

VOLUME 11 *number 2*

*Ezra* is often struck by what critics say about criticism. What could be more removed from what counts, from literature's soul, than this, you ask? But check in with one of the great ones, Maurice Blanchot, in the preface to his *Lautréamont and Sade*.

When criticism gets this good, we cheer, of course, huzzah, but— isn't it strange?—we often think of *translation*. And the highest praise you could give a critic is that he or she gets into it, *gets after it*, as intensely as does a translator:

In the same way that the necessity of communicating is not a quality added to the book, with communication, at every turn of the book's creation, catalyzing the very creation process, similarly this sort of sudden distance in which the completed work reflects itself and which the critic is called upon to gauge, is only the last metamorphosis of this opening which is the literary work in its genesis, what one might call its essential noncoincidence with itself, everything that makes it possible-impossible. All that criticism does then is represent and follow outside what, internally, like a shredded affirmation, like infinite anxiousness, like conflict (or even in all other forms), does not cease to be present as a living reservoir of emptiness, of space, of error, or, better yet, as literature's unique power to develop itself while remaining perpetually in default.

*(Stuart and Michelle Kendall translation)*

Allowing for exasperating French style, this passage certainly underlines the humility and receptiveness that abides in translators. Try substituting the word "translator" for "critic" in this last sentence.

Ten years after his appearance in the very first issue of *Ezra*, Don Mager will be the featured writer in the fall, with master translations of Mandelstam. In the current issue we're proud that Marjolijn de Jager joins us as the featured translator. Among other things, she is the acclaimed translator of Tahar Djaout.

Note that there are two reviews in this issue.

**FEATURED WRITER:**

**Alex Verburg**

Alex Verburg (1953) is a Dutch author. He began his career as a journalist and made his reputation through interviews with prominent people such as Isabel Allende and Cecilia Bartoli.

From the beginning of this century on he has been devoting himself to writing novels and biographies. He chronicled the life stories of high-profile individuals. In 2006, he wrote about the abduction of Gerrit Jan Heijn based on lengthy interviews about the experience with the latter's widow.

*My Father's House* [Het huis van mijn vader, 2002] was his debut as a novelist. It is the coming-of-age story of a boy who is growing up in the orderly Netherlands of the fifties and sixties. The death of his father and the love of an adult man seriously disrupt his existence.

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### **Marjolijn de Jager**

Born in Indonesia (1936), raised in The Netherlands, and residing in the USA since the age of 22, Marjolijn de Jager earned a PhD. in Romance Languages and Literatures from UNC-Chapel Hill in 1975.

She translates from both the Dutch and the French. Francophone African literature, the women's voices in particular, have a special place in her heart. Retired from a 35-year long career in teaching French and Francophone language and literature (both secondary and college levels), she is now self-employed as a translator.

Among her honors are an NEA grant, two NEH grants and, in 2011, the annually awarded **ALA Distinguished Member Award** received from the African Literature Association for scholarship, teaching, and translations of African Literature.

For further information please see <http://mdejager.com>

## MY FATHER'S HOUSE

a novel by

# ALEX VERBURG

An excerpt, translated from the Dutch

by

Marjolijn de Jager

1

They call me a Sunday's child, partly because I was born on a Sunday but also because they see me as a happy child. I happen to whistle a lot. Mrs. Jaarsma, of Mr. Jaarsma of the furnace factory, who lives diagonally across the street from us, says the same thing. She heard me whistling while she was walking through the little green alleyway next to our garden path, which in the spring always has that wonderful scent of jasmine. It was so teeming with green that she couldn't see me, not until she reached the wooden side gate, which I sometimes open very wide so I can jump on it and then delight in having it swing me back and forth.

“People who can whistle that cheerfully are happy people, Floris,” she said. I was busy fiddling around with my bicycle. The little cardboard pieces I had fixed to my front wheel with laundry pegs so they would clatter against the spokes when I go riding, kept on slipping though they were supposed to rattle, like a moped.

