

***Le son juste: Translatory problematics
in the contemporary scene of polyglot poetry***

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In 2004, three European poets, unbeknownst to one another, embarked upon three seemingly similar yet essentially different individual projects of multilingual verse. Five years and a number of awards later, these same poets –Peter Wessel, Øyvind Rimbereid, and myself– were invited to participate together in readings dedicated exclusively to what was advertised as 'translingual poetry', as part of the poetry festivals of Copenhagen and Berlin. Although the practice of writing poetry in a blend of tongues is by no means a novelty, the fresh contagious interest in 'translingual verse' among cultural organisers and literary critics is indeed a welcome development. By presenting our polyglot projects in a common context, the audience was invited to appreciate our work more for what it is (a literary expression of 'betweenness') and less for what it is not (as often occurs in generally monolingual readings, where the multilingual verse tends to stand out for its mysterious, exotic qualities). More importantly, the joint readings provided a dynamic framework in which to compare and contrast diverging forms of polyglot verse, each with its particular rhythms, modes and moods of manifestation, and varying attitudes to language and the use of translation, both extratextual (from the multilingual to the monolingual) and intratextual (translation as a poetic ingredient and technique within the text itself).

In late 2008, as I came to publish my first book of poetry, *Mużajk, an exploration in multilingual verse*¹, I began to receive regular invitations to readings and poetry festivals across Western Europe. Although conscious that I was not alone in the endeavour to explore the possibilities of polyglot poetry, a poetry striving to transcend the static notion of 'nation-state' literature, throughout my travels, I was enthralled to discover that a number of other European poets were writing and even *performing* their own multilingual verse, each with their own very personal styles, rhythms and purposes. There is no conscious 'concerted' movement, as far as I know, seeking to promote polyglot poetry, nor do I believe that multilingual verse is by any means "*the next big thing*" (as Paul Opstrup, the director of the Copenhagen Poetry Festival, suggested in a newspaper interview in April 2009²). Poetry written in a blend of tongues has been composed for centuries, in different parts of the globe, in a myriad of different forms and styles and for a broad range of purposes. For the sake of brevity, it could suffice to mention the Hispano-Arabic *jarchas* glossing the *moaxajas* of 12th century Al-Andalus; the Middle Age non-liturgical carols written in a mixture of vernacular and Latin, which were particularly popular in the land known today as Germany;

¹ Cassar, Antoine: *Mużajk, an exploration in multilingual verse*. Edizzjoni Skarta, 2008. A collection of multilingual sonnets in Maltese, English, Spanish, Italian and French, and other tongues according to the subject of each poem.

² "Den ene linie er på tysk, og den næste er på mæltisk. Muligvis er det fremtiden for måden at tale på. Globaliseringen rammer vel også vores sprog, og her kan det være, at poesien er foran. Wessel og Cassar udnytter det i deres digtning, og det kan være starten på noget stort." Interview with Paul Opstrup, "Viertes internationale poesifestival", Information.dk, 4.5.2009 (<http://www.information.dk/190170>).

the light-hearted 'macaronic' verse of Tifi degli Odasi and Merlin Cocai; and beyond Europe, the Mongolian poet Ayurzana Gun once told me of a poetry written by Mongolian Buddhist monks based in Tibet, written in a mixture of Mongolian, Tibetan and Sanskrit (not only three different tongues and traditions, but three very different scripts). Closer to our times, it would perhaps not be too risky to suggest that the list of examples of polyglot verse increases at a much faster rate; whether or not we can trace a diachronic development of multilingual poetry, its presence has not been of a sporadic nature, but indeed a continuous one. Thus, it was not particularly surprising to find that the multilingual poets I had the honour of meeting from one literary event to another were not all of my age group, but represented at least four different generations. For the purposes of this paper, I would like to focus on four of the multilingual writers I have had the pleasure of meeting, listening to, and reading: Lambert Schlechter (Luxembourg, 1941), Peter Wessel (Denmark/Spain, 1950), Adrian Grima (Malta, 1968), and Elia Maqueda (Spain, 1982). These are only four of the many polyglot poets I have encountered along the way; I could mention a dozen or so more (notably from plurilingual countries such as Malta, Belgium and Luxembourg), but have chosen these four as I believe they represent a good possible cross-section of the varying approaches to multilingual verse, and in particular, to the use of intratextual translation as an important trope or technique within their work.

1. Lambert Schlechter (Luxembourg, 1941)

Having begun writing in German at an early age, Lambert Schlechter soon switched to French, which remains the main language of his poetry to this day. A prolific poet, Schlechter has published over twenty collections of verse, in a number of different styles; always highly lyrical, he is widely known in Francophone circles as a writer of prose poems (salient examples of which can be found in the volume *Le murmure du monde*³, winner of the Prix Servais in 2007), urban as much as rural, and more recently as a late-style explorer of erotic verse.

My first encounter with Schlechter was as a member of the audience on the opening night of the Luxembourg *Printemps de poètes* in April 2009, where he performed what he loosely termed a '*poème babélique*' in six languages, *Ici c'est comme nulle part* (Appendix, poem 1)⁴. The poem is made up of four sections, each containing five unrhymed quatrains in a combination of French, Dutch, English, German, Italian and Spanish, in no particular order, though as we will see further below, it may be significant that the poem opens and closes with a line in French, Schlechter's main poetic language. In the copy of the poem kindly sent to me by the author, each of the six languages is printed in a different corresponding colour; however, far from constituting an interlinguistic *divertissement*, a certain desperation quickly exudes from the lines of the poem, in such a way that the apparently arbitrary flitting between the six tongues (after every one or two lines, but never in the middle of a line) exacerbates the feeling of disorientation and placelessness suggested by the very title. Indeed, this is a poem on death, or the fear of death; we do not know where we are, except that it is night time, and we are waiting either for an ambulance –white, representing the sum of all colours–, or for everything to cede into darkness –and

³ Schlechter, Lambert: *Le murmure du monde et autres fragments*. Bordeaux: Le Castor Astral, 2006.

⁴ Schlechter, Lambert: "Ici c'est comme nulle part: procès-verbal de l'ambulancier" in Beausoleil, Claude, ed. *Poète toi-même: une anthologie de poésie contemporaine*. Bordeaux: Le Castor Astral, 2000. pp. 209-213.

thus the negation of all colour—. Beyond the graphic element of colour-coded lines (an effect not necessarily lost in performance, as each language carries its own particular tone and rhythm), the true chromatic quality of the poem is to be found in the lexis, symbols and images, in a loose linear development from black and white (*le monsieur manchot*, l. 6; *schwarze Amsel singt ein weisses Lied*, l. 12) through grey (*une embellie soudain dans la grisaille*, l. 46) to red and yellow (*mettra du rouge entre tes jambes ouvertes*, l. 54; *las hierbas son más amarillas que nunca*, l. 58), as if to represent a journey towards the faint colour of blood seen when the eyelids are lowered for the final time.

