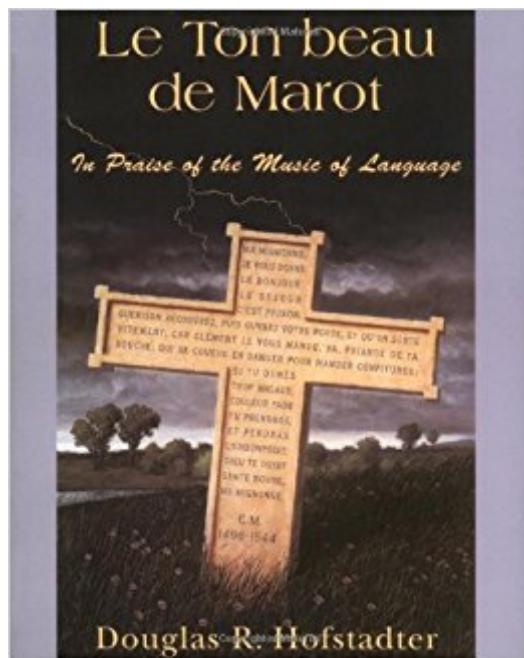


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Le Ton Beau De Marot: In Praise Of The Music Of Language



Synopsis

Lost in an art—the art of translation. Thus, in an elegant anagram (translation = lost in an art), Pulitzer Prize-winning author and pioneering cognitive scientist Douglas Hofstadter hints at what led him to pen a deep personal homage to the witty sixteenth-century French poet Clément Marot. “Le ton beau de Marot” literally means “The sweet tone of Marot,” but to a French ear it suggests “Le tombeau de Marot,” that is, “The tomb of Marot.” That double entendre foreshadows the linguistic exuberance of this book, which was sparked a decade ago when Hofstadter, under the spell of an exquisite French miniature by Marot, got hooked on the challenge of recreating both its sweet message and its tight rhymes in English—jumping through two tough hoops at once. In the next few years, he not only did many of his own translations of Marot’s poem, but also enlisted friends, students, colleagues, family, noted poets, and translators—even three state-of-the-art translation programs!—to try their hand at this subtle challenge. The rich harvest is represented here by 88 wildly diverse variations on Marot’s little theme. Yet this barely scratches the surface of *Le Ton beau de Marot*, for small groups of these poems alternate with chapters that run all over the map of language and thought. Not merely a set of translations of one poem, *Le Ton beau de Marot* is an autobiographical essay, a love letter to the French language, a series of musings on life, loss, and death, a sweet bouquet of stirring poetry—but most of all, it celebrates the limitless creativity fired by a passion for the music of words. Dozens of literary themes and creations are woven into the picture, including Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*, Dante’s *Inferno*, Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye*, Villon’s *Ballades*, Nabokov’s essays, Georges Perec’s *La Disparition*, Vikram Seth’s *Golden Gate*, Horace’s odes, and more. Rife with stunning form-content interplay, crammed with creative linguistic experiments yet always crystal-clear, this book is meant not only for lovers of literature, but also for people who wish to be brought into contact with current ideas about how creativity works, and who wish to see how today’s computational models of language and thought stack up next to the human mind. *Le Ton beau de Marot* is a sparkling, personal, and poetic exploration aimed at both the literary and the scientific world, and is sure to provoke great excitement and heated controversy among poets and translators, critics and writers, and those involved in the study of creativity and its elusive wellsprings.

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Customer Reviews

In the fall of 1537, a child was confined to bed for some time. The French poet Clément Marot wrote her a get-well poem, 28 lines long, each line a scant three syllables. In the mid-1980s, the outrageously gifted Douglas R. Hofstadter--il miglior fabbro of Godel, Escher, Bach--first attempted to translate this "sweet, old, small elegant French poem into English." He was later to challenge friends, relations, and colleagues to do the same. The results were exceptional, and are now contained in *Le Ton Beau De Marot*, a sunny exploration of scholarly and linguistic play and love's infinity. Less sunny, however, is the tragedy that hangs over Hofstadter's book, the sudden death of his wife, Carol, from a brain tumor. (Her translation is among the book's finest.) Marot's poem, in Hofstadter's initial translation (he is to compose many more), begins: "My sweet, / I bid you / A good day; / The stay / Is prison. / Health / Recover, / Then open / Your door ... " a slim frame on which to hang 600 or so pages of text. But the book is far more than a compendium of translators' triumphs (with the occasional misstep). Most of the renderings are original and lively, some lovely, though Hofstadter often feels compelled to improve them. He lightly laments that Bill Cavnar's rendering, "though superb along so many dimensions at once, still seems to lack a bit of that intangible verbal sparkle that I associate with the deepest Maroticity." Hofstadter's talents lie in linking his intoxication, erudition, and vision with humor, autobiography, and free association. His book takes on "rigidists," asks questions like, "Is plagiarism potentially creative?" and strives to define linguistic soul. Along the way, it accords the same level of respect to the seemingly trivial: sex jokes, Texas jokes, The Seven Year Itch, and the puzzle of how someone you love can hate a food that you adore. Throughout there is pun, ingenuity, and above all, love for language--which can compress distance and, through constraint, lead to freedom. --This text refers to an out of print or

unavailable edition of this title.

