Peter Schmidt:

Thank you. I'm Peter Schmidt, I teach in the English Department here and I'm doing a course that's basically a survey course of poetry in English, including medieval to the present, and it has a section on translation. And so, that was a great opportunity to take advantage of the fact that Swarthmore grad and friend Daisy Fried has been doing a translation project that started during the COVID era of Baudelaire's work, translation, adaptation. After Baudelaire, it's called. She's published three volumes of poetry that are really amazing and they have great titles. My Brother is Getting Arrested Again, one. She Didn't Mean to Do It, and also Women's Poetry: Poems and Advice.

Peter Schmidt:

And she gave a reading with a Pulitzer winning poet who thought that the book was actually not a collection of poems, but an anthology, and asked her whether she was going to do more anthologies or not. It's not an anthology so much as it is a parody of different ideas that people, or cliches that they bring, about the assumption of what a woman's poem is, and then it works in very inventive ways to counter that and to suggest other possibilities for women's poetry.

Peter Schmidt:

She's going to read and introduce the various poems from the translation book today, and then she and I will have a brief conversation afterwards with a couple questions, and then we'll very quickly open things up to you all for reactions and questions and things. Okay? So welcome again, and welcome back, Daisy.

Daisy Fried:

Thank you. It's good to be back at the mothership. And I understand this is the very first time, oh, I'm told I can take this off. I put on lipstick for the first time in two years. Thank you, Peter, and thank you, McCabe Library. I'm going to just talk a little bit about the project, which happened by accident. I address this in my book. I'm going to read a little bit from the forward. By the way, I do have books for sale. I'm giving a Swarthmore discount, 10 bucks per book. So if you want one, they're in back, and Nathalie Anderson will sell them, the famous Nathalie Anderson will sell them to you.

Daisy Fried:

So the thing is, I don't know French very well, and I don't like Baudelaire that much. He's full of decay and pestilence and death and adjectives, too many adjectives. He invokes muses all the time, classical figures, goddesses, personifications. He's more self-centered than I am. But his disgust, he's full of disgust, but his disgust is kind of diagnostic and it's glorious, and he's always most revolted by himself. And I think that we in America could use more self-disgust sometimes.

Daisy Fried:

And I started messing around with Baudelaire in the spring of 2020. My husband was slowly dying of a very cruel disease, which affected his body, attacked his body, and his mind. He was in a hospital bed in the living room. And for quite a while, we didn't have any help to speak of. So it was a really tough time. We got COVID too. It was mild cases. But all of this stuff was going on in my life, and I didn't have a whole lot of time to write poetry.

Daisy Fried:

One day I was stealing a few rare minutes for myself, and I pulled a book of John Ashbery translations from the French off the shelf. What was happening was, because I didn't have any time to write and nobody has any attention span anymore, but I really didn't have any attention span, I decided I would read at least two poems every day, alphabetically from my poetry library in alphabetical order. I had been through Agudelo, Ai, Amichai, Ammons, Anderson, and Ashbery came next. And I didn't have enough brain power to read Convex Mirror, or anything like that, so I pulled off the Baudelaire, his French translations, looked up the one Baudelaire he had translated, and discovered that it was [French 00:04:54], which means landscape. And I thought that it was a lousy translation. I thought it was bouncy and chimey, maybe it was Ashbery-ish, maybe that was his intention. But I thought, "I can do better." So, that's how I think a lot of translation projects start. So this is the poem that this all started with. This is [French 00:04:55], which means landscape.

Daisy Fried:

To compose my sexless eclogues, I will bed down near the sky like the astrologers and, neighbor to bell-towers, listen dreamily to the somber wind-carried hymns. Chin in hand, high up under the slant roof, I'll see the factories' chatter and singsong, their chimneys and steeples, those masts of the city, and the giant sky dreaming of eternity.

Daisy Fried:

It's sweet, through mists, to watch a star born in the blue, lamp at the window, rivers of coal climbing the sky, moon pouring sorcery. Up there I'll see springtime, I'll see summer, fall, and when the winter comes with monotone snow, I'll close curtains and blinds, and build my fairy palaces in the night. I'll dream of blue bright horizons, of gardens, of fountains crying in alabaster, of kisses, birds singing evening and morning, all that infantile Idyll. And when Riot storms impotent at my window, I won't get up from my desk, I'll be plunged, voluptuous, in calling forth Spring by force of will, prizing sunshine from my heart, making of my burning thoughts a gentler weather.

Daisy Fried:

So this seemed like... When I got done, I thought, "Wait a minute, this is a quarantine poem." You know, Baudelaire in his attic and the mob outside dreaming of eternity. This was also at the time George Floyd had been murdered in Minnesota, and there were demonstrations in Philadelphia and all over. And so, there were literal mobs in the streets, and so I just thought, this poem, finishing this poem, this translation, gave me a joy in making that I hadn't felt in a long time. So I said, "I'm going to try more", because I couldn't... It was too hard for me to start with a blank page and to not know where I was going, so this gave me a kind of structure. But what happened was I started to move away from attempting to translate things very soon, I just wanted to take over the poems and run them through my own idiom. And I started to move some of them to Philadelphia in 2020, a time when...

Daisy Fried:

It was just that Baudelaire seemed to me to have a lot to say about life in 2020. Illness, losing one's beloved, a corrupt, violent, economically spiraling country led by an incompetent, malignant, narcissist with all kinds of racist institutions, and people in crisis. And so, something about his over-the-top-ness felt right. So, I think what somebody described it to me as is I was running it through my own nervous system. Some of them went pretty far from the original, so for example, Daybreak is after [French 00:08:39], which means, [French 00:08:42] in French is both dawn and dusk, but this is the morning, the morning [French 00:08:47]. And I call it Daybreak.

