

Poems

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Volume 38, Number 4, décembre 1993

Le *Je* du traducteur
The *I* of the Translator

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/003637ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/003637ar>

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Publisher(s)

Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

0026-0452 (print)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this note

Meredith, C. (1993). Poems. *Meta*, 38(4), 736–737.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/003637ar>

All you need's something penned by a friend of a friend,
But remember: the higher the better.

So I'm biding my time till the boss learns that I'm
The least qualified translator yet.
For the friends I've on ice will then find me a nice
Sixty thousand per annum *tablette*.

THE ARCHITECT AS ARTIST

A prestige catalogue for a prestige exhibit
For a nation's prestige galleries
From Québec with love.

Ninety thousand words
Abounding in architese.

Ninety thousand words
To be translated in
One month
(Deadlines, you know).

Ninety thousand words:
For one translator,
A six-month task.

So call in six free-lancers
And add one for luck
(deadlines, you know).

That way, each expression
Will only be given
Seven different renderings.

The reviser can figure it out.

Reviser? What reviser?
No time for revision!
Notimenotimenotimenoti...
Oh, all right.
Give it a casual read
But
No comparison with source
(Deadlines, you know).

POEMS

ADMITTED TO CLASS 1

I sat for the latest translation exam;
My paper was full of corrections.
I failed. So you ask how I got where I am?
My secret, in one word: connections.

When the interview came (oh, I know *that* old game:
Equal doses of wisdom and bull),
The notation was zero, but see? I'm a hero!
How come? In three words, I got pull.

It's so easy, you know, in this government show,
And you don't have to be a go-getter.

Then up the mediocracy
In service of bureaucracy.
No time to speak of quality.
No time
No time
No...

TO A NOVICE TRANSLATOR

1. Irregardless of the quality of what you might
produce,

TYPE!

And forget time-honored theories on proper
English use.

JUST TYPE!

Nose to grindstone, keep a-slogging, nine-to-five
without a stop

Though the racket all around you makes you want to
blow your top.

Just remember — you're in trouble if you let your
word count drop,

SO TYPE.

2. If some morning you've got worries, you must
leave them at the door

and TYPE.

Word production's all that matters at the factory
(second floor),

so TYPE.

Sick or tired or hung over or recovering from a spat,
Practise not self-consolation — they're not paying
you for *that*.

Just make certain that the carriage keeps on flying
like a bat

and TYPE.

3. It's the saddest commentary that today such stress
is laid

on TYPE;

That a qualified translator, just to feel he's got it
made,

must TYPE.

You'll be honored with a handshake once you've
logged your millionth word,

You might even get a letter from your Minister, I've
heard.

But speak about the *quality*? Why, Confrère, that's
absurd!

GO TYPE!

RUSH JOB

One more...

- deadline met;
- emergency coped with;
- feather in the translator's cap;
- client satisfied.

Sharing the envelope with the prose
(the deathless prose),

a statement spells out precisely
how much that prose will cost the client
in dollars and cents.

(Bueraucrats love to read figures;
it makes them feel they've arrived.)

A lifetime's harvest, then, of

- diligence, perseverance, self-discipline,
- knowledge, patience, skill

has again borne fruit;

fruit measured in terms of numbers
and silly decimal points.

CLIVE MEREDITH
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