

THE POETRY OF LUCETTE DESVIGNES

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The publication of *Le Journal Indien* (Précy-sous-Thil: Éditions de l'Armançon, 2003) — a catalogue of 105 miniatures by French artist Michel Dufour accompanied by 105 short poems of Lucette Desvignes — and the more recent appearance of a bilingual edition of her poetry entitled *La Poésie de Lucette Desvignes/The Poetry of Lucette Desvignes* (Potomac, MD: Scripta Humanistica, 2005) have drawn attention to the fact that this French author, known for her novels, plays, short stories and tales, (and celebrating this year her 80th birthday), is finally receiving recognition for the body of poetry she has written over the years. The objective of this study is to comment on the nature of our collaboration in translating Desvignes' poetry in the Scripta Humanistica collection, to examine the salient sources of her poetic inspiration, and to provide a sampling of her poetry in French and in English.

Collaborative Translation: Challenges and Objectives

Translating poetry is nothing like translating prose. One of the more salient advantages of attempting to transmit poetry from one European language to another is that first the translator, then the reader, can juxtapose, line-by-line and on facing pages, the poetic form of the writer's thoughts. Perhaps the most significant disadvantage to the translator, however — apart from the impossibility of translating rhymed verse with any degree of accurate mimesis — is attempting to breathe the original meaning into that inescapable form with language and rhythm and tonality and mirror, or at least approximate, the intentions of the author. A translator must be able to capture the fusion of these elements

inherent in a genre that relies, primarily on the *oralité* of the text, since poems are meant to be read aloud, to be heard. Moreover, this fusion of poetic elements is extremely difficult to achieve when transforming them to a language such as English with tonic accents from a language that relies, instead, on vocalic and consonantal correspondences rather than on musical modulations of phrase and tone.

The translator must choose between two ideal objectives: either he aims at putting the text being translated within reach of the foreign public reader he is addressing, a public he targets (he poses therefore as a *cibliste*), or he aims (as a *sourcier* above all) at conserving in the text that which seems to him to bring out its profound originality (tonality, word order, intended impression, reflection of a particular personality), even if this must require of the foreign public a supplementary effort, the same effort that the public of the original language must make. The danger of a *cibliste* translation is that of diminishing the originality of the text and the style by attempting to render them more accessible. The danger of the translation of the *sourcier* (he who privileges the source) is to remain glued to the hermetical aspects of the original text, above all in poetry, satisfied with preserving expressions or a turn of phrase without illuminating their obscurity and thereby facilitating the task of the reader. The ideal for the translator is to navigate between the two attitudes, to render the text sufficiently "tamed" so that the foreign public can understand it, but at the same time, to leave the text with enough flavor so that the reader can appreciate what the original text offers (profundity, complexity, tragic elements, poetic subtleties, sensitivity, etc.). Translation, when all is said and done, can only be betrayal ("Traduttore, traditore," said Dante), that is the premise; but betrayal must be limited as much as possible, that is to say, by replacing all word-for-word automatic transcription by a long and fruitful meditation on the meaning. Hence it has been decidedly advantageous for me to be able to consult with the poet herself in the course of translating her work, enhanced by the fact that she speaks impeccable English and has taught literature for over a quarter of a century. Together we have been able to re-inject life into verses where my translation might have

taken away the breath or mute the original voice within them.

One of the most difficult aspects of translating Professor Desvignes' poetry was remaining faithful to various *tonalités* within this very diverse collection: the classical dignity of *The Portal of the Lionesses*, the ironic, meditative, and emotional feelings voiced in *Screams in the Night*, the themes of lost love and passing time and death apparent in *My Heart, Little by Little the Night is Falling*, the cryptic, yet insightful descriptions of 105 miniatures of painter Michel Dufour in *The Indian Newspaper*, and the various tones found in the *Diverse Poetry* that ends the collection. It should become apparent to readers of Desvignes' poetry that her control of both form and content of the variety of poems we will consider here demonstrates that she has mastered the genre of poetry with the same finesse she has shown with the novel, short fiction, and drama.

Sources of Desvignes' Poetic Inspiration

Lucette Desvignes' poetic ability is anchored in her creative intuition, a result of her rigorous academic formation, the expression of life experiences, a reaction to places she has traveled, and often an attempt to articulate her personal encounters with culture and art.