Daisy Fried:

Helicopters sang out in the South Philly sky and morning wind blew branches against our windows. It was the hour my dream swarm twisted me pale on my pillow; when like a bloodshot eye darting and twitching, the last lamp stained the day incarnadine; where, trapped in my surly body, I recast the battle between lamp and day as my struggle between intention and accident. And like a face wiped dry by breezes, the air was full of thrilling, fleeing things. Anger, change. I was tired of writing, or you were, you were tired of fucking, or I was.

Daisy Fried:

This and that torched boutique sent up smoke. Somebody heaved a planter into another store window. The shopkeeper put the safety back on his sidearm, with stinging eyes dialed his insurance adjuster. Someone danced on a police car. Someone blew up an ATM and his hand off with it. Women who forgot to stop bearing children mopped their brows and chewed on ice. It was the hour when, sweating and starving, they gave birth to their latest, moaning and cursing. Like a sob cut short by foaming blood, a siren, another, tore through the fabric of morning. Buildings snuffled like marine mammals bedded down in smog sea. Old ones in nursing homes, their minds gone, hawked up last juddering breaths. They'd been abandoned as sometimes I wish to abandon you. Someone crept home broken by stupidity. Shivery Dawn in her green pink shift, crawls up the Schuylkill, into the parklands. Angry Philly, rubbing her eyes, grabs up her tools again, that old worker.

Daisy Fried:

So, Baudelaire has a poem called [French 00:11:06], which is a strange engraving, and my poem uses imagery from this Steve Sack political cartoon, which is Trump's Brain's Brain. And this is Trump and his head is like a tank hatch. And this is Stephen Miller coming out of it, and then a KKK guy, white nationalist guy on top. So this is my [French 00:11:28], Strange Engraving.

Daisy Fried:

This ghoul has, clamped in his cadaverous dome, a diadem in the shape of a cone, signifying hate. Without spurs or whip, he drives like a tank, the pale horse. Apocalyptic hack, who drools from his nose, like a snuffling cokehead. Through spacious skies together they thunder, trampling with hazardous hoofs, the multitudes. A crackling and rattling of money. A growl in the mind moans from maws. The rider, with flaming Tiki, parades over crowds, his steed crushes, and rooting out traders to his cause, gallops over a graveyard nation. Where stacked, as far as the eye can see, by fever light of a black sun, are body on body of those who perished by his bloody [inaudible 00:12:31]. That's dedicated to Stephen Miller.

Daisy Fried:

One of the things I did throughout here was to change when Baudelaire's a man looking at a woman, I'm change the perspective to a woman, sometimes looking at men, and this one, this is called the Soul of Wine, and in it, basically wine speaks to the woman. Okay? And I believe I changed the son to a daughter, and the wife to a husband, okay? The Soul of Wine.

Daisy Fried:

One night, wine sang in the bottles, "A woman disowned." This is the wine talking. "A woman disowned from my prison of glass and red ceiling wax. To you, I give a song of light and sisterhood. I know how, on the flaming fell, it takes murderous toil under a baking sun to give life, to give me life and soul. Gratitude. To you, I won't be vicious. Such joy to tumble down the throat of a woman like you exhausted by work, your warm belly's my sweet rest. Better pleasure there than in the cold vault. Can you hear the Sabbath canticles singing out in my breast, sobbing with hope? Elbows plunked on tables, sleeves rolled, worship me and be contented. I'll ignite your ravished husband's eyes. To your daughter I'll return luster and metal, and be for her, frail wrestler of life, the oil for her muscles. Into you, I, fruity Ambrosia, fall. Precious seed sewn by the sower. So from our amour grows poetry, spreading toward God, like a flower."

Daisy Fried:

It's kind of a ridiculous ending, but it's not my fault, it's Baudelaire's, so. Okay. There were some times when I was doing this where I was kind of like, "Well, a lot of times I would never say that in a poem." I'm like, "I don't talk like that." And that's one of those times, but then I was like, "But this is fun. I get to talk like that in a poem, right?" Owls.

Daisy Fried:

In black yew shelters, owls tuck themselves away. Strange gods with red, meditating, shifty eyes, otherwise roost unstirring till the melancholy hour, when darkness shovels the sun offstage. Thus, they teach the sage she need fear in this world only tumult and action. Passing, drunk on shadows, my punishment for desiring change is desiring more change.

Daisy Fried:

Okay. This is Jewels. [French 00:15:39], the original, was censored in Baudelaire's time for being likely to "lead to the excitement of the senses by a crude realism offensive to public decency". I can tell you, if you send this to somebody you're into, it works. Okay. Jewels.

Daisy Fried:

My man gets naked, and knowing my hunger, the family jewels are all he wears. This gives him an air of opulence, playing stud in the seraglio. When he dances, virile and mocking, he seems made of a world of rock and steel, so that I may, in beguiled fury, adore his whole body, paunch and luster. So he's lying there, letting himself be loved. And from the top of the chaise, smirks with pleasure at my lust, deep and sweet as the ocean that, tidal, climbs a cliff. His eyes on me are a barely tamed tiger's. He plays vague and dreamy, strikes poses of animal lust and ravishment, satisfying me with every twist and thrust.

Daisy Fried:

And his arms and leg, and his thigh and ass, polished like oil, pumping like the neck of a swan, pass before me and now I feel... Becalmed? And his belly and his... Clusters and vine... Advance then, tempter, disturb my soul's response, my Zen. Lure me from my crystalline calm where I thought I might, lonely, rest awhile. And now I swear I can see Apollo united to Priapus in hairy chest, bit of a belly, and below, his narrow dressy pelvis, the tawny textures are superb. And the lamp has resigned itself to die. And the flickering hearth barely lights the room. And every time he sighs his sigh, he swamps us both with his electricity.

