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# On Not Interpreting the Roar

Simina Banu  
*University of Windsor*

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ON NOT INTERPRETING THE ROAR

by  
Simina Banu

A Creative Writing Project  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Department of English Language, Literature and Creative Writing  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts at the  
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada  
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Simina Banu

APPROVED BY

---

J. Mboudjeke  
Languages, Literatures and Cultures

---

L. Cabri  
English Language, Literature and Creative Writing

---

S. Holbrook, Advisor  
English Language, Literature and Creative Writing

August 22, 2017

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## ABSTRACT

My project interrogates the way English acts like a brick wall for non-native speakers. I draw from my personal experience as an immigrant and combine that with LANGUAGE poetry techniques and translation in order to capture the immigrant experience. I then reflect on what is and is not lost in the process of translation, and what is built anew.

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## TRANSLATING EMINESCU

A poem, exasperated, speaks candidly to its poet:

Many flowers are in this poutine.

Though few bear fruit, all knock

at the gate of life

from within this death-shake (50% off).

I know:

It is easy to write nothing.

It is easy to write nothing.

It is easy to write nothing.

It is easy to write nothing.

But your heart is troubling.

Wishes, troubling. Passions, also troubling.

Your mind (troubling) listens

to them

like similes at the gate of life, extended

metaphors at the doors of thinking,

all wanting to break

into the world.

Yet here

you've drowned

me in the gravy.

You misread twenty-four entire books

as "sleep."

Ah! The sky falls on your head.

"Give it to me straight," you plead.

But who will break

it to you now? Well,

how bout you

plant me in the dirt,

I've had enough.

What is love? Never mind, what is

a lung?

a sea?

your trachea?

a soufflé?

pragmatism?

Sears?

despair?

bate?

convent?

eyelashes?

a nap?

A long opportunity.

Thousands of ears.

More required.

Your whole life.

There! Shadows of angles.

How your heart asks.

H earth

Beating your chest.

Everything hanging by a word.

A tremor of genes.

Over day - so many times, and night forever.

Un singur dor

I have a singer's door.

Afloat, let me be

moored in margarine.

I mean, on the edge

of the sea. This one:

←  
Cer senin. Relax,

I knitted a bed

from young branches.

Ten thousand

trees fall

in my throat:

do they make

or break?

Simon Cowell

covers his ears

at the thought of my heart.

I know we all groan

when the sea sings.

I will be earth

in my solitude.

A far tomb

Je tombe. Leaving imprisons.

Yet here: wind with guinea pig pictures

(his name was Jack. I was allergic). And, I leave. Yes, I read.

Yes, I think. See, in scissors. Sea, in totes. She, tombée.

Pier 1 has a sale on nothing.

I read the sign in a Braşov elevator as “do not slam USA.”

Hast thou no doors? Lock 'em if you have 'em.

Sit dreaming fire. Drip sleep.

Ew, falafel. I take a bite and look at thoughts

vis-a-vis the basement.

The jury uses Crest, on sale, on nothing.

No foundation. All of a sudden:

a wedding appears. An ellipses.

Copper eyes covering my hands.

From the strainer

Whether you do something, or you do something else:

this looks like a garden: zile fără nori.

Zzzz & two bees on a flower.

And cloud to the right. Homeland!:

Germs. Pain.

You wouldn't believe the amount of snails.

Once I saw a woman collecting them in a bag. Braşov

streets after the rain. A restaurant to the right.

They're not bugs, they're animals.

They will live seven years if you don't eat them.

Why do we love what's ordinary?

Ticks. Ticks. Tocks. Ticks everywhere!

Vale: pastoral scene.

liniştiri, : a lake, s reflected, still,

or someone is fishing.

Imagism about a leaf.



Diminutive about a house.

A native land and something about a spatula.

The mountainous lie  
of a cloud's forehead.

O to see again! Fields, teeming,  
cigarettes blooming out of the dandelions.

I was getting bread: skidding.

I turn to see a car run into a man in June.

A plastic melodica sounds a bit like the accordion  
in the same way a paper mâché apple tastes  
like an apple.

The markets threw their fruit at me.

A Russian yes, fierce data.

O native land: my, my,  
Some pot, to cook in, smoke,  
bang, riot.