I like listening to music. Often, I already know what I'm hearing at the first note. We have a lot of records at home. *Happy days are here again*, *Jesu bleibet meine Freude*, the *Elisabeth Serenade* whose cover shows marvelous fireworks, just like a colored fountain. Some of the singles have music that is also on the LP my father and mother later bought. The *Dance of the Blessed Spirits* by Gluck, something by Locatelli, and *Liebstraum* by Liszt. We also have records that are larger than a 45 and smaller than an LP but which you can play at the normal 33 speed. One with Kathleen Ferrier and one with Handel's organ concertos, which Aunt Andrea and Uncle Johan gave us. We often play those on Sundays after church when we're together having coffee in the living room. Then there are coconut macaroons or shortbread cookies and lively conversation about the sermon or the New Guinea issue or about Krishnamurti and whether he is the anti-Christ.

My grandpa, my mother's father, once spent time with Krishnamurti in Ommen. My grandma was praying for my grandpa then. They first lived in Wassenaar but now they're in Rijswijk. I always love it when they come to stay with us, but I have to be careful not to be left alone in the room with my grandpa because he'll just start preaching. If no one comes to deliver me it can go on for a whole half hour, sometimes even longer.

My mother is always a little bit nervous when my grandparents are there. She's afraid of the discussions – my father has written a book with the title *Bible and Astrology* and now the family claims that he's abandoned God.

But I think it's a real treat when my grandpa and grandma come to visit. Then the house smells of the freesias with their little gossamer-thin green branches that my mother put on the living room table and of my grandpa's cigar smoke. That's how I know they're here. Sometimes my parents light a cigarette just to keep him company. It looks weird because

normally they never smoke. The cigarettes are in a wooden music box that is usually in the drawer of the tea-table. The box appears when we have company and my mother has me ask around whether anyone would like a cigarette. But when there are a lot of people, we put the cigarettes on the table in a wineglass so they can help themselves.

I taught myself to play the piano. Jacobien, my oldest sister, had lessons but stopped after only a year. "We'll never do that again," my father says.

I also have a harmonica. The first one was orange and made of plastic. It looked like a small boat. Now I have a silver one but the silver part is gone, and you can only see the dull copper interior. Still, it has a fuller sound than the little boat.

Sometimes, when I play something I heard in church, it's as if I'm not listening to my harmonica but to the organ. And when I'm in the bathtub, I let the soap dish that juts out from the wall fill up with water by closing the hole on the bottom with my finger; then when I let go I hear the street organ, decorated with a lot of pink and light blue and white, which comes through our street every Friday around lunchtime. Because the spirals the water from the soap dish makes when it dribbles down the wall are exactly the same as those of the street organ. Only those are made of gold.

I'm not allowed to leave the table, but when the organ grinder comes, I may. And I dash out. The organ grinder laughs when he sees me come running across the flagstones of the garden path. He pushes his cap forward and then backward so I can see his tanned forehead and his eyes-with-sparkles really well. He turns the wheel that makes the organ's music books move. He does it very evenly so the tempo of the music doesn't change, and when his right arm gets tired his left arm takes over. The brown books that look like fans are clearly visible through the

open hole in the organ. I can also see the little holes that are punched across the pages through which the air is pressed. “Perlée” is written in graceful letters above the opening and to the left and right of the name naked angels are blowing the trumpet. Sometimes my eyes suddenly fill with tears. It comes from happiness, I think. My mother has the same thing, she says she gets it when she looks at me, but for her it has a different name, she calls it melancholy.

The organ plays “*Waar de blanke top der duinen,*” one of the old traditional Dutch songs, or “*Que será, será,*” and often a Strauss waltz. Two small ballet figurines dance around to the three-quarter beat and when the organ plays the *Radetzky March* the big drum moves with a roll that shakes the earth. There’s no end to it. But then, suddenly, the party’s over. The organ grinder shakes his copper money can, walks over to the horse that’s patiently waiting in front of the organ, and taps him on the neck in a friendly way. Then they move on. I follow them with my eyes. On the back end of the organ is a small bench, a corner where someone might just barely sit down. If only I could go along.

[...]

**Traduttori/traduttrici:**

Mark Statman

Kay Cosgrove

Ross Weissman

Tamryn Bennett

Lancelot Kirby

Maria Elsy Cardona

Andrew Sunshine

Chris Mingay

## China

*~~translated by Mark Statman*

It was a small night like a stone in the memory of a dream.