Despite the general syntactic independence of each line, the poem's true penetration of tongues lies in the use of intratextual translation, enhancing the above-mentioned chromatic quality via a loosely cumulative description and treatment of the chosen symbols and images. In one ominous example, a line in German introduces the blackbird singing a white song (*schwarze Amsel singt ein weisses Lied*, l. 12); in section 2 of the poem, a Spanish line clarifies that the blackbird 'whistles' rather than 'sings' (*pero el mirlo se burla, silba sus blancas notas*, l. 25), adding as an adverbial detail the bird's tone of mockery ('*se burla*'); and towards the end of the composition, a line in Dutch juxtaposes the monochrome souvenir of the blackbird with 'the red stain of the sketch' (*het gefluit van de merel, de rode vlek van de schets*, l. 80). It is as if the multiplication of tongues here illustrates, through the variety of sounds and tones, the multiplication of fear brought about by a steady bout of paranoia. Other language permutations may indeed be possible, in this instance and in others, as a means to produce the music of variety, yet the tongues are not selected entirely at random, as can be heard in the subtle alliteration of sibilants in the German line quoted above, and the alliteration of sibilants and labial consonants in the Spanish. On other occasions, the selected language proves appropriate for the use of a cultural reference: in l. 13, for example, the adjective '*rilkische*' qualifying the rags hanging from the branches could theoretically be transposed into '*Rilkian*', '*rilkiano*', and so on, yet the morphological and phonetic changes in these proposed translations immediately sound and feel less '*rilkische*' than the German.

Other evident examples of sound as an integral part of the meaning and thus a deciding factor in the choice of language include the Italian alliteration '*nel folto della fredda foresta*' (l. 19), and the use of the onomatopoeia '*all is hushed*' towards the end of the poem (l. 65). Aside from the disposition into unrhymed quatrains, attention to rhythm in the construction of the text is rather minimal, with the important exception of the French anapaestic alexandrin '*on ne sait jamais quand, on ne sait jamais si...*' which opens the poem and is repeated four times (l. 1, 11, 21, 48, 66), punctuating the uneven development of the expression with the regularity of doubt and suspense, until climaxing on its fifth appearance with a following rhyming (non-alexandrin) line: '*on ne sait jamais quand, on ne sait jamais si... / et si c'était maintenant, et si c'était ici*' (l. 66-67). If the six different tongues used in the poem were to be taken as six separate identities or voices of the poetic I, the use of French, Schlechter's main literary language, at this emotional peak of the poem may be significant in that it resounds where the fear of death is most acute; equally significant, in that case, would be the closing line of the poem, which although in French implies the end of all tongues, and of all language and expression, for the subject succumbing to his fate: '*puis la cervelle s'écoule et gèle aussitôt*' (l. 81).

Ici c'est comme nulle part could well be translatable into a different blend of languages, or in the same six

tongues set in a different permutation, yet the translator would encounter several difficult hurdles, mainly particularities of sound that cannot easily be transposed into another phonetic system. On the other hand, were this poem to be translated into a monolingual text, up to five sixths of the effects of sound and cultural allusion would potentially have to be sacrificed; a monolingual version may gain in direct communication to a monolingual reader, yet the feeling of desperation and disorientation would certainly not be as clear, and would very probably miss the closing sensation of there being too much for the subject to comprehend, too late.

2. Peter Wessel (Denmark/Spain, 1950)

Of the four polyglot poets chosen for this brief survey, Peter Wessel is the author to whom the blending of tongues comes most naturally, to the extent that the multilingual expression forms the very crux of his poetics, in a highly authentic and personal journey. Born in Copenhagen and raised equally in Danish and English, Wessel has lived for extended periods in the US (where his English book of verse *In place of absence*⁵ was reviewed and acclaimed by John Ashbery), Paris and Mallorca, before settling in Lavapiés, the multicultural haven of Madrid. The facile-rhyme moniker '*danés de Lavapiés*' tells only half the truth, for US and French culture have also made a profound imprint on Wessel's outlook and tireless creative personality. In 2004, after fifteen years living in Spain but in constant contact with the three other tongues for both family and professional reasons, Wessel realised that he had become incapable of thinking or expressing himself in a single language. As he explains in '*Draft for a cv*', the prose introduction to the cd-book *Polyfonías*⁶:

"And I suddenly felt that I no longer had command of any one language, but had been invaded and occupied by words from all the emotional and physical geographies in which I had lived; **those culturally specific words, words whose meaning could not be separated from their sound, their tonal colour, and which, ten years later, would intertwine with the language of music to form the unique poetic language to which I gave the name Polyfonías.**"

(my highlight)

The '*language of music*' refers to the instrumental accompaniment by Mark Solborg (keyboard and guitar) and Salvador Vidal (clarinet) at most performances of the quadrilingual texts, and could easily be counted as the 'fifth' tongue, in agreement with Theodor Adorno's axiom "*musik ist sprachähnlich*"; nevertheless, this music is more an appealing enhancement of the poetic expression than a justification and bonding element of the four tongues, and the poems work perfectly on paper or in voice alone. It is important to stress Wessel's reference to cultures as well as languages, for as we shall see, his poetry exploits the particularities, the untranslatability of words, expressions and concepts in each tongue. This ties in with the profound respect that Wessel professes for each individual language, and his attention to correctness, style and lyrical flow keep his *polyfonías* far at bay from the 'macaronic' (the appearance of the *y* rather than the *i* in the prefix of the Spanish title for both the project and the created genre is the exception that confirms the rule, the result of a happy accident that came about during the design of the cd cover). In these poems, Wessel endeavours, in a very natural fashion, to express his own plurality of

⁵ Wessel, Peter: *In Place of Absence*. Baltimore: Chestnut Hills Press, 1990.

⁶ Wessel, Peter; Solborg, Mark; Vidal, Salvador: *Polyfonías*. Madrid: delsatélite ediciones, 2008.

voices and experiences, without the need to translate all thoughts and emotions into a single tongue –a process that would imply lying, and being only a quarter of himself–. Much like Walt Whitman, Wessel contains multitudes, and gives voice to each of them at once.

