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Pleasure Trout
by Gloria Mindock
Muddy River Books
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reviewed by David P. Miller

This chapbook is the first publication by Muddy River Books, a new venture by Zvi A. Sesling, who also publishes the online Muddy River Poetry Review (<http://www.muddyriverpoetryreview.com/>).

Gloria Mindak/Mindock, who gives these alternative forms of her name on the cover and title page (just one in her bio, though), author of three collections of poetry, is widely known as founding editor of the prolific Červená Barva Press (<http://www.cervenabarvapress.com/>). Pleasure Trout is the first collection of her mistranslations, an approach to writing she has practiced for some thirty years. She begins with poems in languages she does not know, primarily Romanian, Serbian, Italian, and Spanish. Writing quickly, she produces English-language poems based on what the words remind her of or what the originals suggest (affective gestalts, perhaps). The original source poems aren't specified. Although it would be interesting for comparison to know about the sources, it really isn't necessary because these are not, after all, attempts at translation, rendering, or even "adaptation." From one point of view, there isn't any actual pre-existing version of "Clamour mouth! / The procedure is easy / Tank this weekend!" ("Clamour Mouth") or "Spill it in Vegas honey / This girl is not bleak / Just because big bomb buicks / race on your body" ("Punitive Operations").

Reading Pleasure Trout (a phrase not found in the poems, so maybe it's a mistranslation of the title of some other book), I was reminded of Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt's *Oblique Strategies*, a card deck presenting over a hundred "worthwhile dilemmas" as aids to kickstart a creative process. I wondered, if Mindak/Mindock (maybe "Mind[*a/oc*]k"? let's call her Gloria!) had consulted *Oblique Strategies*, what might she have turned up? Perhaps the card with a dilemma contributed by Stewart Brand: Try faking it! - given, of course, as non-perjorative. In any case, mistranslation is a method by which the poet leads herself willingly astray, exposing from the misled mind titles such as "Vienna Animal," "Parched Hands," and "Sensitive Cottages," and stanzas like these:

*What will happen if I
stretched my wooden walls to their
greatest urge?
Hungry for skin, your
threads are unusual, they
perform on my deep wound. ("Slices")*

or -

*What did I do?
I jumped the roof
I fell into your typical face
Born without a name that wasn't mine,
I move in a life that is yours ("Resurrected Armpits")*

The self-distracting process of mistranslation allows for a surrealism that wears lightly and is easy to appreciate. As she cautions at the start, "Don't try to understand what is written here. Just enjoy the nonsense." So – very well then – we're not required to decipher:

*I have cried so much that the tears
have fallen and formed paths
What good is it since I'm not
a mapmaker? ("Mind")*

But hold on: this passage, with its allusion to an unchartable grief, is difficult to try not to understand. Which brings us to another Oblique Strategies card: Honour thy error as a hidden intention. The original, to our poet incomprehensible, poems seem to have been templates allowing the composition of, in fact, work in her own voice. The reader is initially distracted from this as well: opening the chapbook with the intention of sliding across surfaces of language like "The table in the square/ has gorillas for crucibles" ("Wings"), before realizing it you're caught short by the unrelenting need behind:

*What a combination!
The worse it is, the more the flow
Battle after battle, season after season,
I grow up with stones
Each year my voice feeds on knives
mad for someone to listen ("Feeding")
or a hint of shocked self-reflection in:
The camera captures
my duty
full of satisfaction
It's worse than I thought ("Not to Be Broken")*

Out of respect for Gloria's insistence that these poems are vehicles for enjoyment, not objects of interpretation, I'll leave it there. Except to note that, after an immersion in Pleasure Trout, it takes a bit of an act of will to read other poets without responding as if their writings, too, are non sequiturs at the surface level. That impression will fade, of course. You'll re-enter Tennyson or Cisneros, Cornish or Hirshfield, whoever else you're reading, on their own terms, apart from "Save your / local elegies / fierce cuts / What comes next / The fresh air is exhausted" ("Wrong Hand"). It's just that a readjustment is called for.