Daisy Fried:

And again, it's not my fault, so. Baudelaire had written four poems called Spleen, and "spleen" was melancholy, boredom, dissatisfaction. I translated or adapted these poems, but I translated the word as Temper. I'll read you two of them. Temper.

Daisy Fried:

I got more crap up here than if I lived a thousand years. The filing cabinet stuffed with credit card statements, doggerel love letters, subpoenas, paperback novels, heavy locks of sex partners' hair folded up in paper, hides fewer secrets than my blasted brain. It's a mausoleum, enormous walk-in freezer, holds more dead than a mass grave. I'm a graveyard the moon hates, where remorse is the tunneling worm chomping through my dearest departeds. I'm an old bedroom stuffed with wilted roses, strewn with last year's cast-off fashions. Where sick pastels of fatted [inaudible 00:19:06] babies stink of talc and the open bottle. The limping days are so fucking long, snowed under by years and years and years and years. Say it. Boredom born of apathy achieves immortality. Body? You're nothing. Bag of dread and granite crag, magma-cooled. Old sphinx in a fog mumbling to self, forgotten by the whole giddy world. Haranguing in a dwindling light

Daisy Fried:

Temper.

Daisy Fried:

I'm like the provost they used to call rainmaker. Endowed, but impotent. Gleaming, but spent. Disdaining lecturers lickspittling his boots, as you might be bored with puppies and other beasts. Nothing can cheer him, no promotion or publication, nor students demonstrating in front of his window. His favorite admin grotesquely singing his praises no longer amuses. To be honest, he's twisted and sick. His stand-up desk resembles a sarcophagus. The suck-ups, for whom all bosses are beautiful, no longer know how to please, elicit no simper from his manscaped face. His chief alchemist in HR hasn't been able to leach out tainting corruption. They tried furloughing full-timers, the bloodbath, they called it. Failed to restore institutional health. He doesn't know how to warm his dazed brains, nothing but buzzwords running in his veins.

Daisy Fried:

So that's not about Swarthmore, though. Let's see. The Broken Bell.

Daisy Fried:

I like winter nights to find in a heat lamp, that beats and fumes, old memories rising in the banging of church bells through the snow spray. Blessed be the bell of liberty that, ancient, keeps trying to ring, tossing out his faithful cry like an old soldier in his bunker on the eve of battle. My soul's broken. And when I want songs of trouble, it often happens that his voice weakens like the death rattle of a forgotten man by a lake of blood, under a pile of the dead, who dies, without moving, in struggle.

Daisy Fried:

Got two more Baudelaires, and then two regular Daisy poems. So, Baudelaire's, I think one of his greatest poems, the Swan, [French 00:22:08], is about Paris changing, about modernity on the march. I transferred the poem to Philly in 2020. He starts by invoking Andromache, who's Hector's widow. She's a big figure of mourning, but also her name appears to mean, etymologically, fighter of men. So, I couldn't resist that, so. So, my bird is not a swan it's a goose. So this is called The Goose.

Daisy Fried:

Andromache, widow, fighter of men. I think of you about by the poor mirror of the river, which glitters with grieving. Seems to show by its slow, full float, the size of our sadness. It seeds my memory, walking where the road carousels. Everything bewilders, a city changes. Faster than a human heart. That's a field. There, houses. And the grasses, green blocks, where water puddled. Upriver, a zoo, giraffes hung their faces over a wall. We took our girl, arriving early, the hour the air was cold and clear. There I live in memory. And here I live, Andromache, in the dull what-is.

Daisy Fried:

Then sweaty work wakens, traffic awakens to make of the silence a dark hurricane. And there's a goose, separated from its hateful shitting gaggle that marauds by the boathouses, rasps webs over the macadam, dodges fast cars. His stained hind plumage trails on the ground, he shambles near the disc of the enormous fountain, dry and silent since disease broke on us. Dry since the city emptied itself of itself, emptied its people only to rooms. Dry the bronze breasts of the river spirit statues, the birdshit-stained spouting bronze swans they hoist on their shoulders, dry-mawed.

Daisy Fried:

As if the ruins of a beloved, his broken cornices, sprawled stone blocks stained green, can be forgotten. No kids playing there nor older folks coming back to ill-advised life for an early dark morning drunken grope. Nope. Just the living goose nervously bathing wings in brimming filth, scum, dung, rotten leaves. He opens his beak, heart full of his native lake he'll never return to, as if to say "Water, when will you rain? Sky, when lightning, thunder?" Unlucky bird, son of the sun, you stretch your pumping neck up and up toward the hazy azure, as if like me you're blaming God who doesn't exist.

Daisy Fried:

Our Philly changes. I wander back into glass canyons between unleaseable new office towers, and in their bases shuttered shops with bric-a-brac displayed unbought in ghastly windows, empty bars and restaurants, their outdoor tables barely inhabited, heat-lamp flames warming air where people aren't. Trucks hitting wrinkle bumps, distant sirens, sirens, sirens. Scaffolding, rehabs paused, old mini-mansions, roofs fallen in. Laborers for insurance law firms, hunched at screens, working for the market. Everything metaphor for memories heavier than rocks.

Daisy Fried:

Outside the Rodin Museum, images oppress me. Dour Thinker and Gates of Hell. And my great goose, with his crazy motions. And then you, Andromache, ridiculous, sublime, like and not at all like the protestors in their playing field encampment of nylon and polyester in teals and grays, pegged with cords to tired trees, with laundry hung between, and Black Lives Matter and other signs, No Cop Zone, Housing Now, Our Demands! Long list. Some sit stoned, some march about. The grass remains a stretch of emerald.