I had the fortune of performing my multilingual poems on the same stage as Wessel three times during 2009, in the poetry festivals of Copenhagen and Berlin, and later during the Valletta *Noche Bianca* in Malta. A good understanding of Wessel's task and practice can be obtained by reading the introductory poem *Un idioma sin fronteras* (Appendix, poem 2), indeed a clear statement of poetics, awarded the 2008culturas prize organised by the Spanish Ministry of Culture⁷. From the first strophe, we are immediately invited to become accustomed to the very accessible and natural sliding from one tongue into the next, often in an exercise of intratextual translation, a technique which Wessel appropriately terms '*glissandi*' (borrowed from the terminology of jazz, of which Wessel is a keen connoisseur⁸), and that Prof. Alfons Knauth⁹ has described as a '*meandering of meaning*':

Dentro de mí

viven cuatro personas, each

with their own voice,

su propia

lengua,

5

sa propre langue.

Hver med sit eget sprog

og sin egen stemme.

The '*cuatro personas*' make an evident allusion to the well-known axiom of psychology we already mentioned in the section on Schlechter, according to which one may tend to have differing personalities in each of the languages they think or speak in. In this poem and in others, however, Wessel successfully blends his personalities in Danish, English, French and Spanish into an at once individual and plural voice, by forging, with a light touch yet with eloquent care, a flowing and engaging rhythm. Contrary to the paranoiac quality of Schlechter's poem, there is no sense of chaos, but of sincere order. Sincerity of expression is a central theme in itself, carried by the particular idiosyncratic sound offered by words in each tongue, not in competition but in perpetual agreement:

No disputan: habla

quien ha de hablar,

10

the one who comes up with the best

and truest word,

le mot juste.

⁷ Unfortunately, the 2008culturas.com website has been taken off the web, but the poem *Un idioma sin fronteras*, set to music by Mark Solborg, can be listened to on the *Polyfonías* myspace page: <http://www.myspace.com/polyfonias>.

⁸ Interview with Peter Wessel, 3rd October 2009, *Inizjamed*, Malta. Available at http://www.inizjamed.org/antoine-cassar_interview_peter-wessel.pdf.

⁹ Knauth, Alfons: *A Portrait of Peter Wessel's Polyglot Poetry*.
<http://www.myspace.com/peterwesselpolyfonias/blog/529218973>

As Wessel concludes later in the poem, poetry can be considered a language in itself irrespective of the tongue employed as a medium (“*tout compte fait / ils n’ont qu’une langue!*”, l. 29-30). Nevertheless, the use of the ‘truest word’ or ‘*le mot juste*’ requires a momentary choice in each instance, according to the meaning channelled through sound and cultural reference as offered by each language. As Borges was once keen to suggest during his series of lectures at Harvard, the origin of all words lies in the metaphor of onomatopaeic imitation¹⁰. Lines 18-24 of Wessel’s poem demonstrate the importance given to meaning carried in sound, and the way in which the agreement of tongues through intratextual translation occurs not by democracy and entirely conscious choice, but of its own accord, as if by magic:

Vote-t-on
or is there something
that pulls up the word like a root, qui tire 20
le mot, la palabra
abra

cadabra
from a common soil

Note the dactylic rhythm of the words ‘*something / that pulls up the word like a root*’, with the succession of three long vowels beginning and ending in /u/, the ‘deepest’ of the five basic vowels of Hellwag’s triangle, pronounced with the tip of the tongue closest to the throat (and thus to its own ‘root’). The decisiveness of the plosive alveolar /t/ at the closure of the English sequence becomes intensified by the plosive dental /t/ of the French verb ‘*tire*’, now with the (equally long) vowel /i/, pronounced with the tip of the tongue furthest from the vocal chords, suggesting a violent yanking sound which ‘intra-translates’ the action already expressed in English at the beginning of the same line. As we can see, Wessel’s poem also has room for words and expressions which need not be subscribed to any particular one of the four tongues: the interjection ‘*abra/cadabra*’ (l. 22-23) may perhaps be in Spanish, yet there is no need to classify it as pertaining to one tongue or another, other than the ‘*une langue*’, that of poetry itself, referred to six lines later. The word, *le mot*, or what we could call ‘*le son juste*’, is hauled up from the ‘*common soil*’ (l. 24) of poetic expression, further described towards the conclusion of the poem as a ‘*universally / shared / trove of sentiments*’ (l. 65-67), common to all languages and thus to all their speakers. The sound of the word ‘*trove*’ is significant in itself, with the falling diphthong bringing the tongue back from the alveolar /tr/ towards the throat, again an acoustic illustration of depth. The choice may not be entirely conscious, but it is the close relationship between the sound and the meaning of a word which lifts it to the surface of the poet’s expression before any possible equivalents in other languages (although these often follow via intratextual translation).

To cite the impossibility of accomplishing a monolingual extratextual translation of this *polyfonía* would of course be an understatement, for the intratextual exchanges and plays on sound which string the poem together require an essential balance of difference and similarity, and a carefully managed tension

¹⁰ See Borges, Jorge Luis: ‘*The Metaphor*’ in *This Craft of Verse*. Harvard University Press, 2002.

between what can and can not be transposed accurately from one tongue into another due to the cultural baggage or 'flavour' of a particular word or expression. As Wessel explains in the prose intermission '*Je suis un chien*':

“I want to roll myself in words and feel the same as the French when they say '*terroir*', as the Spanish when they say '*pueblo*', as the Americans when they say '*go west!*'.”

The cultural flavour of expressions –even the simplest of noun phrases– across different tongues is the central theme of the second *polyfonía* we shall approach, with the interestingly extended title '*On the Difficulty of Translating "La Femme et la Nourriture" into Spanish*' (Appendix, poem 3). The first strophe of the poem provides four different, and very imperfect, alternatives in Spanish for the French words cited in the title, each accompanied by a short commentary helping to evoke the shifts in meaning:

lines	translation	comment
3-5	<i>mujer y la alimentación</i>	<i>antiséptica y pedante</i>
6-8	<i>mujer y la cocina</i>	<i>tan llevada y tan traída que ni la notamos</i>
9-10	<i>mujer y la comida</i>	<i>mundana</i>
11-13	<i>mujer y la mamá</i>	<i>ya cumplida</i>

The elegance and sensuality suggested by the sound and cultural flavour of the French '*la femme et la nourriture*' are lost completely in at least the first three possible Spanish translations, although the fourth alternative closes the strophe with a positive and much more human ring, with the alliteration in /m/ rooting the meaning back into the essence of woman as a motherly provider. The elemental symbol of the soil common to all languages returns in the second strophe of this *polyfonía*, explaining that the French noun phrase carries a meaning that goes far beyond –or comes much closer to home than– the sum of its parts:

a fundamental chord - a resonance
infiniment plus près de la tierra;
closer to, and yet
darker than earth.

