

VOLUME 9 number 3

EZRA sprang about at the fabulous ALTA 38 conference, like a sugared-up ten year old in an English sweets shop. The bilingual readings were especially strong. The veterans noted how many gifted young translators are around—and how eclectic and prolific is that body of work. This positive note came up in discussions about the state of the art, as did the increased visibility of translation work in the promotion and tenure scheme.

Pamela Carmell, our feature for the issue, was at ALTA, and it was fascinating to hear how many authors she has worked with besides Gutierrez (below).

Don Bogen—the recent Ezra feature—read from his book, *Europa*, the first translation of Madrid poet Julio Martínez Mesanza. DiálogosBooks.com

Those of you good at the alphabet will especially enjoy the acrostic in this issue. Dominique Townsend's book is just out: *How To Wake up A Hero* (about Shantideva—Wisdom Publications).

Ezra will soon appear in a new format, with new functionality (you'll love it). This has occasioned some brooding about our emblem, Daphne. We do well to take Ovid not only as artifact but as muse. The abiding model and inspiration of his *Metamorphoses* keep both process and product before our eyes. Never mind that his writing comes to most of us as a translation from Latin. More importantly, his subject speaks for the ineffable, the transcendent, and the weird that breathes on us practitioners in the middle of a translation. As vital to us as were gods to the superstitious Romans. Then, too, Ezra would have us remember (in a reminder of our target-only house style and of the hard-won freedoms implicit in many conversations at ALTA) that when Daphne is all done she's a laurel tree, the leafy quiddity of a laurel tree, and not what she was before.

Be reminded of a new program, the **Ezra Residencies** (New Hampshire, summer). Click on that tab to discover.

There are two reviews in this issue.

FEATURED WRITER:

Pamela Carmell received a Translation Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts for the novel, *Oppiano Licario* by José Lezama Lima. She co-translated *With Eyes and Soul*, poems by Nancy Morejón (White Pine Press, 2004). Harper Collins published her translation of *The Last Cato*, by bestselling Spanish author, Matilde Asensi. Her translation of another Spanish best-seller, *The Last Portrait of the Duchess of Alba* by Antonio Larreta, was a Book-of-the-Month Club alternate selection. *Woman on the Front Lines*, a translation of poems by Belkis Cuza Malé, was supported by the Witter Bynner Foundation for Poetry. She co-edited/co-translated *Cuba on the Edge*, an anthology of short stories (CCC Press, England, 2007). She translated the best-selling trilogy, *Apocalypse Z*, by Spaniard Manel Loureiro. Her translations of poems by

Nancy Morejón Homing Instincts/ Querencias were published by Cubanabooks in 2014. Other translations include work by Luisa Valenzuela, Manuel Puig, Ena Lucía Portela, and Gloria Fuertes, among others.

THE BLAZING LIGHT OF DESIRE

A friend talks about desire hidden and banned
on this desolate, sad island
The blazing light of impossible desire
flies over us
like a shadowy omen
Its wings scatter poisonous dust
it smells of death
Our only salvation is the infinite
I say
Escaping into the ether
And I read some poems
subtle and fragrant
One of them
tells of the blind prophet
who stops in the middle of beseeching
the gods and draws the multitude
to the abyss of euphoria
when he shouts to them:
Cheer up / The tyrant is dead.

THE SECRET LIFE

At night
from my roof top
Havana barely lit up
frugal and stoic
Havana endures these years
like a grand old lady / wise and silent
She doesn't part her lips
to protest

and lets foam and niter
lap against her side
The old lady conceals her wounds
hides her scars
and confesses to me / late in the night:
It doesn't matter
you will be gone
everyone will be gone
I am eternal
I will always be here
my enormous heart
beating in the wind
I hand over my love / and don't suffer
I am the city of stone
The eternal city.