Daisy Fried:

I don't want to say I'm gnawed by longing for a man like a city, city like a man whose mind's a ruined city. I'm bored with these feelings they call grief. Andromache, fighter, your husband ripped from you. You felt a captive beast, wandering deserted streets, heavy, aching, widow of the world. One protestor emerged from the mass, tripped on a tent wire, and crying, cursed into a bullhorn, muttered something about a mama hugging, soothing them, keeping them safe. And the man I love said, "You think my eyes are pretty? Oh, you should have seen my mother's eyes. They were the most beautiful blue." The last most lucid thing he said to me. Old memory like a lost goose vanishing, honks out a full note. What good to think of others forgotten, kneeled on, jailed, killed, defeated, robbed? So many others more.

Daisy Fried:

So, in his famous poem, [French 00:27:51], Correspondences, Baudelaire depicts nature as a majestic, but indecipherable, force, I think, and believes that it's the poet who, through metaphor and symbol and just synesthesia can translate nature to the human world. I'm a person who's quite resistant to the ineffable. So I translated this one seriously, because Nat asked me to, so. Otherwise I probably wouldn't have. She was teaching the poem in late 2020, is that when it was? And she wanted a modern version to go along with other people's versions. So I was like, "Okay", because when Nat asks me to do something, I do it. So I was actually really pleased with the result, made it the last poem in my book. But just to give you a sense of what other translations might sound like, here's, I just pulled this off, I don't even know who this is, pulled this off the internet. So this is how it might sound, more literally translated into English.

Daisy Fried:

Nature is a temple where living pillars let escape sometimes confused words. Man traverses it through forests of symbols that observe him with familiar glances.

Daisy Fried:

And I say nature is a temple where living pillars, I'm like, "Oh, God", you know? I'm not going to... Anyway, but I was like, "I'll do it." So, here's my Correspondences.

Daisy Fried:

Our woods today was a temple where living pillars whispered leaf-words, bark-words. A woman passing there crosses a forest of symbols in the lichens, the mosses, the schist on the hillside, which watch her with knowing glances. Like faraway echoes their shadowy, complex entwining was vast as night in the clear light of day, in the deepness between trees, and the chasm the creek carved. So your smells, colors, the sounds you made, I remember them. Correspond, scents fresh as infant skin, sweet as oboes, prairie-green. And others, mulchy and rich, becoming compost, expanding infinite as amber, musk, resin, and incense to sing the soarings of my spirit and senses.

Daisy Fried:

So those are some Baudelaire from The Year the City Emptied. Peter asked me, maybe, how has working on this project affected your own poetry? And these two poems might be part of that answer. Have anybody seen the Immersive Van Gogh? They blow up van Goghs really big, and you walk inside and you can be inside a van Gogh painting, right? So this concept kind of fascinates me, so this poem kind of riffs on that. It's called Step Inside van Gogh, because that's what they say, step inside van Gogh.

Daisy Fried:

Night, for 65 bucks, will froth and flow, and shapes between the orbiting clouds intensify their indigo while doleful, chipper Imogen Heap cools the moonlight fever of the stars in ambient warble. The sounds, the shake, between you and me. A foothill village lifted by its glow. The trees, a knife. It's not a flame. That's not Saint-Rémy. It's in your head. Immersive spectacle, take me in, take from me my disease and sorrow dream.

Daisy Fried:

"But Bosch immersive might be fun," you, riffing, say, and we begin to joke of pokerings and orifices, of bodies stretched on racks like hospital beds. Nevermind, I like the godlike feeling I get peering in on all that suffering contained in smallish frames in smallish galleries, a scale to reiterate proportion and intensity. Nevermind I love looking like deities at what humans do, eschewing intervention.

Daisy Fried:

Imagine what spectacle could, with Kahlo, cause, [inaudible 00:32:18] to come to life. This is really true. Icepick they got Trotsky with, impalement by trolley bar, the limping legs, that brow, or a version, augmented, of What I Saw in the Water. Enter the scenario between her thighs, as if she's giving birth to you. Lacquered toes propped on tub slab, stale water into which she farts, scenes of autobio. Skyscraper, the Empire State, burning inside a volcano. Conch shell full of bullet holes, woman strangled with a rope, blood that drips from bathtub plug, and curling, caresses hallux, joins the water.

Daisy Fried:

No. Put her away. Her disorder, possibility, and pain. Give, give me Goya's Black work instead to walk in, that I may drown with dog in quick sand, while an old man starves with soup, while crones circled for a sacrificed quail before the Goat God, and Saturn eats my head. Else battles, redemption, no such thing. Else rebellion in the streets. A man hangs from a tree, dead sticks. Life, cast it off. A rifle blooms with death. Only $65! To sever from me, remembrance of kisses and embraces. Let me live far from fading shadow of my dead. Stupidity, dull and bright, a long way from my umber dread. Last word is dread.

Daisy Fried:

And this is my last poem. One of the things I really wanted to do was write shorter poems. So I ended up writing five short poems and one long poem. So I don't know if that really counts. But I wanted to get in and out fast, so let's see if this... This is called Quickies and Widowhood, with three instances of laughter, one not narrated, two instances of crying.

Daisy Fried:

One. Flies, first crush after. Amid the whiteness of cheeses, corn puffs, icing coated animal crackers, the salt and milk, napkins, even the plastic wear at my sidewalk picnic, the neighborhood flies were already beside themselves with delight when I poured him a snifter of Tawny or brandy. Then they swarmed as he swirled and opened his mouth to sip. I watched his tongue, pink writhing muscle. He spat after one fly tried to settle there.

Daisy Fried:

Two. Blister, for Maisie. You showed me the place your snake pants melted where you touched them by accident to the metal of the flaming chimenea, but did not show me where the knob of your big toe blistered up to pain you when you tried to walk normally. Nor did you explain why you were barefoot in January. All I know is you were laughing till you screamed all afternoon out there that day with your friends. First time since your dad died.