20

The explanation '*a resonance / infiniment plus près de la tierra*' slides effortlessly across three languages, with the accelerating rhythm of the words '*infiniment plus près*' (+---+++, enhanced by the enjambement) leading into the softer Spanish '*tierra*', a paroxytone or '*palabra llana*' which avoids the abrupt ending of the line that would have been offered by the French monosyllable '*terre*'. In the context of the poem, the sound of the Spanish '*tierra*', with its liquid rising diphthong /*ié*/, lends the word perhaps a more intimate feel (and is also very close to the adjective '*tierna*', 'tender'). '*Tierra*' could of course be transposed into English as 'land', 'soil', or 'earth', yet as the intratextual translation of l. 21 clarifies, it is the latter, more collective and planetary connotation that Wessel appears to have in mind. Linking this elemental reasoning metapoetically to the '*common soil*' of the first *polyfonía*, we see that paradoxically, through the exploration of untranslatability across his four languages yet also the timely use of '*le son juste*', Wessel's

poetry does not float in a vapid 'supralinguistic' space alienating the reader or listener, but submerges into the heart of the human condition and its expression. In other *polyfonías* (such as '*Flux*' and '*Madrigal*'), at the best of times, the smooth meandering from one tongue into the next demonstrates that, with the right temperament, polyglot poetry can avoid the easy trappings of babelic chaos and instead even manage to transmit a certain inner peace, through a very natural flow across the sounds and cadences of different languages.

In a recent interview with Peter Wessel on the back page of the Spanish newspaper *El País*, Wessel claims to have 'antennae as opposed to roots'.¹¹ In reality, Wessel's verse has both, and one need not exclude the other. The *polyfonías* are not a poetry of placelessness, but spread their roots out across borders (and even beneath the ocean, if we link the English mode to his experience of US culture). Does Wessel contradict himself? Very well then, Wessel contradicts himself, but we can easily understand why.

3. Adrian Grima (Malta, 1968)

Poet, critic, and cultural activist Adrian Grima is not a polyglot author in the way that Schlechter and Wessel are, yet he is known to often pepper his Maltese verse with multilingual elements, for different purposes and with varying effects. One of the most salient examples is the long poem '*Ramallah*' (one of the leading texts of Grima's collection *Rakkmu*¹², '*Weavings*'), which narrates the true story of the mother of a Palestinian dancer sitting outside her house weaving, shot dead by a passing Israeli soldier for no apparent reason, and with no subsequent explanation given by the authorities. The Maltese text welcomes a number of elements in Arabic, including the numerals in Arabic script at the head of each section, rooting the poem in the geographical and social context of the Palestinian town. Although Grima would not strictly be considered in the Maltese literary scene as a travel poet (as opposed to fellow Maltese author Immanuel Mifsud, whose continuing series of poems '*Ftit weraq minn...*' / '*A few leaves from...*' keeps non-Maltese words to a bare minimum¹³), he does write of many places and localised anecdotes, mainly in and around the Mediterranean basin, or with an inevitable Mediterranean understanding and outlook if the place visited is beyond the region.

For the purposes of this paper, let us limit ourselves to two examples, with two very different approaches to the weaving of foreign words within the Maltese text. The first poem, '*Għajnejk l-Alġier*' ('*Your eyes, Algiers*', Appendix, poem 4)¹⁴, could be considered a sensual love song for the Algerian capital, linking with the long Arabic poetic tradition of personifying cities as beautiful women. The poem is essentially a fragmented series of reactions to the magic of the city, in a tone and rhythm symptomatic of the poet's rapture. The third (and longest) strophe is made up mainly of a sequence of noun clauses, with three lines (almost at the centre of the poem) in a mixture of transliterated Arabic, French and Maltese:

¹¹ '*En lugar de raíces tengo antenas*', Entrevista de Peter Wessel (con Javier Rodríguez Marcos), *El País* 20.2.2010. An electronic copy is available at:

http://www.elpais.com/articulo/madrid/lugar/raices/tengo/antenas/elpepiespmad/20100220elpmad_18/Tes.

¹² Grima, Adrian: *Rakkmu*. Malta: Klabb Kotba Maltin, 2006.

¹³ See for example the bilingual collection Mifsud, Immanuel: *km*. Malta: Klabb Kotba Maltin, 2005, with English translations by Maria Grech Ganado.

¹⁴ Included in the anthology of the 2009 Lodève poetry festival: *Voix de la Méditerranée. Anthologie 2009*. Millau: Clapas, 2009.

(original)		(English translation of the Maltese)
<i>jistennew id-dawl biex jiskuraw</i>		<i>they await the light, for your eyes</i>
<i>għajnejk</i>	10	<i>to darken</i>
<i>Shahira, Farroudja, Shehrazade</i>		<i>Shahira, Farroudja, Shehrazade</i>
<i>la rive nord, la rive sud</i>		<i>la rive nord, la rive sud</i>
<i>al-baħar fond mirdum al-mutawassit</i>		<i>al-baħar fond mirdum al-mutawassit</i>
<i>il-mewġ, il-portijiet</i>		<i>the waves, the harbours</i>
<i>iċ-ċaġhaq, għajnejk [...]</i>	15	<i>the pebbles, your eyes [...]</i>

Within the rapture, the poet expresses his enchantment at the sounds of three Arabic female names (l. 11), with the inevitable allusion to the book of *1001 Nights*. The French antithesis in the following line is also chosen partly for its sound, yet although it may seem easily translatable (the north and south 'banks' or 'coasts' of the Mediterranean), it is the history of cultural dialogue between France and the Maghreb which allows the antithesis to evoke the idea of a common sea, a theme which is central to Grima's poetics. The sequence of words in l. 13 is more complicated, as it joins together grammatical and lexical elements from transliterated Arabic and Maltese: the Arabic definite article *al-*, as opposed to Maltese *il-*, suggests that the word '*baħar*' ('*sea*' in both Arabic and Maltese) is in the former language, although the fact that the word and its sound are shared by both tongues reinforces the sense of the common sea introduced in the previous line. The adjectives '*fond mirdum*' ('*deep, buried*') are in Maltese, followed by the transliterated Arabic noun *al-mutawassit* ('the very middle', part of the Arabic name given to the Mediterranean, '*the white middlemost sea*'), which is unrecognisable to the everyday Maltese reader but may perhaps be guessed from the context. In these three lines of Grima's song to Algiers, the poet celebrates the charm of the city through both the sounds of the admired words and what they represent, and also through a delicate balance between untranslatability (the Arabic names, the French antithesis for its cultural flavour, the adjective '*al-mutawassit*' in a particular superlative morphology that does not exist in Maltese) and similarity (the word '*baħar*', which although preceded by the Arabic article and occupying only two syllables, immediately pulls the Maltese reader closer to home).

