A celebration of the writing of Ilse Aichinger with an evening of performances of poetry, prose and philosophy from

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Tuesday, 8 March 2016, 7.00pm
Austrian Cultural Forum London
28 Rutland Gate, SW7 1PQ

FOR FURTHER DETAILS AND BOOKING VISIT: www.acflondon.org
This event is free, but booking is essential as seating is limited.

The Bound Man, and Other Stories by Ilse Aichinger (trans. Eric Mosbacher): isbn 978-1-909570-02-3

CP Reader’s Union seeks common spaces for readers and writers to delve into the possibilities and limitations of ‘coming together’ in our contemporary society. www.copypress.co.uk

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This evening begins in the 1955 when ten short stories by Ilse Aichinger, translated by Eric Mosbacher, are published in English as *The Bound Man*. This evening also begins when Vit Hopley, author and director and editor of Copy Press, has the vision to publish these stories – this translation – as a contemporary work of fiction in the *Common Intellectual* series of Copy Press. And this evening also begins with a photograph taken at Greenham Common, in 2015, and which has behind it, unseen by the eye and akin to a massive quantum field, the Women’s Peace Camp that began in 1985 and stayed put for 19 years. And this evening begins in both 1906 and 1977 when International Women’s Day was becoming formed and making itself present in the world.

Quite a few beginnings – and I’m sure there are more. And what is to be celebrated, alongside the remarkable writing of Ilse Aichinger, is that this evening there is nothing stopping these beginnings all happening at once here now. At this moment, time is enjoying itself.

Let’s say that time is sparkling, bringing past and present into proximity to each other, letting beginnings come into contact with each other and become excessively near to each other – yes, it’s as the comma that if you stay with for a while shows you and gets you experiencing a time that does something (profound) to the order of things – *translation, friendship*.

Tonight the Austrian Cultural Forum, London has made it possible for us to come together to share *translation, share friendship*. And what we are sharing is the possibilities of a comma.
Plurality of Languages
Amélie Mourgue d'Algue
8-3-2016

translations of the eponymous short entry of Hannah Arendt’s Denktahebuch …

https://vimeo.com/162245643
Eshu meets Aichinger

Olumide Popoola
8-3-16

_Eshu, do not undo me,
Do not falsify the words of my mouth.
Do not misguide the movements of my feet,
You who translates yesterday’s words,
Into novel utterances,
Do not undo me,
I bear your sacrifice._

My offering today are reflections taking as starting points the ‘The Bound Man’ and ‘The Story in a Mirror’, and the themes of tonight’s event: translation, as in understanding something/somebody across a distance; friendship, as in what might be sharing; and the notion of the pause.

I’m responding to them by drawing on a Nigerian, or more precisely Yoruba deity, the god of the crossroads Eshu. Eshu is a useful thought-tool if one wants to assess things we cannot name, things that are inevitable, that belong to our lives but which we cannot necessarily always see or frame in appropriate manner or with adequate words. Eshu is also concerned with things we avoid or fail to confront, whether consciously or unconsciously, deliberately or not.
Eshu challenges friendships in particular or, to be more precise, the taking for granted in friendships. Eshu is known to trick people and to produce quarrels between friends, who could have never imagined to quarrel, to expose underlying patterns of laziness and failing to address deeper concerns. He tricks us in this manner not because he is cruel, but to help propel us onto new levels of humanity. To get us to think, to be clearer, to see more angles and, at the same time, accept that we can never see all of them at once. Each time we turn, another vanishes from our view.

Literature, and fiction in particular, can do something similar. It can propel us onto new levels of understanding. But it does so best, I think, when we cannot quite grasp how. When we cannot quite make out immediately what has happened in our consciousness and take with us a feeling of epiphany, a moment of surprise and recognition that remains unclear and in need of engagement long after the text has been put away.