Clement Marot (1496-1544) may have been a great French poet, but "A une Da-moyselle malade" is not his best effort. Essentially it's a get-well greeting: sorry that you're sick, but try to eat something and get some fresh air. The ditty serves as a springboard for Hofstadter's thoughts about language, translation, culture and human genius as the author, his friends, translators, scholars and even computer programs contribute to numbing permutations of this one weak lyric. Hofstadter, a professor of artificial intelligence at Indiana University, had bestsellers with the 1980 Pulitzer Prize-winning *Godel, Escher, Bach* and a collection of essays reprinted from *Scientific American*, called *Metamagical Themas*. Here he is on shakier ground. Hofstadter is not a poet but doesn't hesitate to lay out his opinions: for example, all rhyming translations of "Eugene Onegin" are "excellent" and "fine," but he trashes Vladimir Nabokov's monumental and helpful literal version; he also calls *Lolita* "pedophilic pornography." And while there are moments of wit, intelligence and uncommon curiosity, there is also a diffuse structure and inflated?and sometimes hokey?prose: "In SimTown, many other things can happen including houses being set on fire and goldfish flopping out of their bowls. (I'm leaving off the quotes merely as a shorthand?I know they aren't real goldfish!)". His cheery gee-whizzery often rings false, and there's probably a good reason for the hollow sound?in 1993, his wife died of a rare disease, which probably also explains his choice of the verse. This book pays tribute to her, while illustrating the powers and limitations of speech. \$60,000 ad/promo. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

One of my favorite books, this is by the author of "Godel, Escher, Bach". Impossible to categorize accurately, it's a very extended riff on the difficulties and challenges of translation, carried out with a kind of beguiling enthusiasm. It shares the playfulness that characterized "Godel, Escher, Bach" but I found it more accessible and more interesting. Starting with a single unifying thread that winds through the entire book (various* translations of a single 28-line poem by the French author Clement Marot), Hofstadter weaves a fascinating tapestry about the challenges facing a translator. There is a whole chapter dedicated to translations of Eugene Onegin; another discusses various efforts at translating Dante. Along the way there are fun digressions about such challenges as translating lipograms (text written with the constraint that one or more letters of the alphabet are never used), the paradoxical usefulness of writing under constraints of various kinds, be they artificial as in lipogrammatic writing, or metrical constraints, as in Pushkin, Dante, or the sonnets of Shakespeare,

difficulties in writing translation software, linguistic issues such as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis**, how one would translate a 'dirty' joke to a clean version, while preserving the humor.*: I haven't counted, but there must be at least 50 different translations. Oddly enough, the accumulation of so many is not boring, but fascinating - Hofstadter's boyish enthusiasm helps to charm.**: (very) roughly, the linguistic notion that how we think is constrained by language. Dismissed by Steven Pinker in his book "The Language Instinct", though I think Pinker's case is less than convincing. A fascinating tour-de-force, it is also the kind of book one can dip in to from time to time and be entertained by any one of its chapters. In fact, this is probably the best way to approach this book - Hofstadter does meander at times, and has never met an interesting digression he doesn't like, so reading it all the way through might be fairly tough going.

Even with its imperfections (hey, the author is human) this work remains every bit a favorite as its prequel, GEB. A more detailed review is posted on the Leonardo website ... Search "Cameron Carpenter" Galeev "Rick Wakeman" and the review should come up. Once there, check out the footnote links.

A superb exploration of the "music" of poetry, the cognitive process in the reading/hearing of poetry, the complexity of meaning and the question of translation, and the "music" of language itself.

Sometimes a bit long winded in a few chapters going over the same point. Concept very interesting.

This is a great book and one of my favorites. It is a delight to share Douglas' Hofstadter's thoughts.

... this is an amazing book. It's one of my all-time favorite nonfiction books and is especially fascinating for readers who speak more than one language and are interested in the dilemmas of translation.

magical essay about words and feelings

Perfect present for the poet pal I have.

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