The second poem, '*London by night*' (Appendix, poem 5, from the book *Rakkmu*) uses foreign words and sounds –this time in English– for very different reasons: the play on pronunciation and rhyme, with English words appearing both in their standard spelling and in Maltese transliteration, conveys an at once serious and tongue-in-cheek expression of discomfort of feeling lost and cold in the city, before breathing a sigh of relief as the poet finds refuge indoors. The poem makes a humorous, more 'macaronic' use of '*le son juste*', yet although the place visited is far from the Mediterranean, to a certain extent, the expression remains rooted in Maltese, portraying one culture as experienced and spoken by another. The best examples of this can be found in lines 8-12 (the Maltese ending *-ajt* rhymes perfectly with the English '*night*'):

(original)
Landin taċ-ċajt,
li thallik ixxomm l-alkoħol ta' mnifsejha baj najt,

li thallik tisker bil-kesha taht hajt;

10

li meta ssejhlha tinjorak u tibqa' fejn bqajt.

Landin orrajt.

(extratextual English translation by Maria Grech Ganado)

Landin! The blight

that lets you smell the spirit in her breath by nite,

that sees you drunk in some cold corner, huddled tight,

10

ignores your call and leaves you to your plight..

Landin, alright.

The first macaronic element here is the spelling '*Landin*', representing the Maltese pronunciation of the English toponym (the true Maltese word would be '*Londra*'), with a more open /a/ in the first syllable, and with the schwa (/ə/) of the second English syllable, inexistent in the Maltese phonetic system, shifted to a short /i/. The second is the English expression 'by night' transliterated into the Maltese '*baj najt*' at the end of l. 9. '*Landin*' reappears in l. 12, together with the word '*orrajt*', which although derived from the English expression 'alright', has long been accepted as part of the everyday Maltese vocabulary. '*Landin orrajt*' would not normally be a perfect equivalent of the English '*(London), alright*', as preserved in Maria Grech Ganado's English version: '*orrajt*' is an adjective whose meaning is closer to that of 'good', 'cool', 'decent' than it is to 'fine', 'acceptable', although within the context of the poem, '*orrajt*' would translate better as 'not bad after all', carrying the same subtle tone of acceptance and resignation before something unpleasant as the English use of the adverb in '*London, alright*'. In fact, it is at this point of the poem that the subject finds refuge and begins the concluding sigh of relief:

(original)

Landin orrajt.

Issa jien qiegħed hawn

taht das-saqaf inserrah mal-hajt;

u dawk l-uċuħ imgerfxin saru attrazzjonijiet

15

fuq London by night.

(extratextual English translation by Maria Grech Ganado)

Landin, alright.

Now I'm here

with a roof over my head,

fully fed and warm in bed,

15

but those bewildered faces are still sights

of a London by night.

Grech Ganado's English rendering of Grima's poem is an excellent example of the possibility of forging an extratextual poetic translation into the language –and culture– used as the 'macaronic' element in the original. The rhyme *head-fed-bed* (l. 14-15) brings with it a homely, 'cat sat on the mat' nursery-rhyme

feel (in the Maltese, the subject is not necessarily in bed, but has found shelter indoors and is resting against the wall) which compensates for the temporary loss of rhyme in '-ajt / -ite / -ight' (preserved all the way through the translation of the previous stanza), although this rhyme does in fact return in the noun 'sights' at the end of the penultimate line. Equally interesting is the keeping of the form 'Landin' (l. 8, 12 of the translation), easily recognisable as a foreign transliteration by the non-Maltese reader of English, and thus retaining the important ingredient of intratextual translation –and appreciation of sound– that gives structure and further character to the original.

Grima's poetic appreciation of the sound of words in different languages –particularly but not exclusively names of people and places, and often as seen or heard 'through' another language– gains greater presence as his poetry and global outlook develops, not only in tones of celebration and tongue-in-cheek melancholy such as in the two poems we have just seen, but also with a more politically committed attitude. In *Distanzi*, for example (from the book *Rakkmu*), the poet 'buys' Congolese names from a small boy in order to offer them to the reader, 'so that when you read them / they can jingle like coins in your head, / or be saved in the cell of your gaze'.¹⁵ Later, in the collection *Riħ min-Nofsinhar* ('Wind from the South'), a recent book of poetry and prose on climate change¹⁶, the careful use of multilingual elements in poems such as 'Siem Recalls the Trees of Afabet' and 'Todo Relación' helps Grima to lend his voice to communities respectively enduring the desertification of northern Eritrea and the newly extreme rainfalls and droughts of the central Andes. Although not strictly examples of 'polyglot' poetry, poems such as these are important indications of how multilingual weavings can strive beyond the modes of 'macaronic' banter and even of individual self-expression, moving towards a humble but open voice for a planetary conscience and consciousness.

4. Elia Maqueda (Spain, 1982)

The youngest of the four multilingual authors chosen for this paper, Elia Maqueda is an active poetess, songwriter and singer based in and around the city of Madrid. Her first collection of poems, *Recortables* ('Cut-outs')¹⁷, is essentially a monolingual book in Spanish, but one of the central texts is the pentalingual composition 'Babelia heterogénea' (Appendix, poem 6), written in a blend of English, French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. Although this title may quickly appear arbitrary to the avid reader of multilingual verse (with so much polyglot poetry too readily calling itself 'babelic'), it refers to the content as much as the form of the text that follows. Leaving aside a small handful of excusable grammatical and phonetical mistakes in Italian and French, it could be considered a successful attempt at writing an 'airport poem', beyond the stereotypical image of a cold and chaotic point of transit: the subject expresses the desire to live 'una vida heterogénea' (l. 30), not merely in terms of languages and cultures, but more specifically in the variety and totality of human relationships. The poem has been recorded as a short two-and-a-half-minute black and white film (with Maqueda's own voice, light background music, and a series

¹⁵ Translation by Maria Grech Ganado, available on Issue 29 of the online review *Transcript*: <http://www.transcript-review.org/en/issue/transcript-29-bordered-by-the-sea/adrian-grima>.

¹⁶ Mifsud, Immanuel & Grima, Adrian: *Riħ min-Nofsinhar*. Malta: Edizzjoni Skarta, 2008. The book alternates the poetry of Mifsud and Grima with prose contributions on climate change from fellow members of civil society.