We all know that creative intuition is innate, while writing skills are learned. Hence Lucette Desvignes readily concedes that her teaching was an enlightening and formative apprenticeship for the writing career she has chosen. "For 25 years," she notes, "I dabbled in the literature of others, so I must have learned something from all that! I don't regret my past university career because it allowed me to acquire a broad spectrum of different views on literature and probably sharpened my own sensitivity."¹ Desvignes also remembers the painful experiences of those war years that imbued her with decidedly humanistic perspectives. Following the *Libération*, she was spirited by an Olympian determination to dedicate herself to the life of the mind, and admits that over the years she had filled drawer after drawer with sheets of paper on which she had scribbled poems and short stories and plays without intending to publish them — forerunners of the works to come.²

One of the sources of Professor Desvignes' poetry is her love of antiquity and travel,³ hence a series of poems entitled *La Porte des Lionnes/The Portal of Lionesses*, based on the image of the gateway into Mycenæ. The famous portal image serves as an entry into Desvignes' fascination with the Greek concept of *Anankè*, or Destiny, a poetic *Dialogue with Pan*, a recreation of the legendary stories of ancient heroes and heroines wandering the deserted streets of Tyrinth and Mycenæ and Epidaurus. Perhaps the most prevalent source of Professor Desvignes' poetry is found in the perils and pitfalls of life itself, to which she has given poignant voice in her *Screams in the Night* and in *My Heart, Little by Little the Night is Falling*.

The Fusion of Poetry and Art

Lucette Desvignes' poetic imagination has also consistently found inspiration in her admiration of art. For more than 25 years, she has made presentations of exhibits featuring the work of such artists as Michel Dufour, Michel Couqueberg, and Pierre Leygonie, and, more recently, she wrote the poetic introduction, as well as insightful commentaries, to a volume containing the paintings of Marianne Benkö.⁴ Many artists have asked her to compose poetic interpretations of their work displayed in galleries. One such example is *Le Journal Indien*, where 105 miniatures of painter Michel Dufour are accompanied by 105 short poems by Lucette Desvignes.⁵

The genesis of this dual approach to art is described in the book's Introduction: "Chance so ordained that the painter Michel Dufour received from Lawrence Durrell a daily newspaper printed in India. How fascinatingly beautiful these indecipherable Hindi letters, and again here and there some equally hermetic Arabic graphisms . . . The Orient was silently offered to a Western imagination: why not dream it? And, in exchange, why not offer this ephemeral symbol of existence an admission into Duration through the medium of Art? Torn into a hundred fragments (each of them imbedded in the paintings which drew from them inspiration to dream about India), the Indian newspaper was reshaped into a living body from then on destined for permanence. A

mysterious duration was substituted for its fugitive primeval truth, which had been one day's relevance. In this nonrepresentational inspiration, oniric forms—evoking hanging vines and plants or clouds—give these patches of color a strange power over one's imagination, which feels attracted to the Far East."

Through the music and the clash of words, Lucette Desvignes' poetical accompaniment to Dufour's miniatures aims at expressing the impression received when she was gazing at these confessional paintings. To each painting its own short poem, in the Japanese haiku style: no descriptive comment, but rather a lyrical rendering of an aesthetic emotion longing to be transmitted in its turn. A passionate deciphering digs out the painter's secret presence in his contemplation or his effervescence, clearly pointing at the meanings, enhancing contrasts and symbols. The common recollections of the books about India the poet and the painter had read in their childhood, the impetus of their well-attuned imaginations—all became associated in a subtle complicity, and so could bloom through color into suggestions of an Indian decor, into visions of a luxuriant jungle proliferating over civilization, into references to Hindu gods and goddesses, those who create such as Vishnu, those who destroy such as Shiva, those who kill such as Kali, those who command the cosmic order such as Brahma. The constant battle between Darkness and Light, Violence and Serenity, Balance and Turbulence thus appeared as obvious. Above all, the struggle of each newspaper fragment (which in its time was the truth, was an event, was life) against the external forces which want to swallow it up concludes on a stimulating keynote as the re-creation through Art succeeded in settling it into beauty and duration. In order to follow the painter's inspiration harmoniously, the elaborate structure of each poem is a personal response to the free-flowing, dream-like forms and colors, as shown in the following sample from *Le Journal Indien*:



