

EZRA: An Online Journal of Translation

Spring 2008 Vol. 2 No. 1

This issue of Ezra stretches across the wild abyss of a two thousand year debate over the relation of form to content. It reaches from Latin poems (even rhyming Catullus!) to Bill Lavender's homophonic translations. Ezra tip-toed up to the latter, shuddered, and then plunged in. Bill's translations richly demonstrate the process, and give a new sense of translation process in general. They plant the flag at a very high point, for translators and their sense of freedom. Bill is the featured artist for this issue, and there's more at lavenderink.org

Ezra is thrilled to make the acquaintance of Chinese poet Cai Qijiao – a great contemporary discovery. And to have more of Arlene Zide's work (see last issue).

We hope all translators will join PEN, as well as ALTA (American Literary Translators Association). The National Endowment for the Humanities is also a great resource: there are grant opportunities for translators.

There will be a Translation Workshop within the San Miguel Summer Seminars, of the University of New Orleans low-residency Master of Fine Arts program. That's June 23-July 18, in San Miguel, Mexico. Just google UNO MFA San Miguel.

Let's savor Rainer Schulte's words ("The Paradigm of Translation," Translation Review, no. 73, 2007): I think that the paradigm of translation should become the new paradigm to revitalize the reading and interpretation of literary and humanistic texts... The reader who approaches the interpretation of literary and cultural texts from the point of view of "translation thinking" changes the basic question of "what does a text mean?" to "how does a text come to mean?" That attitude immediately indicates that there is more than one interpretation of a text and that there is no such thing as the "only" definitive interpretation or translation of a work.

And let's welcome new editors Heather Dowds and Dan Gortze!

i traduttori/traduttrici:

Bill Lavender

Brenda Riojas Nettles

Edward Morin, Dennis Ding, Fang Dai

George Held

Keming Liu, Joanna Sit

Derek Updegraff

Arlene Zide

Featured Translator: Bill Lavender

Bill Lavender is the director of the Low Residency Creative Writing program and coordinator of the San Miguel Summer Seminars. His most recent books of poetry include *I of the Storm* (Trembling Pillow 2007), *While Sleeping* (Chax Press 2004), *look the universe is dreaming* (Potes and Poets 2002), and *Guest Chain* (Lavender Ink 1999). He is the editor of *Another South: Experimental Writing in the South*, an anthology from University of Alabama Press (2003). His poetry and essays have appeared in numerous print magazines including *Jubilat*, *New Orleans Review*, *Gulf Coast Review*, *Skanky Possum*, *YAWP*, and *Fell Swoop*, and web publications including *Exquisite Corpse*, *Muse Apprentice Guild*, *CanWeHaveOurBallBack*, *Moria*, *Baddog*, *Poets Against the War*, and, more recently, *Big Bridge*, and *Nolafugees*. He has published scholarship in *Poetics Today* and *Contemporary Literature*. He lives in New Orleans with Dr. Nancy Dixon.

Serenity

—Homophonic translation by Bill Lavendar

On two fronts, decant the color of lost armadas.
The loot of long violet halls echoes, our apiary,
counting carefully despite those fierce cartels, in logical
elegance delegating labor to the estates,
two pieces broken trembling like dueling vapors.

Her woven sin recalls the statue of a pregnant pauper's hopeless volition,
like hands of hell moving in two atmospheres, combing pigeons
from hunger's less grand and already
crusading near-miss, meaning incomplete,
crescendos so all can hear, all go on, bruised and doting
and palpable as those of us already in the red,
honing instruments, perfect and brilliant and submerged.

Or remember the diameter of the seed,
that sober appendage so similar to jasmine,
her corpse profound amid quagmires of recognition,
bound to a temporary shrine.

Pharoahs call the grand marshal, & she enters like a loon, soiled legs of
my vigilance mark her coming into the room,
or never, my always, incorrigible as precious
desperation, the poor old metal of necessity.

Pablo Neruda, "Serenata"

The Rabbit

—translated by Bill Lavender

Vacancy sullies ports to the garden, a piccolo
infuses cuneiform dice into the piano,
terror contracts with suburban
noise, and the ring-master of day glories in his mammals.
Coy suits lined with soot rise & sound radios
in turn, theatrical compositions parade in peace—
tranquility, companionship—
that facile gall that gratifies
fascists despite unbound subsidiaries.
All the old red spaces languish in utero
like wounds that rhyme and fester, sons of Che
begin so low that oil threatens in gain or loss,
granting a glance at Mr. Other's center,
candid as a dove named The Morbid,
and one murder cancelled all fauna in the fluid fresco.

