Tu as réveillé le feulement.

Tu t'es donné comme on prend.



You've given me a weapon

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ronge, creuse, tremble,
souponne ses chances.

La détresse s'enroule,
se tasse comme une bête malade.
Nous sommes méconnaissables,
uniques,
avec la certitude de notre férocité.



Je te donnerai

Je te donnerai
des fleurs poivrées pour l'extase,
une chambre de torture pour la peur.

Tu me donneras
des lèvres pour brûler l'éternité,
des ongles pour accrocher le vent,
des dents pour marquer les saisons.



Les quatre portes

J'ai ouvert la première porte.

Mes lèvres, rouge de l'envie de mordre,
ont risqué un sourire.

Quand j'ai ouvert la deuxième porte,
les parfums volaient comme des étourneaux.
Ils entonnèrent un chant de bienvenue.

La troisième porte ouverte,
nos fantômes sortirent de terre.
Ils formèrent sur le mur
une chenille qui nous fêtait.

Quand tu as ouvert la quatrième porte,
nous ne formions plus qu'une ombre.



The Four Doors

I opened the first door.

My lips, red with the desire to bite,
risked a smile.

When I opened the second door,
the perfumes flew like starlings.
They struck a song of welcome.

The third door opened,
our fantasies exited the earth.
They formed a caterpillar on the wall
celebrating us.

When you opened the fourth door,
we were nothing but a shadow.



Je n'ai rien renié

Je n'ai rien renié,
ni la branche devenue goéland,
ni cette île qui va et vient
et jamais ne se pose,
ni la caresse revenue
à contre-courant,
ni tous les désirs
aux becs acérés qui m'emportent
et crient au-dessus de la mer.



On ne vous demande pas

On ne vous demande pas de comprendre,
on ne vous demande pas de juger,
de hair,
de jeter l'anathème.

On ne vous demande pas
de dénombrer les morts.

On ne vous demande rien
qu'un peu d'indifference.



No one asks you

No one asks you to understand,
no one asks you to judge,
to hate
to anathemize.

No one asks you
to count the deaths.

One only asks you
for a little indifference.



II. The Green Parrot



Green Parrot

I saw a parrot in the ficus.
Heard it talking in sentences.
I have grown bizarre in this boa.
Crackers for a time of war.
Policemen guarded the hotel.

The parrot was immaculate
on foreign soil,
and if the eye saw us looking,
it did not tell. There was no inquisition,
no history to be rewritten.

Only the depths of a water
at times taupe, black, turquoise.
The yachts departed lazily
with their rummies,
and we stayed behind,

holding inadmissible evidence
that someone's pet
had been abandoned
to language in the vagaries
of a Mexican afternoon.



Near the John Huston Restaurant

The beach is replaced by dump trucks
filled with sand, their loads deposited
in a noisy secrecy like women rejoicing
over the end of a war.

Men occupy their nights
with shots of the best tequila
from bottles with worms at the bottom.

A waiter named *Ramone* feeds
a grackle. He clucks and the bird
with the yellow eye comes to him in the café.

Ramone donates leavings from a plate,
he points proudly
at his pet grackle's blue-black plumage,
its feathers like Elizabeth Taylor's hair.

Someday, he says, his silver teeth flashing,
I eat this bird. The hotel doesn't feed
anyone or anything. It takes from
the monied hand, it shines
a ribbon of kitsch—trumpets and lights.

Beneath white-washed arches a stage appears
in pinks and purples to frame dancers
on Tuesday nights, those who entertain
the rich old ones with spotted faces.

If the day has gone to a new home
across the Pacific, passing its fine lineage
to an infinity of islands,
still the night stays on—an iguana
from a movie whose figurehead has vanished.



A Foreign Beer Garden

I remember the scoop and swallow,
the smile of a widow and her daughter

setting tables in an outdoor restaurant.
Laundry strung on lines in the rain.

Later the chairs stood on their front legs in a warm rain,
the tablecloths were folded, their flowerings

bizarre as the hot pepper envelope
in which sheets of cheese melted.

I remember being poor and hot,
hearing my Mother mention stone soup.

At night vivid imaginings.
Grasshoppers crossed my pillow, crickets sang

from embankments. Don't think the sea forgets
what it carries—a resemblance, a blank stare

and then, once more, the waiter with one eye
standing before our table, asking about drinks.



Ficus

I was not there when the hand
slipped underground and, with a simple

wave of farewell, left Paradise—
the bloated flowers and fruits, the animals

fused together with scales and feathers.
I stood in another century beside a road.

I walked cobblestones that burned and cooled
my feet by turns. A plant spread tear-shaped leaves,

coiled its roots deep in a soil
fed by saltwater, freshwater. Dirt was light as vermiculite.