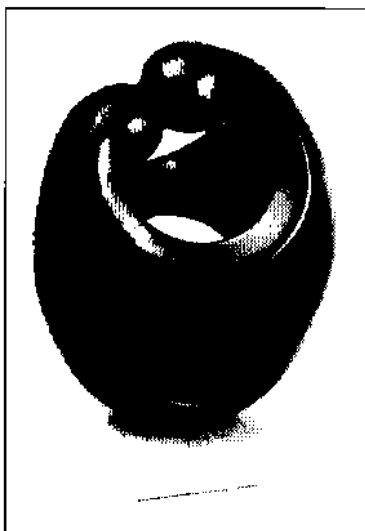
*Comment le renouveau du matin
pourrait-il éclore
sans le parfum des tubéreuses?*

*How can the renewal of morning
show itself
without the perfume of the tuberose?*

Lucette Desvignes has also written poems to accompany the sculpture of Michel Couqueberg in a *plaquette* or catalogue of his work entitled *Couqueberg, Sculpteur: Dessins, Maquettes, Sculptures* (Dijon: Imprimerie L.C.O., 1996) — a catalogue that contains a page dedicated to the poet: “Many thanks to the writer and friend whose complicity and talent have accompanied me in my efforts throughout the years, true testimonial of an ‘Artistic Osmosis’.” In 2004, a superb volume of 200 pages includes, aside from a long and substantial preface, a choice of Desvignes’ poems accompanying Couqueberg’s sculptures.⁶

It is obvious, as Professor Desvignes wrote the *Préface* for the catalogue, that her prose took on a poetic tone. She wrote this description of Couqueberg’s art: “Pathways of creation, impenetrable, irrepressible . . . One fine day the work is there. It seems to have sprung forth, suddenly, and no doubt came to light in the fever of a brutal birth, but in reality it emerged from the secret of the deep following a gestation of which no one was aware. It tore itself away little by little from the

limbo that held it captive, as yet unformed, and at the same time giving it strength. It separated itself, slowly eddying forth, from the mysterious strata where it had long been engulfed. Suddenly it was ready to appear, open its eyes to the light, and show itself to the world.” She interprets Couqueberg’s sculpture below (*The Secret*, bronze, original work (1/8) (31 x 19x 19) as follows:

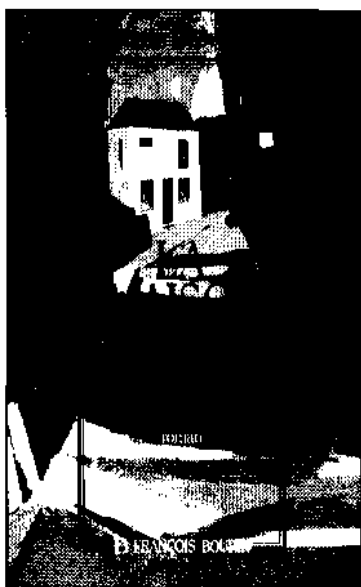


*De la mère à la fille
un secret passe
Qu'importent les mots échangés?
L'amour partagé
remplit tout l'espace*

*From the mother to the daughter
a secret passes
What matters, the words exchanged?
The shared love
fills the entire space*

Lucette Desvignes has also had a long-standing connection with the artwork of Pierre Leygonie, whose exhibitions she has often presented and whose paintings are often massive representations of a variety of themes and subjects inspired by his native Le Creusot and of images gleaned from his travels, especially to Italy.