Writing is powerful when its elements come together and not all the signs are overtly signposting. The reader has to unravel and think and turn and turn to try and see all angles. Yet as we know from Eshu, we can never see all angles together, at the same time. They shift and need to be adapted and re-accommodated.

Aichinger’s symbolism and allegorical stories fit my understanding of Eshu’s trickery in the sense of being highly developed images that allow us to assess aspects of life, and the relationship to knowing it (life) without the burden of clear signposting. She asks us to reflect on issues that are mundane yet complex and all
pervasive, and we might not always know immediately that we have started thinking about them, or what exactly we are thinking about.

Aichinger, like Eshu, forces us to see differently and look anew as we are shown angles that have been un- or under-explored, some of which we perhaps don’t want to confront. In ‘The Bound Man’ we are faced with the choosing of limitation over the opportunity of freedom. It asks of us to delve further to question what a clear definition of freedom could be but in the end we are all bound by the limitations of life.

Eshu teaches us that we can never really know each other, or life, completely; there is no ultimate translation, and therefore we have to accept, to some extent, what and how life presents itself, whether we can always grasp it or not. The ungraspable, the untranslatable, the things that need unravelling for each and every person in their own terms, is the powerful opportunity of fiction.

The element of surprise, the epiphany that cannot quite be framed or translated in its entirety, the surprise that might perhaps be unsettling, emerges as the valuable moment. Not a conclusion in itself but an opening. This unknowing understanding reaffirms our humanity by not pre-inscribing anything, or demanding clear sign-posting, be it as readers, writers, or persons in general. Because it asks us to pause, and reflect, we enter a moment of emergence, of possibility. A pause is after all an acknowledgement, a brief moment between others.

To share, to be in friendship, is to enter such a moment of emergence, a space for the other to insert themselves, without the burden of pre-conception. It takes time, after all.
And fiction is a place that does not need to explain but is. Here we can test how we can meet each other and ourselves, and therefore life, a new. Amongst the old questions and themes.

And perhaps, there will not be an end to the undoing, the unknowing, the ungraspable, the disruption.

If, between these instances, we create a pause, to acknowledge that we cannot walk across easily, we cannot make meaning directly from what we see or hear.

If I could recount, construct aims and without the burden of direction, without the burden of knowing what means what when and where

isn’t it that we get lost, always, anyway and meaning deducts itself from what is not not known

isn’t it that more than not we prescribe onto all us, however infinite we try to erase the shadows

isn’t it that you can truly never know anything not another, nor ourselves, not the limits of our existence isn’t that the absence of strings, knowing that you can never resolve the knowing or the quest for it

and in the limitation lies the freedom to assign new to overcome and adjust
Note
This is an associative interpretation of Eshu’s attributes in correlation to Aichinger’s themes and the generative freeness of fiction. For more detailed research on Eshu see examples below.

Bibliography


Beier, U. (2001) *The Hunter Thinks the Monkey is not Wise Enough… The Monkey is Wise, but He has his Own Logic*. Bayreuth: Eckhard Breitinger.


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¹ Hyde, 1998, p. 239; Gates, 1988, p. 35
Echoes of The Body
NaoKo TakaHashi
8-3-2016

a soundscape …

https://vimeo.com/158803262
Language, Freedom, Constraint

Emily Jeremiah

8-3-2016

‘Der Jubel beim Lesen von Ilse Aichingers Anderssprachigkeit (...) besteht darin, das Unauffindbare in der eigenen und zwischen den Sprachen bei jedem Lesen neu in Gegenwart zu übersetzen. Dieser Vorgang, so reich an Möglichkeiten, nähert das Lesen dem Schreiben an, fast so, als würde man eine neue Sprache lernen, die nicht nur anders, sondern für jeden anders ist.’ (Uljana Wolf, ‘Das Unauffindbare übersetzen’)

‘The jubilation provoked by the foreignness of Ilse Aichinger’s language (...) involves translating the untraceable that lies in one’s own language, and between languages, into the present, anew, with every reading. This process, so rich in possibilities, brings reading close to writing, quite as if you were learning a new language that is not only other for you, but for everybody.’ (Uljana Wolf, ‘Translating the Untraceable’; EJ’s translation)

So reflects the poet Uljana Wolf, inspired by her involvement in translating Aichinger into English, on Aichinger’s inherent ‘foreignness’.