That's when earth put forth bougainvillea and peppers
in every color. Laundry strung the lines

in rain between huts roofed with palm leaves.
The ficus grew large as an oak

and gave its shade in equal measures of sadness
to the rich and poor, the fallen and found.



A Palm Tree

The shroud of Turin peels away
Beneath green globes
That hold all the milk
Left on earth.
This is the shell a man will crack
Against a rock.
Rain-white sky pours into sand
Wasting the shavings
Of macaroons left on a plate.
Effects the sea made
When it climbed by centimeters
Higher on the beach
To expose roots.
Palms sway
Beneath a palapa
made from a palimpsest
Of leaves.
Earth stiffens
As if ready to fall
Into hot coals,
Where already the fish head
Grins on its skewer.



Bougainvillea

Bright as women who wash by hand.

These blossoms lay claim

To a specific act—flowering—

Though they are only leaves.

Then, one per hour,

They fall to lie like white moths

Or crimson umbrellas a waiter places

In tropical drinks.

Unable to move or breathe,

Kerchiefs not yet defiled

By the gracelessness

Of humanity.



Cobblestone Streets

Made for trouble,
meant to slow things down.
Narrow alleys,
lines of laundry to reel in,
a language smelling of garlic and gutturals.
Colors, scents, and secrets.
The street will not tell,
the map will not get you found.

These cars, these houses—
look now, none of them are yours.
Admit you are lost.
That you came from Europe
and can't remember when or why.
Perhaps there was a war.
A girl, barely a woman,
smiled at a man.

Skimpy clothes were thrown down,
right there, on the stones.
The moon was slim.
The earth was a flat plate, an offering
still full of fish and Tarsiers.
Someone had died of drink.
A pillar of stones for memory,
flowers piled in a cairn.



Montezuma's Revenge

What, after all, can be said
about the indelicate?
That it's a nasty business.
Mahi mahi under a palapa,
rice soaked in vanilla--
the rope bridge we crossed
to get from resort to culture
gave no sign of sickness.

What, after all, can be said
about revenge? That it is infectious.
I remember a sea the color of turquoise,
heavy birds with black feathers.
The waiter said,
We're out of chicken, I bring you pelican.
A slice of lime posed like a smile
on the lip of the largest glass I'd ever seen.

Bloated with pleasure, we walked the beach,
fended off vendors who only wanted
to feed their children.
Come here, spend your money,
one said to me. Quartz charms,
turquoise and silver, silver and malachite,
silver and onyx. Across the street,
scowling women hung their worn towels

like flags. The church, the Tequila Factory,
the darkness inside each shop
conveyed scents of musk,
wrinkled oranges, speckled bananas, cheap lipstick.
Was it the leg of a chicken
forgotten for hours at room temperature
or the nameless green pepper
that made our eyes tear, our throats beg

in another language
for the most essential element,
here where Montezuma still owns the water.



Frigate Birds

One day we found the sea
turning over and over.
We immersed ourselves in its tonic—
salt and nettles.

Some days were good, some bad.
One of us had a sickness
or a fracture. The other remembered
to turn off an element on the stove.

The birds went on about
their business of hunting
the waters. Like eagles
they flew high and alone.

Even if nothing has changed,
birds have a designation,
an identity based on the split
in their long black tails.

Egalitarian, they cleaned their feathers
whether or not we stared
up at them, and if they reminded us
of death, it wasn't their fault.

Wearing the split black tails
of tuxedos, they flew. Like officials
attending a meeting
of the utmost importance,

they flew straight toward
destiny, and we followed them
with our eyes. When we said
we'd trade our arms for their wings

it must be because of the clean
break they made
between the floor of the jungle
and the ceiling of the sea.



Quizno

If you want to know more
About the lizard Mexicans call *quizno*
Pick it up, watch it dart back
Along white stucco
While you hold the tail
Still writhing in your hand.



About the Translators

Judith Skillman has a Masters degree in English Literature from the University of Maryland, and has studied Comparative Literature at the University of Washington.

Eric Dillon is a computer specialist with an intense interest and understanding of French literature and culture. He is a native of Paris.

Jean-Marcel Gayraud was born and raised in Provence. He lives with his wife Patricia and their children Sebastien and Laura in Bellingham, Washington.



About the Author

Judith Skillman is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Eric Mathieu King Fund from the Academy of American Poets for her book "Storm," *Blue Begonia Press*, 1998. Grants include a Writer's Fellowship from the Washington State Arts Commission and a public arts grant from King County Arts Commission. Her poems have appeared in *FIELD*, *Poetry*, *Southern Review*, *Seneca Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Northwest Review*, and other journals. "Heat Lightning: New and Selected Poems 1986 – 2006" (*Silverfish Review Press*, 2006) is her most recent book. She is a faculty member at the Richard Hugo House in Seattle, Washington.



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