The Poetry Foundation defines ekphrasis as "description" in Greek: "An ekphrastic poem is a vivid description of a scene or, more commonly, a work of art. Through the imaginative act of narrating and reflecting on the ‘action’ of a painting or sculpture, the poet may amplify and expand its meaning." Citing the poem "Ode to a Grecian Urn" by John Keats as a notable example, The Poetry Foundation freezes time, as if nothing has transpired between then and now in connection to ekphrasis. As I ponder how ekphrasis may reference other poems or works of art or both, I want to add another layer of complexity to the conversation through The Polyglot: We are in twenty-first century Canada, not in Trump’s America, and, most importantly, we owe this exploration of words and images to ourselves as a literary community.

It is this image of Canadian Literature as a community of multilingual writers that has influenced the grouping of the poems in this issue. Beyond languages and images, there was a common thread: our Humanity. The poems revolved around, in the words of Miguel Hernández, three wounds we all carry as human beings: the wounds of love (el amor) - for others, for one’s birthplace; of life (la vida) - the movements of our bodies through displacement, growing up, or a change of scenery; and of death (la muerte) - illness, memory, forgetting and rebirth. Arranging the poems loosely around these three main themes allowed me to see the healing potential of ekphrasis, generating understanding and conversations free of taboos and clichés. This issue of The Polyglot revolves around the general movement of the works from love, to life, and finally death with its potential for transformation.

We know by rote that we are a multicultural country, yet the idea of the multicultural seems to exclusively imply a category of writers that do not write in English as their first language. These writers become confined to the most remote corner of Canadian literature, in “a league of their own;” yet, we are in a day and age where we write our Facebook posts or Tweets in at least two languages, constantly re-contextualizing our memory image banks and each other’s cultural references. In fact, in this very issue you will read poems by writers who mainly publish in English, but who have sort of “come out of the monolingual closet” to show their interest in writing words in their heritage languages or in other languages, dead or alive, about their chosen images. Thus, it gives me enormous hope that multilingual writers will one day be able to publish their multilingual poetry in supposedly all-English literary publications. This does not mean putting translators out of work; on the contrary, some of these writers are translators themselves. It means enticing the readers to seek out more authors whose first language is not English, but who can claim to write for a Canadian audience without having to pander to their multicultural author credentials. I believe it is this very pull between porosity and opacity that may offer Canadian literature a unique opportunity to finally and fully take advantage of the many worlds our writers inhabit. Enough of the idea of the mosaic, and let’s press on with the messy, intricate world of this new time in Canadian literature. Let’s be brave and display our wounds proudly, shall we?

Luciana Erregue-Sacchi
Voice

she told me ou pa ayisyen ankò
‘you’re not haitian anymore’
I asked poukisà
She answered: ou pèdi tout kréyòl ou
‘you lost your creole’
ou pa konn mizè
‘you don’t know struggle’

then, she proceeded to explain
how my voice sounds like a snob

apparently, I have une voix très bourgeoise
et une richesse élégante dans ma langue,
c’est grave pour elle!
apparemment, my voice sounds a little ‘bougie’ now

... can you hear the wealth in my accent? can you audit it?
... can you trace the lineage of my past French slave-owners?
... can you measure the scale of this past transaction
... can you feel the bloodline of slave-led rebellions
... tracing my lungs?
... does this history scare you?
... does this richness intimidate you?

... what makes you think my travels
... somehow
... sucked out the history from my marrow?
... what makes you assume
... my black skin will one day lessen in richness?
... who gives you the authority to declare who I’m not?

... you don’t know me.

that is what I wanted to say
that is what I wanted to tell her

I wanted to show her
how her response exposed the shackles of her ignorance
I wanted to give her a mirror
so she could see how she sees herself:

a Haitian woman
only reflecting struggle

I wanted to tell her:
the lens in which she framed her mind
was much too small to contain her worth
she was a treasure

but how do you do that
in creole?
in the fables?
in prose stitched in the fabric of a language?

with the words I managed to remember
I proceeded to tell her this:

eské’w konnen ki sa mo kréyòl la vlé di?
do you know what creole means?
sé tankoù on bouyon li yé
it’s like stew

menm-si pa gèn anpil patat
even with less potatoes
bouyon-an rich kan menm
a stew is still rich

then

she responded
with an all too familiar tone of understanding and revelation:

Anh!
li riche

in that moment
we exchanged the wealth of our history
past and present
for the first time
she began to see how we shared the same currency:
her voice was also expensive
treasure chest
first-world wealth
enclosed in a third-world box
though seemingly
brittle, useless and fragile
she was Gemstone
Ruby and Sapphire
Strong as stone

precious

She could see
her self

a Haitian woman
reflecting the wealth
of a queen.
Poet Statement - Medgine Mathurin

As a multilingual writer in Canada, I often find myself having to compromise exercising my French and also my Creole. Perhaps this is because I live in a province where English is spoken as a majority. Every time I do use my French, for example, I find myself carrying the burden of translation, something that is not necessarily reciprocated on the side of strictly-English speakers. This burden often comes across very subtly and implicitly as a demand from this English-speaking world. I think Canada can better support multilingual voices in our community by taking ownership of the work to understand languages that are not English. If there were more spaces and opportunities to share words that are not in English, without placing the entire burden of translation onto the speaker of this foreign language, I believe there would be very powerful and unique solidarity that would transcend any diction. I also believe that those whose tongues carry words that are not in English would find more joy in giving them out to the rest of country, and that the Canadian literary canon would become quite revolutionary.