

In the altitudes of elation 'we look up
and hold the folds of language inside
us without any word for wind'¹:
at the start of the light we ask,
what is Secession/Insecession?²

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¹ *Insecession* (26).

² A lengthier and stylistically different version of this text, which reroutes, rehearses and rewrites certain of the ideas appearing here, can be found in “Traduire / Translating” under the editorial direction of Myriam Suchet, *Intermédialités*, Vol. 27, winter 2017. The article is entitled “Letters On The Move: Erín Moure and Chus Pato’s *Secession/Insecession* and Nathanaël (Nathalie Stephens)’s *Absence Where As (Claude Cahun and the Unopened Book)*.”



In “altitudes of elation” I examine the space opened up by Erín Moure’s English translation of Chus Pato’s Galician biopoetic text, *Secession* (or rather *Secesión*), which is published alongside her own co-responding homage-text, *Insecession*. Ultimately, the question that will circulate in this brief but no less poetically elated analysis, and that will continue to guide the method or path of its inquiry is: What is *Secession/Insecession*? Asking the question *what is*, this study could have followed a rather deductive approach and been led to speculate on *what it is not*, or even *what it is similar to*, drawing historical parallels with works of a similar and dissimilar nature. The question *what is* could also have led me to read the book in relation to various translation theories and strategies, many of which shall make a covert appearance during this nano exposé. There are other avenues and venues as well – a comparative study, for instance, which would have sparked a reading that juxtaposes *Secession* against *Insecession* – marking the ways in which one text arrives or departs from the other. Another possible avenue to consider might have been to probe the significance of departedness in relation to friendship and Aristotle’s view of friendship as loving the other as one would the deceased, and therefore not demanding love in return.³ Why this quick pit stop to speak of friendship? Because friendship is significant to the space in which *Insecession* and *Secession* occur. Given that they accompany and face each other, at least in the Canadian-English translated edition published by BookThug in 2014, they are to be considered – not as mirror images of each other – but as friend or companion texts.⁴ As a kind of philosophical backdrop, then, it might prove worthwhile to keep this in mind and wonder what the poetics of friendship entail for translation. Finally, and among many other possibilities, this study could have chosen to riff off the two-headed or bicephalous nature of the work, taking the ancient road of mythology, the gothic, or even that of science fiction with its question *what if* and the leaps made possible there. Instead, what I propose to do here, and this I believe is not contrary to the possibilities I have been pinning to this study’s diverging lines of inquiry, is to follow the inclinations of science fiction and its prizing of “speculative inventiveness” and “poetic probes” and to

³ From Aristotle’s *Eudemian Ethics* here referenced in Derrida’s *The Politics of Friendship* (see Works Cited for full bibliographical information).

⁴ “*Insecession* is my biopoetics nestled ‘in *Secession*.’ They appear ‘with’ each other because they are friend texts, reverberative” (Moure, *Lemon Hound*).

“think small, preferring the spec over the spectacular,”⁵ which is a posture of thinking that I am borrowing from the philosopher Avital Ronell.

In the sense of the small, I want to return to the symbol of the slash in the title of the book and ask: what does it mean to write on an incline?⁶ To bend inwards or towards, in-

⁵ I am borrowing the terms “speculative inventiveness” and “poetic probes” from Avital Ronell who, in an interview with Diane Davis entitled “Breaking Down ‘Man’: A Conversation with Avital Ronell” (2014), suggests that the prizing of “scientific objectivization” comes at the cost of inducing a kind of phobic reaction to the philosophical modesty of more poetic approaches that often do not get addressed. The inclination to “think small” and to read for the “spec rather than the spectacular”, in contrast, comes from a talk Avital Ronell gave entitled “Walking as a Philosophical Act” where she examines a series of (small) steps and mis-steps taken by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Reveries of a Solitary Walker*. The idea to “think for the spec rather than the spectacular” is also about turning one’s attention to modes of address, whether that entails what is often considered small, minute, everyday subject matter or modes of address that, for whatever reason, refuse to address or overlook their address or are hurtful in their mode of address. The evocation of friendship is important here as well, and although I could revert back to Derrida, I find the following passage from Avital Ronell’s exchange with Diane Davis worth reciting:

Let us continue to think about what it is to be modest as we proceed and question and interrogate. So, to resume, I’ve been very interested in the undead and the friends, dead or alive, that one can have or not have, the barriers to friendship – all of which is sometimes laughably grim: what does it take for scholars to sustain friendships – does the institution disrupt or block genuine friendship, should such a thing or practice or gift exist? That’s another storyline (“Breaking Down ‘Man’” 378).

⁶ In “Walking as a Philosophical Act”, Avital Ronell puts forth the idea of walking/writing on the decline: “I want to consider simply in terms of philosophical tracts (tracks) and literary tropologies, the history of coming down the mountain. The law-givers, the light-bearers, the phallus-wielders, the world-class illuminated came down the mountain. Socrates, Moses, Nietzsche and Zarathustra [...] fatefully came down the mountain. They delivered. Rousseau, for his part and parts, came crashing down a hill. So I think the fact that he traces and tracks the way he falls on a hill also pushes against a whole tradition of philosophical and literary positing. Rousseau makes us ask about postures and figures of thinking on the move, our relation to the path – remembering that in Greek *methodos* is path – so what’s our relation, our method, what it might mean precisely to write, as Rousseau says, on the decline [...] only to lose one’s standing” (my transcription).

Working on the metaphorical register of philosophical “tracts” as ways of “making tracks,” Ronell suggests that, at least in Western philosophy, there is a tradition of “doing” philosophy, of walking the philosophical walk and by implication talking the talk that suggests a “certain” relationship to knowledge and perhaps even transcendence. Writing on the decline, the sure-footed philosopher comes down the mountain to share *his* enlightenment. In light of this, Ronell asks: What does it mean to perform a series of mis-steps, to stumble, to depart from an established course, and to lose one’s grounding. What does it mean, she asks, to write on the decline? This is where my own study situates *Secession/Insecession* – as a book that is pitched from higher altitudes, as I shall suggest, and as a book that also in many ways breaks ground.

clining one's ear to better hear the other, to listen, to attend to? What does it mean to write with one's heart swayed, desirous – feeling an inclination towards – or else to bend as hills and roads do, or to bow in an act of humility? Simultaneously, I realize that if I am to ask what it means to write on an incline, then it seems just as important that I situate myself, as Moure and Pato do, in the prefatory notes to the book:

We recognize altitude as we ascend, we call the ocean that unfolds below: Canadian Rockies [...]

- when you translate Chus Pato, where are you?
- in the startling air, in the no-event: on Air Galicia, for example
- and when you write your own poems?
- in the continual fold of the event

where worlds are ecstatic figures and unjudgeable, marred and irretrievable, which is to say, amid the aspens (Moure, *Insecession* 10)

/

We recognize altitude from elevation, we call the most extensive prairie: Ocean [...]

- when you make love, where are you?
- in the unexpected, in what will never occur: being a trapeze artist, for example
- and when you write?
- in what occurs, in what continually takes place so, words are free to be extreme

figures and unjudgeable, irreparable (Pato, *Secession* 11)

Where am I when I read *Secession/Insecession*? I suddenly find myself in the air, I am erring, in the case of *Secession*, in “Ourense, Galicia in the green Atlantic climate of the northwest of Spain” (6), which was translated by Moure in Kelowna and Montreal, which is also where her own text, in “a city traversed by two rivers, just east of the Canadian Rockies” (7) took shape. When I receive these texts, I am also in a non-concordance of times: Montréal, where I am first received by the book, and where I continue to read it. The book, it is worth mentioning, can also be situated in a long history of philosophers who have come down the mountain bearing wisdom: Nietzsche's Zarathustra came down the mountain, Moses, Socrates, even Rousseau came crashing down a hill (Ronell, “Walking as a Philosophical Act”). In light of this, it would be interesting to think of the ways in which the ascendant inclination of *Secession/Insecession* dwells in opposition to the tradition of the solitary, illuminated walker coming down the mountain to share *his* enlightenment, even though I regretfully reserve this discussion for another time.

