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Henri Deluy
translated by **Jacqueline Kari**

The Oath of Strasbourg

0

Red canteens brought to
Lips. Thigh laundry.

Little heaps of brine under
The folds. What's needed.

What warms. What's
Necessary.

1

The day was
Day and night.

Shells. Rags.
Double hours.

For three days of night.

2

Iraq slept closed
Around Babylon. Fog

Laid in. Chance bus.
Smashed skull, the little

Girl disappeared
Behind the buildings.

3

Manufactured paprikas. Strings of
Adverbs. Slogans, from Gaelic.

Linens and fabric near the body, right
Side. Jaws, benefiting

Only the skin.

4

Strange drinks. Thinned sludge.
Perfect combinations of consonants.

Lentils on the ground. Wild edges of
The Great Wall. With this

Thing under which nothing
Moved.

5

Beaters, at two o'clock, and background.
Heather, from the morning. Spices toward

Evening. Wrong foods. Around
A gentian flower.

6

Rows of beams, cinnamon bark.
First darkneses. Turquoise plums

On the roofs. Chiles, suitable
Only for snakes. And the Arab man,

Striking.

7

The adjective. Or any
Adjective. A proper noun. Broken

Containers. Mineral salts. Posters.
(«French first»). And

What had been this gray soil
Arranged on the page.

8

1945. Unbroken silence in dim
light.

In a MITROPA train, Roger Queudane,
Welfare child,

Unruffled killer, standing, exhausted, an evening late summer,
Near a wooden church, taught

English to the girls working for him.

9

Midnights to come. Fringes of clouds, high
Up. Layer of tapestries

That spread to the Northwest.
After you—who walked behind the

Potemkin.

10

Berber. The Berber tongue. The article,
Apostrophe, the Bosnian. Or even

The path through Chellah. The pool

Of sacred eels. The henna

On the ears of the cats.

11

The wind beat against the grass and lifted
Pollen from eglantine roses. You let

The weather come and let no one
Temper your pain.

12

Ropes piled in front
Of the barges. The children, sitting on

Wide sidewalks, selling little
Things. Dolls' arms. Clay

Cranes. Erector set parts. Rags.
Broken counters inside

The bars.

13

Ribbons of foam at low tide. Docks grazing
The waves for the adventurer Saint-Ange,

Friend of the brothers Boileau. Beginning
Articulations, in a washed-out language.

But what then was this violence you spoke
Of, that it didn't take place?

14

Memory forgotten of an emphasis
Lost. Carp and turtles from Japan,

Among the grasses and flowers, behind
A pane of glass covered with

Rain.

15

Teotihuacan. Or far from Mexico. Muddy
Ditches. Scrawny, mangy dog,

Almost transparent, attempting to feed
On the remains of another dog, crushed

On the other side of the road. Fighting pigs,

Roused each night, in your mind.

16

Green beans from Marathon.
Yellows from Epidaurus.

Yellow oranges from Epidaurus.
Greens from Marathon,

Olives from Kalamata, grapes
From Corinth and

The onion, the difference.

17

Torpor. Semantic vagueness of vocabularies.
Near Iași, toward the East, in the darkness, the

Trains from Bucharest cut the heads
Of wolves then pour them into a cage

Of corn.

18

At the doors of Kathmandu, the guerilla was
Maoist. She carved her stakes

In the forests of bamboo. A copper
Ladle. List of a monolingual lexicon.

Words, that, here, suddenly, refused
To speak.

19

Sky below white houses
Under a hollow sea. Indeterminate

Vowels. Isolation of eras in
This pocket of memories.

20

Dry cleaning. Technical mastery
In the production of a form.

Shades of peach, or rose.
Of magenta or lemon. The trains

Parted and collected the dead
Trees.

21

The word, in German. The words, in
Akkadian. Finally sunk

Into this saffron-colored field
Of destroyed poppies. Love,

A wedge, always supplied
The second column.

22

Northern quarters of the city. On the hills of
La Belle de Mai, last trail

Before the upended clay. Declensions
Buried. A crossword that no longer

Combined.

23

And the Assyrian officials should await
The last word of the sentence to know

If they were to destroy or to deliver the
Grains. A wedge, always, in

The second column.

24

Seaweed. Seagull eggs. Cod
Cheeks. Sagas. In the useless modesty

Of total fog, close and closer.
And over there, an arctic tern, in the polar

Circle, attacks your head then
Throws itself into the sea.

25

Grains of straw on the horizon. Tongues too
Foreign, who watched at the doors of

Hotels, in Warsaw. Four times, you went back
On what you said most. And

The night—cut your bed in two.

26

«Immigrants, don't leave us
Alone with the French.» «Or the Arabs.»

«Or the Polish.» «Or
Juliette.» In pencil. In marker.

In chalk.

27

Indian fabrics in a Madurai alley.
Spontaneous versification. Kolkatan drapes.

Wood spoon. Legal terms.

Then, Ingeborg, a lover, from the first
Day.

28

You had decided to say nothing. To
Let nothing happen that might

Be said. Some archaisms alone
Thwarted the letter.

You told yourself that if you were silent,
Others would be silent as well.

29

Intransitive markets. Conjunctions heavy.
Periwinkles bare on geometric plates.

Heaps of self-portraits. Screens covered
With roving dogs, with white lilacs. Cut wood

Odor. Possibilities of the mouth, in the small
Hours.

30

The researched distinction. The invisible
Weeks. The distant air. Who knows
And doesn't want to. Time wasn't anymore,
Where you turned your face
Toward this other face, and watched itself die.

31

Sequence of tenses. Coloring of the genitals.
In a little melody. Light,
Emptied on an odor of nutmeg.
Ingeborg, slopes of the bust on
The snow.

32

A set of symbolic signs
Overlooks the open book. You
Never knew what they were
An image of. You continued to write.

33

Tracks of boars. Beard of children.
Root of mountains. Tendon of
Bears. Breath of fish. Saliva
Of birds. And, this way, cold water
To wash the blood.

34

Full paint on the ocean. Postcards
Never written. Vernacular edges of an

Assemblage of unaccented words. A
First hour that barely parted

From a complete darkness.

35

Total nudity near your leg. Missed
Opportunities. Time to dress. Near

A window. After the shower. The door
Closed itself. You didn't come back.

36

Canticle of Saint Eulalia. Stammers.
Proceeding stricken in a tonality

You don't know. Outrageousness of aristocratic names.
Coins brought, withheld. Neither limb, nor shape

Nor entire body, neither perfect.

37

This February 14, the Oath of Strasbourg,
Between Louis the German and Charles

The Bald. Thick odor of rust.
Recall some lines from a fragment of prose.

Vienna. In a cotton skirt. And saying yes
To the yes you said.

38

With all the words there are,
A life without end

On a filthy duvet, and also
What it is to

End together, as before.

Author Info

Henri Deluy is the founder and curator of the 'Biennale Internationale des Poètes' (1990–2005) in Paris, director of the journal *Action Poétique*, and editor of the journal *IF*. He is a translator, anthologist, and poet. His recent books include *L'amour charnel*, *Da Capo*, and *Je ne suis pas une prostituée, j'espère le devenir* from Flammarion; *Au blanc de neige* from Virgile; *Les poètes du tango*, with S. Yurkievich, from Gallimard; and *De ça*, V. Maïakovski, translated from the Russian, with *Address to Maïakovski*, from Inventaire/Invention.

Jacqueline Kari is a poet and translator and a recent graduate of the MA in poetry program at Miami University; she will begin an MFA at George Mason University this fall. More translations from *Les Arbres Noirs*, by Henri Deluy, are forthcoming in *Lana Turner*.