It was a small stone sleeping in the fist of the night.

Night had two hands:

In one, Carlos Baúl del Aire, who slept like a small stone

and, in the other, waking to emptiness:

the already opened hand without a stone.

That's how Baúl del aire left his typewriter for writing poems.

Through an open window with another's hands.

It was the breeze of the night sun and trust in the neighbor sky,

plus a liter of wine held in the waist

left insulting and stirring

Motherfucker. I should have a backup disc,

a hard copy, a thumb drive

an account in the Cloud

Nothing.

Nothing like a stone.

Nothing.

But an idea.

To cry in a small room.

A small stone.

## **Carlos Baul del Aire writes in the complaint book's cleaning section**

That star dust you are seeing in the sky,  
the explosion, gas, the starry space in your eyes.  
It's no more than the fusion,  
the fiction felt in the pinch of crab claws  
trapping the constellate fish in your eyes  
in its space of lightless hours, illuminated:  
conglomerates explode life while we can't see the sky.  
So we can't see life while the sky explodes.  
Cancer, Crab,  
Wake up !

## **The subhuman machine**

I'm going to get a tattoo of a tattooing machine, he thought.  
The man and machine taking turns,  
Giddyup nature!  
The machine  
doesn't know the shadow of the machine  
nor that it is the machine.  
I imagined the instant in which the shadow machine  
became conscious of itself as an incomprehensible object,  
unlike asphalt, unlike walls,  
unlike high tension wires,



whispering: shaaaadow, stretching  
shad-d-d-dow, tossing, shadooooow,  
The rest of the sun's mantle transformed to a billboard.  
A traffic light,  
days cutting form into light.  
The object hanging  
to tattoo the skin.

MARTIN BAREA MATTOS

### **The Last Piousness**

*~~translated by Ross Weissman*

During those nights, our blood bubbled up toward the Holy One  
as we yelled with clenched fists  
Show yourself, God,  
    please, appear.  
They've since all been taken up by the wind—  
some of them are busy  
some feel betrayed,  
most of them are exhausted.

(there are also a few engineer-philosopher types at the corner,  
their fearful sweat drops into my throat and I can't stop coughing).

Now I walk through these smoky nights,  
into the great books, where the ox still gores the cow  
then one or two, tired, knock at the door,  
wanting to discuss despondency.

I seal the windows  
cover the secret of the generations in one wrap, and then another,  
shouting to them: Just a minute,  
just a minute.

ELHANAN NIR (Israel)

## **The Infinite**

*~~translated by Lancelot Kirby*

Always dear to me has been this lonely hill  
and hedgerow, that from all along its length  
blots out horizon and setting sun from view.  
But sitting here I contemplate those endless  
spaces far beyond, and those superhuman  
silences in this very deep stillness  
I fake my thoughts, and pretend that little  
scares my scarecrow heart. How the wind  
when heard rustling among these trees, in that  
infinite silence is a living voice, that heard,  
recalls by comparison the eternal.

Here, past seasons dead, and now this living one  
charged with infinity's hymn; here between  
these Immensities I could drown my cares  
in my shipwrecked self in so sweet a sea.

GIACOMO LEOPARDI

### **Description Of A Dream**

*~~translation by Andrew Sunshine*

In memory of Tolye

Pigeons were sitting on a flat roof.  
A window opposite. And at the window, there I stood  
And saw: approaching the very edge of the roof—  
A pigeon. She flew toward me and amazed there I stood.

Now she rose up opposite me  
floating there a moment above the window—  
And before my eyes began to grow  
To take on a woman's form. She rose opposite me

The pigeon become a woman. And I marveled  
At how the lines conformed to each feature  
And drew together in a complete picture

And with a smile not of this world  
The form regarded me--took flight—and vanished.  
And my despair was great and I was wildly astonished

AARON ZEITLIN

### **Ghost-Ships**

*~~translated by Kay Cosgrove*

The fantastic smoke arabesque  
Of my cigarette outlines what you said,  
In blue, in the air, and what you wrote me,  
And all that you dreamed and I presume.