Daisy Fried:

Three. Times we had to pause recording the podcast, or, little essay on the emotions, for Glorious and Sebastian. First, with the poem about the nursing home. I started to cry right as we figured out the exact moment collective changed to subjective consciousness. Then, when you two were explaining Aristotle's continent, ma'am, and thinking about poopy pants, I couldn't find it in myself to stop snickering.

Daisy Fried:

Four, Let's Fly to the Castle. It wasn't your bomber, old boots, duplicate copy of the [Shore 00:36:21] bio, or your wheelchairs that made me feel I couldn't breathe. I was glad to see those go. But our girl's Princess Celestia, she who raises the sun and moon in the land of Equestria, that feminine pony-topia, trebling, "My hair is so pretty!" in weakening voice from inside the 30 gallon garbage bag I dropped at the curb. Guilty, crying, I dashed to save, save them from my zeal and determination, to fish back Twilight Sparkle, Pinkie Pie, Rainbow Dash, Rarity and Applejack, Fluttershy and Zecora, even Nightmare Moon, but especially the Princess, and ran barefoot, no bra. All I saw was the garbage truck, the men hanging on, disappearing around the corner, pale pony Princess with blue and green artificial hair churning in its maw.

Daisy Fried:

Five. Yahrzeit... is the Jewish traditions a year after your... Beloved dies, and you light a candle. Yahrzeit. My thought... Am I pronouncing that right?

Speaker 3:

Yahrzeit.

Daisy Fried:

Yahrzeit, thank you. Yahrzeit. My thought, after the rioters, the Vermont mittens, and supple purple leather gloves, after the snowstorms of uncharacteristic timing and volume, the scolding and shitstorms after vaccines and sickenings, after the angers and fears, after hurricanes set up their artistic swirl shapes on the weather channels and radar apps, and rock and roll, and cello sonatas, and Texas, and dread, and falling in love again, my thought was "Strange. You're still dead." Anyways. I'm sitting on my boyfriend's deck all the way on the other side of the great land, watching all the colors going golden, or all sherberty, ascending a hillside, and my mind thinks out there all in its own, "Oh good. And soon you'll get home, and we'll all be here." The wind snuffed the candle my boyfriend lit for his wife. "Oh shit," he says, a look on his face. Relights it, moves it out of the window. The vista going purple, plums ripening, tall tree points its tip at the raven, who caws, blackly iridescent at its top. Thank you.

Peter Schmidt:

Think we'll have brief conversation, open things up for questions. There's also books back in the back for sale, if you'd like to buy some. Thanks.

Peter Schmidt:

So Daisy, could we talk a second about The Goose?

Daisy Fried:

Yeah.

Peter Schmidt:

And your sense of how you wanted to use Baudelaire, but also add all these changes and additions, and in some ways make Baudelaire new, I think, not just updated, but to make the contrast between the sublime and the ridiculous, which is kind of at the heart of the poem, new again. And I'm really fascinated with lots of the changes that you've made, but especially the ending. I looked at some of the translations of Baudelaire, and also at the French, and it's fascinating. The last stanza is full of references to a forest where Baudelaire can retreat, in safety, from all of the chaos around him in the city, in Paris. There's also this sound of a memory, ancient memory, that he describes as like a hunting horn, or at least that's one of the ways that it's translated, like a hunt is happening in the forest and stuff.

Peter Schmidt:

He's also very proud to say that he's... "I think of the captives, the vanquished, the vanished, and so many more." And the shifts that you make to that is really striking to me. The whole poem was incredibly moving, I think, as a way both of talking about grief and your grief and things, but also the way modernity promises so much and then alienates us. Some of the major changes that you did was to have Baudelaire ask a question, or to have your voice ask the question of "What good is all of this sympathy?" Like we're trying to think of those who are vanquished. And instead of being very vague about the vanquished and the defeated, you add a bunch of very powerful, very specific adjectives, including somebody who's been kneeled on, and died because of being kneeled on. And we probably all know what that is in reference to. I guess, a big, simple question here is your thoughts about how you came up with those shifts and changes. If you can remember the creative process, or how you make sense of them now. What you did.

Daisy Fried:

I actually don't... So I, thinking back, I don't feel like I've really studied or processed the Baudelaire poems. And I think my resistance to doing that was useful to me.

Peter Schmidt:

Yeah. Especially his romanticism and stuff.

Daisy Fried:

Yeah. Or, what do I take, what don't I take? And I knew that I wanted to, I was saying, some of you were in Peter's class today, and I said I knew I wanted to get rid of a lot of his Latinate language. And I knew I wanted to, because it's hard to make that stuff be feeling in English, I think. And I knew that I wanted to use fewer adjectives and make it sound something closer to how I would talk. These are obviously not exactly conversational poems, but I wanted to play in and out of idiomatic. So, I was really thinking a lot about sound as I went along, I was thinking about how the parts go together, how the energies of things... I think one of the things I think about in all poems is almost maybe like a painter would think about a canvas, I think even abstract painter, you put this color up here and you put this color down here to create some kind of balance or imbalance.

Daisy Fried:

So I was thinking about the structure, what comes first? What comes next? How do they balance each other out? How do they create... And I knew I wanted to get some personal story in, because that's what I was doing with a lot of these poems, was bringing my own story in and avoiding the openly philosophical. Although I went there, I ventriloquized that. But I took images. Some of these images, I think, I don't remember very well, Andromache's there, it starts out the mirror of the river glittering with grieving is very related to what he does, I think. "A city changes", that exclamation, I think, is direct translation. Obviously he didn't have a giraffe at the zoo, and he didn't have... What else...

Daisy Fried:

My swan does a lot of the things that his swan does. So his swan opens his mouth and seems to be calling out to the empty universe. Where's God, basically, when are we going to get solace? When are we going to get things? When will things be better? But I wanted it to be at Logan Circle in Philly. Some of you who know Philly will have recognized that, Rodin Museum is right up there, and it tickled me to put Rodin and The Thinker in there, same century and location as Baudelaire.

