

15th St. Jerome Translation Contest

— 2020 EDITION —

English
First prize



Hilary Ancel-James

I pop 18 Valium before flying (but otherwise, I'm fine)

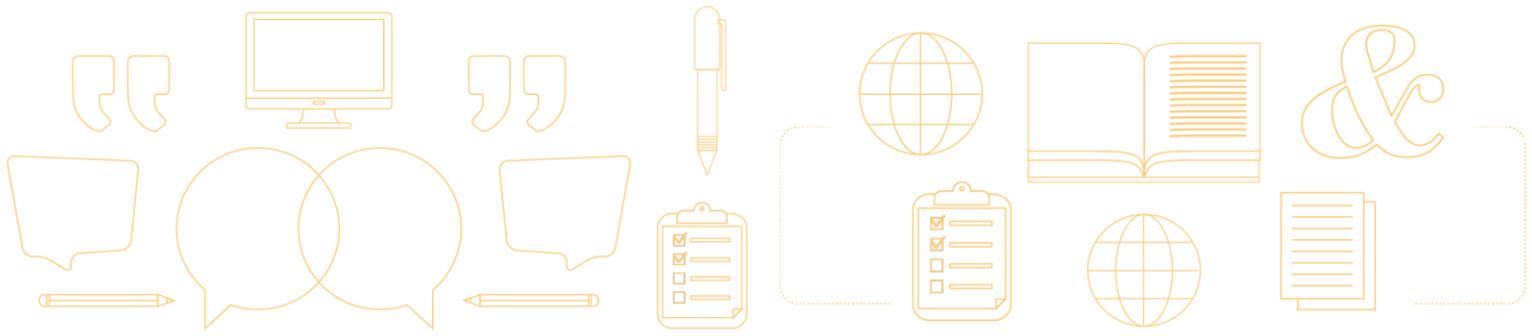
Next week, I'm flying to France. Flight time nine hours, many of which will be spent drifting over the ocean. I'm not the least bit nervous. Not at all. It's quite simple, really — I just never think about it. Some people I know, weeks before boarding, start imagining all kinds of grisly scenarios in which, due to one malfunction or another, their plane ends up crashing, but thank God I don't ever do that.

In all honesty, I'm as calm as a cow en route to the slaughterhouse.

I almost can't wait to find myself 12,000 feet above the Earth's surface, as chill as ever, mellow like only a stoner can be, head in the clouds, happily contemplating the endless blue sky, to say nothing of the majesty of our planet, whose countless marvels I peer down at through my little oval window: enchanting lakes, eternally snow-capped mountains, vast prairies, the ocean that'll soon engulf the plane's carcass...

What a joy, my friends, oh what a joy!

It's as if I were born to fly. No sooner do I settle into the cabin than I feel alive again. It's all I can do to not plant one on my neighbor's cheek. I'm like a kid in a toy store, so taken with it all: the random mingling of the passengers, the cushiony comfort of my seat, the beaming face of the newborn who had the bright idea to sit with her brother in the row just ahead, the inflight magazines I feverishly flip through to see what's in the meal I'll soon be served (a mishmash of frozen pasta and scraps of discarded salmon trawled from the septic tanks of the Indian Ocean), the ever so subtle monologue of our flight attendant, whose gesticulations indicate which way we should go when the plane bursts into flames mere seconds before hurtling into the tarmac — all this air travel lore never gets old.



Before long, there's our heavenward ascent; the tricky choice of my first movie, its opening scenes appearing crystal clear between two bouts of turbulence and three interruptions from the flight attendant; the velvety smoothness of my tomato juice, served without celery but with no shortage of ice; the hazy roar of the engines, whose every sputter compels me to pop another Valium (my 18th today); the announcement from our captain, who cheerily informs us in English that, due to a failure of the ventilation system, we are all going to die in agony; the silly grin I flash my fellow passengers when, just for kicks, our plane suddenly strays off track for a few fleeting seconds before correcting course. Or not.

[...]

Night sets in, all is quiet on board, sleep beckons as your eyelids weigh heavy and your body stretches out and manages to find that sweet spot, torso aslant, legs askew, head on the armrest, hands to toes, shoulders burrowing into the seat [...], a discomfort quickly forgotten when, between wakefulness and sleep, you envision in exquisite detail the precise moment when the plane, having lost both engines, begins its slow descent toward the blue waters of the Atlantic, that vast marine cemetery soon to be topping the evening news, as the anchorman gravely announces the horrific air disaster's devastating toll: 203 passengers, including 15 children, 12 crew members and — an immeasurable loss for French culture — one runaway Jew whose latest piece in Slate was, oddly enough, about his special love for transatlantic flights.

What if I just called the whole thing off?!!!