Returning to the slash, in order to better understand what *Secession* is to *Insecession*, I approach the title first: The shorthand notation, which is the one I've been referring to, namely *Secession/Insecession*, and the longhand version, which appears as “Seces-

sion by Chus Pato the Erin Moure translation *with Insecession* by Erin Moure.” The substitution of the slash with the use of the word “with” is worth noting.

The slash is a graphic way of presenting a bicephalous book [Moure explains]:

[O]ur titles appear as equals. Although Pato's biopoetics *Secession*, in this edition, is interwoven with my own *Insecession*, it is in no way subordinate to my text, but is its very cause, its precursor and its most precious interlocutor. *Insecession* is my biopoetics nestled “in *Secession*.” They appear “with” each other because they are friend texts, reverberative. (Moure, *Lemon Hound*)

Although the face to face layout of the book recalls the design of many “bilingual editions,” reminding the reader of the book's relation to translation, the *mise en relation* implied by the slash as well as the word “with” demarcates a simultaneous distance and proximity that, while signalling alterity and refuting equivalences, denies the giving-over of one text to the other:

[H]ow can I write Chus's text from the Galician of a rainy mountainous and very green landscape of mists [asks Moure] into the English in Canada of the dry land the Okanagan, where *green* means the presence not of rain but of irrigation? (*Evening Will Come*).

As readers, we are, instead, within the dynamics of asymmetry, of response and correspondence, of *exhorbitance*,⁷ of cuts and breaks, of caesuras, of simultaneous rupture and reciprocity, but also of slants and inclines, grafts and folds. “This is a dialogue with Chus Pato, [Moure writes] this is not a dialogue with Chus Pato, this is a corner of a textile, an irruption in conversation with poets though the house is silent and in it there is only me” (166). The irruption suggested here certainly piques my curiosity. The dialogue that is simultaneously not a dialogue suggests finicky lines of transmission and reception – the slant of the slash a kind of interruption that breaks the machine, and which could imply any number of broken things: translation, the telephone, Skype, the book, words, lines (of poetry, of communication) etc.. Moure's neologisms alone could send one on an entire discussion about the value of breaking things. This break, of course, seems far from an inherited coincidence in a text that is all about cuts and intervals. The titles alone already entitle the cut: *Secession* and its link to *secedere* or to move apart, to break away; the in of *Inseces-*

⁷ Erin Moure's neologism for “the translator/reader Erin Mouré, facing Alberto Caeiro's *O Guardador de Rebanhos*, [who] was compelled to become Eirin Moure, a performative and *exhorbitant* body announcing a textual inscription she calls a *transelation*” (*My Beloved Wager* 173).

sion expressing a state or condition of being both within and without, graft and graph; and of course there is the slash itself, which gives way to a process of thinking through “writing that is inclined” and the implications thereof; the way, for instance, what I have been calling “broken things” is really just another way of reading various intervals – translative, poetic; or else to ask, what does it mean to say or to assert something, sometimes perhaps one’s self, where the very contra-diction or impossibility of that saying asserts itself, like Hölderlin’s caesura, a kind of slash, an exorbitant third body, which is Moure’s neologism for excessive subjectivity, for *le corps démesuré* that goes beyond the bounds of self or I – *l’exorbitant qui est inabordable*, that’s Hölderlin’s caesura again, but it is also that which Moure, after Pato, also finds in Barthes, who writes of a third text, “receivable” – unreaderly – which Moure affectatiously unreads as “the intranslatable”:

