

## I Never Talk About It

**Véronique Côté**

**Steve Gagnon**

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*This offbeat collection of stories provides insights into the process of translation.*

Véronique Côté and Steve Gagnon's *I Never Talk About It* is an intriguing and ambitious collection made up of thirty-seven short stories in the genre of "flash fiction."

Derived from French monologues first presented theatrically on the streets of Quebec City, these stories feature sentences that vary: some are short, some are without verbs, some are one word long, and there is an occasional run-on sentence. Each story is told from the point of view of either a man or woman, but specific author attributions are missing.

Both narrators grumble incessantly—about their parents, their lovers, and their insecurities. The stories resemble what a psychiatrist might hear. Language is honest, chiding, vulgar, and erotic.

Infrequently, the narrators have epiphanies, and their stories soar above the everyday. In "Cupcakes," a woman empathizes with a friend who lost her daughter. In "Light," a woman reflects on her son's breathing, concluding that "life is hard and infinitely full of light." The grateful tone of "Rice," with its recitation of blessings, resembles a secular Te Deum.

Rather than relying on one translator, the collection calls upon a different translator for each story. The question raised is whether readers want faithful translations, or something more interpretive. After each story, the translator comments on the process of translation—revealing whether they sought to convey the voice of the speaker, to capture the narrator's stream-of-consciousness style, or to duplicate French idioms in English.

When handling these narrators, it comes to seem that each translator has envisioned a different speaker than that imagined by another translator. Are these characters lost in translation? Faithful translation, it seems, may be in the eye of the translator after all.

This offbeat collection of stories provides insights into the process of translation, raising the question of how one can truthfully replicate the stories of complex characters.

THOMAS H. BRENNAN (September/October 2017)

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