¹⁷ Maqueda, Elia: *Recortables*. Madrid: Anidia editores, 2008.

of anonymous travelling images related to the text), and is freely available on the internet.¹⁸

Although not with the same natural temperament and spirit of research as in Peter Wessel's *polyfonías*, Maqueda's polyglot poem makes frequent use of words and expressions in different languages chosen for the meaning channelled by their particular sound, which is often difficult to transpose faithfully into any of the other four tongues. The first example is the English expression 'back and forth' at the end of l. 4 (notice the corresponding movement of the small airplane in the film as the words are pronounced), an antithesis that expresses itself acoustically, going from labial-to-velar 'back' to the tongue thrust forward in the word 'forth'. The subtlety of this sound effect is very difficult to reproduce in the other four languages; the Italian 'avanti e indietro' perhaps comes closest to recreating the phonetic back-and-forth movement by going from the open /a/ to the falling diphthong /ié/, although as with the equivalents offered by French, Spanish and Portuguese, the extra two or more syllables needed dilute the sense of itineration carried by the three English monosyllables. The second example we could point out is the Portuguese adjective at the end of l. 8, 'tantas pessoas juntas e tão sozinhas', in a diminutive form which is sweeter and more affectionate than its nearest equivalent to be found in the other four tongues, the Spanish 'solitas'. Thirdly, two other examples of acoustic untranslatability within the poem are two important alliterations whose sound illustrates well the image created by the words: the succession of sibilants and their combinations with the dental /t/ in the Italian 'insieme nello stesso spazio' (l. 13) contributes to the feeling of pressure and claustrophobia described in the second half of the first strophe, whilst the English line 'all the red parties dancing in the middle of my mind' later in the poem (l. 40) creates an admirable merry-go-round effect through the play on the alveolar (/d/, /ð/) and labial (/m/, /p/) consonants, accelerated by the symmetrical paeonic rhythm of the last nine syllables (+---+---+, with each stressed syllable containing the letter *d*). Finally, although Maqueda's attention to the particularity of sound throughout this poem is generally given to only one tongue at a time (it would be extremely interesting, for example, to explore the possibilities of alliteration in two or more languages at once), an important exception is the rhyme which introduces the final strophe, combining a Portuguese preterite verb with a French adverb, 'Quero todas as pessoas que amei / et toutes ce[lle]s que j'aime fort désormais' (l. 42-43), as the poet calls out for all her past and present loves to gather in the airport.

As mentioned above, *Babelia heterogénea* contains a small number of grammatical and phonetical errors in French (such as 'ces' instead of 'celles' in l. 43) and Italian (in the recording, 'spazio' of l. 13 is read with the stress on the *i*, in hiatus rather than eliding with the following *o*). Such linguistic faults are one of the most difficultly avoidable pitfalls of polyglot poetry, for however advanced and natural the poet's grasp of a language, natural incidences of *contaminatio* will often open the door to interference among tongues (writing an expression in one language yet in the syntax of another, shifting stress in pronunciation, and so on). Although unfortunate, the slips in Maqueda's poem may nevertheless be justifiable by the airport context: on the one hand, it is no secret that mistakes are often found in multilingual airport signs and announcements¹⁹, whilst on the other hand, the linguistic inaccuracies in

¹⁸ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5LwTKUKGMvE>. Image: Patty de Frutos. Soundtrack: Fernando Álvarez.

¹⁹ To cite only one example, recently in Frankfurt Airport I came across a sticker by the door of one of the runway buses, in which the English words "WARNING: bar rotates" were followed by the Spanish "ADVERTENCIA: girar barra", which of course can only be understood as an imperative to turn the bar rather than to avoid contact with it.

Babelia heterogénea could be accepted as ingredients which add to the atmosphere of confusion and instability within the airport, before the concluding expression of reaching out to all past and present loved ones for the comfort of a multitudinary embrace:

Quero todas as pessoas que amei
et toutes ce[lle]s que j'aime fort désormais
vous tous
vi voglio qui, tutti insieme
by my side in this huge airport
abrazándome muy fuerte
para que nunca me caiga.

45

As this final stanza indeed clarifies, this 'airport poem' is by no means a poem of placelessness, but of all places, friendships and loves rolled into one. The very subject and atmosphere of the composition, a backdrop to the desire to live in the plural (notice the passage from *tú* (l. 1) to *vous* (l. 44)), makes it impossible to translate into a single language; without the multiplicity of tongues, the concluding exhortation would not be able to entwine the five strands together in order for all past and present experiences and relationships to converge and thus keep the 'poetic I' from falling. Ironically, contrary to the connotations of the title, in *Babelia heterogénea*, stability and reassurance are to be found in the bringing together of different languages, and not in their separation.

Conclusions

Before drawing any conclusions to this paper, it is important to bear in mind that we have seen only four examples of contemporary polyglot poetry; although a limited cross-section covering little more than Western Europe, they nevertheless represent four successive generations, showing similar and different attitudes to the poetic braiding of different tongues. One of the major aspects that the four chosen authors have in common is that their poetry is not composed merely for the page, but for performance, with or without musical or audiovisual accompaniment. In this respect, attention to sound as an essential part of the meaning is immediately and necessarily paramount within their creative and performative processes, as each poet takes fundamental steps away from the mere ludic exercise and divertissement, towards an expression that shifts from the singular to the plural, and from the personal to the collective.

In the hands of all four poets, the use of several languages is justified by their very plurality, yet there is multiplicity also in the purpose of their combination. As we have seen, in *Ici c'est comme nulle part*, Lambert Schlechter makes use of alliterations in different languages (although never in more than one tongue at a time, due to the syntactic independence of each line) whose untranslatability, coupled with the incremental details provided by the intratextual translation of the more menacing images, contributes to the progressive feeling of paranoia at the approaching sound of the ambulance and the possibility of all colours fading into the white-red seen as the eyelids are lowered for the last time. Not long later, the enhancement of meaning through the particularity of sound across words in different tongues appears as a central technique in Peter Wessel's *polyfonías*, which also explore and exploit the untranslatability of

cultural references, paradoxically highlighting the compartmentalisation of individual languages whilst reinforcing the expression of a composite –whole but not shattered– identity.²⁰ The tension between the idiosyncratic particularities of each individual tongue and the inevitability of plurality is relieved in the *polyfonías* by Wessel's light technique of intratextual translation or '*glissandi*', bringing about a natural cohabitation of sound systems, tones and modulations as if to create the one unique language of poetry ardently sought by the poet. Adrian Grima's more sporadic and selective peppering of foreign words in his Maltese poetry also owes itself to the untranslatability of cultural references (think of the historic charge within the apparently simple French antithesis '*la rive nord, la rive sud*' in *Għajnejk l-Alġier*), and more importantly, to the at once playful and serious expression of one culture as seen and experienced –and as heard and repronounced– by another (as in *London by night*, not only in the Maltese, but interestingly, also in Grech Ganado's translation into the language used as the 'macaronic' element in the original). Finally, as is clear in the concluding strophe of Elia Maqueda's *Babelia heterogénea*, the multiplicity of words and sounds across different tongues represents the sum of all past and present relationships, which are summoned together in the final lines in order to keep the subject from falling into a linguistic and human void.