OLD, DIRTY PHOTOS

The man strolls
past shelves full
of broken, dirty knickknacks.
He steals some little black and white photos.
He tucks them into his pocket
and keeps wandering down
those long, dusty aisles.
Antique market
an equally dusty and worn poster announces.
It's more like a trash heap.
Afterwards he sits down outside
among the birches
next to the train tracks
and pieces together a story.
In every photo
the same little girl-teenager-woman appears.
On the back are dates.
In meticulous, German penmanship.
From 1927 to 1963.
There the trail goes cold.
There are other details too:
Places, people's names.
Just then a train races by.
Red and fleeting. Startling.

Just a whine and a red blotch.
The man feels the vacuum
of air.
And he's seized with fear.
Two seconds later
there's nothing.
The birches.
The wind.
The soft murmur of leaves.

THE GHOST

Once I believed in the end of the world.
Not anymore.
Not in the beginning either.
Could be I only believe in
a stormy place
where the sea and the wind
fling niter and foam
in my face.
When I get bored with that
I turn my back and close my eyes.
I try to forget and smile.
I listen to boleros full of despair.
A fire rages inside you
she says.
Cynicism has a price
I say.
And I always go back.
All the way to the end.
Life isn't as long
as it seems.

MEN ON EDGE

I do some erotic drawings in charcoal.
Some quick sketches.
I shade them a bit with my fingers
to add bulk and shadows.

They're always men
with a large, erect phallus
ejaculating all that semen in every direction.
Men on edge.
They walk fast and ejaculate.
Despair surrounds them.
Crazy men.
Men lost with no direction.
I finish up.
I leave the sheets of paper on the table and turn out the light
hoping
that during the night they'll escape
and disappear from my sight
But no.
The next day they're still there.
Waiting for me.
To keep on playing this game.
Like the dog and cat.

PEDRO JUAN GUTIERREZ

Traduttori/traduttrici:

Estefania Di Bua	(Andres Neuman and Alejandra Pizarnik)
Dominique Townsend	(Tibetan acrostic)
Robert Wooten	(Horace)
Bacem Essam	(Shawki)
Sylvia Kofler	(Ernst Jandl)
Damon Aukema	(Gunvor Hofmo)
Torin Jensen	(Valerie Mejer)
Jay Hopler	(Georg Trakl)
Guillemette and Allan Johnston	(Abdellatif Laâbi)
Hyacinthus Meredith	(Zhang Jiuling)

I Don't Know Why

~~translated by Estefania Di Bua

I don't know why I venerate porn

this docile habit of strange savagery
every time I behold the pleasure in others
an elusive part of me is satisfied
spying on who I'm not
fornicating without me
I see reflections
domestic perversions
I'm happy to be here with no one.

ANDRES NEUMAN

The Word of Desire

~~translated by Estefania Di Bua

This eerie texture of the darkness, this melody in the bones, this gust of diverse silences, this going under, this obscure gallery, dark, this drawing without drawing.

What am I saying? It's dark and I want to go in. I don't know what else to say.

(I don't want to speak; I want to go inside). The pain in my bones, the language destroyed word by word, little by little reconstructing the blueprint of deceit.

I don't have possessions (this I can assure you; finally something is certain). Then there is a melody. It's a mournful melody, a lilac light, a forthcoming recipient. I see the melody--the presence of an orange-colored light. I would not know how to live without your gaze. This, too, I can assure you. Rise; I resurrect you. And it told me to face the wind and go door to door and ask if you were there.

I stay naked holding a candle, snow castle, garden of delights. Solitude is not to stand by the pier, at dawn, gazing greedily at the water. Solitude cannot be asserted, for you cannot enclose it, nor give it form, or make it synonymous with a landscape. Solitude would be this broken melody of my words.

