

Mime X. The Sailor
(trans. Alina Opreanu)

If you doubt I wielded heavy oars, look at my hands and knees; you will find them as worn out as old tools. I know each sea grass, sometimes violet and sometimes blue, and am familiar with all the spiral shells. There are some grasses endowed with human life—these have eyes as transparent as jelly, a body like a sow's teat, and a multitude of thin limbs that are also mouths. And amidst shells full of holes, I've seen some that were pierced over a thousand times, and from each tiny opening emerged or retreated a fleshy foot upon which the shell moved.

After passing the Pillars of Hercules, the Ocean that circles the earth becomes strange and furious.

And in its course it creates shadowy islands inhabited by strange men and marvelous animals. There is a serpent with a golden beard, which governs its kingdom wisely, and the women of this place have an eye at the end of each finger. Others have beaks and crests like birds. As for the rest, they are just like us. On an island where I landed, the inhabitants bore their heads where we have our stomachs, and upon greeting us, they bowed their bellies. As for the Cyclops, pygmies, and giants, I won't say a word—they are too many to number.

None of these things seem extraordinary to me; I am not terrified of them. But one evening, I saw Scylla. Our boat touched the sand of the Sicilian coast. Turning the rudder, I noticed in the middle of the water a woman's head with her eyes closed. Her hair was the color of gold. She seemed asleep. And I suddenly trembled—for I feared that I would see her eyes, and knew that after gazing into them, I would straighten the rudder and direct our boat into the abyss.

Mime XI. The Six Notes of the Flute
(trans. Alina Opreanu)

In the lush pastures of Sicily there is a wood of sweet almond trees not far from the sea. There is an ancient seat made of black stone upon which shepherds have sat for years. Finely woven cicada cages and green wicker nets for catching fish hang on the branches of nearby trees. She who sleeps perched on the black stone seat, feet wrapped in strips of cloth, head hidden beneath a pointed red straw hat, waits for a shepherd who never returned. He left, hands coated in pure wax, to cut reeds in the damp thicket: he wanted to fashion a flute of seven pipes as the god Pan had instructed him. And after seven hours had passed, the first note arose beside the black stone seat where the one who sleeps today was keeping watch. Now the note was close, bright, and silvery. Then seven hours passed over the meadow blue with sunlight and the second note rang out, joyous and gilded. And every seven hours today's sleeper heard the sound of one of the pipes of the new flute. The third sound was distant and somber, like an iron clamor. And the fourth note was even more distant and chimed deeply, with brassy resonance. The fifth was disconcerting and brief, like a hit to a pewter vase. But the sixth was dull and muffled, and only as loud as the leaden weights of a net that knock together.

Now she who sleeps today awaited the seventh note, which did not sound at all. The days enveloped the almond tree woods with their white mist, and the twilights with their grey mist, and the nights with their purple and blue mist. Perhaps the shepherd waits for the seventh note, beside a luminous pool, in the growing shadows of evenings and years; and, sitting on the black stone seat, she who waited for the shepherd has fallen asleep.

Alina Opreanu: *The watery world of Mime X is a strange one of sea creatures that populate the imagination. I chose to translate the French "marin" as "sailor" rather*

than “mariner” in order to bring this narrator with his gnarled hands and fantastical tales closer to our present day. The transition from the fearful image of Scylla to the delicate shape of the sleeping woman in *Mime XI* provided an opportunity to play with descriptions of sound: a silvery note (“la note était proche, claire et argentine”), a somber iron clamor (“grave comme la clameur du fer”), a brassy chime (“la voix du cuivre”). Throughout there is a tension between the weightless voice of the flute and the increasing heaviness of the metaphorical objects—iron, brass, pewter, and lead. The musicality of the passage becomes like that of a dirge in the last paragraph where “brouillard” is repeated three times. While “mist” is a faithful translation, this is perhaps where the English diverges from the French original by creating an atmosphere that is crisp and dreamy rather than shadowy and ancient.

Mime X. The Seaman
(trans. Hannah Embleton-Smith)

If you doubt that I have plied the heavy oars, look at my hands and my knees: you will find them worn as ancient tools. I know every weed of the underwater plains that are at times purple and at others blue, and I have absorbed the science of every coiled shell. Some of the weeds are endowed with human life; their buds are transparent eyes, like jelly, their bodies like the teats of sows, and they have scores of slender limbs, which are also mouths. And among the punctured shells, I have seen some that were pierced over a thousand times; and from each little opening came and went a fleshly foot upon which the shell would move.

After crossing the Pillars of Hercules, the ocean surrounding the land becomes strange and wild.

And on its rapid course, it creates dark islands inhabited by marvellous animals and men of different kinds. There a serpent lies with golden whiskers, wisely governing his kingdom; and the women of the land have an eye on the tip of each finger. Others have beaks and crests like birds; as for the rest, they resemble us. On one island at which I alighted, the inhabitants bore their heads where we keep our stomachs; when they waved at us, they bowed their bellies. As regards the Cyclops, pigmies and giantss, I shan't speak of them; for their number is too great.

