

Utshimauat / The Masters, by Josephine Bacon



Ambassador for indigenous cultures, Joséphine Bacon is an Innu writer from Pessamit, on the coast of the Saint Lawrence river, in the territory now known as Québec, in Eastern Canada. Bacon writes in her native tongue, Innu-Aimun, and in French. From 2009, she has published four bilingual books of poetry and collaborated on a number of anthologies. Two books of poetry have been translated into English: *Message Sticks: Tsbissinuatsbitakana* (Translated by Phyllis Aronoff, Mawenzi House Press,

2013) and *A Tea in the Tundra / Nipishapui Nete Mushuat* (Translated by Donald Winkler, Bookland Press, 2017). She has also written scripts for two films (*Ameshkuatan, Les sorties du castorin* 1978 and *Tshishe Mishtikuashisht, Le petit grand européen: Johan Beetzin* 1997), as well as collaborating on various television programs. For years, she has worked with elders to try to preserve indigenous languages and ancestral traditions as well as with young indigenous artists to foment artistic creation. She has won a number of distinguished prizes at the provincial and national level.

The poem “The Masters” comes from her first book, *Bâtons à message/Tsbissinuatsbitakana* published in 2009 by the Quebecois publisher, Mémoire d’Encrier. The message sticks from the title are pieces of wood that nomadic Indigenous groups from that area would position on their paths to leave messages for others who might be passing through the same place. In the book’s preface, Bacon says: “My people is rare, my people is precious, like an unwritten poem. / The elders have fallen silent, leaving us the echo of their murmuring...” (Translation by Phyllis Aronoff). With select and precise words, Bacon’s poetry renders explicit the undeniable relationships between Indigenous people, nature, territory and the spirit world.

Utshimauat © Joséphine Bacon (Innu-aimun)

De Bacon, Joséphine. *Bâtons à message/Tsbissinuatsbitakana*. Montréal : Mémoire d’Encrier, 2009.

The Masters © Phyllis Aronoff (English translation)

From Bacon, Joséphine. *Message Sticks/Tsbissinuatsbitakana*. Aronoff, Phyllis, Trans. Toronto: Mawenzi House, 2013.

Nimichumat nejanat nuitamakutiat :

“Tshitatshakush puamuishapan
eshk^ueja inniuin.
Shash petamushapan assinu tshitei.”

The ancestors told me:

“Your soul dreamed long before you.
Your heart heard the land.”



Tshitei uitam^u
anite uetshin

mamitunenim tshitatshakush
uin an ka minishk
anite tshe ituten,
eshk^ueka inniuin.

Your heart tells
where you come from

think of your soul,
it gave you the source
before birth.



Papakassik^u, Atikuapeu
Pakushuenimakan
tshin ka pagushuenimikuin,
nimititen meshkanau anite

etat Missinak^u
uin nika ashamik^u
kukamessa shiueniani

Uapishtanapeu
nika tshishunak
shikatshiani
tshetshi minukuamuian,

Ushuapeu takushiniti
nipuamunit
uin nica uitamak^u

etati Tshishikushkueua
uin ja tshitapamikiuak^u
ute tshitassinat.

Papakassik^u, Atikuapeu
the one we wait for,
you lead me to

Missinak^u
who will offer the lake trout
of our land, and if

I'm cold,
Uapishtanapeu
will keep me warm
in my sleep

Ushuapeu
will take me away close to

Tshibikushkneu,
she who watches over
the beating of the land
in my heart.



Alanis umenu

Uetakussiti shakassineu pishim^u
nuamapamau ukaumau ka mitshetushet
e minat peik^u
auassa pakushenitamunnu

innitsheuu mamitshetuait
ishi-uashteshiu
anite shipit
anite ut kuepitak

uin muk^utshissenitam^u
nete tshe ishi-shatshituaunit
tshetshi uinipek^unipekakuiak^u
natutuakut kashkanat.

For Alanis, my mother

On a night of a full moon,
the mother of so many children
gives new hope
to a child

an image gives
a multitude of colours
to a river
diverted from its place
of birth

it alone
knows its course
to the sea that rocks us
on the waves of sleep.

THE TRANSLATOR



Phyllis Aronoff. Born and bred in Montreal and educated at McGill, UQAM and Concordia (MA in English literature), Aronoff translates fiction, non-fiction and poetry from French to English, working solo or with co-translator Howard Scott. She has translated a dozen books and served as president of the Literary Translators' Association of Canada. She has received a number of awards for her translations including the Governor General of Canada Prize for Translation in 2018. [For more information:<http://www.attlc-ltac.org/en/translator/phyllis-aronoff-en/>]

MORE ABOUT JOSÉPHINE BACON

Video "Uiesh. Quelque part. Avec Joséphine Bacon. Le Devoir, 2018:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAldgGVA0DA>

"Joséphine Bacon: A Linguistic Legacy": <https://myscena.org/la-scena-musicale-team/josephine-bacon-a-linguistic-legacy/>