ALEJANDRA PIZARNIK

Tibetan Acrostic

~~translated by Dominique Townsend

Attention that's expansive like a water lily's petals
Best-intentioned for the people of the snow land
Compassionately soothing, a rainfall cool as camphor
Desperate as I am, Guru Rinpoche keeps me in his mind

Ever mindful from afar, be unremitting
Forget not a man's clothing style and signs of ranks come and go
Give up the delusion that making a living is everything
Have pristine motivation, like the lone full moon each month

In solitary places such as groves of palm trees
Just forget all that's ordinary and distracting
Keep at it and you'll achieve freedom on your own here and now
Let it be today that you accomplish the ultimate aim

Mastering the practices of the paramitas
Now you know the path of transcendence
Obstinate beings, like cattle, are difficult to tame
Persevere in liberating them without exception

Quite a subtle spark, the size of a mere sesame,
Really can ignite everything with its scorching heat
Stave off wild and careless behavior and
Take up the cultivation of vividness and true memory

Undue concern with superficial fashions such as hat styles and
Vainly collecting silk brocades takes time away from the teachings
What we call “partiality” comes about; be non-divisive
Excellently demonstrating that noblemen can be liberated

Your courtyard’s enclosure cannot fend off the army of death
Zipping about, crossing passes and rivers, you flee but nowhere is safe
Abandon the illusory body of meat, blood and bones as a corpse
Bits of dirt and stone, don’t you see?

Cast off excessive laziness, comfort, and idleness
Dzogchen is the right path for you to practice now
Extreme in your application, having marshaled that effort,
Fantastic! Accomplish the meaning of this life

Thus advised Gyurme Dorje to Namka Wangjor

Ode

~~translated by Robert Wooten

I finished a monument more lasting than bronze
and, with princely site, higher than a pyramid,
which neither the greedy storm, nor headstrong North Wind
is able to pull down, nor innumerable
series of years and the fleeing of the times.
Not all will die, and the greater part of mine
will avoid death; coming after, I will increase
right by the praise just come. While Jupiter's temple
the high priest ascends with the unmentioned maiden,
I'm sung in verse, as well the breaking Aufidus
shouts down with a noise, as Daunus the poor of rain
ruled of the wild multitudes, the mighty within
the lowly, chief poem to have fetched the standard
Aeolian measures into Latin. Let me
be proud, sought out because of merit, and, for me,
Melpomene, lift the wished bay, enclose the leaves.

HORACE Ode #30, Book Three

~~translations by Bacem Essam

ألف الدال على المدى	هام الفؤاد بشادن
والكم يفتحه الندى	أبكي، فيضحك نغره

In loving a damsel

In loving a damsel, my heart's enchanted—
settling for indulgence she's granted,
rapidly, she smiles as I shed tear-islets;
As petal palms embrace dew droplets.

بثت شكواي، فذاب الجليدُ

وأشفق الصخرُ، ولان الحديدُ	بثت شكواي، فذاب الجليدُ
هيئات! بل قسوته لي تزيدُ	وقلبك القاسي على حاله

Heartily vulnerable

It is thawing after I've voiced complaints –
softly, rocks sympathized; iron had yielded,
ruthlessly, your heart keeps constraints,
and nay, the relentless heart has shielded.

SHAWKI (Egypt, 1868-1932)

to existence

~~translated by Sylvia Kofler

to existence
the coexistence
and why not to coexistence
the cocoexistence
and then to it
the cococoexistence
and its logical continuum
the cocococoexistence

in this manner the co-
has no set boundaries
just like the weapons systems
that make such a co- possible
merely existence
that occurs only once at a time
is set
and therefore irrelevant

ERNST JANDL (Austria, 1925-2000)

jumping jack

jumping jack
presupposes its string.
so do senior clerk, office manager,
department head.
with arms and legs
everyone draws a circle

that cannot be escaped.

who knows spout the ignorant.

ERNST JANDL

Four by Hofmo

The Stars Are Forgotten

~~translated by Damon Aukema

The stars are forgotten
now

and my soul
is like the clouds
that cover them.

But beauty
exists in the Word,
where the darkness
brings forth the depth
of the stars.

I Wrap Myself

I wrap myself
in the light that comes

in the darkness.
I open like the mussel
to find beauty
in the beggar's
distorted features,
in the refugee's face
turned towards the land
he has abandoned,
and the loneliness
of all the deserted streets . . .

A White Rose

The moon is a white rose
set in the solitary vase
of the sky.

They Return Home

They return
home
to the trees
that stood in their childhood.

Like a door
to the open spaces,
to meadows of snow
with the frost nailed
to the stars.

The stars:
wine glasses on a distant
tablecloth.