None of these things appears incredible to me; towards them I feel no terror. But one evening, I saw Scylla. Our boat was grazing the sand of the Sicilian coast. As I was turning the rudder, I remarked in the middle of the water a female head with closed eyes. Its hair was coloured gold. It appeared to be sleeping. And I immediately trembled in fear of seeing her pupils, knowing full well that the moment I gazed into them I would turn the rudder towards the gulf of the sea.

Hannah Embleton-Smith: *I was struck by the assault on the senses in Schwob's text. In *Mime X*, the assault is visual. Eyes pervade the land and sea; they infest bodies, with eyes spreading over hands and stomachs. I opted for translating “herbes” as “weeds,” rather than a more neutral “plants” or “flora,” in echo of the underlying sense of invasion by sight and sensuality, which in turn echoes the exploration of beauty in decay and sin by the Symbolists.*

This led to one issue with the “yeux transparents” of underwater plants: “yeux” can be translated to “buds,” but in opting for “eyes,” the landscape maintains a voyeuristic

symmetry with the women's hands on the island, endowed with an eye on the tip of each finger.

Another concern of mine was in maintaining the lulling, almost hypnotic rhythm of the original. I manipulated word order: "marvellous animals" comes before "men of different kinds" to end on a short iambic phrase that evokes a hypnotised state and yet a certain playfulness in, or concession to, that hypnosis.

The undercurrents of monstrosity throughout "Mime X" were interesting in translation. For example, "elle" in the original refers to the woman's head in the water, yet still retains feminine connotation. In translation, it was more evocative to opt for "its," intensifying the interplay between human and monster, beautiful woman and seemingly detached head awaiting its bait. This "dark side" of the text was also perfect fodder for a collage counterpart.

Mime XI. The Six Notes of the Flute (trans. Hannah Embleton-Smith)

In the rich pastures of Sicily there is a wood of sweet almond trees, not far from the sea. There rests a timeworn seat of black stone where shepherds have sat over the years. From the branches of neighbouring trees hang cicada cages, plaited together with fine bulrushes, and baskets of green osiers used to catch fish. The sleeping woman, perched upright on the seat of black stone, her feet wrapped in strips of cloth, her head hidden beneath a pointed, red straw hat, awaits a shepherd who has never returned. He left, his hands coated in pure wax, to cut reeds in the damp undergrowth: he wished to craft a flute of seven pipes from them, in the manner shown him by the god Pan.

And when seven hours had passed, the first note rang out near the seat of black stone, where she who is now sleeping was keeping vigil. Now this note was close, crisp, and silvery. Then seven more hours passed on the meadow, which was blue with sunlight, and the second note resounded, joyful and golden. And every seventh hour, our sleeper heard another note come forth from the new flute. The third note was distant and solemn like the clang of iron. And the fourth note was yet more distant and tolled deeply, like struck copper. The fifth was confused and abrupt like the clatter of a tin vase. But the sixth was as dull and stifled as the leaden weights of a fisherman's net knocking together.

And the woman, now asleep, listened out for the seventh note, which never sounded. The days enveloped the wood of almond trees with their white mists, and the dusks with their grey mists, and the nights with their mists of purple and blue. Perhaps the shepherd is waiting for the seventh note, at the edge of an effervescent pool, in the growing shade of the evenings and the years; and, sitting on the seat of black stone, the woman once waiting for the shepherd has fallen asleep.

Hannah Embleton-Smith: *In this study, it is the ears that fall victim to sensual assault. From the title, "les six notes de la flûte" (my emphasis), our audial expectations are undermined: we begin the scene in silence, with a woman for whom time has stood as still as the black stone on which she sits. When the flute is finally introduced, we are left questioning by the number seven which dominates the text and even commands time, each note ringing out on every seventh hour.*

Nevertheless, as readers, we hear the sound of each note one after the other in short sentences: time has accelerated. Schwob's mime here evokes a sense of chaos, yet it is a

paradoxically soft chaos, a lulled (self-)destruction as a result of the measured rhythm of each sentence. I slightly exaggerated the reader's accelerated state in translation with the repetition of "like" for each metallic comparison, simultaneously speeding up the reading process and tiring the ears through repetition as much as through the clanging metal.

As for the collage, I wanted to mirror the metallic texture that marks time for Schwob's characters. The eyes are thus obliged to take a linear direction in the collage, as we follow the sound of each note downwards until it fades away. Images of time sneak in and eyes continue to watch, both a lingering trait of Mime X and a way of confronting the reader with his/her own gaze. By the sixth note, the image is as inconsequential as the shepherd's submerged note in the text, and the missing seventh is replaced by a pen drawing of an anonymous face who is both watching and distant, for you to decide whether it is the shepherd, the woman, or you, the reader.

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Hannah Embleton-Smith is a graduate from Cardiff University in French and English literature. Currently translating commercial and academic texts on a freelance basis, she is going on to pursue an M.A. in literary translation.