Something about death and a tower  
of humans. Flower ghetto.

A piccolo harmonizes  
with the silence.

Tomorrow, adagio

*Chorus:*

Today plus tomorrow  
minus life (yesterday)  
plus face paint  
and feeding the dog Purina (x2).

When under trees, wine.

When moon, urn.

When can (Sprite, or otherwise), do.

Re-salt somewhere.

Hey, 'morrow, slow down. You seem in altitude.

I stare at math in jellybeans  
paring them into 1s and 0,  
dead leaves.

Tea makes me wander:

stop sign to stop sign

Even more tea

makes me still consider death.

Tomorrow clips toes onto the rice,

evolution having decided we don't need that fifth.

I drink it anyway, wear old jeans and don't

order the cabbage rolls.

And once this fly befriended me.

More accurately: the glow of my computer.

I exploited it for art, made it pose

on literature: To The Lighthouse,

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.

Shot on iPhone. Horrified, I apologized,

its life already wasted.

*Chorus x2*

*Chorus x2*

What strings are not rushed cistern.

*Chorus x2*

*Chorus x2*

When armadillos...

When armadillos try to cut  
my present tense  
with calm and lung. Cosmonauts,  
floating, they offer Krispy Kreme.

They try to tail  
today back into the blue.  
(After all, they argue, so many  
todays have come out of it.)

Rasputin. They remind me  
that training for poison  
is preferable to poison, and the hug  
of a gas giant is preferable to Big—

whispering preferable, preferab

When even the pancakes don't work  
the armadillos invite, without hesitation,  
flower bats.

They bring computer games: Putt-Putt

and Pep's dog on a stick, balloon-o-rama, fun pack, birthday surprise, goes to the moon.

Waves: raise or

don't cease crying.

Voice: raise or

squirm and marrow. Armadillos, yes, I have held tight

to a dewy Pepsi to steady myself. When out of the blue,

an explosion of kale from a shot glass.

## When the voice itself

*\*A note on the translation:*

is silent. Elevators aren't in the poem. Chemistry isn't in the poem. Pluto isn't in the poem. Din isn't in the poem. Faces aren't in the poem. Dolce & Gabbana isn't in the poem. Racial slurs aren't in this poem. Chimeras aren't in the poem.

Mops aren't in the poem. Insomnia isn't in the poem. Eyes are in the poem but oinks aren't. Paces aren't in the poem. Bland is (not) the poem. Umbrellas are not the poem. Seven is not the poem. Resay is not the poem.

Rope is not the poem. The poem is not aping. The poem is not Zimbabwe. The poem is not feta. The poem is not a pest. The poem is not imbibed. This poem is not a rat. O?

The poem might be tingling. The poem might be string. The poem might be bratty. This poem might be smitten. I might be pardoned. I might be neighbouring. We might share sugar!

Why in my soufflé

My soufflé?!

This port tastes like death.

Why: a dry spell of the word- “variety.”

Why: it all tastes like death.

Why, then, is my dessert-head

life in a way?

...

Why “why”



## DIRECTIONAL DYSLEXIA

Spadina & Willcocks

it could be heartburn

I don't think it's heartburn

maybe heart arson

for example

I forget

am where I

me and my pockets pretending

we lose things.

Jesus graffiti.

iPhone & pillow

will I grow a second head

will I like the second head

sorry no

results found for dill eye

right to beckon feds

foam & home

sweat foam Alabama

at the end of the tail

the mermaid turns home

the rules of breath-ball:

1.

some things about<sup>1</sup> breath:

it's not for you

no one gave you a glove

so imagine dodging it

they gust vowels

at you and you duck

they say something

about getting it

but it bonks you

on the noggin

then: a muteness

is a room

of one's airtight

---

<sup>1</sup> etymology: "on the outside of"

home, safe

but you try

to lure the breath

you paint your muteness

you paint it oh, too:

“oh? me too”

you lament your planthood but

be more assertive?

maybe if you didn't google

idioms six times a day

to keep that doctor away

“there's nothing wrong!

nothing to see here!”