The fact that these authors are regularly invited by cultural organisers to perform their poetry in public demonstrates that their polyglot works are not considered marginal, but as increasingly less exotic, and a more integral part, of contemporary international literature. However, it is not form alone, nor the progressive and ever more necessary demise of the national literature paradigm, which are bringing multilingual verse closer to the forefront of poetry circuits and criticism. Several volumes could and should be written about the directions being taken by the dozens of poets, across and beyond Europe, who find themselves more comfortable expressing themselves, and perhaps the world around them, in more than one language at once. In the cases of Wessel and Maqueda in particular, the braiding of tongues should be understood as a sincere and genuine manifestation of Goethe's *Weltverkehr* or 'world-traffic': with people generally a lot more mobile today than ever before, their expression as nomadic subjects resonates not within a limited group of readers, but within a not-so-gradually growing collective. *Le son juste* of their poetry, then, is the constant traffic of tongues heard as a single, continuous noise, or indeed music.

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²⁰ As Amin Maalouf exclaims sincerely in his essay *Les identités meurtrières* (Grasset & Fasquelle, 1998), identity cannot be compartmentalised, nor can it have any clearly defined set of boundaries; the identity of Wessel's poetic I is not several but one, made up of all the elements that have shaped and continue to shape it: "*Moitié français, donc, et moitié libanais? Pas du tout! L'identité ne se compartimente pas, elle ne se répartit ni par moitiés, ni par tiers, ni par plages cloisonnées. Je n'ai pas plusieurs identités, j'en ai une seule, faite de tous les éléments qui l'ont façonnée, selon un «dosage» particulier qui n'est jamais le même d'une personne à l'autre.*"

Appendix

Poem 1

Lambert Schlechter

Ici c'est comme nulle part

Wittgenstein: You mean it clicks?
When things don't click,
take clicker from your pocket and click it.
John Cage, Diary, 1969, Part V

1.

on ne sait jamais quand, on ne sait jamais si...
hagelstenen zo groot vallen straks uit de lucht
und Wolken ziehn, ziehn leichter denn je
il y a un merle dans le bouleau et qui se tait

messages are delayed, posts entangle 5
passe clopin-clopant le monsieur manchot
avec son éteignoir de réverbères
augurarci la notte, buona notte, notte nera

de wolken ze jagen voorbij ze zijn lichter dan ooit 10
une lune japonaise fait son tour de bilboquet
on ne sait jamais quand, on ne sait jamais si...
schwarze Amsel singt ein weisses Lied

und rilkische Fetzen hängen am Gezweig
wer jetzt kein Haus hat, wird in den Wald gehn
messages are delayed, posts entangle 15
ambulance weaves driverless

hagelstenen zo groot vallen straks uit de lucht
und Wolken ziehn, ziehn leichter denn je
e nel folto della fredda foresta c'è una casa
- une maison, peut-être, si le merle ne s'est pas moqué 20

2.

on ne sait jamais quand, on ne sait jamais si...
en als het grijs van de wolken nu lood was
en als het plots met geraas op ons neerviel
you never know when, but you know that some day...

pero el mirlo se burla, silba sus blancas notas 25
una ambulancia en Manhattan, una ambulancia en Budapest
y por supuesto que hay un conductor, un mexicano, un polaco
on va s'occuper de vous, on vous rendra votre sang

una luna giapponese sorge sulla Mesopotamia
da tanti anni antibiotici non ci sono piu
hagelsteen en zo groot vallen straks uit de lucht
messages are delayed, posts entangle 30

en attendant on enterre les enfants au bord des champs
les coquelicots seront plus rouges que jamais
und Wolken ziehn leicht, leicht wie Dunst
graue Amsel flötet ihre weisse Klage 35

aquí es como en ninguna parte y aquí es por todas partes
aquí es aquí y ahora es nunca desde siempre
y pasan las nubes más nubes que nunca
y hay una luna, tanta luna 40

3.

on s'occupera de vous, on vous rendra votre sang
Schiele devant le miroir éclabousse de rouge son dessin
sono segnali, gridi di carne
nel bel mezzo della notte, buona notte, notte nera

douceur douce du con de femme
et une embellie soudain dans la grisaille
but the messages are delayed, posts entangle
on ne sait jamais quand, on ne sait jamais si... 45

we komen zo bij u, we roepen een ziekenwagen
de chauffeur spreekt je taal niet, maar hij brengt je waar je zijn moet
on vous rendra votre sang, à New York, à Budapest
una luna nera abellirà il bianco della notte 50

Schiele devant son miroir s'occupera de vous
mettra du rouge entre tes jambes ouvertes
chambre fleurie où il voudra se loger de tout son long
ein Hagel von Pflastersteinen zertrümmert ihm den Schädel 55

messages are delayed, posts are lost
las hierbas son más amarillas que nunca, tendremos sed,
sed por la noche, sed por el día, el agua está helada,
todo queda blanco de nieve
et il n'y aura personne pour nous rendre notre sang 60

4.

messages are delayed, birds are mute
de enige boodschap die ik ooit hoorde
was soms op een avond de spot van de merel
messages are delayed, all is hushed

65

on ne sait jamais quand, on ne sait jamais si...
et si c'était maintenant, et si c'était ici
hagelstenen zo groot vallen straks uit de lucht
ça fait un moment que j'en parle

und ein Blick auf die Postkarte : Schieles Zeichnung,
Striche schwarz & rot
messages are delayed, it snows all night
l'ambulance n'avance pas, s'arrête, s'enlise

70

ça fait un moment que j'en parle
nobody hears, the message is stuck
y la luna viene, y la luna se va
atente al cabeceo de las galaxias

75

avant que le grêlon fracasse le crâne
il y aura eu, le temps d'une seconde
het gefluit van de merel, de rode vlek van de schets
puis la cervelle s'écoule et gèle aussitôt

80

Poem 2
Peter Wessel
Un idioma sin fronteras

Para José Antonio Marina

Dentro de mí
viven cuatro personas, each
with their own voice,
su propia
lengua, 5
sa propre langue.