And so I, a translator, translate Wolf into English, stumbling over ‘bei’ and ‘man’, in particular, as usual, and through questions of ‘otherness’ and difference, so rich and so loaded. If Aichinger is already ‘foreign’, then how to translate her? What does this act tells us about freedom and constraint, about the ‘possibilities’ Wolf refers to?

How apt to talk in those terms when we think of ‘Der Gefesselte’ (‘The Bound Man’), a story about freedom and constraint – about Spielraum, a word I’ll come back to. The story involves a man waking up to find he has been tied up. We know nothing of his past. We know only that he fears ridicule as he makes his way through the landscape, to be spotted by an animal tamer and become a successful circus act.

The story echoes Kafka, especially ‘Der Hungerkünstler’ (‘The Hunger Artist’), and in the opening, ‘Die Verwandlung’ (‘Metamorphosis’). And like Kafka, Aichinger in her sly, elusive, multivalent text asks us to reflect on power and discipline, on will and desire, on animal and human, and, crucially, on liberty and entrapment. What emerges is a complex set of
musings – so dense, so compact, and so disciplined in their suggestive power – about, in particular, questions of human agency.

So the man realizes early on that:

‘Alle Möglichkeiten lagen in dem Spielraum der Fesselung.’ (p. 8)

‘His chances all lay in the amount of free play allowed him by the rope.’ (p. 10; trans. Eric Mosbacher)

‘Spielraum’, literally, ‘play-space’. The freedom to play, space in which to do it. Aichinger herself is playing with the idea of constraint, suggesting that it is only when bound that freedom comes into view.

Freedom is something one has to practise: it is a discipline:

‘Sein Ruhm wuchs von Ort zu Ort, aber seine Bewegungen blieben immer die gleichen, wenige und im Grunde gewöhnliche Bewegungen, die er unternags in dem halbdunklen Zelt immer wieder und wieder üben mußte, um die Leichtigkeit in der Fessel zu behalten. Indem er ganz in ihr blieb, wurde er ihrer auch ledig, und weil sie ihn nicht einschloß, beflügelte sie ihn und gab seinen Sprüngen Richtung.’ (p. 11)

‘His fame grew from place to place but the movements he went through were few and always the same; they were really quite ordinary movements, which he had to practise continually during the day in the half-dark tent in order to retain his shackled freedom. While he remained entirely within the limits set by his rope he was free of it; it did not confine him, but gave him wings and endowed his leaps and jumps with purpose.’ (pp. 12-13)

So ‘the limits set by his rope’ – the German ‘sie’ is more ambiguous – actually free him, and orient him. There is only ‘freedom’ within, alongside, or against constraint.

This story addresses us confidentially. Within the text, we are at first confined to the point of view of the bound man. We do later ‘see’ him from outside, through the perspective of the animal tamer; and then through the eyes of the animal tamer’s wife – and of those of the crowds
who flock to see him ‘perform’ (though there is no real distinction between his performance and his life; like Kafka, Aichinger thematizes art as torturous and all-consuming). These other perspectives grant no explanation, as such, but they evoke the complex interplay between points of view that is always possible.

In the end, though, the bound man flees, unbound, and we ask if the conditions of his belonging – the crampedness, the sores – were not in fact too high a price to pay, in any case – though the triumph he nearly experienced suggests they might have been worth it, had his act not been sabotaged.

To come back to Wolf, the richness of the possibilities in Aichinger’s language are experienced in and through the shackles of language.