Quest for my poverty, guarded tutelage
piecemeal— my how comparisons age and
waste away. Organically made to matter,
this vast day of no special importance
announces a fratricide of legend, a pouting
obedient and roseate poll made to order,
trivial and pleased as portent, like some uncle
from a circular mobile farm. The new castle's crumbling.
Lost in stages, this crust of bucolic war
feeds a loose and verdant totality, locally vernal.

Pier Paola Pasolini, "La Rabbia"

Clog

—translated by Bill Lavender

Oh why are all the ferns
and language forbidden?
In globs of their stern
warm welcome the glance employs

a sigh's judgment from the top,
in globs, in boots
that're always over-full.
Houses say it's the banging against
a house that ruins a rule—
guess later
in which cool house
their meaning was mine. As her scent hinted for us
in a grove of thistle thrives
the musical bleating.
Am I a fiend or just certain
mulch to work out and sign?
In globs of waste
our violet allies
giving head—
whether we earn a whistle start
or end it stalled in this hampered state.

Rainer Maria Rilke, "Klage"

Hell's Cloven Monarch

—translated by Bill Lavender

Came in contingent as old leaders and precedents left the page, a quiet sign of doubt incarnate,
we estranged in terrorist armor.
Plowed up limitations for the lard boys, brazen callous thugs, of larger passion certainly than he,
in situations where oreos defend those for whom systems and mathematics silence guarantees.
See, queers consummate contempt, much as bells on Monday, curious or uncomfortable or
involuntary, a terrestrial ease, ruined a motor with choking hands, or an eastern vault of fault, he
spits denouncement like the movement he questioned, coming back with oranges.
And/or the needle of pee sequenced to the grand cigar store, florid and amber in hell's pure
cylindrical panic, he denuded the pugilist, came unto lyric and desperate cabals from gruesome
constituencies.
He my espoused and my oracle, old ladies of the rumored tall buildings that leap, my espoused
bird-man, queen of hell's ray.
Soon enrolled in the cartel's niggling entry-level best-of, you sue to dislodge perpetuity: your
acid air, your lacks noted, disinterested, your moldy escutcheon melting gray as your wild ascent.

Pablo Neruda, "El Joven Monarca"

Hunt

—translated by Bill Lavender

Taught just the lame natural
past, couples cite servility,
the parqueted blank, vertigo,
a vapor jetting northward.

Ah Les, devout cooper's son,
neither lever nor orifice,
stoned, venting fair abandon
on these jambs and marbles.

By noon free of the crux, the taunt
that pours out light and land,
that lets caliphs guard their flank,
that imports buoyancy and flight,

not a grunt past aging, but defiant
genius who sees something better.
You can't cease in an instant
the rushes of debt. Trader,

come and chat with monks, rush the
dim frontier of spheres.
What the mouth portrays omens don't,
self's quilt on the prairie.

Arthur Rimbaud, "Honte"

The Mall

—translated by Bill Lavender

Dandies queue on crocheted rugs like a bitmapped
sniveling throat in jail; for leanness you'll steal the
cute anklets off guards, press old Roy's key like braille,
cruel as the battlements glassed for the feud.

Dandy queens fold & evaporate, brief
as fate, cement melts your domes until fuming,
paving over dark lessons, sand tribe, sand in jail,
nature, a tight key fits its own basement!

Well, the undo key ripped the nipple's damask,
the hotels, as mentioned, are ground glass dorms,

key to a basement that houses the horse.

It is revealed, quantity minus romance,
sand languishes and pleasant souls lean their bonnet near,
like currents of groceries lie and leer, munching.

Arthur Rimbaud, "Le Mal"

Ropey Cabanas

—translated by Bill Lavender

A boy's a nodding hell to test you.
A door is untroubled if trampled.
Trace-laden tumblers of sugar.

Trace-laden tumblers of sugar.
A boy's a nodding hell to test you.
You sold one type of belief but you
lost a ration of soul,
a loading of lost fumbles decoded;
you & me to mirror the rabbits.

You know to go, remiss or no,
mixed proportions follow me, a cousin
to an altar of occasion,
lost in Aquinas, not permanent.

The real detects the urinal, see-ya,
my carcass is lending it moisture.