2.

some things about breathe:

it's also not for you

the e is silent<sup>2</sup>

yet the whole operation

is squeaky

eeee

but it makes sense

you know?

it's called asthma

as-ma

---

<sup>2</sup>

l nd  
m  
th  
bl nd r

l nd  
m  
th  
l tt r

l nd  
m  
th  
sp ch

forget about running

except out and about it



## Words, my reflexes

Fine, drinking a glass of orange juice. Well thanks, in a blue tuxedo. No problem, with a fine moustache. Will do, in ironed jeans. Of course, preparing a smoothie. Great, going on a bike ride. Thanks, building a fence. Dandy, gardening. My pleasure, planted in a suburb. Better, shopping in the superstore. Alright, redirecting a bee from the fruit salad. You're welcome, figuring out a Manhattan. No worries, losing the change. Better, Flying Monkeys by noon. Better, an owl on the wallpaper. Fine, eating yogurt. Of course, pacing in the terminal. Of course, terminal. Fine, used in a sentence. Fine, the Silverstein poem about the safe. Safe, 3:34am, Bloor. Better, tap water. Better, hardwood. No worries, that busker, Rue Saint Jean. No worries, that truck on fire outside Montreal. No worries, air conditioning. Fine, in green shoes outside a Café Starbucks.

## PICTIONARY

## A

The **Aardvard** eats **ants**.

**Anxiety** eats an orange and sidesteps

**Anger**, who is also **Asleep**. An **actor** bumps

into **Alienation** and together they become

the **aye-aye** of the **Americas**.

**Asleep/Anger** talks

in her dreams.<sup>3</sup>

The fruit makes **Anxiety** break

a mug, runs

at the first sign of danger.

---

<sup>3</sup> in your dreams *humorous* - something you say to someone who has just told you about something they are hoping for, in order to show that you do not believe it will happen “Anger talk?! In her dreams!”



translating the rock

not Dwayne the rock Johnson

but it might be rock bottom

not the Bar & Grill

but it might be a bar

the rock might be a seashell

from the Montreal busker you bought pot for

or the blue umbrella he threw into your home

or the whirling dervish coin pouch

he left for you with tokens for the TTC

the rock might be hard (the Cafe or the genre

or the gender) or

you might be between it

and a hard place

the rock is likely out

before it bottoms

you might ing with the rock

back & forth

you might calculate the distance between balconies

for a quick getaway

the rock is confusing

so you might throw it at your boat

don't try skipping a rock

the rock is not la roche

la roche is not delicious Ferrero chocolate

la roche is not personalized medicine solutions in Canada

la roche does not have a LinkedIn

la roche is not wine

but it might have an aftertaste

la roche is not the rock

but the rock might have roaches

the rock might be air conditioned

with cold beer in the fridge

the rock might have a balcony

or a cliff

the rock is not a pebble

you might have used the rock to mark your trail

now the rock might snowball

fight and you'll get suspended

in the psychiatric ward

the rock wrote

about being suspended in lava

six months later

the rock cracks open

a Pabst Blue Ribbon

comedy rock:

you put googly eyes on it and

your therapist thinks the rock is hilarious

the rock is a punch

line the rock hugs

eska spring water the r

hopes to erode

what will change your

ock cycle

in times of stress your pet

rock might display the following symptoms:

- reckless spending
- uncontrollable sobbing
- cracks
- volcanic eruptions
- sedimentary lifestyle
- befriending dung beetles

the rock might break on through to the other side

break on through to the other side

break on through

break on through

break on through



break on through

the rock bonked you

on the noggin and you said yes

when a drunk Jeff asked to marry you

even though you don't like men

The Rock's dog died

after eating a mushroom

you befriended a sixty year old

over your love of rocks

on the rocks

you've tried to fire the rock

with cigarettes

to decide what rock to be under

you consult the internet

[RateRock.com](http://RateRock.com)