As a translator, and as a reader, as a translator-reader, one is both bound and bewinged; without the rope of language, one is nothing, like the final images of white obliteration in Aichinger’s text, when memory no longer persists.
Materiality and Collusion

Rebecca May Johnson
8-3-16

Document 1: Der Gefesselte (The Bound Man)
Document 2: Demystifications
I woke up like this!

Bound

I woke up like this!

Flawless

The Bound Man
Der Gefesselte
in Fesseln that
snake softly
softly into
flesh
tightening
flesh a boa
constrictor
it’s erotic or...
er ist ein held
in seilen
verstrickt in
seilen die den
leib enteignen
entangled in
ties like
Odysseus: to
protect myself
I constrict
myself yes I
can hide in
this theatre of
cruelty where

my ropes just
disappear one,
two, three
rotting bodies
lumpen sores
hard calluses
red rings run
around hidden
weals that
decorate his
lovely legs and
what can not be
spoken of must
be passed over
in silence he
can pass here
in silence but
to be clear the
house of pain
is an effect
and to be clear
a lion in a
cage is a lion
in a cage and a
bound man is
bound to be a
bound man
unless he is
freed and the
Sirens saw his
ties the Sirens
saw his sore
skin half cut
with desire to
get out for
what he was was
a bound man
Brecht cleared that up some years later: der Gefesselte 'fessed up the real story is that they cut his ties and he survived...

Do not look at me do not look at me do not look at me look at my ropes look at my ropes sometimes I imagine that they glitter the riveting fetters sparkle spraying silver bullets that dance ever so playfully against the walls, catching my eye over and over again I remark to myself that I can gaze and gaze and gaze until I fall asleep.

**Epilogue**

I noticed that 'He tried walking

**und bemerkte,**

*dass die Schnur ihm erlaubte,*

*einen Fuß vor den anderen zu setzen’*

is different to

‘and discovered that he could put one foot before the other’ because in the German language the ropes can do the talking.
Demystifications

"I woke up like this"
***Flawless, Beyoncé and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2014)

Penelope wakes unable to leave her weaving room at night or day making and unmaking her bindings.

Everyone in their body.

‘Bound’
Bound 2, Kanye West (2013)

Binding erotic relationships with other things and other bodies.

‘er ist ein held in seilen verstrickt in seilen die den leib enteignen’ [he is a hero in ropes entangled in ropes that remove the body]
Niemands Frau, Barbara Köhler 2007

‘theatre of cruelty’
Antonin Artaud (1938)

‘hidden weals’
The Bound Man

‘what cannot be spoken of must be passed over in silence’
Tractatus Logico Philosophicus, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1921)

‘the house of pain is in effect’
Jump Around, House of Pain (1992)

Odysseus und die Sirenen, Bertolt Brecht (1933)

Allegory of the Cave, Republic, Plato (c.514-520)

und bemerkte, dass die Schnur ihm erlaubte, einen Fuß vor den anderen zu setzen’
Der Gefesselte, Ilse Aichinger (1952)

‘and discovered that he could put one foot before the other’
Translation: an experiment in subjectivity
by Arat
8-3-2016

The OULIPO, Ouvroir de littérature potentielles, or workshop for potential literature, founded in France in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais, was a group of writers who applied strict formulae to their production. Inspired by mathematics, or a form of arithmomania, OULIPO members imposed rules on their writing: these they saw as scaffolding in which the content, the subject, of their literature would be built. This scaffolding could take a variety of forms, equations, a chess board, crosswords, lipogramms, style variations, rhyme conventions, narrative modes. However, these structures or strictures, ‘public games’, should never be obvious and often no trace of them can be discerned in their texts. Despite the myriad of complex layers of self-imposed strictures in Georges Perec’s Life: A User’s Manual, the plot is never fragmented, the characters never forced, the settings hardly alien. Queneau’s The Bark Tree was a translation of Descartes’ Discourse on Method, but nowhere can this reference be seen. As he once said of the scaffolding, ‘it would be dreadful if it showed’. A defected surrealist, Queneau described the OULIPO members as ‘rats who build the labyrinth from which they will try to escape’. This, they believed, would spur creativity, or a special kind of creativity, one that was as committed to a given form as it was to content, if not more. They experimented with limits as the potential for transgression, as exercises in the discovery of rules that may govern exceptions. Against surrealist ‘automatic writing’, they saw no key to poetic revelation in the unconscious. Language was a system, an impossible one, and OULIPO writers, like hackers, were gaming the system because for them creation could only occur within the combinatorial possibilities language allowed.