For my static and aimless soul,  
The memory of everything you gave me  
Passes like a ship you lost,  
In the fantastic smoke arabesque.

They come, they come. Without candles, without masts,  
They have the brilliance of shining stars,  
Ghost-ships, they lose themselves to the distance.

They come for me, without masts, without candles,  
Child-bride on the insane caravels  
Toward that unknown country of my childhood.

## **Chopin**

Today no light shines, all the moonlight  
stays outside. The minute stars  
are welcoming, giving to the air  
The twist of a strand of daisies.

Dizzying moths enter,  
Nightfall, a winging bat  
Passes...and passes...and passes.  
Things appear dormant,

Quietly, the fingers brush the piano keys.  
In the vacant sigh that heals all and makes all shine,  
Soul, soul sanctuary, my beloved.

And, while the piano exhales the sweet complaint,  
Divine and sad, the great blonde shadow  
Comes to me from the darkness of the room.

FLORBELA ESPANCA (Portugal, 1894-1930)

**The disabled man** (excerpt of novel, *The Second Coming of Christ on Earth*)

*~~translated by Chris Mingay*

As they were waiting for the bus, Jesus noticed that in the group of people at the stop, there was a man with a limp. With the help of a crutch, he dragged an inert leg along, this effort triggering ungainly movements traveling up from his hips, through his torso, and ending in a wobble of his head. Each step was activating a malfunctioning mechanical system where a missing part caused

the others to clash. Nevertheless, the owner of the machine had found a way to make the most of the damage, using the involuntary movements to find his balance and, after a few steps, to move almost effortlessly. The mechanism thus wound itself. However, when the bus arrived and the waiting passengers were required to climb two steps, the machine was confronted with an obstacle for which it wasn't prepared. The man hesitated before the door and went no further. Some people tried to help him, but they succeeded only in hurting him.

“Get off me! I can do it on my own,” he ordered in fury. And everyone moved away from him.

“Can you let me get by, please,” Jesus asked the people waiting to get on. Then he entered the bus, turned around to face the disabled man at the bottom of the steps, and stretched out his hand to him. The driver, who was protesting, became quiet. The man was perspiring and trembling. He didn't react to the help being offered to him, in order to protect himself from further humiliation. Then Jesus spoke to him. The other people drew closer, but no one could hear; the driver also missed the words. The disabled man breathed deeply, grabbed Jesus's hand, and climbed up into the vehicle. Seen in the rear-view mirror, the steps taken to reach his seat seemed to the driver to be those of a normal man.

JOAO CERQUEIRA (contemporary)

### **This afternoon I'm a character in Fyodor Dostoyevsky**

A novel is a work of poetry. In order to write it, one must have tranquility of spirit and of impression. ~ Dostoyevsky

*~~translated by Tamryn Bennett*

Rummaging in the papers of the author. I'm made of codes.  
My blood is a river of words, stones singing in time  
frozen in that Moscow winter visit 1982 ...

## I

My eyes are footprints on the road bordering the swaying waters.  
My skin an image of a dry leaf swimming  
in the reflection of rays of the day and the evening  
penetrating the mind of Fyodor (pages already written in 1870).  
I return home through the streets that force me to the author  
developing the conflict of the climax is essential.  
Nothing belongs to me.  
I'm again a reading in waiting,  
every night I open the pages I am there  
palpitating in the heart of the reader...But where is the beating of my own heart?  
In what line or literary image do I die?  
Until tomorrow... But which tomorrow will open the page marked yesterday?  
And continue the reading of the character I am.  
Pain and passion I was resurrection of life.  
Read by someone not myself,  
who gives me the freedom to be in reading  
yet imprisons me in reality.

## II

My brother was not a Karamazov, his name is Carlos.  
But I baptise him in my reading, Ivan.  
The distance is not absence, only moon, dark lady, howling.

*Flowers for the dead*

on the streets of what we were when warmed by agony.

Today I am a character responsible for that final kiss  
my lips nested, dried blood that I don't even breathe today.

### III

About the novel.

It is there between the written papers and cast aside about my fatigue.