we will we will rock

you stuff a hundred rocks into your stomach

to better appreciate a concert

you don't make it to

the rock weighs down your pockets

so you stop eating

your parents don't understand the rock

you don't roll

out of bed

your home is furnished with boulders

you have a rug for guests but when

Will with the knee problem

can't sit on the floor you drape a

blanket over sandstone

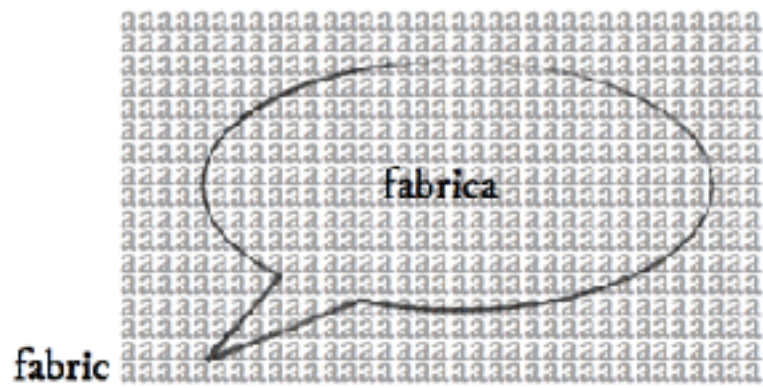
your friends suggest softer rocks

Coca Cola, radler

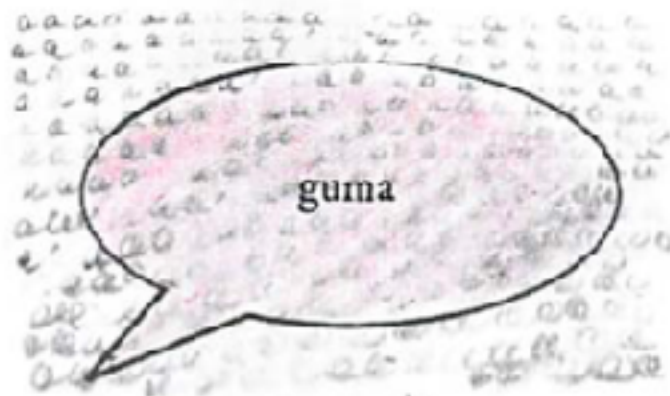
you boil over

## FALSE FRIENDS





gum



urechile-mi reamintesc: y )) ears

12

Ears detect the pour of 5% blonde lager. The beer expired in October. An ear can notice decay in the composition of a drip. A fresh beer drips to the planet's pulse. Old beer lags. Expired beer taps arrhythmically.



17

The other room perspires television. They Ears used to make up shit about knowing basement static from the attic. Middle muddle: they pass me along a Dove deodorant ad with added abyss. Ears ghostify concrete in castles behind fire.

5

Lock 'em up. With that history of wall-hearing. That wall itself: bricks, white, bricks, white.

They stitch fabric. At 5 they invent brocades for all the curtains in Braşov. A brocade: the melody of a furnace overlain on Dacias trying their best. Like wild animals, ears invent my tulips.

Lawbreakers.

They should star on A&E. Fingers can't barre, so ears euphonise squeaks. They hoard: a) steel strings squeak a windy bridge b) a nylon string (the B) prepares a bow; I've named it Robin Hood c) a banjo's voice cracks jokes, surrounds hate and forces it to surrender d) tenor ukuleles wax off-key poetry in English accents e) the baritone uke belonged to a greasy punk, hiccups soap in French f) a guilele whisper-squawks the alphabet g) the merlin performs seagulls.

6

Seagulls.

7

Newer brocades. Rivers replace furnaces. Free baguettes lure birds.

22

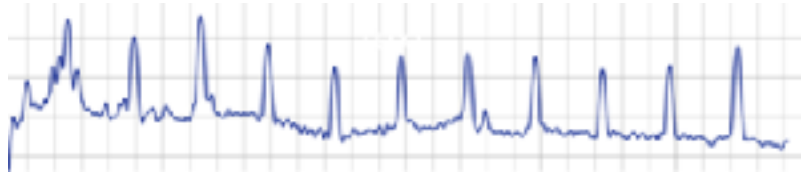
Ears spill coffee on a bpNichol book. Not really. That would be gross.

7

I don't know the name for gull laughter. Are baguettes hilarious? Ears cut into the bottom line while tongue's on sick leave. "You're mute, right?"

22

They draw Robin Hood:





9

Phonemes cross lingual more easily than the Ambassador Bridge. Larynx and tongue early influenced toward mutation: Remember me again why we merge to the magazine to buy guinea pork?