Your toys quit when expression marks
expression with visas unchecked.

You're torn and muddy,
count shells, feet to come under, a special defeat.

Paraquat sons eat those Mr. Magoos?
Quick hit on the esteemed colanders?

A lost major hastened to India.

Your degree-zero coasting pours over.

Nicanor Parra, "rompecabezas"

FEBRUARY

—translated by Edward Morin, Dennis Ding, and Fang Dai

Today I must be exceptionally gentle
so I can tell my friends the best of news.
Go on quickly budding your light green leaves--
the season in you already waves its greeting to me.

Here's what the moss in the rain is telling me,
as it appears on top of the drenched walls:
such masses of bright life-giving green
are the sure sign of spring's arrival.

The fingers of the wind caressing my cheek
already seem surprisingly warm and soft,
my throat breathes in currents of moist air
as if drinking the mellowest wine without restraint.

Remember that bright day not long ago
when a butterfly paid a call at my window;
it sipped on a nearly withered winter-plum flower--
upon what hill slope could it be perching now?

I guess the peach trees blooming by the lake
must have watched this splendid parade in their dreams,
for they've hurriedly decked their branches with blossoms,
and greenness pulsates quickly through their boughs.

In ploughed fields all over the countryside
countless bands of sparrows frolic happily;
tranquil mountains that seem to float among the clouds
undulate like swatches of light green silk.

Time to view the colors of spring in the wild,
you my friends who have formed unbreakable ties with spring,
in this fine season that belongs to you alone,
what melody of life will you be singing?

Cai Qijiao

WINTER NIGHT

—translated by Edward Morin, Dennis Ding, and Fang Dai

How sad and desolate this winter night is—
except for the railway station nearby
and a freight train arriving in a thunderous roar,
its locomotive spouting a wisp of white smoke
that tumbles and rises under the shadowy clouds;
my thanks to the boat cruising upstream
past the foot of the tall embankment—
with a sharp thud, the bamboo barge-pole strikes a rock
and resounds through the iron-hard dark of night;
thanks also to lamplights in distant villages
that spark up in distinctive hues
at river banks and in the mountains
bobbing in the surrounding darkness
giving travelers the warm comfort of hope.

Cai Qijiao

YOUR EYES

—translated by Edward Morin, Dennis Ding, and Fang Dai

are the brightest most enchanting star
in my darkening evening sky;
in frenzied confidence
and hope I climb up,
facing your clear sacred brilliance
without batting an eyelash.

A vast net
exudes a purple haze,
and in expectation the rose
ignites herself for me in the sky.

No one in the world
is more fortunate than I,
a small green bird
chirps in small branches all day long,
because of the intense fire
spreading through your eyes.

Bitter tears
beat in time with the shouting of my pulse,

and at the subtlest half-closing of your eyelids
I have already thrown myself into the abyss.

Cai Qijiao

NEW YEAR'S EVE

—translated by Edward Morin, Dennis Ding, and Fang Dai

Removing striped gloves,
untying a snow-white scarf
under the soft lamplight,
imperially proud, you arch your delicate neck
and smile as you walk toward music,
keeping rhythm, and ever so slowly
raising your slender hand elegantly
as a swan flying in the distant sky,

your supple body drifting so gracefully
I mistake it for a faraway cloud.

Cai Qijiao

QIUPU RIVER

—translated by Edward Morin, Dennis Ding, and Fang Dai

The cost of having walked in lock step with others
brings punishment as cruel as a march toward a mass grave
What folly to surrender obediently to conventional norms
or turn tail and stampede in retreat
Better to position oneself between these two extremes

The gathering dusk is reason enough to feel assured
that the life force has things under control
Regeneration of the spirit on a higher level
allows us absolute freedom of behavior
Late blooming flowers are most beautiful

Cai Qijiao

COLLEGE STUDENTS

—translated by Edward Morin, Dennis Ding, and Fang Dai

The warp and woof of hope and disappointment
are woven into the same time and space
A generation breaking out of a frozen mind set
is the light at dawn that everyone anticipates

On a battlefield long since turned cold and dark
they challenged the authorities' glaring scowl
as sirens blared throughout that fateful night
Freedom now lies where no hand can touch it

Cai Qijiao

DARK SHADOWS UNDER THE EYES

—translated by Edward Morin, Dennis Ding, and Fang Dai

I see reflected in your dreamy eyes
boughs in their earliest stage of budding
as they hasten on to bloom forever
and dye everything in the background black