Paragraphs... (agony of the word) in the ashes of cigarettes whispering at the dead.

Ink... (on stained paper) blood or cold sweat in the soul.

Chapters (abandoned from the novel) the heart is spring invaded (invaded spring)

by steel birds torching dreams...

Poetry...(smoke of the afternoon) character sitting in the dreamed garden

murmuring the dialogue of Raskolnikov.

JUAN GARRIDO-SALGADO

### **Eau de Parfum**

*~~translated by Maria Elsy Cardona*

From childhood, the smell  
of moss in the streams, of muds, of berries  
and the extreme violence of getting to know one self.

From the sea, the last note  
in the last unfurled wave  
before the return knowing  
that there will be no sirens.

From the evening, the soft foginess  
of an Italian perfume  
still in fashion.



From your body, the aroma  
of an adventure book  
read again; but also of  
distressed and burning oleander.

It smells of a burnt life.

## **Of Childhood Illnesses**

### I

From childhood illnesses  
I did not recover;  
the terrible allergy to being happy  
in the afternoons of ripe, watered gardens,  
when the useless excess of desire  
started to hurt  
and I wished for fever, the first metaphor,  
naïve and secret,  
the other way of gazing.  
But the fever does not last and since then  
we gulp down slow recoveries.

### II

You ask yourself at times  
what the sea's voice would be like if it wrote poems,  
if the disordered ecstasy it produces in men  
dwelled in its center  
and it had words attached to its waves  
and stanzas to its book of tides.

### III

Like a silent and translucent revelation,  
as if on purpose a god left tracks  
and a vague desire for hunting roses,  
the child could explore the landscapes, the skies  
different and polychrome, the self-absorbed river,  
the earth's loyal metamorphosis in February,  
the cascade of lights at night or the tree,  
the white indifference of the faceless moon.

And an ordinary evening, the house already dark,  
the child felt that the word, like a wind made of stars,  
whipped its lips, and it found itself defeated,  
it found itself on the other side of the deepest river  
as if a god had untied the boat.

### **Interior**

I often chat with my dreams.  
I invite them to step out of the night  
and they sit down, in their foggy clothes,  
by my table, untidy with papers.  
And I ask them about their syntax  
because they get offended if I talk semantics.

Today, I recovered from their hands  
a fragment of you, as exquisite  
as a June evening in Gild de Biedma,  
an autumn of Keats or that flavor of orange sherbet  
of long-past Sunday mornings.

### **Tango I**

Time has already taken off  
its summer attire.  
The evening cafes,  
perfumed of alcohol and honeysuckle  
and its tango breath at dawn  
at the bare house have started fading out.

The night also takes off the tiny laces  
with which the bodies  
highlighted themselves  
to know they were the chosen fruit,  
the final center of the luminous,  
blank page of desire.  
The dying-off tango reminds me that you were  
the seashell I searched for among the burnt  
islands of life.  
And, finally, silence arrives with a slow-paced refrain,

unavoidable, at the end of summer and a glass;

*Death wraps life's shoulders  
with the sleazy embrace of a trained seducer.*

AURORA LUQUE

## REVIEWS

YOU AS OF TODAY MY HOMELAND: STORIES OF WAR, SELF, AND LOVE. Tayseer al-Sboul, translated from the Arabic by Nesreen Akhtarkhavari. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2016. 89 pp.

The second of Tayseer al-Sboul's work to be published by Michigan State University Press in the last two years, *You as of Today My Homeland* provides an important counter-part to last year's collection of poetry, *Desert Sorrows*. Nesreen Akhtarkhavari returns to provide an expertly translated edition, capturing the late al-Sboul's narrative voice and emotion in this short story collection. Composed of a longer, titular narrative somewhere between a short story and novella, and two other short stories, the collection recounts the confused pulse of a region confronting sweeping change and an uncertain future. This sense of uncertainty and conflict makes the collection a unique voice in MSU's Arabic Literature and Languages Series.