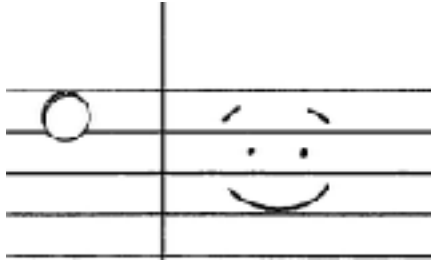
22

Peaks as airplanes, surprise! Systematic nervousness requests (aaaaeeee!) fossilisation of skilled motors: all in the wrist. Coffee spills on a bpNichol book.

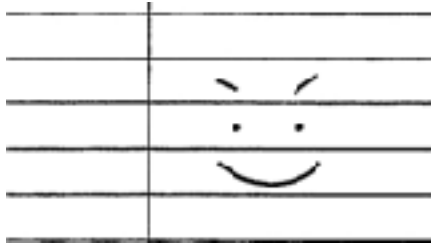
6

They haven't heard of semantics and appraise poems on the basis of danceability. They inform me that sense ain't got soul. I find the backseat of a Chrysler as comfortable as advertised. Celine Dion says Hercules on and on.

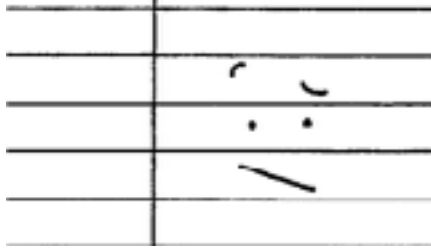
## READING FACES



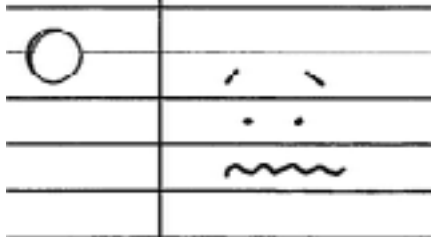
Way too many rays.  
Punctuation takes a nap,  
introduces swamp.



The ceiling caves in.  
Yet again, two olives fall  
into the cat's bowl.



Birds don't explain song  
featuring armadillos  
bouncing down a slide.



The sun roof explodes.  
The dots of my i's retreat,  
worm into the sky.



## On Not Interpreting the Roar

In Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, he remarks, "If a lion could speak, we could not understand" (Brenner 233). This statement attempts (in sloppy translation) to articulate that even if creatures share the same language, communication will not be possible if there is an absence of shared experience. This absence can be extended from the cross-species metaphor Wittgenstein uses to other aspects of our own human experience: taking for instance the Wittgenstein quote itself and our English translation of it. Is the experience of life in German and that of life in English comparable to the difference between life as lion and life as human? Even with translation, are we able to articulate the original meaning? In his book, *The Power of Babel*, John McWhorter begins with an anecdote from his childhood, where he reminisces about a preschool crush and an earth-shattering discovery:

...one day after a lesson when we went outside to join our respective parents ... I was shocked to hear that as soon as she started talking to them, I couldn't understand what they were saying! This was the first time in my life that I had ever known that there were different languages than English, and it remains the profoundest shock I have ever encountered in my entire life. (McWhorter 1)

Here, McWhorter pithily communicates how unaware many of us are of languages different from our native tongue until we are shocked into awareness. But what about more abstract codes? For example, what about the shock to fluent speakers of heteronormativity, patriarchy, or classism that can occur when they encounter what is outside their periphery? Do words exchanged between native speakers of the same language carry the same meaning for each individual - or does meaning vary based on the intersecting identities of each person: their genders, race, class, sexual orientation, age, politics, religion? Would the words “that’s so gay” mean the same to a straight person as to a gay person? In my project, I aim to capture how meanings become lost and muddled in translation, drawing from my experience as an immigrant to illustrate how meanings literally become lost in between languages. I also draw from many instances of meanings’ tendency to slip, even when everyone is, in theory, speaking the same language.

LANGUAGE poetry originated in the late 60s through the experimental work of such writers as Ron Silliman, Steve McCaffery and bpNichol. In describing Tom Clark’s book *Truth Game*, Silliman encapsulates the LANGUAGE objective:

What's happening is the language. Not only in the usual sense of being interesting (which it is), but in the new sense that words are events, as real and important in themselves as wars and lovers... It is to the word, then, that the mind moves, and the word responds by taking on a physicality, even a sensuality, we have all been trained to ignore.