Peter Schmidt:

And a Canada goose, of which they're all over Philly.

Daisy Fried:

Right. So, it's like a plague up there. Although a friend of mine who read this poem was like, "You know, you're really not getting the geography quite right. I've never seen a Canada goose down by Logan Circle, they stay up by Kelly Drive..." I'm like, "Stop! So what?"

Daisy Fried:

So I was doing stuff like that, and I also wanted to get a feeling of what the city was like the first year of COVID, when everybody was really just staying home, nobody was vaccinated. Restaurants were trying to get people to go, heat lamps and things, but things were pretty empty, and it felt like a strange, neutron bomb feeling, for the early days of COVID, right? So that was going on. And then I think I wanted my private loss and the collective loss to be coming in there. And I always want... Well, I don't, "always" is too strong a word, but I often like it when... If I'm wandering around in the city, one of the things I think about is politics, and who am I seeing? And during that time, there were people camped out on Parkway, a tent city.

Daisy Fried:

And so I was just trying to do some kind of reporting, in a way. I used, long ago, I worked as a journalist. So I tend to record things in my mind or on paper, like what I see. So I wanted all these things to come together. And in that, that kind of technique is actually pretty similar to what I do when I'm writing my poems, which is just gather things from other places. And in this case, Baudelaire got into the structure.

Peter Schmidt:

Came into the [inaudible 00:46:22].

Daisy Fried:

I knew I wanted to get to this list at the end. I knew I wanted it to be contemporary. I knew I wanted my own personal life to be talking to the public life, the political life of the city and vice versa. So...

Peter Schmidt:

Okay. Thanks. One other, just quick, question, you used a small press that's based in the Midwest. And I wonder if you could talk a little bit about your sense of the role that small presses play, just in the poetry network and helping sustain things?

Daisy Fried:

Well, there's a few big New York presses that publish poetry, and there's some kind of powerhouse, independent presses... But there are a lot of poets doing incredible work and poetry doesn't sell very well. So what do you do? You know? So there are a lot of university presses. My other books, I was with a university press. This one was such a short book, I thought it was going to be a chapbook. And I knew I needed to find a... I didn't even approach Pittsburgh with it actually, for a number of reasons, but... So what the small press could do, it's an odd project, it's a niche. Niche, niche. Do we say niche or do we say niche?

Audience:

Niche.

Daisy Fried:

Niche? Okay. It's a niche project, and this press in particular does, I think, really gorgeous books, really exquisite books, odd books. They have some big names, but things that fall through the cracks of other places. So a lot of the independent presses are able to do this, right, and they're able to make really good products, and send them out and distribute them. And I think that the ones that do it well, like Flood Editions, it's a labor of love. And they put a lot of effort into the book. And I think he puts out a few books a year, and this is the big one for him, so he's going to do a lot to support this book. Which, the New York presses, they have good resources, but they're likely to go with their best selling novel. Right? And some of them have poetry, so you're not necessarily the star of that press. So it was a lot of discussion about order of poems, and just a lot of trustworthiness I felt here. So I think that the independent presses can do that kind of thing in poetry, and I think that a lot of, myself and my press's side, I think a lot of what's exciting going on in poetry is with these smaller presses, so. Yeah.

Peter Schmidt:

And it's a good way to find small presses, is to look at where other poets publish and things like that.

Daisy Fried:

Yeah, I think so. Yeah.

Peter Schmidt:

And you had a say in the amazing cover? [crosstalk 00:49:37].

Daisy Fried:

Yeah. Yeah, well, my friend Richard introduced me to Paula Rego, she's an amazing artist, and this is a series of Dog Woman. This is her Dog Woman paintings. And she actually did these Dog Woman paintings while her husband was dying, and there are these portraits of [inaudible 00:50:04] tenderness, and also extreme emotion. But she does a lot of this, this is a pastel, she does a lot of pictures of women. So what happened was we wrote to her gallery and they gave permission to use it, so.

Peter Schmidt:

Wow. Yeah. Questions? Comments?

Daisy Fried:

Yeah.

Speaker 4:

I have a question about the poem that you read, Jewels?

Daisy Fried:

Yeah.

Peter Schmidt:

Yeah.

Speaker 4:

It's contingent upon [inaudible 00:50:33], but you replaced the gender, right, [crosstalk 00:50:36]?

Daisy Fried:

Yeah.

Speaker 4:

Okay. I was wondering if you could elaborate more on your decision on how to do that? Because, from reading it over again, it seemed like a gender reversal perspective, but not necessarily fully experienced, because it seems like you put a man in the role that was a woman, but you also changed the language of which was used to be more masculine, or traditionally masculine, I guess? With the "girl" and "smirks".

Daisy Fried:

Yeah.

Speaker 4:

And not just talking about the anatomy, but just the description. And I was wondering why you didn't decide to put a man and make the description more feminine and [inaudible 00:51:23]?

Daisy Fried:

Oh, I see. Well, because I was trying to make the poem about cisgendered woman who is excited by cisgendered men, so I wanted, again, to be true to my experience. So, I wanted it to be kind of funny, he's a little chubby and he's... And stuff like that, when he's Priapus and Apollo, and like... So I wanted, every time it got kind of overwrought, to be kind of amusing, I didn't want it to be all... But yeah, it's a pretty traditional, heterosexual, erotic poem. And I stand by it from my own experiences.

Daisy Fried:

But I think it'll be an interesting project for somebody to take it and do something different with it. And I think that's one of the fun things you can do with this stuff is, all right, now I'm going to change the adjectives and I'm going to change... I don't remember if "clusters and vine", I think that actually had something to do with the original. I don't remember what the original is. Does it? Yeah.

