

# 15<sup>th</sup> St. Jerome Translation Contest

2020 EDITION

English  
Second prize

Miriam Gartenberg

## I pop 18 Valiums before I get on a plane (but otherwise, I'm fine)

I'm flying to France next week. Nine hours on a plane, most of it spent drifting over the ocean. I'm not anxious about that in the least. Not one bit. It's easy, really—I just don't think about it. I know people who, weeks before getting on a plane, start imagining all sorts of dreadful scenarios where their plane ends up crashing after experiencing some type of mechanical problem, but, thank goodness, I don't do that.

To be perfectly honest, I'm calm as a cow being led to slaughter.

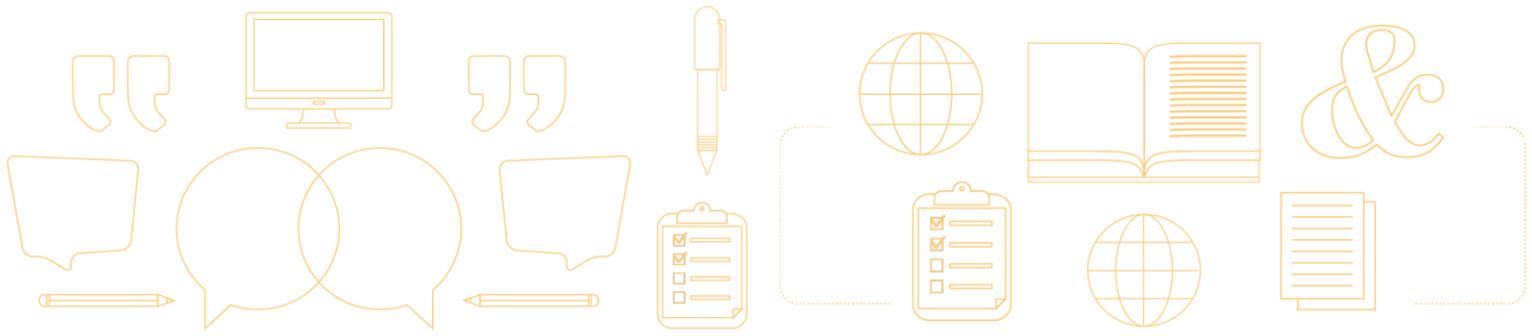
I can hardly wait to find myself 12,000 feet above the Earth, snug as a bug in a rug, serene as only a stoner can be, head in the clouds, thrilled at beholding the infinite blue sky—not to mention the thousand and one splendors of our planet, which I can just make out from the edge of my seat through the oval-shaped porthole: enchanting lakes, eternally snow-capped mountain peaks, vast plains, the ocean that will soon be swallowing up the carcass of the plane...

I'm delighted, my friends—simply overjoyed!

I was practically born to fly. Just taking my seat in the cabin brings it all back! I can barely restrain myself from double-kissing my seatmate's cheeks. I'm like a kid in a candy shop. Everything is exciting: the close passenger intimacy; the soft comfort of my seat; the contented face of the newborn who had the brilliant notion of taking up residence with her brother just one row ahead of me; the magazines whose pages I flip through feverishly to find out what tantalizing meal they'll soon be serving me (some hodgepodge of frozen pasta with salmon remains fished out of the septic tanks of the Indian Ocean); the highly nuanced instructions given by our male flight attendant who, using grand yet precise gestures, shows us how to exit the plane when it catches fire just seconds before crashing on the tarmac—you know, all the traditional aspects of air travel that I never tire of experiencing.

Pretty soon, we take off. The first carefully chosen in-flight movie begins and, between two bouts of turbulence and three interruptions from our female flight attendant, I start to perceive a few perfectly clear images of it. I take in the unctuous texture of my tomato juice, served with plenty of ice but no celery; the hazy whoosh of the jet engines whose every bump leads me to pop another Valium (my 18th since I woke up this morning); the perky tone of the captain as he announces, in English, that, following a breakdown in the ventilation system, we are all going to suffer atrociously, then die; the cheerful look I give my travel companions when, without warning, the plane decides to drop out of its flight path for a few furtive seconds before righting itself. Or not.

[...]



The night passes; the plane is quiet. Sleep calls; your eyelids grow heavy; your body stretches out and somehow manages to find the perfect position: angled torso, legs akimbo, head against the armrest, hands brushing toes, shoulders scrunched deep into the seat [...]—a momentary discomfort quickly forgotten as, while drifting in and out of dreamland, you imagine in torrid detail the exact moment when the plane, having lost both its engines, begins its slow descent towards the deep blue waters of the Atlantic, that immense watery grave, soon to become the lead story on the evening news, the anchor’s bland voiceover reading out the heavy toll of the latest air disaster: 203 passengers, including 15 children, 12 crew members and (an immeasurable loss to French culture) a wandering Jew who, ironically, in his last blog for Slate, reflected on his particular fondness for transatlantic flights.

Is it too late to cancel?!

Laurent Sagalovitsch, “I pop 18 Valiums before I get on a plane (but otherwise, I’m fine)”, Slate, 23 August 2019.