But who fills the glasses
that eternity drinks
from?

GUNVOR HOFMO (Norway, 1921-1995)

from “Countryless”

~~translated by Torin Jensen

My Lord,

This tree I see now is exact in its leaves. It's precise the number of those that move through the street, and exact how the window places them in a frame. Like the eye that's witnessed the struggle for your mind, Lord, a mind of lakes and dragonflies and further below, at the end of your limbs hang the ordinary hands of a man. Lord, nothing is mine; you above all. The innumerable butterflies of a memory, where you hadn't yet touched my life, they, by all means, are there covering the body of a girl dwarf in the forest. I carried her on my shoulders to the sanctuary because her legs already twisted themselves. At last we rested, those bodies of paper, the victory, covering us from head to foot, and a tremulous blanket nearly floated from our bodies to the mind that I hadn't yet encountered and to the hand that would take me to a similar path. To a paradise of insects. Lord, nothing is ours, you know, not even the day when we'll know to ride the same mare, or when we'll boil a couple of potatoes in a pan. Already we're on the table of the others, we're already there, but that thought isn't yet ours, Lord, it's an idea of the sun who considers us momentarily. It belongs to you, what I give you, but it's been forgotten at the entrance to my house and now too what I write is a reminder: On the table, to the side of the door, is my heart. The organs left outside a body don't survive.

VALERIE MEJER (Mexico, contemporary)

Landscape

~~translated by Jay Hopler

September evening; through the gloaming village, the sad-dark calls of the
herdsmen ring out.

The farrier fires up the forge. An enormous black horse

Rears up. The hyacinth-like locks of the farm-

Girl brush against its crimson nostrils.

Gently, the cry of the doe grows stiff

At the edge of the forest.

And the yellow blossoms of the mums bend mutely over the pond's blue
face.

A tree is engulfed in red

Flame. Bats flutter up with dark faces.

In An Old Garden

The brownish-green scent of the mignonette drifts across

The great pond. The water shimmers, shivers with it.

The willows stand wrapped in a fog of white

Moths fluttering crazily. Abandoned, the patio basks in the sun.

Goldfish glister deep beneath the surface of the pond.

From time to time, clouds swim up over the hill and then drift

Away again, slowly. The arbors seem bright

Because young women walked past them earlier this morning.

Their laughter lingers, hanging in the delicate leaves.

In golden mist dances a drunken faun.

Melancholy

Bluish shadows. O you dark eyes that look at me so longingly,
gliding by!

In the garden, guitar chords provide the perfect soundtrack for
autumn

Dissolving in brown acid.

Nymph-like hands ready death's gloomy rooms.

Cracked lips suck red breasts and in black acid

The children of the sun's

Wet locks float.

GEORG TRAKL

Tribulations of an Acknowledged Dreamer

~~translated by Guillemette and Allan Johnston

It is not a business of shoulders
or of biceps
the burden of the world
Those who have come to carry it
are often the most frail
They too are subject to fear
to doubt
to discouragement
and sometimes come to curse
the splendid idea or Dream
that has exposed them
to the fires of Gehenna
But if they bend
they do not break
and when they are cut and mutilated
by frequent misery
these human reeds
know that their bodies
lacerated by betrayal
will become as many flutes
as the shepherds of awakening play
to capture
and escort to the stars
the symphony of resistance

ABDELLATIF LAABI

Vaccine

Paris Orly

You have front row seats

at the rolling belt

watching for the red suit case

you have broken in with this epic journey

When it comes out after a long wait

you can hardly recognize it

One would think it had passed

through the bowels of a coal mine

Also it is completely battered

What inquisitor has pleased himself

by visiting it so coarsely

when you have put your poems

in the shelter of your carry-on luggage?

Come on, stop your drama

think about it

today's inquisition puts on gloves

and utilizes x-rays
It has other worries in mind
You have shaved your beard just in time
and no longer think that the revolution
is tomorrow
After tomorrow maybe, if you succeed
in perfecting
in your secret laboratory
a horse vaccine
against triumphant stupidity

ABDELLATIF LAABI

Reflections I

~~translated by Hyacinthus Meredith

The orchid leaves soft drooping in the spring,
The candid-pure osmanthus in the autumn,
In life most vivid, their own hour of beauty,
Boast not, and seek not others' eyes.

