

Patrick Bizzaro

Translations

"Our intention in producing this translation has been to try to give the reader ... an experience as close as possible to that of the reader of the German original."

Guyer and Wood, trans. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 73

I comprehend my immigrant father's words
the way I understand Guyer and Wood's translation:
a series of correspondences,
not the exact words, but maybe the exact intention.

After all, they cannot be exact.
They are not the same language
any more than the language of his heart
is also the language of my brain.

They are the correspondences,
the best possible matches for those words,
nothing more than points of contact
between one language and another.

And they offer the almost-idea
the near-truth
of Kant's near-truth,
his almost-idea.

Instructions
My father was made
foreman on a printing press,
stamping cardboard
boxes with instructions,
loading letters into the rack
with such steady hands
gamblers' eyes flutter by contrast.

He would watch
my fingers pry open
every package I touched,
my head flying from words
of explanation,
letters of complaint.

“They were written for a reason,”
he’d whisper, almost confidentially,
nodding slowly, with such care at the instructions,
his gestures turned light italic
into bold print.

I’d smile and turn away.
Since his death, I’ve stopped reading
boxes before opening them,
ripping at them furiously.
This has become my way
with cardboard
which, like my life,
I squeeze with my tightening
hands. Only now,

in my father’s absence,
I’m blind to the instructions
of the man who lined letters
on boxes slowly,
correctly spelling words
he could not pronounce.

Dictation Dilemma

My mother wanted to be a secretary.
I can only imagine it now,

the decision to study dictation
in a language she didn't know.

I've seen her stenographer's notebooks
filled with marks of words:

peace offerings to enemy nations, or
a menu for a Chinese restaurant, or

a drawing of intervals a spider walks
across the page. Maybe all of these at once.

I imagine her boss asking that the pad
be read aloud,

her invention of words a bridge
of confusion immigrants crawl across

an hour before dawn, and the boss
unsure now what exactly he might have said.

Cherry Tree

No longer able in late life
to climb the tree himself, father squats
under it in the backyard, a table
of shorts and knees balancing a basket.

Mother shouts down to him, one hand
around her mouth, the other holding the tree,
tossing from her ladder
a glance both hungry and apart.

She drops a handful of cherries
toward my father who ducks and smiles,
covering his forehead with the back of one hand,
holding the lopsided basket with his other.

He has spent the day outdoors,
catching cherries, one pile of seed
thrown to the ground,
another of fruit to be cooked and stewed,

stored and drawn in winter
for pies, for cobbler. His face red from work
and ale, he has spent the day
sitting in the shady yard

listening to mother,
small explosions of laughter
tossed from a tree and shattered
on the ground around him.