These poets bring attention to the materiality of language through wordplay and deconstruction. I take influence from these poets and situate my work in within contemporary experimental poetry.

In bpNichol's *translating translating Apollinaire*, he subjects his original translation of an Apollinaire poem to a variety of retranslations. These revisitations play with form rather than semantic content. For example, in one poem, Nichol "translates" by rearranging words alphabetically. In my own poetry, I often reinterpret source texts, not only with attention to semantics, but also with this re-investigation of form. I reinterpret stanzas, rhythm and rhyme, and visual components to interrogate how much meaning is contained (and transferable) through form itself.

I take a lot of liberty in reinterpreting (and mistranslating). I do this to reflect the untranslatability between languages (and people). Wilhelm von Humboldt writes:

It has repeatedly been observed and verified by both experience and research that no word in one language is completely equivalent to a word in another, if one disregards those expressions that designate purely physical objects. In this respect, languages are synonymic; each language expresses a concept somewhat differently, placing the nuance in each instant one step higher or lower on the ladder of perceptions. (55)

Because of the liberties I take, my poetry is very seldom "straight translation"—that is, translation where the objective is to translate semantic content as accurately as possible. Rather, I consider my work "transportation"—I envision transporting meaning, across linguistic, temporal and spatial boundaries, as well as the interpretive boundaries of identity. Along the way, the meanings are disfigured, scorched, remoulded, lost, and found.

My thesis begins with a variety of poetry based off the work of Mihai Eminescu. Born in 1850, Eminescu is the most renowned Romanian Romantic. His work is frequently cited and anthologized, and he has played a prominent role in shaping Romanian national identity. His work centred on classic Romantic themes like love, nature, happiness and genius. I was interested in exploring what happens when this iconic work is carried over into contemporary Canadian culture. I also took influence from Erin Mouré's *Sheep's Vigil by a Fervent Person*. In the introduction to the book, Mouré reflects on her process of translation:

...I opened Alberto Caeiro's *O Guardador de Rebanhos* ... I translated a short poem, altering posture and voice, and sometimes (thus) words, but still staying "true" to the poem. A few pages and days later, I realized Pessoa had entered Toronto, living a pastoral life in Toronto's not-quite-vanished original topographies ... A last note: I see this book as translation, as faithful, even if different. (Moure viii - ix)

I became fascinated by Mouré's insistence that her translation can remain true, even across space, time, gender and language. In the first of Pessoa's included poems, we encounter "Quando o vento cresce e parece que chove mais" (Moure 2) This line is translated by Google as "When the wind grows and it seems that it rains more." Mouré, however, translates it thusly: "When the bus goes by, a huge wind splattering greasy water" (Moure 3). Her translations add multiple layers of connotation and meaning that would have been inaccessible to Pessoa, and, as such, rewrites the work from her vantage point.

In my transcreations, I aimed to enact a similar cross-cultural transition, but with the allowance to deviate from the original works. I used a variety of homophonic, visual, and semantic techniques to “translate” the works. When Eminescu’s “memories” (amintiri) visually resembled “armadillos,” the poem became about the latter. When Eminescu’s “wish” (dor) sounded like “door,” the poem became about that. Semantic translation was trickier. An example of this technique is in “A poem, exasperated.” In the original Eminescu piece, he writes:

E ușor a scrie versuri  
Când nimic nu ai a spune,  
Înșirând cuvinte goale  
Ce din coadă au să sune.

This stanza is literally translated to

It is easy to write verse  
When you have nothing to say  
Inspiring empty words  
That from the tail they will ring.

In my transcreation, I opted to rewrite it so:

It is easy to write nothing.

It is easy to write nothing.

It is easy to write nothing.

It is easy to write nothing.

I decided to try to convey the semantics of his “empty verse” through repetition, through form following function. It is nothing, over and over. But it is also something. It exists on the page, which is a nuance of meaning that exists in Eminescu’s original piece, though he may not have wanted it there. Empty words are not, in fact, empty. “Nothing,” is something, both a signifier and a concept. By semantically transforming it as I have, I hoped to bring attention to a linguistic aspect that exists, but remains obscure, in Eminescu’s original piece.