It's sad that stars up in the vast sky
are incapable of breathing freely
but must drop through dark heights above our clouds
like fluttering petals or doves that mourn in pain

Cai Qijiao

Report of a Work-related Injury

—translated by Keming Liu

Gong Hui-zhong
Female
Twenty years old
Native of Jiangxi province
ID Number: Z0264
Department: Molding
Line of Work: Beer machine
Employment Date: 24 August 1997

While stocking beer machine,
product fails to drop into mold

Safety door fails to open
Putting her hand in from the side
to push product down
Hand touches safety door
Mold folds
Crushing hand
Middle finger and little finger
Two segments of middle finger, one segment of pinkie
Result of investigation:
“Violation of factory safety procedures”

Accordingly
her hands had been burnt often.
Accordingly
she had been on the job for over twelve hours.
After the accident, she
accordingly
did not cry.
neither did she
holler
holding her fingers she
staggered

At the time of the accident
there were no witnesses.

Xie Xiang-nan

Remembering New Zealand

—translated by Keming Liu

The killer's hand
is white like the lotus
white like the white of the lotus
“Having killed, the hand cannot be changed”
That belongs to Gu Cheng
Gu Cheng belongs to the poets
He isn't man's
Excuses are for the dead
The hand of the killer is a lotus when in a tight fist
is an axe when open
The palm of the axe runs red
The wrinkles of the palm vanish.

September 5, 2005

Xie Xiang-nan

The Roofer

—translated by Keming Liu

“To reach the roof, I’ll need a ladder.
How else would I get up there to change the tile?”

Father goes to find a ladder.

“Not only do I need a ladder. I’ll need
a new piece of tile, of course. The broken one
needs to be taken down and changed immediately
for a new one.”

Father goes into town to find a tile.

“The tile is here. I still need putty.”

Father reaches up to the roof and brings one down.

“I need a rope.”

Father takes down the quilted jacket from the clothesline.

“One last thing I need is a little mud.”

Father casually digs a few shovels’ full in the yard, piles up
a small amount of dirt, throws a bit of water on it.

He says, “Good. Just like that.” And like a monkey,
climbs up on our roof.

But to our surprise, when he reaches the top,
the guy actually asks, “Where’s the problem?”

This time, father can’t think of any way to help him,
so he cheerfully moves the ladder away.

Jiang Fei

“Alive”

—translated by Keming Liu

A circle
A rectangle
Four right triangles
This is a composite
although
it resembles him
only
roughly

He has not bathed for a long time
very dirty
on the side of the composite I write
“filthy...”

He is not bad
On the side I draw
another circle
another rectangle
four right triangles
resembling another person

I want to say they are friends
So
I link his right triangle
with his/her ninety-degree triangle
I draw a line
symbolizing the horizon
symbolizing they are still alive
also
they have lots of time to kill

Shu

FRIENDS

—translated by Arlene Zide

The wind
is soaking up
their sounds of laughter
The wind is soaking up
their secrets, their sorrows.

At this very minute, blood gushes out
Once they part,
they will be left shadows
of themselves.

This is the hour of God.

He knows
what is going to happen to them
once they go away.

Leaving all his work behind
He's come
to watch them all.

At this moment
all of them move
like puppets
dangling from the magic hand of God.

God has finally arrived
It's bad news.

This is the hour of God

They
the orphans
of God.

GAGAN GILL

CROWS

—translated by Arlene Zide

And then the Buddha said to the gathering of monks:
'Monks, I allow a child under 15 to take vows. I allow any child who can
shoo away a crow to take the holy vows.'

- Vinay Pitak, The Rule Book for Monks

None will stop.

They will all go; as many as you shoo away. Will go and sit on the rock of some other life.
Again they'll wait for you. But there will be one who won't go anywhere.

To stay close, he'll become invisible. Will follow you with every breath. In sun and rain. In memory and in forgetfulness. You will crawl into a cold bed and he will have warmed up your space.

Only every so often, you'll get suspicious. You'll stop abruptly under the sky in the midst of the mountains, as if someone had asked you something.

No, this is not the Mount of Memory. Those who seek answers never show themselves.