They do

Not sense the forester's admiring gaze,
As he, who by their very wind inspired,
Doth sit transfixed, in quiet, glad delight.

Yet herb or flower it is a natural thing,
Why should it love its lover's culling hand?

ZHANG JIULING (Chinese, 678-740 CE)

Note: This title oft appears in Classical Chinese poetry; it means literally 'feelings upon meeting,' and poems thus entitled conventionally use external objects as metaphors for internal feelings. The poem is the first in a cycle of twelve by the poet.

REVIEWS:

The Revolt of the Young: Essays by Tawfīq al-Hakim. Tawfiq al-Hakim. Translated by Mona Radwan. Foreword by Roger Allen. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2015. 167 pages.

The Revolt of the Young: Essays by Tawfīq al-Hakim is the long-overdue English translation of Tawfīq al-Hakim's collection of journal articles, *Thawrat Elshabaab* (Cairo: Adaab Publisher, 1984). The essays in *The Revolt of the Young* are commentaries on the ever-evolving generational dynamics and accelerating "future shock" characteristic of the human condition, especially in connection with the culture wars and political turmoil that popped up around the world from the 1960s through the 1980s.

The essays offer us a mixed bag of cantankerous bickering and wise and cogent reflections on the difficulties and incompatibilities between older and younger

generations, indeed between fathers and sons. Al-Hakim's remarks throughout the essays oscillate between (a) grumbling about the way the young ignore established traditions and (b) acknowledging that the future must perforce be shaped by those very youths. What he repeatedly asserts is the fact that upheavals -- unlike true revolutions -- are doomed to failure if those who are rising up offer no new platform and agenda to replace the old. The somewhat repetitious and dated commentaries of *The Revolt of the Young* have been given new life and relevance by international developments since 2001 and especially since the uprisings of the Arab Spring. Therein lies much of the contextual interest of al-Hakim's book.

There are at least two reasons for us to take a special interest in the English translation of Tawfīq al-Hakim's *Thawrat Elshabaab*. First, *The Revolt of the Young: Essays by Tawfīq al-Hakim* opens up to a large global audience his pertinent words of wisdom and counsel that had long been forgotten but were resurrected in 2011 and 2013 during the Arab Spring uprisings in Cairo; Second, Roger Allen's "Foreword" and Mona Radwan's "Translator's Introduction" offer insights respectively into the contemporary pertinence of al-Hakim's essays and into the hurdles the translator faced in her effort to convey in a viable modern English discourse the author's old-style Arabic mannerisms, *fioritures*, and grammatical intricacies. In his Foreword, Allen sets al-Hakim and this collection of essays in proper historical context, pointing out that, as a revered dramatist and political essayist for six decades, al-Hakim (b.1898 -- d. 1987) had been quite influential in Egypt and the Arab World, inspiring among others the politically ambitious military officer Gamal Abdel Nasser. In the short "Translator's Note" Mona Radwan succinctly seconds Allen's remarks, referring to the contemporary political relevance of the essays: "Some young Egyptian rebels from the April 6 movement, interviewed on Egyptian television in 2011, stated that they were inspired by al-Hakim's book *The Revolt of the Young*. One of them had the book with him in this interview and referred to it a number of times." Radwan also provides a glimpse into her inspiration and modus operandi as a translator between two languages with quite different literary traditions and linguistic dynamics. She explains that "one of the challenges in translating this book was Tawfīq al-Hakim's style [...] which has been described by some critics as elevated and abstruse classical Arabic."

Radwan had to cope with and/or suppress the author's "intricate syntax" and his unusual punctuation that uses "hundreds of exclamation marks" and makes copious use of ellipses (...) to show hesitations or in lieu of commas. Radwan also takes a moment to discuss a dilemma familiar to every translator but especially to those translating between languages with different moods and verbal nuances. She struggles for the right equivalencies in English to distinguish between the words "althawra" and "alhoga" and consults many dictionaries and translators before opting for "revolution" and "upheaval." [For "alhoga" I would feel more at ease in English with a word Allen uses in his Foreword: "uprising."]