I now recognize a third text alongside the readerly and the writerly: let’s call it the intranslatable. The intranslatable is the unreaderly text which catches fire, burns in the mouth, an instance continuously outside any likelihood, whose function – ardently assumed by its scripter – is to contest the mercantile constraints on what is written. This text, guided, armed by a notion of *material*, prompts me to redact the following words: *Dear Chus, I can neither read nor write what you produce, but I can intranslate it, like a conflagration, a drug, an insecession, an e(ri)nigmatic disorganization. (8)*

Some context is required here. An epigraph from Barthes’ *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes* opens Pato’s *Secession*. Moure, under the heteronym “Ruin E. Rome,” an anagram of her name, playfully alters the passage in *Insecession* – allowing the quote to traverse her *corp(us)s* – not unchanged – and not unlike her e(ri)nigmatic disorganizations of Pato’s text. To offer an example, in Barthes’ passage the third text is conceived as the “receivable,” while in Moure it is the “intranslatable.” Despite their mediated “appellations”⁸ both terms gesture toward a fictitious third text that dwells in-between or rather alongside the readerly and writerly one. This is why the emphasis on the site of the slash is so crucial. As a site of irruption, “[T]ranslation’s affective challenge (and joy) then *is* this traversal, this seeding of a place *beyond* the text, where two texts shimmer and something *more* or *else* coalesces”. (Moure, *Evening Will Come*, italics in original)

What I want to do now is to acknowledge the rather liquid nature of what I have thus far laid out, the way the particles of my reading seem to move in an unformed shape, the way a dream might feel. Or else to observe that, because the book is situated on an incline

⁸ I put in the word in quotation marks because I cannot help thinking of the mountains not far from where I grew up in Moncton, New Brunswick (Canada) called the Appalachians.

and pitched from higher altitudes, my reading carries residues of groundlessness, of elation. That said, focusing on the inclined nature of the work still does not address the inter and intra textual relationships suggested by the slash, nor the question of how these texts meet and collide, if they meet, and if so under which circumstances? What kind of book is this? What question does it ask of its reader? What is *Secession/Insecession*?

WHAT IS SECESSION/INSECESSION?

A first response to the question might be answered thus: *Insecession* is Erin Moure’s Canadian English response or “echolation-homage” to Chus Pato’s biopoetic text, *Secession*, “with one added Chinook wind” (6). Before I touch on the “added Chinook wind,” I want to say a few words about the neologism “echolation” or “echolation-homage.” In “echolation” the ghost of the words “echo” and “echolocation” float above the newly claimed expression like a kind of 3-dimensional technology, presencing *Insecession*’s disposition or *dispositif* if one is to think of translation as technology, as transmission, as broadcast system, as a form of response to the vibrations or sound waves in Pato’s text. Echolation also contains the trace of the word “elation,” which beyond its elevated (as in the latin *elacion*, meaning “raised”) or exultant connotations, elation also echoes Moure’s use of the neologism translation in her poetry collection *Sheep’s Vigil by a Fervent Person*. In *Sheep’s Vigil* Moure reads and intranslates – a term I am using retrospectively here – Fernando Pessoa’s long poem “O Guardador de Rebanhos.” The poem is signed by one of Pessoa’s many heteronyms, Alberto Caeiro, and Moure – herself morphologized into one of Pessoa’s “exorbitant bodies” or “excessive subjectivities” – places her English translation beside the Portuguese version and signs it: Eirin Moure. Like *Secession/Insecession*, she ardently allows the two texts to interact, to touch (often without touching), to translate, and perhaps even to receive one another – the way one receives a signal, a message, or other kinds of transmissions, or again the way one receives a guest, “a *gesture*,”⁹ a “*gifture*.” Elation, in translation and echolation, then, is linked not only to the poetics of exorbitance and response but to various forms of reception on the incline.