What happens when the constraints lie in the content rather than its form? What if the rules governing the text in advance were set by its very meaning and the story it tells? What if the subject of the text was the scaffolding rather than the building? Here one would approach the conditions under which translation works. To most, the idea of translation as a creative act is unconvincing. Translators are secretarial workers, linguistic technicians, machine operators, and as such they are recognised by professional bodies, government census, publishers’ contracts and the wage form. But in fact, this second class citizenship, this constrained creativity, affords it the possibility of experimenting with subjectivity. And this is what is most interesting about it, and pleasurable. How so?

Thought about thought, an entire tradition wider than philosophy, has taught us that thought leads us to the deepest interiority. Speech about speech leads us to the outside in which the speaking subject disappears. No doubt, that is why Western thought took so long to think the being of language: as if it had a premonition of the danger that the naked experience of language poses for the self-evidence of the ‘I think’.¹

Contradiction Identity
The anonymity of the translation act bids defiance to the authority of authorship, individual genius and authenticity. The invisibility of the translation act makes the text the real protagonist and creates language as its persona. Undetectable and unobtrusive, the language that translation produces is a mask that must fit without adjustments: the translator is a tailor and a needle worker, not of garments but of skins. The subjectivity produced by and through translation is anonymous and invisible, but also non-identitarian, set transversally, if not beyond, the linguistic communities that are often the currency of exchange of nation states and the glue of their imagined identities. And yet the ‘cultures’ that languages might demarcate are but one aspect that the translation act needs to address; one constraint, but a negligible one. If anything, by the very possibility of entertaining more than one ‘culture’, or ‘identity’, in the form of more than one language in one’s head at any one time, the translator proves how feeble this strategic alliance and alignment of language with culture and identity really is, how arbitrary, artificial and potentially redundant their cherished and overprotected correspondences ultimately are.

And here we come to the first subversion, the power to subvert the many as the one, the people.

Contradiction Heimlich
And yet to describe the subjectivity involved in translation acts one recurs to the metaphors and heuristics of home and foreignness. One of the difficulties is that it is assumed that the translator is operating in the target language as a native. Why should this be the case? Is that necessarily useful? What makes one foreign? Why eliminate foreignness from the experience of reading a different language in your own? What of those at home only when foreign or those whose foreignness has become familiar, in the realm where the limits of acceptable speech loosen up, when one can dance with words to combine them into ambiguities, ambiguity that in any case is potentially intrinsic to all language and without which poetry wouldn’t be possible? William Empson wrote that we have ambiguity when “alternative views might be taken without sheer misreading”. Translation needs to do that. Empson reads poetry as an exploration of conflicts within the author. What exactly is ‘familiar’? How is one at home in a language? Which family must one belong to speak one’s language? The one that in its frigidity and rigidity is only capable of experience through some shared norm? The translator is the foreigner and becoming foreigner is a peculiar situation where you wear the nation state, whether source or target, as your skin. No longer ‘what do you do?’ but ‘where you come from?’ is the ice breaker of conversations with strangers.

I speak of ‘becoming foreign’ as an existential, or experiential condition and phenomenology of being, so not exclusive to us migrants but involving those who stay put and under whose eyes the world metamorphosises into an alien host.