The final chapter in *The Revolt of the Young*, entitled "The Case of the Twenty-First Century," is by far the longest (67 pages) and the strangest of the essays, contrasting as it does with the casual ordinary language discourse of the other essays. Its tone, unlike that of the other essays, draws our attention away from the author himself and causes us instead to focus on the text itself. The essay is the report of an alleged all-expenses-paid trip al-Hakim made to New York at the behest of an American journalist he met in Cairo. During his VIP trip al-Hakim decides on the spur of the moment to spend a few days attending the trial of some young anti-war protesters who had planted explosives near the Statue of Liberty before he cuts short his trip because of the severe gastrointestinal woes he is suffering from as a result of the American fast food regimen he seems unable to avoid.

In the trial he attended, the alleged protestors had opted to defend themselves in court and al-Hakim provides extensive quotations from the proceedings. At this point in my reading alarm bells started going off in my head. The articulate argumentation of the defendants -- who with their brilliant legalistic sophistry repeatedly outwit the bumbling prosecutors and the judge -- bears no resemblance to the rhetoric of real-life anti-war militants I remember, impassioned though their speeches may have at times been. Since the material is presented as eye-witness testimony by a reputed journalist, I wondered if the court proceedings might seem stilted because they had been translated into Arabic by al-Hakim and then rendered back into English by Mona Radwan, resulting in dialogue reminiscent of that encountered in a Perry Mason TV episode or a Noel Coward drawing-room comedy. I tried to find the original

transcription of the trial in order to see if the translator had perhaps re-inserted the original English testimony of the proceedings that as they had been recorded. After a few minutes on the iPad I realized that over many years there have been several threats or attempts to sabotage the Statue of Liberty but that this particular caper had been invented by al-Hakim out of whole cloth! I checked some articles on Tawfīq al-Hakim and I learned that he, like Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens), was wont to invent news if he found himself faced by an imminent deadline without a “scoop” handy. For the account of the conspiracy trial al-Hakim had apparently fallen back on his well-honed default skills as a dramatist.

It is a good thing that *The Revolt of the Young* has been resurrected in this comfortable translation. Despite its thrown-together quilt-like texture, al-Hakim’s book is an important document and should be required reading for anyone interested in what is going on today in the Middle East, Near East, and the Maghreb, including the political mavens in Washington, D.C.

~~Eric Sellin

Monarch of the Square: An Anthology of Muhammad Zafzaf’s Short Stories by Mohammad Zafzaf, translated from the Arabic by Mbarek Sryfi and Roger Allen. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014. 281pp.

This book is a particular and very special part of the Syracuse Middle East Literature in Translation series. The afterword section of the book is especially helpful in that it gives the reader a biographical reenactment of the author’s upbringing, accomplishments, and intentions. Zafzaf’s stories “portray a slice of life, a simple struggle for survival in a challenging world that is changing at a rapid pace.” p. 279.

Monarch of the Square: An Anthology of Muhammad Zafzaf’s Short Stories collection depicts Moroccan life from all aspects of the social ladder. Almost immediately the

stories submerge the reader into a world of subjective experience and an individual illustration of sensitivity in a festival of storytelling.

This book is a work of translation of short fiction as well as an autobiographical collection of stories/tales about the (extra)ordinary lives of Moroccan people. The biographical feel comes through each story as one can easily sense Zafzaf from behind the pages observing and jotting down in his journal the lives of these characters as their stories unfold in his presence. The chemistry with which these stories were written puts the reader right at the center as each evolves from beginning to end. Each piece is as personal as the previous one—as if one is reading and experiencing each tale through his eyes as he did. The overall source of inspiration was formed through a collection of childhood stories or events that happened to neighbors and other people Zafzaf knew. What's clear is that the stories and topics reveal something about Zafzaf upbringing, education, and his life in Morocco. Each piece is the epitome of the influence of social, political, culture and religion that shapes, defines and deepens Moroccan life.