What is this added Chinook wind?

I now want to address Moure’s claim that *Insecession* is a response to Pato’s biopoetic text “with one added Chinook wind.” Chinooks are warm coastal winds that blow where the Canadian Prairies and Great Plains meet various mountain ranges, and although their

⁹ See Moure’s *My Beloved Wager* (180) on receptivity and giving.

presence makes sense in terms of the “where” of Moure’s writing, this wind from the mountain range also blows one all the way to the Canadian publishing industry and government subsidization programs that offer their tendered support for titles or books in translation as long as they fit the following criteria:

For publishers:

This program provides grants for the translation of literary works written by Canadian authors.¹⁰

To be eligible, a title must:

- contain at least 50% Canadian-authored creative content;
 - have at least 48 printed pages between the covers;
- and be published principally in English, French or one of Canada’s Aboriginal languages;

Publishers, then, cannot receive financial support from the Canada Council for the “Canadian publication of international translation by Canadian translators”. (Moure, “Outside the Fold”)

On one hand, the funding policies explain the dually-authored nature of the book. Textually speaking, Moure must travel with Pato to Canada, otherwise she is detained at the Canadian border and denied access. It is here that Moure’s added Chinook wind becomes significant. As a metaphor for the text entitled “48, OR 49” that appears at the end of the book, it’s the only text that is not facing one of Pato’s. It reads: “I still owe 48 words, 47+1 so the book will be Canadian +1 missing from ‘Lgiht’s End’” (170). In fact, Pato’s *Secession* ended one page earlier, leaving one to conclude that Moure’s *Insecession* is one text longer than *Secession*. The addition of this last text is as significant as the importance it seems to attribute to mathematical equations. Not only is this small, seemingly inconspicuous fragment, or wind!, what tips the scales in Moure’s direction, thus ensuring that the book qualifies as Canadian, it is also dedicated to the Canada Council for the Arts. In the space reserved for a few final notes about the book Moure writes, “‘48, OR 49’ is for the Canada Council of the Arts. May it one day show support for Canadian publication of international translation by Canadian translators” (174).

¹⁰ Canada Council for the Arts website. “Book Publishing Support: Block Grants,” *Canada Council for the Arts*: <http://canadacouncil.ca/glossary/eligible-titles> (Feb 7 2017); See also “Book Publishing Support: Translation Grants” <http://canadacouncil.ca/funding/grants/arts-across-canada/translation> (Feb 7 2017).

By making *Insecession* one text longer than *Secession*, the now bicephalous book, containing both Moure’s English translation of Pato’s *Secession* and her own *Insecession*, thus qualifies as Canadian. Still, one must tread with caution here, for to suggest that Moure’s *Insecession* acts as *Secession*’s escort seems to me not only a crass and reductive reading, but it also overlooks the entanglement of the “in” of Moure’s text as in-secession. Instead, one might ask: What does it mean that Moure’s text “accommodates” Pato’s, especially in the Latin sense of *accommodāre*, which suggests “to fit together, to synchronize, to make available” (OED), or that her own text is not only organized around the poetics of a response but that it also acts as a reception in the sense of a “formal welcoming” (this is an homage after all)? Or, perhaps inclining one’s reading toward the ambivalence of the slash, one might say that *Secession/Insecession* offers an example of a “mutual reception.” This reading would above all accommodate the fact that Pato’s text is the very impetus for Moure’s, but that Moure, as Pato’s translator, is at the same time the author, in English, of the very same text that is not hers.

TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

I want to pause here, indefinitely, admitting that I have opened more cases than I has solved, and that, in doing so, I have spent much of my time figuring out “broken things.” I had gestured toward friendship and the question of translation in my introduction, had even promised to touch on a few hypotheses to do with these – all of which I relinquish to the space of yet another encounter, forthcoming I hope, but to thank you, dear reader, dear Moure, dear Pato, for our walk up the incline.

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