Estrangement is the condition of possibility for our multidinal politics in its destituent aspect. But no matter the extent to which the translator is boxed-in by the labour market and its education industry through labels of nativity, originality, motherhood and source; though branded at birth, the translator is in fact an orphan, at home only when foreign. Foreign to the text, foreign to its author, foreign to the imagined readers across borders either text or author might potentially touch. Anything short of this foreignness, anything short of this openness, anything that subsumes the text to predictions of success or failure, will visibly strike you as a translation. And wouldn’t it be dreadful if it showed.
Contradiction intimacy
Translation is an act of disloyalty and infidelity to the task of nation-building. To the translator, foreignness is both familiar and familial. And whilst a symbiotic relation to the text is necessary, this intellectual intimacy involves a form of distance without detachment, an affinity without endorsement or signature: in the anonymous rendering of the text in another language, the translator is not involved in becoming the author in an act of ventriloquism, but rather in treating the untranslated text as a character in search of an author, striving to make it speak for itself.

And here we subvert the two, the tango, the dialectics. One, no one, one hundred thousand.

Contradiction true truth
The translation act is fundamentally inauthentic but involves no betrayal. One can only speak of betrayal if authenticity entails truth as representation. In translation, at the level of the relationship between text and authorship, truth can never represent. Language destroys this possibility and translation only makes this more evident.

Contradiction papamameme
So the subjectivity produced in the translation act is also fundamentally ambiguous. We have ambiguity when ‘alternative views might be taken without sheer misreading’, and translation involves a sort of linguistic anamorphosis. One is forced to question, in translation, the possibility of authenticity and betrayals thereof. But this level of inauthenticity is also negligible. More importantly, perhaps, what the translation act is inauthentic about is the authenticity one understands as a transparency and translucency of consciousness, as a form of being-true-to-one-self, where the term translation throws into disarray here, much more than ‘true’ or ‘self’, is ‘one’. ‘To forget one’s self is to be actualized by myriad things’. Because the subjectivity involved in the translation act is multitudinally projected, where multitude is not merely a collectivity of some selves, a whole as a sum of its parts be they individual or singular, but a collectivity within a self, an implosion of the self as non-identical or anti-identical, undermining identity at the level of the possibility of its desire.

And here we come to the subversion of the one, the self.

Against self-sameness in space and time, translation spatially expands the text, placing it geographically elsewhere, and throws it in a different time, as a second birth, in another present. Heterotopia.

The subjectivity at play in the translation act is anonymous, invisible, foreign, inauthentic, ambiguous, multitudinal, heterotopian and perhaps, as an experiment in subjectivity, translation belongs to pataphysics, the science of imaginary solutions.

The discourse about which I speak does not pre-exist the nakedness articulated the moment I say ‘I speak’; it disappears the instant I fall silent.²

With thanks to my friends: William Empson *Seven types of ambiguity*, Michel Foucault *The thought of the outside*, George Père* Life: a user’s manual*, Luigi Pirandello *Six characters in search of an author*, Raymond Queneau *Morale élémentaire*, Dogen Zenji *GenjoKoan*

A version of this text was published in B. Buden, B. Mennel, S. Nowotny (eds) *Translating Beyond Europe: Zur politischen Aufgabe der Übersetzung*, Turia + Kant: Verlag, 2013.
On Visionaries

Kristen Kreider
8-3-2016

Excerpts from


VISION SIX
The Choirs of Angels

Then I saw in the secret places in the heights of Heaven two armies of heavenly spirits who shone with great brightness. Those in one of the armies had on their breasts wings, with forms like human forms in front of them, on which human features shone as if in clear water. Those in the second army also had wings on their breasts, which displayed forms like human forms, in which the image of the Son of Man shone as if in a mirror. And I could see no other form either in these or in the others. These armies were arrayed in the shape of a crown around five other armies. Those in the first of these five armies seemed as if they had human forms that shone with great splendor from the shoulders down. Those in the second shone with such great brightness that I could not look at them. Those in the third had the appearance of white marble and heads like human heads, over which torches were burning, and from the shoulders down they were surrounded by an iron-gray cloud. Those in the fourth had forms like human forms and feet like human feet, and wore helmets on their heads, and marble tunics. And those in the fifth had nothing human in their appearance, and shone red like the dawn. And I saw no other form in them.