Peter Schmidt:

It sounds weird weirdly like Whitman, too.

Daisy Fried:

Yeah. But that seemed to me like a nice little phallic image too. So yeah. No, it's a great question. The answer is I'm a boring, cisgendered, heterosexual, middle-aged lady, you know? So yeah.

Daisy Fried:

Yeah.

Speaker 5:

In the process of writing, at what point do you say "I am done with this poem, I'm done editing"?

Daisy Fried:

Well, I was reading something today and I'm like, "I don't think that poem's done. Okay." Next edition, I'll change that. Oh my God. You don't really know. And in fact, for example, the new poems that I read at the end, I don't know if they're done, really. I'll probably change. But I do have a feeling of something dynamic happening. A lot of people can do good writing, and most of the time I'm doing what is, at best, good writing that's not really performing as a poem. I want the poem to somehow tap dance, or something like that. And I want it to put on a show, whatever kind of show it is. So I guess I get a feeling of, when something is happening, I recognize it. No, sometimes, over and over, most often, I think, "Oh, this is great! This is great. Something's really happening here." And then I'll be like, next day...

Peter Schmidt:

Like the next day.

Daisy Fried:

... "What the hell! This is terrible." So there's also this desire for it to be done all the time that sort of misleads you. So you just have to live with it over time. I also have people I send it to, to read them and they give me their frank opinion, that's helpful. I don't always take their advice, but useful thing to do. It's good, as a writer, to have people who are also working in the art with you, who you can... A lot of people are like, "Oh, that's great, Daisy. You're so talented." And I'm like, "Okay, you're not being honest. Let me find somebody who'll really tell me what's going on." And that's extremely important, to find somebody who'll be honest with you. Even if it's kind of... Can be kind of bruising, but it makes you a better writer.

Peter Schmidt:

Was there somebody who said "good poems aren't ever finished, they're just abandoned"?

Daisy Fried:

Somebody did say that, but who said that?

Peter Schmidt:

Yeah, who the hell was that? Oh well. We can Google it later.

Daisy Fried:

Yeah.

Speaker 6:

So is the process for you of writing the Baudelaire poems different than writing your own poems, and how do you go about the revision process? How do you figure out where you got to go?

Daisy Fried:

So the process was going like this, more or less, I would look through, I had a particular Baudelaire that was translated, I didn't really like the translations very much, but it was useful, had the French on one side and English on another side. I would find ones that felt good. You know? Some of them I would read and I'm like, "Vampire? Nah, I'm not going to do that one." He's got a lot of vampire poems are like, no, rotten...

Peter Schmidt:

You turned down a vampire poem?

Daisy Fried:

I did. And then there's one about a balcony, which is just ridiculous. [inaudible 00:56:01] balcony, I don't know what's happening, but it's just so silly and sincere, and...

Peter Schmidt:

French.

Daisy Fried:

... ridiculous. But I would find ones where I felt like there was some meat to it or some stuff I was interested in. I would start by feeding... I would read it through in French, and I would kind of look at the English, but not too much, but I would put it into Google Translate. Google Translate, you want to hear wooden translations? That's what you do. So right there, I had to make it better. So I would start going through line by line, and I would just start... It sounds really goofy, but I would just start messing around with it. I would understand that I was working with lines of a certain length and certain meter, and I would have images I wanted to get in there and I'd be like, "Oh, look where that just swerved to, I need to make a swerve right there." You know? So it was looking at structural things, but I would... When his language got too elevated and cloying with adjectives, or when mine did in response, I would try to undercut it. You know?

Daisy Fried:

So I was really just trying, I think, and again, this is stuff I do with my own poems, which is playing with fancy language, and playing with colloquial language, and what happens if one thing undercuts another? What if I have a tonal shift? What if the diction shifts? Because my sense is that language has... I want all language to be in the poems. So I guess I was like, "I want these to be Baudelaire and not Baudelaire at the same time." So, did that answer your question?

Speaker 6:

It seems to me that there's always a process of discovery as you work interpreting [inaudible 00:57:57] visions, but within a context of a translation, you're somewhat bound by the poem itself.

Daisy Fried:

Yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 6:

Where did you say "I'm not going to go further [inaudible 00:58:08]?" I think that's the interesting question. Because some places, as you say, just say, that's an interesting spin, I'm going to go down that direction, see where it goes.

Daisy Fried:

Well, the ones that were more, there's... Did I read them? I'm sorry, students I already did this to, but there's a short one that I can read really quickly called Music. It was a very straightforward one, it's practically translation. But I didn't like it until I undermined it with modern language. So, Music.

Daisy Fried:

Music, like a sea under sealing of mist to my pale star, I set sail in clear air, breathing huge and deep, like the canvas of a ship, I mount the backs of rollers, midnight veil me. Breeze, gust, storm, convulsion, derelict ship, I vibrate. Soft feelings, mega emotions. Immense days, immense abyss, lull and lullaby me, doldrums mirror my despair.

Daisy Fried:

And I think when I got "mega emotions" in there, I was like, "Okay, that threw a wrench in the works, awesome." And then, I think "lull and lullaby me" was a half-related, but I got to play around a little there. So, I think it was when I created enough static within the poem, I knew I was onto something. So I would say when the wrench is in the works, or the brick is through the window of the poem, that's when I know it's going to be working better, so, yeah. Yeah?

Speaker 4:

Specifically [inaudible 00:59:42] one of the newer ones you wrote, the Quickies and Widows, I was wondering what the process of writing those [inaudible 00:59:48], you said you were trying to write shorter poems, [inaudible 00:59:50] usually written them all separately and combine them afterwards? Or as the story depicted?

Daisy Fried:

Separate, and then combine them afterwards.

Peter Schmidt:

It was like, "Oh".