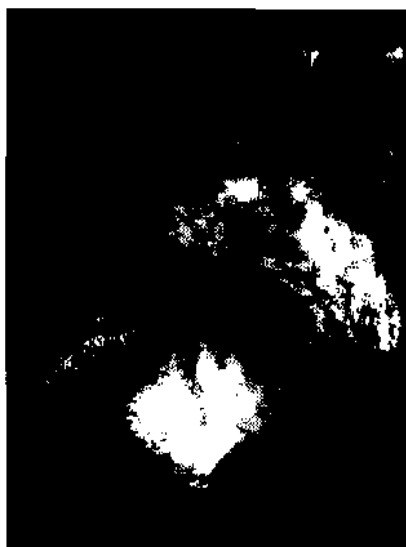
One of Leygonie’s paintings adorns the cover of one of Desvignes’ novels, *La Maison sans Volets*. The painting was presented to her by the artist, who was inspired to paint it when he first read the manuscript of her novel, and eventually will be bequeathed to the Center for Studies on Lucette Desvignes, together with the rest of her manuscripts. The cover painting depicts a deserted Parisian suburb during the somber season surrounding All Saints’ Day, suggesting the frightening nocturnal atmosphere where crimes will take place in the novel.



*Un quartier désert de banlieue
parisienne voué à une prochaine
démolition. Jardins en friche,
brouillard et tristesse de Toussaint,
ombres fugitives, clochards,
squatters invisibles . . .*

*A deserted neighborhood of a
Parisian suburb destined for
imminent demolition. Yards turned
to wasteland, the fog and sadness
of All Saints' Day, fugitive
shadows, vagabonds, invisible
squatters . . .*

The following reproduction of Benkő's "Le Nid" or "Nest" appears in *Red and Blue Fires* (The Hague: Terra Promessa Art Gallery, 2004) — a volume containing an introduction and poetic commentaries by Lucette Desvignes in French, English, and Dutch.



*Marianne Benkő n'explique rien,
une fois qu'elle nous sait entrés
dans son univers de Ruissellement.
Couleurs intenses ou délicates,
traînées lumineuses, molles
transparences, nous baignons dans
une poésie de l'informulé
où tout est calme et beauté.*

*Marianne Benkő explains nothing,
once she knows we have entered
into her streaming universe.
Intense or delicate hues, bright
trails, limp transparencies: we
are immersed in a poetry of the
unformulated where
everything is stillness and beauty.*

Poster announcing the vernissage of the exhibit of Dufour's miniatures
accompanied by the poetry of Lucette Desvignes at The Works in Newark,
Ohio on October 4, 2003.

Meet the Painter and the Poet !!!



celebrating the fusion of
the painting of Michel Dufour
and the poetry of Lucette Desvignes

Announcing the opening of an exhibit

Extraits de la Poésie de Lucette Desvignes

Anankè

Ils voulaient, les Grecs nos pères,
Ils voulaient expliquer la détresse

Ils avaient expliqué déjà
la Beauté avec leurs Trois Grâces
Ils avaient surtout expliqué la Mort
avec ces trois sœurs tricoteuses
qui ne faisaient rien autre que détricoter

Alors ils s'attaquèrent à la détresse
pour en l'expliquant l'apprivoiser peut-être

Ils crurent d'abord que Moira expliquerait tout
Moira la superbe avec ses yeux de glace
la jalousie d'en-haut envoyée sur la terre
pour étouffer entre ses bras
l'humain trop grand trop beau trop fort trop droit
beau comme un arbre faisant de l'ombre à l'Olympe
Mais il restait les laids les faibles les tordus
et cependant ils connaissaient aussi le désespoir
que Moira la dure écartait sans les voir
et ce n'était jamais vers Moira
qu'ils se fondaient à tourner leur rancune
avec le poing levé et des imprécations
lancées au ciel comme des cailloux

Ensuite ils crurent, les Grecs nos pères,
qu'une fois mis à nu
le manège de Dikè l'inexorable
ils sauraient pourquoi le malheur les frappait

Excerpts from Desvignes' Poetry

Anankè

They wanted, the Greeks, our fathers,
They wanted to explain Distress

They had already explained
Beauty with its three Graces
They had above all explained Death
with its three sisters at their knitting
who did nothing but unravel

So they tackled the problem of Distress
so that by explaining it they might tame it

They at first believed that Moira would explain it all
Superb Moira, with her glacial eyes
celestial jealousy sent down to earth
to suffocate in her arms
the human too beautiful too strong too straightforward
beautiful like a tree overshadowing Olympus
But there remained the ugly the weak the twisted ones
that hard-hearted Moira dismissed without seeing them
and yet they too knew despair
and it was never towards Moira
that they thought it fit to vent their rancor
with fists raised and with imprecations
 thrown at the heavens like stones