Gagan Gill

Always

—translated by Brenda Nettles Riojas

Always this sensation of anxiety. Of waiting for more. Today it's the butterflies and tomorrow it will be unexplainable sadness, the boredom or the wild activity to fix this or that room, to sew, to go here or there or do errands, while I try to cover the Universe with one finger, make my happiness with ingredients from kitchen recipes, sucking my fingers at moments and at moments feeling that I can never be filled that I am a bottomless barrel, knowing that "I will never be satisfied" but looking absurdly to conform while my body and my mind open, they extend like infinite pores where a woman nests, a woman who had desired to be a bird, ocean, star, a deep womb giving birth to universes, shining novas... and I am exploding popcorn seeds in my brain, white puffs of cotton, bursts of poems that assault me all day and make me want to inflate like a balloon to fill the world, Nature, to soak in everything and be everywhere, living one and a thousand different lives...

I must remember that I am here and will continue longing, getting bits of clarity, making myself a dress of sun, of moon, a green dress-the-color-of-time, with the one I've dreamed of living with for a time on Venus.

Gioconda Belli (Nicaragua)

I FEEL THAT I AM MOVING AWAY

—translated by Brenda Nettles Riojas

I feel that I am moving away, that I am leaving little by little this reality from the mornings and the afternoons and I am entering a world that I am constructing with my desires and my anxieties and all the suppressed things that start wanting to escape and push me, almost without me taking notice, in the uncertainty, there where I should remain alone, where it makes me scared to go because I know I will have to assume all responsibility for having taken notice, for knowing that not everything is air and water and bread and milk and that there is something more that surrounds us, that it is in the atmosphere, that chases us and waits to envelop us in that painful

beauty that we want to share and bring close to others but, on the contrary, it distances us, it makes us feel unreal, different, as if we had just been born into a world we don't know until later or as if we had arrived from the closest stars or the farthest and we are completely open to the leaves, the noise, feeling life spill, feeling that we are nearing that one, the true reality, even though everyone thinks otherwise and we can't explain it to them.

Gioconda Belli (Nicaragua)

VIII.27

Martial

—translated by George Held

Being rich and old, Gaurus,
whoever gives you gifts
is saying, if you have the sense
to comprehend, "Die."

VIII.62

Martial

—translated by George Held

Picens writes epigrams on the back
side of a paper,
and he's miffed because the Muse's back
is turned while he writes.

XII.92

Martial

—translated by George Held

You often ask, Priscus, what kind of man I'd be
if I suddenly became rich and powerful.
how can one tell one's character in the future?
tell me, if you became a lion, what kind of man would you be?

A Multitude of Kisses (Catullus 5)

—translated by Derek Updegraff

Let's live, Elizabeth, and so let's love,
And let's consider all the rumors of
Those prone to talk as worth less than a penny.
The sun can set and rise again, but when we
Find that our temporal light has set,
One everlasting night is to be slept.
Give me a thousand kisses, then a hundred,
Another thousand, then a second hundred,
Still a third thousand, then a hundred more.
Then with so many thousands kept in store,
We'll jumble them around and lose our count
So even we won't know the sure amount,
And then no prying eyes can send ill wishes
Because they know the tally of our kisses.

A Warm Welcome to the City (Catullus 43)

—translated by Derek Updegraff

Hello. Good afternoon, young girl, whose nose
Is hardly small, whose foot is great in length,
Whose eyes are brightly dull, whose fingers, those
Cherry-topped stumps, are poorly masked, whose strength

Is certainly not seen or heard when she
Discusses anything, whose lips are damp
With spittle spots, mistress of that carefree
Yet bankrupt rake from your resort-side camp.

Your town says you are something to behold?
They think your "beauty" matches that of my
Elizabeth? Oh foolish times that mold
Dumb men whose tastes can't help but stupefy.

I Hate and Love My Girl (Catullus 85)

—translated by Derek Updegraff

I hate and love my girl. Perhaps
you question how I can relapse

from adoration to disgust
so easily. Ask, if you must,

but I have no idea. In fact,
I seldom choose how I'll react

to her. I feel it done to me,
and I am left in agony.

To a Man of Letters, On a Tragic Occasion (Catullus 96)

—translated by Derek Updegraff

for Alfred Dorn

If any sweet or beneficial thing
Can go where silent graves remain,
Alfred, from our grievous pain,
The longing that enables us to bring
Old loves to life and makes us weep
For friendships we no longer keep,
Surely Anita's thoughts are not of grief
For her too early death, but of
The joy she feels from your great love.