Subtitled "Stories of War, Self, and Love," the collection could alternately be classified as stories of the postmodern experience, reflecting conflicts of the heart, mind, spirit, and ideology. Through shifting voices and intense environments, the reader encounters moments of transition in Jordan, experiencing them at the street level. The collection opens with "You As Of Today," a story told by interweaving the perspectives of two separate narrators and voices (first-person and third-person) of an unnamed citizen and a student named Arabi. Serving as the most developed piece in the collection, political conflicts between the Ba'ath and Communist parties on a university campus intermingle with the frustrations of a young man's discovery of the many facets of love. As the political conflicts in the story intensify, the narrators perceive the growing influence of surveillance and religion in their national political scene. Again, the story seamlessly shifts from the national to the personal, as Arabi tries to resolve the complex issue of inheritance following the death of his father. The reluctance of al-Sboul's narrators to firmly commit to one political ideology reflects the greater mood of Jordan at the time, as citizens struggled to make sense of the cacophony of radio broadcasts, propaganda, and the public power

shuffle. Purposefully non-linear in structure, the story draws strength from its portrayal of the details of daily life, with the narrators' needs to smoke, drink, eat, make love, and even the process of renting a room, adding distinctive vibrancy. The story's reflection of the post-war experience of the Six-Day War, and its comparison to the Dark Ages, acts as a call for the reader to "think intentionally or unconsciously about light" and the future of Jordan (45).

"Red Indian," al-Sboul's second story, changes the pace of the narration. Following a more traditional storyline, "Red Indian" examines the post-colonial experience, as the narrator struggles to fit the ideals of the white hero he idolized in the Western films he watched with his father. Following the death of the father, he travels to Beirut seeking his vision of an American paradise. Here, the narrator struggles to learn the language that will give him access to this world; English. Distanced linguistically from this perfection, a night out with a professor, his American wife, and her white friend, provides a moment of epiphany for the narrator, as he realizes that the great divide between himself and these so-called idols cannot be remedied. Dreaming with his father, the narrator realizes fallacy of white adulation and accepts his greater proximity to the image of the Red Indian on the screen, thus forging a new identity.

"The Rooster's Cry" continues with the collection's examination of love and desire, telling the tale of a prisoner recently released from jail and attempting to make sense of his new-found freedom in the home of a former cellmate who now hosts him. Following a dinner in his honor, the former prisoner is overwhelmed by his host's promise of wealth and love through work at his insurance company, all the while attempting to control his own growing desires for his cellmate's wife. When left alone the next day, emotions and impulses overtake him as his advances are at first rejected by the wife, but then given affection as the pain and confusion of imprisonment pour from his soul before the woman in a torrent of tears. As with his other texts, al-Sboul masterfully places the climax of his story at the intersection of what is morally and ethically acceptable. The stories touch on raw human emotion, creating a complex modern world.

The collection opens with a Prologue by Otba al-Sboul, Tayseer's son, and a thorough Introductory essay by Nesreen Akhtarkhvari. Together with the prudent endnotes found throughout the text, the collection provides the reader with a complete vision of al-Sboul's craft as a storyteller and preserves one of Jordan's most important literary voices of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

*~~Lee Jackson*

POENA DAMNI: Z213: EXIT. Dimitris Lyacos, translated from the Greek by Shorsha Sullivan. Nottingham; Shoestring Press, 2016, 147 pp.

With no introduction, little fanfare, and a slew of questions, *Z213: EXIT*, by Greek writer Dimitris Lyacos, inaugurates the labyrinthine *Poena Damni* trilogy. Lyacos, a fellow at the University of Iowa International Writing Program, turns a palimpsest of paganism and apocalypse into a postmodern narrative that is as cryptic as it is captivating. A combination of Bible verse, travelogue, and Greek myth, the text stands as an incredible challenge for any translator who wishes to capture its poetic and metaphysical qualities.

In this addition, Shorsha Sullivan manages to produce a lyrically wrought text that grapples with and re-contextualizes thematic elements from the greater Greek canon—the escaped hero, the devote wanderer. One need not look far for examples of Sullivan’s expertise:

*On the road back, on the plain, a tepid, breath, like the last, and a gleam, the river falling behind, the town mute as before, with some wine on the end of the table, the Bible being erased, between its pages the words of a stranger, among his pieces I write wherever I find a no-man’s land. (21)*

By pulling at the eternal literary threads from Greek antiquity and beyond, and coupling them with dystopic landscapes, Lyacos has woven a narrative that is relevant and timeless in the way it incorporates myth with modernity. It is a refreshingly honest take on the march of history and, most notably, the chimerical burden of the anxiety of influence.