Then they believed, the Greeks, our fathers,
that once laid bare
the stratagem of Dike the inexorable
they would know why unhappiness struck at them

Diké la sourde, qui distribue
 en gros en large et en travers
 une masse de récompenses et de châtements
 lauriers et piétinements gloire et misère
 amours et plaies
 Mais ce qu'elle laisse tomber d'en haut
 avec négligence — ou malveillance, qu'en sait-on?
 c'est ce qu'elle puise dans sa réserve de justice
 à tâtons, sans examiner le cas de chacun
 Comme cela vient comme cela se trouve
 Et le mérite écarté dédaigné voyait les gredins
 et les sots se faire couronner d'olivier et de pampres

Alors ils crurent, les Grecs nos pères,
 (avec ce désespoir qui débordait
 et ne trouvant nulle part sa raison profonde)
 alors ils crurent que Némésis
 régnait enténébrée sur leur destin
 Némésis la sauvage la pincée l'intolérante
 que toute joie d'ici-bas blesse au vif
 jusqu'à ne lui laisser d'espoir d'apaisement
 qu'en la revanche et le saccage
 Némésis tapie guettant les éclairs de bonheur
 les miettes d'amour la générosité des élans
 pour tôt ou tard mieux brandir au bout du bras
 la facture inexorable . . .
 Talion marqué à son sceau :
 non point pour mutilation voulue
 un Wergeld s'essayant à compenser la perte
 mais bien au terme souvent bousculé de la jouissance
 l'amende l'impôt la taxation
 pour avoir goûté sur le pouce
 à des félicités interdites

Dike the deaf one, who distributes
 right and left and everywhere
 a mass of rewards and punishments
 laurels and trappings
 glory and misery
 loves and wounds
 But what she lets fall from above
 out of negligence — or by design, who knows?
 it's what she draws from her reserve of justice
 groping, without regard for each individual case
 The way it works out, that's the way it is
 And disdained merit thus refused saw scoundrels
 and fools getting crowned with olive branches and vines

Then they believed, the Greeks, our fathers,
 (with despair running over
 yet not finding anywhere its deep meaning)
 then they believed that Nemesis
 held some veiled reign over their destiny
 Nemesis the savage the tight-lipped the intolerant one
 whom all joy here below wounds to the core
 leaving neither hope nor respite
 except in revenge and havoc
 Nemesis lurking on the prowl for flashes of happiness
 crumbs of love generosity of impulses
 in order, sooner or later, to hold at arm's length
 the inexorable invoice . . .
 Talion marked by her seal:
 not at all for every wilful mutilation
 a Wergeld attempting to compensate the loss
 but rather at the often jostled end of enjoyment
 the fine the tax the price-fix for having tasted in haste
 forbidden pleasures

Et frénétiquement les Grecs nos pères
 mirent l'une à côté de l'autre
 ces trois ombres qu'ils avaient eux-mêmes baptisées
 et qu'ils voyaient toujours rôder, l'une ou l'autre,
 sur les ruines et la catastrophe
 Moira Némésis et Dikè
 Némésis Dikè Moira
 Dikè Moira Némésis
 Chacun pouvait donc à sa guise
 en tenir une pour responsable
 une seule s'il le voulait
 Mais à elles trois
 en Trinité dévoreuse et muette
 elles ne pouvaient qu'avoir été la cause
 de la souffrance et du malheur
 de l'écrasement
 de la détresse
 sans risque pour quiconque de se tromper

Et cependant nul apaisement
 ne leur venait, aux Grecs nos pères,
 et la source de leurs maux
 n'était pas plus claire
 d'avoir été attribuée aux Ténébreuses
 qui piétinaient l'homme par haine
 jalousie mépris ou indifférence
 Et la raison des récompenses
 n'était pas plus claire non plus
 semilles d'ivraie répandues d'un geste large
 sur la lie du troupeau humain
 C'est alors qu'ils décidèrent les Grecs nos pères
 que pour trouver la paix
 au sein du désespoir

And frantically the Greeks our fathers
 placed side by side
 these three shadows they themselves had baptized
 and that they had always seen prowling, one or the other
 among ruins and calamity
 Moira Nemesis and Dike
 Nemesis Dike Moira
 Dike Moira Nemesis
 Each could then according to fancy
 hold one of them responsible
 Only one if they so wished
 But the three of them
 as a devouring and mute Trinity
 they could but be the cause
 of suffering and unhappiness
 of collapse
 of distress
 without the risk of anyone being mistaken