From beginning to end, this book is an up-close and personal experience of Zafzaf as an observer of life. Moreover, the stories are about the rich Moroccan-Arabic dialect and the complexity of the human makeup as whole.

The book is sectioned into nine titled parts from the 1970s to 1994. Each part separates radical periods of Zafzaf's career and writing process. According to Ahmed Bouzfour, a fellow Moroccan writer, Zafzaf's writing career is depicted (and divided into sections of this book) from 1970-1980 in what he calls "the Moroccanization of Writing" p. 279. Zafzaf focuses on social-cultural and political events across the globe through a personal depiction of these moments. The influence of the time and his reaction to the present is mirrored in the characters, moral and themes of the stories.

Zafzaf's unique and seemingly simple writing style is an assemblage of traditional storytelling and the colorful mundane aspects of the everyday life. The stories are written with a straightforward simple language; however, its pungency comes through a simple makeup of words and dialect between the characters and the narrator's depiction. It took Zafzaf decades to develop a style in which the narrator's voice is as present as any character in the story. The narrator's attendance is as efflorescent as Zafzaf's presence in every tale. According to the afterword (p.280) Zafzaf insisted on the

“involvement in, and shaping of, his surroundings; and, while he may utilize a neutral and distant narrator, he is still personally involved as a writer to such a degree that his work can almost serve as an anthropological adjunct to Moroccan social history.”

The stories in this collection serve as the tunnel that connects the reader to a culture now being accessed through the work of translation of Mbarek Sryfi and Roger Allen. The translation not only works but feels effortless and authentic. The vivid and clear rendition allows the reader to enter the story almost unconsciously. The work conveys the richness of the culture and the characters’ complex lives and circumstances. A passage on page 19 simply describes a man’s grief with ease, yet one can feel through the simple wording the physical stress of his heartache as it circuits through his body swiftly bringing the reader to a time when sorrow had that effect on him or her—“like a defective machine, he stood up slowly, placed his hand on his knees that were sagging under the weight of so much grief and bitterness, and rushed like a madman towards the house...”

Scene description in *The Burial*: p.17—“It was trickling slowly through his short, thick body-hair, in the silent world that enveloped him, it managed to sound like the ripple of a tiny stream flowing through a canyon. Nothing but silence, the lethal trickle of sweat, a blocked road, utter exhaustion, and a woman who was still unburied even though she had been dead for two days.”

Drum Beats: p. 89—“The dark horizon stretches in front of me. At times a glimmer like twilight carves a space between sky and sea, but for the most part, everything is pitch black.”

The closing dialect in *Second Marriage* fearlessly depicts Moroccan women’s oppression in a patriarchal society. Women have little to no say in their marriage and taking a stand against their husband’s decision to take a second wife can have grave consequences. These consequences are frivolously depicted in this story as well as how cultural oppression transcends to the younger generation.

“Poor woman!” Said an old crone. “It’s all Al-Daoudiya’s fault (*referring to the male character’s first wife*). “She tried to separate a wife from her husband.”

“Hit her!” a child yelled. “She deserves worse than that.”

“Shut up, you little bastard!” his mother said. “You don’t understand things like this.”

These works of translation defy time and reach an English speaking audience. Zafzaf’s work bears an anthropological and biographical feel that introduces the Moroccan culture through the eyes and heart of the author/narrator as he experienced it. The translation remains faithful to the original in that it conveys the essence of Moroccan culture with candor in a colorful display of cultural and social transformation. Reading this book has given me an intimate moment with Zafzaf the writer, the storyteller, the anthropologist and the man who celebrated his culture by exposing it to the world with pride and respect for its reality. Both he and the translators give the reader an all-access pass to his life and his land.

Monarch of the Square: An Anthology of Muhammad Zafzaf’s Short Stories is a personal introduction to a brilliant world. Zafzaf’s tales portray his life and how people survive the challenges they face in an ever-evolving culture. His stories are a glass full of culture that needs to be nursed and appreciated to truly feel and savor its richness.

Great read!

~*Estefania Di Bua*

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