

LE PRINTEMPS DE LA TRADUCTION 2015

HÔTEL DE MASSA - SAMEDI 13 JUIN / 14H00

À L'IMPOSSIBLE NOUS SOMMES TENUS

Agnès Desarthe propose à ses invitées, Mathilde Bouhon et Cécile Dutheil de la Rochère, ainsi qu'au public, un jeu de mot "impossible" tiré d'un roman de Gugarnus et qui exige la retraduction d'un poème de Stevenson.

My poem hopes to be meat tenderizer, dream sweetener. I study young ones' footed pj's dangling from their daddy's massy grip. I want these children spared. I chant my ditty toward my husband's muscled back—like that's the world—like I'm now asking it to let these babies all go safe. My poem's "The Pleasant Land of Counterpane" by Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson.

When I was sick and lay a-bed,
I had two pillows at my head,
And all my toys beside me lay
To keep me happy all the day.

And sometimes for an hour or so
I watched my leaden soldiers go
With different uniforms and drills
Among the bedclothes, through the hills,

And sometimes sent my ships in fleets
All up and down among the sheets,
Or brought my trees and houses out,
And planted cities all about.

I was the giant great and still
That sits upon the pillow-hill,
And sees before him, dale and plain,
The pleasant land of counterpane.

Whilst we put kids to bed, I remember: When I first memorized this, I was five, couldn't read yet. I believed that "Counterpane" was spelled like "Pain"—with the I left in. I heard: The pleasant land of counter-pain, of not ever hurting. Only as a grownup, only when reading it aloud to little ones while trying and brighten Captain's rougher bedtime tales—only then did I see the word in print. I went, "Oh dear." Turns out, a counterpane is just a fancy quilt. Won't such a noun as my pet, made-up "counter-pain." —And don't I know there's no such place on earth as one where nothing ever hurts?

Still, I chose to hold in mind my peaceable kingdom—even if it *had* been founded on a mistake about the dictionary and human nature. I went on telling our children about this pleasant land of anti-hurt. That was where I wanted us to stay. Right off, it was so real to me. Still is. Some days, honey, it sure seems truer than this newspaper-headline world, this assigned one.