Daisy Fried:

Yeah, no, I actually had six or seven of them, but I think there's five now. For a while I was like, "All right, I'm going to sit down and I'm just going to write." Boom. And they're edited from that. They're revised from that. But I was like, "I want to get in and out fast. I want them to do one thing and get out fast" because I don't want to just...

Daisy Fried:

So what happened was, I think I wrote Let's Fly to the Castle first, about the Ponies. Any My Little Pony people here? Bronies, any Bronies? No? Not admitting it? Okay. So that was the first one, and that's actually the more longer developed one, but then I'm like, "I want to go even shorter." So I was writing about the sidewalk party I had and the sidewalk party my daughter had out front, because it was COVID, and we had the firepit outside, and my friend, South Philly, my friends would come over and we'd drink wine or her friends would do marshmallows. And I just was like, "What's happening in front of me?" Boom, and I would write it. So they were separate. But I think that I had a feeling they were a little bit too slight to stand alone. So I stuck them all under the title and I felt like they were working better.

Speaker 4:

How did you decide which ones would go together out of the six or seven that you had written?

Daisy Fried:

One of them just didn't work very well, so I jettisoned it. I might stick it back in if it ever works. But I think the Yahrzeit one was chronologically about falling in love again, so that needed to be the end. And then, I think I felt a little bit... I think it was just like organizing. It was a little bit about what happened first, it was a little bit about the energy of the piece. So, one that was just all about food, and then one where it was all about my daughter burning herself, and then... It was somewhat instinctive. When I organize a whole collection of poetry, it's somewhat that way too. A little bit like what happened first, and then mostly just the record album method, you know? The fast one, the slow one, the short one, the long one, the happy one, the sad one, a little contrast so people don't get bored. So it was really like that. Yeah. Yeah?

Speaker 6:

You mentioning albums actually raised a question for me, which is when you write, very general, when you write poetry, do you always generally write with the end goal of some sort of publication in mind? And do you go in phases in one collection, and then you do that and then another one, or is it more free-flowing than that?

Daisy Fried:

I pretty much write until I have enough poems to go in a collection. The Baudelaire is a little bit different, just because everything started in that book with the Baudelaire. But in general, I write individual poems, I don't really write in projects. So that was another interesting thing that I had a project, and I could figure out the shape of it as I was going along. Most of the time I write individual poems and then I have enough, then I'm willing to show people, and then I organize them into a manuscript.

Daisy Fried:

They do tend to go together, because I don't necessarily write literally or factually about my life, but there are certain things I'm thinking about in a set of years that I'm in. And I tend to write... Maybe with a certain aesthetic or a certain sensibility. And so, those things go together in the volume that I'm working on. But I don't set out to write a set of poems about such and such, or a set of poems in a certain form, or anything like that. It's much more improvisational than that. I might, at some point, be more deliberate. I would like to be more deliberate. It doesn't usually work out.

Daisy Fried:

I usually, like, "I'm going to write a series of poems..." One time I was going to write a bunch of poems that were based on the stories of the great ballets. I don't know why. It was a dumb idea, but... It's not a dumb idea. Have the idea if we can make good poems out of it. But I think I got half a poem out of it, and that was it. I've had other really big plans about projects, and they never work out, so. Yes?

Speaker 7:

I was interested in Swan. Swan poem, and you just talked about your sensibility. And I am remembering a poem you wrote and actually performed, because I saw a video of it, about City Hall.

Daisy Fried:

Oh yeah.

Speaker 7:

Okay. Now there's a changed...

Daisy Fried:

Oh, jeez!

Speaker 7:

... sensibility! Because how many years ago was this?

Daisy Fried:

Well, that was a special case, because Glenn Holsten, the filmmaker, he had film projects that were always airing on, probably TV, locally. And he hired a bunch of local poets to write poems related to locations in Philadelphia and he assigned me City Hall. And so, I hung out there, and I watched City Hall, and I don't think I'm a very good occasional poet, and I don't write to assignment very well. And so what I did there was I was like, "Okay, I'm going to try to imitate Whitman and be expansive, and listy, and praising, and praising", so that's what I did there.

Speaker 7:

Yeah. Very exuberantly.

Daisy Fried:

Yeah. I was having fun, I was watching everybody and he was filming stuff and I was like, "Go film that", and then I went home and wrote the poem and read it. But I think that was sort of an outlier, and didn't end up in any of my books, but... Yeah.

Speaker 7:

How many years ago? Because the time difference is amazing. It's like a different city. [crosstalk 01:06:10].

Daisy Fried:

Yeah. It's true. That would've been in the nineties.

Peter Schmidt:

Now it's got all those fancy fountains and stuff. [crosstalk 01:06:17].

Daisy Fried:

Yeah, No, that was the nineties. And that was because City Hall was a place where people would walk, it was a crossroads, right?

Peter Schmidt:

Yeah.

Daisy Fried:

And they have all the sculptures and everybody... So it was really fun to sit around there and watch...

Peter Schmidt:

People live.

Daisy Fried:

... people in life. I don't know, maybe I should try to do a new one. A new City Hall poem. Kind of depressing. So that was a while ago, and I was a lot younger and I didn't know as much what I was doing, which was probably good. Because you can become a kind of...

Speaker 7:

Yeah, I think [crosstalk 01:06:57]...

Daisy Fried:

... energy and... Yeah.

Speaker 7:

... the two is a pretty good marker of a changed city and a changed sensibility.

Daisy Fried:

Yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 7:

Enormous.

Daisy Fried:

Yeah.

Peter Schmidt:

Thanks again, folks.

Daisy Fried:

Thank you, all.

Peter Schmidt:

Please take some food when you go, but there's also books for sale. Great deal back there.

Daisy Fried:

Yeah. $10 each, and I'll sign them if you want.

Peter Schmidt:

Yeah. Thank you all. Thanks, Daisy.