And yet no appeasement
 came to them, the Greeks, our fathers,
 and the source of their evils
 was not any more obvious
 for having been assigned to the three Shadows
 that trampled on man out of hatred
 jealousy disdain or indifference
 And the reason for the rewards
 was not more obvious either
 this sowing of weeds with a sweeping gesture
 on the dregs of the human flock
 It was then that they decided
 the Greeks our fathers
 that to find peace
 in the bosom of despair

le calme au sein de la souffrance
 la force au sein de la mise en pièces
 il leur fallait cesser
 de se torturer
 d'échaffauder périlleusement
 la théorie sur le fait
 de se leurrer
 sur les raisons d'être de la déresse
 et feindre d'y trouver consolation

Et ils firent avec résignation
 et sagesse
 sortir de l'ombre la sœur cadette
 la modeste
 la terrible
 la féroce
 à laquelle d'abord ils n'avaient pas
 accordé un coup d'œil
 Tuè la Chance
 l'inentamable
 l'indestructible
 celle qu'on ne peut ni fléchir
 ni supplier
 celle qui regarde où elle choisit de regarder
 avec ses yeux vides

Et comme le loup qui plus tard refermera ses yeux
 sans chercher à savoir comment il a péri
 ils cessèrent de lécher leurs blessures
 et s'installèrent debout au sein de leurs décombres
 de toute leur stature
 pour vivre debout
 afin que debout Hécate pût les faucher
 au terme de leur longue attente immobile

serenity in the bosom of suffering
strength in the bosom of fragmentation
they would have to stop
torturing themselves
perilously piling up
theory onto fact
deluding themselves
as to the reasons for the existence of distress
and feigning to find consolation therein

And they brought with reluctance
and wisdom
the young sister from the shadows
the modest one
the terrible one
the ferocious one
at whom they had never
even given a glance
Tyche, hazardous Fortune
the unshakeable one
the indestructible one
she who cannot be moved
 nor entreated
she who looks where she chooses to look
 with vacuous eyes

And like the wolf who later will again close his eyes
without seeking to know how he has perished
they ceased to lick their wounds
and decided to stand amidst their ruins
 with all their stature
to live erect
in order that Hecate could hew them down
at the end of their long motionless wait

Lettre Morte

O le non dit, l'informulé,
 le flot du cœur débordant qui se perd parmi les sables
 parmi les herbes secrètes
 Source qui sourd sans bruit
 qui s'étale s'infiltré se cache
 devrait se fondre dans les larmes
 à rencontrer leur voie jumelle mais ne s'y mêle pas
 mais les fuit
 mais fore dans la solitude son propre sillage de sang

O le non dit du Nevermore
 l'informulé du bon vouloir perdu
 Trop tard Trop tard Jamais plus
 Le temps jamais trouvé encore
 toujours Demain
 toujours Plus tard
 jusqu'au bord de l'abîme
 jusqu'à sa falaise de gencive interrompue
 à sénilement mâcher le vide
 jusqu'au néant où toute parole se fige

Et puis — pire
 plus lourd plus sauvage plus ravageur
 pire pire —
 ô le non dit de maintenant
 l'informulé de l'heure présente
 par souffrance de n'avoir pas dit
 de n'avoir pas su dire
 de n'avoir pas cherché à dire
 quand il en était l'heure

Dead Letter

O the unsaid, the unspoken,
the wave of overflowing heart lost in the sands
among secret weeds
Source that gushes without a sound
that settles infiltrates hides
should break down into tears
when meeting their twin paths but does not mix with them
but flees them
but plows in solitude its own furrows of blood

O the unsaid of the Nevermore
the unspoken of lost goodwill
Too late Too late Never again
Time never yet found
always Tomorrow
always Later
up to the edge of the precipice
up to the cliff of its interrupted gum
 senilely chewing the void
up to the nothingness where all words coagulate

And then — worse
heavier, more savage, more destructive
worse worse —
o the unsaid of now
the unspoken of the present hour
the suffering of not having said
of not knowing how to say
of not having tried to say
when the time was right