As is evidenced by the passage above, the primary device Lyacos has chosen to convey this is the palimpsest. Our protagonist carries only a tattered Bible as he flees the confines of a work camp. Atop the Bible verse the protagonist, as well as others before him, have scribbled their musings and lamentations. To delineate the sections where the narrative slips into verse and epic poetry, Sullivan resorts to a thinner font and more spacious page layout, leaving blocks of text to float alone and disjointed on the white page—a painting being peeled back to reveal another masterpiece beneath.

The resulting collage gives the reader the sense that they are peering below the veneer at the underlying mechanics and inspirations of the work itself. And it appears that, rather than feeling burdened or discouraged by his inspiration, or overcome by the need to create something novel

from Western tradition, Lyacos has wholeheartedly accepted his inability to extricate himself from an historical web and has instead made this a central theme in his narrative, as well as in the general structure of the text.

The escaped protagonist is running from an amorphous evil that threatens his existence and individuality. Day after day he is consumed by the thought that nowhere is safe, and the only escape, the only exit, is the constant march forward into the wasteland. A train carries him deeper into the countryside. He is the unknowing, surreal passenger aboard the train in *Time Transfixed* (*La Durée poignardée*, René Magritte, oil on canvas, 1938), for he ultimately must come to terms with the Sisyphusian quality of this life on the run; “Sit at the side of the road and see yourself pass. See the web, see how the passages of the maze all lead again to the same point which does not exactly coincide with the exit,” (93). Lyacos *is* our protagonist, shamelessly accepting the dead-end.

*Z213: EXIT* is a response to the dead-end. It is an avant-garde text that explodes history and assumptions in hopes that something new will coalesce from the resulting disarray. The interpretive essence of the project lends it to reproduction, and *Poena Damni* has enjoyed a life as dance, theatre, film, and music. It’s the type of work that rolls about, crossing the plains of genre and medium. But, as is often the case with these types of projects, it doesn’t always make for an easy, or accessible product.

Anyone endeavoring to become acquainted with Lyacos’ work should expect a challenge, as the text is at times closer to a puzzle than a novel. I found ***Rome: The first book of foundations. Bloomsbury Academic (November 19, 2015) by Michel Serres, trans. by Randolph Burkes*** to be of some use in interpreting the book’s philosophical undertones. For instance, in locating the wellspring of Roman society, Serres recounts the scene in which Hercules slays the giant, Cacus, for terrorizing a small town and stealing his prized cattle. Initially, to confuse Hercules, Cacus drags the cattle into the cave backwards, so as to create a false set of tracks. But Hercules is able to hear their lowing from within the darkness, and he kills Cacus in an act of revenge. Hercules becomes a legend. The nearby town becomes Rome.

Serres then turns our attention to the ground, where the tracks caused by the fray paint a muddy canvas of infinite possibilities—a land that is both victim and perpetrator, guilty and innocent, friend and foe, forward and backward, past and present. It is fertile ground for the birth of historical memory. This concept, or its apocalyptic erasure, is netted throughout *Z213: EXIT*, both structurally and textually; “Now they will remember neither when nor how. Not even I. Tracks only, a hazy memory of those images when I look at what I’ve written, tracks of footprints in the mud before it starts raining again,” (117).

For the general reader—expect to be confused. Expect to glean only what is necessary to ground you in an approximate space and time, and only then will begin to understand Lyacos’ eccentric approach to writing. It is an approach that demands further investigation and reader engagement, or else be left in the dust. For the more seasoned reader—enjoy the referential qualities of the text and let yourself plummet into Lyacos’ literary, historical black hole. And, as Michel Serres writes, “We have so often explained legend by history that we will be excused for risking the converse for once,” (10). *Z213: EXIT*, in all its avant-garde glory, is certainly the converse.

~~ *Will Carter*

