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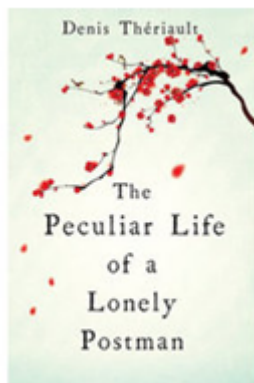
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SUNDAY BOOK REVIEW | THE SHORTLIST

# French Translation

## Dominique Fabre's 'Guys Like Me,' and More

By NANCY KLINE MARCH 6, 2015



### THE PECULIAR LIFE OF A LONELY POSTMAN

*By Denis Thériault**Translated by Liedewy Hawke**119 pp. Hesperus Nova, paper, \$14.95.*

The French Canadian mail carrier Bilodo is an anomaly in today's email-obsessed society, a sensitive isolate who considers delivering real mail a mission, helping to maintain the order of the universe. An amateur calligrapher, he shuns the "reptilian coldness of the keyboard and instantaneity of the Internet" and identifies with the copyist monks of the Middle Ages. He especially enjoys delivering handwritten personal letters — other people's, since nobody writes to him — which he regularly steams open before delivering them, reglued, to their rightful recipients. This "secret vice" brings Ségolène into his life (unbeknownst to her). A beautiful Guadeloupean, she has been corresponding for two years with an unkempt poet on Bilodo's route: The two exchange haiku. When the poet abruptly dies, his postman can't bear to lose Ségolène, so he decides to keep up the dead man's half of the correspondence. But how to turn himself convincingly into another? How to write in the voice of the deceased?

Form is emptiness, emptiness form. Still, composing someone else's poems is no easy trick. In this brief, funny fable (or Zen koan), we applaud Bilodo as he performs it with increasing skill, but we also hope he'll leave behind vicarious experience and step fully into his own life. Charmingly written and translated, his tale is rooted in an Eastern belief in the circularity of existence. It begins and ends with a fitting verse: "Swirling like water /