Marasme

L'Ange de l'À quoi bon m'a frôlé de son aile
 ainsi va commencer mon démantèlement
 Il ne m'a pas touchée au front plus qu'à l'épaule
 et je ne saurais dire, au fond, s'il me visait.
 Il a surgi auprès de moi au cœur des ombres
 comme un fantôme terne et triste et grelottant.
 De son regard sans yeux sans iris sans paupières
 il a versé l'ennui sur les tisons fragiles
 où mon cœur s'essayait à conserver la vie.
 Son geste sans substance au bout d'un bras sans chair
 a posé une taie sur mon rayonnement.
 Son plumage sans forme a sur mon épiderme
 desséché tout au long un passage roussi.
 Jacob et l'Ange aussi
 ont lutté âprement, têtus, dans les ténèbres.
 Jacob, lui, trouvait-il au noir ce goût funèbre?
 D'une manche flottante et vide
 l'Ange de l'À quoi bon a fait neiger la cendre:
 Tout ce que je touchais alors s'est effrité.
 Les bruits se sont dissous et les parfums flétris.
 L'Avant Mort s'est tapie à mes pieds inutiles
 à petits sons menus et dans l'indifférence.
 Voilà que tous les mots ont perdu leur saveur.
 Il semble qu'autrefois j'aie aimé le printemps . . .
 Quand je veux dire: aimer, pourtant, c'est abandon
 recul repli oubli qui montent à mes lèvres.
 Mon dos se tasse sous l'À quoi bon de l'automne.
 Quelle antienne saurait ranimer mes doigts morts?
 À quoi bon redresser son squelette et pour qui?
 À quoi bon? Je n'ai plus à replier sur moi
 que quelques sourdes litanies de fin du temps.
 Tout est rompu, tout ô Villon part en lambeaux
 Chairs molles s'écaillant crissante chevelure
 effondrement du corps léthargie du vouloir

Marasmus

The Angel of What's the use has grazed me with his wing
 so hence will begin my undoing
 He touched me no more on the forehead than on the shoulder
 and I wouldn't know, at bottom, if he was aiming at me.
 He surged out near me from the heart of the shadows
 like a spiritless ghost and sad and shivering.
 From his gaze without eyes sans irises sans eyelids
 he poured out annoyance onto the frail embers
 where my heart endeavored to preserve life.
 His gesture without substance at the end of a fleshless arm
 placed a white speck over my radiance.
 His shapeless plumage has dried a scorched path
 along the length of my skin.
 Jacob and the Angel, too,
 wrestled bitterly, obstinate, in the dark shadows.
 Did Jacob find that blackness had this mournful taste?
 From a floating, empty sleeve
 the Angel of What's the use made cinders snow down:
 All that I touched then crumbled.
 Noises were dissolved and fragrances withered.
 The Before Death lurked at my useless feet
 heedlessly making little mincing sounds.
 Now every word has lost its savor.
 It seems I loved Springtime in bygone days . . .
 Yet when I utter Love, it's dereliction
 retreat withdrawl oblivion that rise to my lips.
 My back shrinks under the What's the use of Autumn.
 What anthem could revive my dead fingers?
 What's the use in straightening one's skeleton and for whom?
 What's the use? There's only left for me to shroud myself
 in some hollow litanies for the end of time.
 All is broken, all — oh Villon — ends in shreds
 flabby flesh flaking off crunching tresses
 collapsing hody lethargy of the will

épaisseur du parler aux bredouillants mutismes
 chancelante torpeur installée dans ma nuit
 enlissement du souvenir privé d'image
 radotage bavoux du non combat voulu
 lâchez-tout lâchez-tout affaissement dérive
 dernier rideau tiré tiré sur les ténèbres

Humeurs d'Automne

Un pan de ciel s'est faufilé à travers branches
 chargé de pluie
 et lourd d'une lumière blanche
 Je l'aperçois un peu quand je me penche

Mon cœur pourquoi cette tristesse?
 Te désoleras-tu sans cesse?

Pour moi aussi le ciel est par-dessus le toit
 ni bleu ni calme
 seulement triste puisqu'il est sans toi
 et que rien ne sera jamais comme autrefois

Mon cœur pourquoi cette douleur?
 Pourquoi, dis-moi? Pourquoi, mon cœur?