“When the voice itself” is a transcreation piece that aims to comment on the composing process itself, how my interpretation differs profoundly from the original piece:

Elevators aren’t in the poem. Chemistry isn’t in the poem. Pluto isn’t in the poem. Din isn’t in the poem. Faces aren’t in the poem. Dolce & Gabbana isn’t in the poem. Racial slurs aren’t in this poem. Chimeras aren’t in the poem.

The poem incorporates the same processes of translation found throughout the suite; however, it brings attention to its difference with the negative assertions. The poem does end on a more promising note:

The poem might be tingling. The poem might be string. The poem might be bratty. This poem might be smitten. I might be pardoned. I might be neighbouring. We might share sugar!

Here, after a volta, the speaker/writer reaches the conclusion that, even if the translation is decidedly different from the original piece, it might still have a neighbouring meaning. Perhaps the poet can be forgiven for the hijacking.

I include translation experiments that do not have to do with Eminescu. The short “Directional Dyslexia” suite aims to collapse the boundaries among spatial, mental and linguistic disorientations. What begins as a physical intersection blends into a mental one and then into a linguistic one. In the first poem, the speaker gets lost wandering around Spadina and Willcocks in Toronto, only to eventually stumble into awareness with “Jesus graffiti.” Later, this intersection translates into the mental intersection between an iPhone and a pillow (with the head in between). Disorientation is present between the iPhone and the speaker’s own mental contemplation. I meant for it to reflect the confusion between what is ours and what is Google’s — do we have a claim on any information at all? Has memory become irrelevant?

The last piece tries to articulate this disorientation as linguistic—the original meaning of “dyslexia.”

sweat foam Alabama

at the end of the tail

the mermaid turns home

Here, words are swapped homophonically into known idioms, including the Little Mermaid fairy tale in which she turns to foam. What happens when these words are confused? For this piece I took influence from Lee Ann Brown's *Polyverse*, in which she (and others) homophonically translates *Amazing Grace*:

Amazing Grits! How sweet the Redeye  
That flavored my Livermush!  
Fried Okra, Collard Greens and Chicken fried  
Ice Tea, lots of lemon with Mint crushed.

Amazing Space! How intergalactic the Wormhole  
That beamed up a Quark like me—  
I once was Kirk, but now I'm Spock  
Was Tribble in another Quantum Reality.

Amazing Grace, I have loved you  
Ever since we were in grade 1-B  
You wore a tight skirt  
To please I wore a pleated one  
But we were both hoods then (Brown 108)



In Brown & co's version of Amazing Grace, a variety of new, associated words are put into the original song, and they repeat this three times. In my poem, I incorporate a variety of different known idioms into one single poem.

The next poem in my thesis is "the rules of breath-ball." This was a more confessional exploration of being an eight-year-old immigrant, and trying to navigate the new rules, both of the English language, but also of games like baseball. In this poem, I aimed to incorporate a lot of vernacular that stood out to me as a kid, like "noggin." In "The Vernacular Muse of Prairie Poetry," Dennis Cooley speaks about the importance of including the vernacular in writing:

...literature now becomes vigorously rooted—in our time and in *our* places, subject to *our* values, *our* sense of what is real. It also becomes for many, vernacularly based in the 'low' and the local, speaking from or for minority groups who have become marginalized ... Once the exiled and the shut-out begin to define their own literature, they put the institutions into disrepute. They break the silence the establishment would fix with shame upon them. (*Vernacular Muse* 182)

In my poetry I incorporate the vernacular to a different effect: rather than give voice to a marginalized identity through its vernacular, the speaker clumsily incorporates an English vernacular to show how the haphazard collage itself becomes an idiolect, bringing attention to the marginalized identity of the immigrant.

"Words, my reflexes" takes influence from Sina Queyras's *Lemonhound*, and its deployment of repetition. In the poem I try to personify the casual niceties we exchange in

Canada on a regular basis. By personifying them, I was hoping to translate their meaning past one of “small talk” and into what they cover.