But these armies were also arrayed like a crown around two others. Those in the first of these other armies seemed to be full of eyes and wings, and in each eye appeared a mirror and in each mirror a human form, and they raised their wings to a celestial height. And those in the second burned like fire, and had many wings, in which they shone as if in a mirror all the Church ranks arrayed in order. And I saw no other shape either in these or in the others. And all these armies were singing with marvellous voices all kinds of music about the wonders that God works in blessed souls, and by this God was magnificently glorified.

And I heard the voice from Heaven, saying to me:

1 God wonderfully formed and ordered His creation

Almighty and Ineffable God, Who was before all ages and had no beginning and will not cease to be when all ages are ended, marvellously by His will created every creature and marvellously by His will set it in its place. How! He destined some creatures to stay on the earth, but others to inhabit the celestial regions. He also set in place the blessed angels, both for human
dead. They have gone home and left me, and now they are lighting the candles; there is a smell of fresh pastry and burnt twigs. A snowstorm has started outside; how good it is to come back home before the snowstorm! And I? I am not dead! Angels, come quickly, come and save me before the breath leaves my body. Why don't you come and save me? Are you dead? Oh, yes, now I know, it was you who died; we buried you yesterday evening. Or didn't you die? Was it you who were buried alive under the marble slab? I'll help you; wait, I'll stir myself, I'll lift the slab! With all my strength I will strive to lift it with the flat of my hand. Good heavens, how light it is! I feel I am flying, like the angels. The stone is snow.

Moonlight is flooding into the room; it is so light that the closed doors might easily be mistaken for open windows. The walls have turned round, and the beds and cupboards have secretly changed places. I feel giddy. What has woken me? Who has turned the heavy slab into snow? There is a noise in my ears, but it wasn't that—no one is awoken by their own voice. My heart beats hard; no, it is not my heart that beats the window over there; it isn't the wind, either, that shakes the panes, that has torn them open then slammed them shut from outside. Is it you?

How had I been able to doubt? It was not I, my angel, who thought for a moment that you were the wind. How white your dress was, there was snow in your hair, it was snowing so thickly that I could not see how many more there were behind you. But there must have been many, a whole host! May I come nearer? Should I pray? How still you stand! May I open the window? I want to see you better. I want to see how you can fly! Move! How big are your wings? What have you on your feet? I want to open the window for you and ask you in, my angel, see you upset everything with your broad wings, and make you welcome.

But as I approached the window I saw the angel shake its head, and I remembered that my sister always said that one must not look angels in the face, and I realised that the angel
did not want me to touch the hem of its dress. Once more I had a horrible doubt that it might be snow, a piece of rag blown by the wind, a dream. I wanted to see the angel spread its wings.

A gust of wind came through the window, and snow blew into my eyes and mouth, and from behind a veil of snow I saw the angel move as if it were about to stretch its wings. But the snow was falling so thickly that I could hardly see; a snowstorm must have broken out. More gusts of wind came and slammed the window and obscured my view. By the time I had wiped the snow from my eyes and torn the window open again nothing was to be seen but snow swirling about the tall, narrow courtyard, falling, and then being driven back over the roofs in great scurries, like the angelic host that does not want to be touched.

Stop them! Stop them! Rise high, you roofs; you houses turn into towers; you chimneys blow smoke before them to prevent them from finding their way. You sleepers, turn on the light so that you may see them! Who would catch them? Who would make it the last day, the day of judgement? Who would call them back for me? This was the time when my sister woke me, but today I was going to wake her. Wake up!