Hver med sit eget sprog
og sin egen stemme.

No disputan: habla
quien ha de hablar, 10
the one who comes up with the best
and truest word
le mot juste.

Y cuál es
le plus précis, or adequate word? Qui décide? 15
Hvem bestemmer? Er
der et valg?
Vote-t-on
or is there something
that pulls up the word like a root, qui tire 20
le mot, la palabra,
abra

cadabra
from a common soil,
de un magma común, y - devant 25
qui - tout le monde stands back
in awe?
Et fælles "jeg" måske?
(tout compte fait
ils n'ont qu'une langue!). 30

Supongo que c'est
l'experience: chaque mot, each word,
cada palabra
taler fra sin tid,
nació en su época 35

and is charged with the force,
the strength, the power,
la fuerza de la mujer que da a luz.

I should have stopped making sense
a long time ago, trying to squeeze 40
my self
into a linguistically clean
corset, mirándome uno tras otro
en los espejos de feria del
danés, inglés, francés 45
y espagnol:
seul "le petit comité",
the barbershop quartet of my four voices,
mis
cuatro idiomas, quatre langues, 50
pueden lograr
ce fameux "dérèglement de tous les sens"
that Rimbaud called for,
reivindicó,
og holdt I hævd; that famous 55
"disordering of all the senses"
que hace posible
contornear
el ubicuo
y todopoderoso 60
billion-dollar-brain,
nuestro encumbrado cerebro,
or rather, THE ECHO CHAMBER CUM RELAY TOWER
WE'VE MADE OF IT,
to gain access to that universally 65
shared
trove of sentiments, whose language,
cuya lengua,
- as eloquent as inefable -
taler for sig selv, 70

speaks for itself.

Poem 3

Peter Wessel

On the Difficulty of Translating 'La Femme et la Nourriture' into Spanish

La femme et la nourriture n'est pas pareille,
pas igual
a la antiséptica
y pedante
mujer y la alimentación, 5
la tan llevada y tan traída que
ni la notamos *mujer y la*
cocina,
la mundana *mujer*
y la comida 10
o la,
ya cumplida,
mujer y la mamá.

La femme et la nourriture no son
cinco palabras seguidas 15
pursuing a sense, a
meaning, sino
a fundamental chord - a resonance
infiniment plus près de la tierra;
closer to, and yet 20
darker than earth.

Plus originelle,
et plus universelle
elle n'a pas d'objet:
she's nurturing nature, 25
gry og grøde.

La femme es
et la femme est la nourriture.

Poem 4
Adrian Grima
Ghajnejk l-Alġier

nistenna l-lejl jaħkimni
't-triq teħodni, 'r-riħ
nimtedd ġo fik,
ninqata' mill-qieġħ

nistenna hađdejk jinbarmu sidri
seklu 'frixni
ħamra x-xemx mifquġħa
minn tulek kif tridni iktibni

5

jistennew id-dawl biex jiskuraw
ġħajnejk
Shahira, Farroudja, Shehrazade
la rive nord, la rive sud
al-baħar fond mirdum al-mutawassit
il-mewġ, il-portijiet
iċ-ċaġħaq, ġħajnejk
il-biża' l-qieġħ
dal-ferħ ta' Marzu x-xemx
ix-xewqa mqallba l-baħar ġenn
il-boġħod il-qrib

10

15

bid-dlam t'ġħajnejk tobromni
ġo dahri, minn ġħonqi, ġo fommi

20

nistenna l-lejl ġħajnejk
teħodni t-triq, ir-riħ
minn ġewwa nett mill-qieġħ ninqata' ġħalik
ġħajnejk
l-Alġier

25

Poem 5
Adrian Grima
London by night

London by night,
il-gożż hwejjeg, il-kartun li rajt;
il-ftit kliem bis-sens, bl-ispirtu,
li smajt;
il-ħalfa sigrieta li ħlift 5
li qatt ma nerga' nagħmel
London by night.
Landin taċ-ċajt,
li thallik ixxomm l-alkohol ta' mnifsejha baj najt,
li thallik tisker bil-kesha taht ħajt; 10
li meta ssejħilha tinjorak u tibqa' fejn bqajt.
Landin orrajt.
Issa jien qieghed hawn
taht das-saqaf inserrah mal-ħajt;
u dawk l-uċuħ imgerfxin saru attrazzjonijiet 15
fuq *London by night.*

London by night

(English translation by Maria Grech Ganado)

London by night
The rags and cardboard boxes,
The few sane words I heard
Witty and light;
The secret vow I made 5
Never to repeat
London by night.
Landin! The blight
That lets you smell the spirit in her breath by nite,
That sees you drunk in some cold corner, huddled tight, 10
Ignores your call and leaves you to your plight.
Landin, alright.
Now I'm here
With a roof over my head,
fully fed and warm in bed, 15
but those bewildered faces are still sights
of a *London by night.*

Poem 6
Elia Maqueda
Babelia heterogénea

No sé si te he contado alguna vez
que yo lo que quiero es una vida de aeropuerto
don't know if you get the picture right
it's everything about flying back and forth
un peu comme le cinéma muet 5
quand tout se déroule à une vitesse étrange,
différente, hors d'oeuvre,
tantas pessoas juntas e tão sozinhas
non sono così difficile
tutti questi messaggi 10
dear passengers et tout ça,
tante nazionalità diverse però
insieme nello stesso spazio,
cuerpos extraños, blandos y a la vez
so obvious, con sus bultos y pecados, 15
with their hearts beating so fast
that they could die of hurry.

Il y en a qui dorment par terre,
des corps qu'il faut sauter,
ma perché non approssimarsi gli uni degli altri 20
y acariciarse, e ficar tranqüilos.

O que eu quero é ter
une vie qui ne s'arrete jamais
a life to sit back on a chair
y escribir con tinta china la memoria 25
tutto quello che voglia essere scritto.

I wanna write while living
da bela forma dos aviões, da sua branqueza
un peu sale.

Yo quiero una vida heterogénea 30
piena di baci
alas, everything but empty.

Ci vuole tutto e ci vuole tanto

preciso uma vida que saiba voar
pleine d'ailes 35
with everything we've ever dreamed of
alguma volta.

Tous les moments heureux
sono adesso dei ricordi azzurri
all the red parties dancing in the middle of my mind 40
noites intermináveis.

Quero todas as pessoas que amei
et toutes ces que j'aime fort désormais
vous tous
vi voglio qui, tutti insieme 45
by my side in this huge airport
abrazándome muy fuerte
para que nunca me caiga.