Great, going on a bike ride. Thanks, building a fence. Dandy, gardening. My pleasure, planted in a suburb. Better, shopping in the superstore. Alright, redirecting a bee from the fruit salad. You’re welcome, figuring out a Manhattan. No worries, losing the change. Better, Flying Monkeys by noon. Better, an owl on the wallpaper. Fine, eating yogurt. Of course, pacing in the terminal.

The poem progresses from the semantics of the words matching the activities: “Great, going on a bike ride” to a discrepancy building between the words and activities: “No worries, losing the change. Better, Flying Monkeys by noon.” With this progression I was hoping to convey what Eminescu also attempted to communicate: the emptiness of words. The result might, paradoxically, convey a fullness. *Better* is, after all, beer, tap water, superstore and hardwood—all connoting different states of mind from within the same nicety.

The pictorial segment is inspired by bpNichol and his visual wordplay. I hoped to, again, personify the words and illustrate their story. With this translation I wanted to articulate how complex and confusing picture dictionaries can be, especially to immigrants. The pictures have so much happening that it is hard to know how each connects to each word. Which A is Asleep, and why is it fading?

On a different note, “translating the rock” aimed to show the impossibility of capturing a feeling—in this case, rock bottom. It takes a vague concept, rock bottom, and tries to translate

the experience with a variety of wordplay and details. It extends and extends and would have kept extending had I not stopped it.

the rock is confusing

so you might throw it at your boat

don't try skipping a rock

the rock is not la roche

la roche is not delicious Ferrero chocolate

la roche is not personalized medicine solutions in Canada

la roche does not have a LinkedIn

la roche is not wine

but it might have an aftertaste

la roche is not the rock

but the rock might have roaches

the rock might be air conditioned

with cold beer in the fridge

the rock might have a balcony

or a cliff

the rock is not a pebble

The progression of the poem riffs off itself in a way similar to bpNichol's Martyrology series.

The next extension of the poem is an improvised take or piece of wordplay on what preceded it—but all the riffs act to extend and translate the meaning of rock bottom.

The "False Friends" suite comprises visual puns of words that sound similar—but are different—in Romanian and English. The visual representation comes to show the Romanian meaning of each word—etiquette as label, fabric as factory, gum as eraser. The piece that follows, "urechile-mi reamintesc: y 》 ears," explores how memory is translated. The numbers represent ages—memory jumps from one age to another associationally and linguistically. Lawbreakers from age five jump to A&E shows at twenty-two. "You're mute" from age seven jumps associationally to sound-waves muted by the page, bringing attention to how written language is itself mute.

The last suite is inspired by Steve Muhs's *221 acres of fun*. In it, there is a section where he translates symbols into poems. Fred Wah's *Pictograms of the Interior BC* utilizes a similar technique. In my poem I try to take the common idiom "reading faces" and interrogate what would happen if people read faces in the same way they read words—left to right, down. I was hoping to bring attention to the construct of the actual reading process.

Throughout my thesis I use a variety of translation techniques. I try to bring attention to the different ways that language can fail at conveying intended meaning, yet how it can succeed

at creating new meanings. I take influence from a variety of contemporary writers (Sina Queyras, Erin Moure, Steve Muhs) and older LANGUAGE poets (bpNichol, Fred Wah). As well, a large portion of my thesis focuses on bringing Mihai Eminescu poetry across linguistic, cultural and temporal space, into a contemporary Canadian milieu.

The Original Eminescu Poems

**A poem, exasperated, speaks candidly to its poet:**

Criticilor mei

**What is love? Never mind, what is:**

Ce e amorul?

**Un singur dor:**

Mai am un singur dor

**A far tomb:**

Afară-i toamnă

**From the strainer:**

Din străinătate

**Tomorrow, adagio:**

Cu mâine zilele-ți adaogi...

**When armadillos...:**

Când amintirile...

**When the voice itself:**

Când însuși glasul

**Why in my soufflé:**

De ce în al meu suflet

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## VITA AUCTORIS

Simina Banu is a Canadian poet. She is an outsider investigator of the oddities that inhabit the English language—from its strange punctuation, to its accidental musicality, to its meanings, unconfined by the structure of words, wandering and irretrievable. Her poetry has been featured in journals such as *In/Words Magazine*, *untethered*, and *Otoliths*. In 2015, words(on)pages press published her first chapbook, *where art*.