

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

— 2020 EDITION —

English Student prize



Jem Walker

## I take eighteen Valium before getting on planes (but besides that, I'm fine)

Next week, I'm flying to France. Nine hours on a plane, including many spent wandering about above the ocean. I'm not worried or anything. Not at all. It's no big deal anyway; I never even think about it. I know people who start to imagine, weeks before setting foot on the plane, all sorts of grotesque scenarios in which it suffers some failure or other and ends up crashing but, thank God, that's not me at all.

In fact, I'm as calm as a lamb headed for the slaughter.

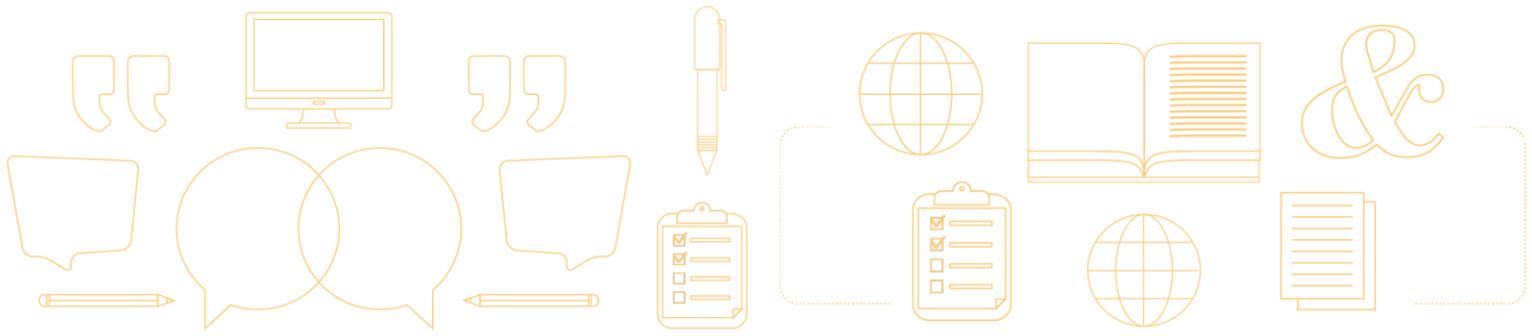
I'm almost looking forward to being twelve thousand feet above the surface of the Earth, just as cool as a cucumber, relaxed as a stoner, head in the clouds and happy as Larry, contemplating the infinite blue sky and the splendour of our planet, viewed through the oval window from my seat on high; a thousand and one marvels, enchanting lakes, vast prairies, mountain peaks with their eternal snow, and the ocean that will soon envelop the carcass of the aeroplane.

The pleasure! The utter bliss, dear reader!

It's as if I were born to fly. I barely take my seat in the cabin before I feel a new lease of life. I can hardly stop myself from planting a kiss on my neighbour's cheek. I'm like a child in a sweet shop, delighted by it all: the way the passengers are packed in, the soft comfort of the seats, the glowing features of the newborn who had the bright idea to sit with his brother in the row in front of mine, the magazines whose pages I feverishly turn to learn about the meal I will soon be enjoying (a pile of frozen pasta with scraps of salmon fished from cesspits in the Indian Ocean), the masterfully delivered speech from our flight attendant showing us, with sweeping, precise gestures, where to go when the plane catches fire a few seconds before crashing into the tarmac of the runway – all the magic of aviation I'll never get tired of.

Soon after, we take to the skies, and there's the careful choice of the first film to watch (of which, between two bouts of turbulence and three interruptions from the flight attendant, I will be able to make out the first few perfectly clear frames), my creamy tomato juice with no celery but brimming with ice cubes, the thin thrum of the engines whose every shake spurs me to throw back another Valium (the eighteenth since I woke up), the perky speech from the cockpit announcing in English that the ventilation system has broken and that we're all going to die in extreme pain, the cheerful glance towards my travel companions when, without warning, the plane decides to spice things up by veering off-course for a few brief seconds before pointing itself back in the right direction. Or not.

[...]



Then comes the night, and calm aboard the plane - sleep calls, eyelids weigh, your body stretches and finds the ideal position (slanted torso, legs awry, head against the armrest, arms at toe level, shoulders jammed into the depths of the seat [...]), all inconveniences quickly out of mind when, between two half-formed dreams, you imagine in minute detail the exact instant when the plane will lose both its engines and begin its slow descent into the bluish waters of the Atlantic, that enormous marine cemetery which will soon feature at the start of the evening news as a bland voiceover announces the heavy death toll of this terrible air disaster: two hundred passengers including fifteen children, twelve crew members and, in a staggering loss for French culture, a Jew on the run, whose last column for Slate was about, strangely, his personal affection for transatlantic flights.

Is it too late to cancel?!

Translated from Laurent Sagalovitsch, « Je m'enfile dix-huit valium avant de prendre l'avion (mais sinon, ça va) », Slate, 23 August 2019, <http://www.slate.fr/story/181014/peur-avion-inconfort>