Le bord du toit me délimite un paysage
 gonflé de pluie
 peuplé de branches, de branchages
 Pas de lumière où puiser du courage

Mon cœur pourquoi cette souffrance?
 Pourquoi cette désespérance?

thickness of speech sputtering silences
 wobbling torpor settled in my night
 swallowing up of imageless recollections
 slobbering drivel of the wished-for surrender
 letgo of all letgo of all depression adrift
 last curtain drawn drawn on the shadows

Autumn Blues

A patch of sky snuck in between branches
 laden with rain
 and heavy with a white light
 I perceive a little of it when I lean over

My heart why this sadness?
 Must you incessantly be so desolate?

For me too the sky is above the roof
 neither blue nor ealm
 only sad because it is without you
 and because nothing will ever be as it once was

My heart why this pain?
 Why, tell me? Why, my heart?

The edge of the roof blocks out a countryside
 swollen with rain
 peopled with branches, with boughs
 No well of light where courage can be drawn

My heart why this suffering?
 Why this despair?

L'une après l'autre on ne voit pas tomber les gouttes
 c'est en rideau
 que l'eau du ciel va se déverser toute
 tranquillement toute la nuit sans doute
 Écoute le bruit de la pluie
 Mon cœur, c'est le chant de la vie

Sur le rebord du toit le métal tinte
 Nul chant d'oiseau
 n'en déplaît à Verlaine ou à l'absinthe
 pour se faire écouter comme une plainte

Mon âme, ne sois pas jalouse
 si mon cœur chante *Tiu Roof Blues*

— 13 septembre 2004

Conclusion

We have commented briefly on the perils and promise of the sort of collaborative translation that led to the publication of *La Poésie de Lucette Desvignes/The Poetry of Lucette Desvignes* — a bilingual collection of poetry that offered many challenges as the poet and I worked together to reach our common objectives. Our study has revealed the fundamental sources of her poetic inspiration, with particular focus on the fortuitous fusion between Desvignes' poetry and art. Finally, we have provided for those not acquainted with Desvignes' poetry some samples of her work, hoping to stimulate those fond of *Belles Lettres* to learn more about the voluminous contribution of Lucette Desvignes to the literature and culture of our time — a fact which we feel, as she marks her 80th year, should be gratefully celebrated.

One after another one does not see the drops fall
 it's in a eurtain
 that the water of the sky is going to pour out
 all quietly all night no doubt
 Listen to the noise of the rain
 My heart, it is the chant of life

On the edge of the roof the metal tinkles
 No song of bird
 with all deference to Verlaine or to absinth
 to be heard like a lamentation

My soul, don't be jealous
 if my heart sings *Tin Roof Blues*

— Septembre 13, 2004

NOTES

¹“Interview à *L’Idée libre*, À la rencontre d’un écrivain: Lucette Desvignes,” *Propos recueillis par Elizabeth Irubetagoiena*, repr. in *Studies on Lucette Desvignes and the Twentieth Century*, Volume 2 (1992), 21. All translations in this study are my own.

²For the most recent bibliography of Desvignes’ work see *La Poésie de Lucette Desvignes/The Poetry of Lucette Desvignes*, ed./trans. Jerry L. Curtis (Potomac, MD: Scripta Humanistica, 2005), 203-211.

³For references to Desvignes’ travels, see her autobiography, *Le Miel de l’Aube: Une Enfance en Bourgogne sous l’Occupation* (Precy-sous-Thil: Éditions de l’Armançon, 1999), 59-76.

⁴Marianne Benkō, *Red and Blue Fires* (Den Haag: Uitgeverij Hapax, 2004).

⁵Lucette Desvignes and Michel Dufour, *Le Journal Indien* (Precy-sous-Thil: Éditions de l’Armançon, 2003), ed. Jerry L. Curtis.

⁶Michel Couqueberg, *Couqueberg, Sculpteur: Dessins, Maquettes, Sculptures* (Dijon: Imprimerie LC.O., 1996); see also Michel Couque-

berg, *Couqueberg, Sculpteur: Dessins, Maquettes, Sculptures* (Dijon: 2004).

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