Six o'clock struck, one stroke coming hesitantly after the other. The room was dark now, and I couldn't find the bed. The snow had dazzled me, I had spent too long gazing after them, I should have woken my sister at once. 'Wake up! You sleep too long!'

The bedclothes fell to the floor, my sister was not gripping them as I used to, and my sister did not groan and defend herself, as I did every morning against the cold floor and the angels; she didn't push me away; she kept as still as those who are not asleep when one wakes them, as still as only those who are not there.

And she remained still when we found her in the courtyard and lifted her out of the snow, which had already covered her.
taken a wrong turn. I would be the first to admit that
I have a tendency to err, but I will assert that I always,
knowingly, leave myself with plenty of time. I have
taken another wrong turn. I could retrace my steps, but
I haven’t been paying attention; I have been too busy
wondering the where, why, and what for, of my journey.
I am lost. I look to the sun, the direction of the wind, the
flow of the traffic, the landmarks, for any sign. I know
I am running out of time. I quicken my pace; I do not
want to be late, miss out on a beginning, nor be the last
to arrive. Finally, I succumb and ask the way. I have no
idea where I am going.

She can barely contain herself. She has had a
vision of a project that will occupy her for a lifetime.
Whether it came from a vague, fuzzy idea that survived
the night, or appeared in a flash, it is visionary. A vast
collage, a tapestry, a patchwork of images, a wall piece;
a work immense in scale, an historical document, an
archive in itself becoming a monument: this work, self-
perpetuating with an unforeseeable end, suggests itself.
Heaven, she will work on it every day and find pleasure
in the subtle nuances of each moment of its making;
all change, movement, and adventure for her will now
occur in the space of this work. A whole new world is
opening up. She has gathered her tools and materials,
and she is ready to begin. A clear vision. She is sitting
on her bed, lost amongst yards of cloth, bags of thread.
That year, for Christmas, everyone received a Hessian
cushion cover and a draught excluder fashioned into
a sausage dog.

I am laughing. Loud ha-ha’s gasping from my
belly are being unleashed, ha-ha, amongst tense bodies,
ha-ha, ha. Embarrassed, lowered heads are turning
away, ha-ha, sharp intakes of breath, ha, cutting silence,
ha-ha. Who the hell do I think I am? Ha-ha. Did I think
I could get away with it? Ha-ha. That it would pass
unnoticed? Ha-ha. I should have known better. Ha-ha. Should I? Ha-ha. It happened. Ha-ha. It just happened. Ha-ha, ha. Ha-ha’s bringing tears to my eyes, ha-ha, ha. If only I had thought, ha, too late now, ha-ha, nothing to be done, ha-ha-ha-ha, ha. Listen to me.

She had lost count of the lengths she had swum. Her stroke was holding, her breathing was rhythmic; she was gliding effortlessly through the water. Length after length after length. It is all in the preparation. She must build her stamina. She will acclimatise her body to cold water. Lie in cold baths, plunge into ice-cold rivers, visit the sea. She must swim with waves and against currents. Before a year is up, in months, a channel crossing could be within her sights. Dream on. Length after length after length. Her stroke began to falter, she was short of breath; she was struggling. Gripped with a sudden sharp pain, and with the water giving way to her struggle, she was finding it almost impossible to stay afloat. At that moment if the lifeguard had not jumped in, and pulled her to safety, it would never have occurred to her that she was drowning. Drowning. She dreams of swimming in immense oceans. She wants to walk in desert storms. She is lost climbing ice crevices. She will fly on the wing of a bird and stroke the back of a bumblebee. She dreams.

All the windows are open. It is raining. I have my coat and shoes on. Room service has been delivered. I am sitting on the bed looking into a vast mirror; my name has been picked from millions and she is one in millions; she refuses her name and I resist naming.

The purity of what is mine is her void.
Separated by a Comma

Erica Jarnes with Emily Gray

8-3-2016

a musical work for two unaccompanied female voices …

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=brTleimQDWk