

*Ezra* was regaled, as always, by the festivities and fine panels at ALTA. This is your Mecca. Go, if you haven't—and remember that there are travel grants for younger translators.

Among great revelations was the Barcelona novelist Esther Tusquets. Also that Mohammed Khaïr-eddine may finally be translated (we heard his poetry, as profoundly inventive as his prose). Also that the sparkling mountain, Goytisoló's *Antagonía*, may finally appear in English (first volume). Ez was particularly happy with the North Africa bilingual reading.

A business meeting revealed financial strength, though it would greatly help programs (and the annual conference) if endowment could grow. You can always give! You could even tithe your ALTA gift and throw something Ezra's way: the Ezra Fund directly helps translators (usually with copyright costs) and supports the Residency (summer).

Ezra has brooded darkly, since an article in *Translation Review*, over Bakhtin's "heteroglossia" and his sense of dialogic language in novels. It might be doing him an injustice to think this, but at times he seems to subvert his interesting take on different languages and socio-linguistic contexts in the dialogues within narration. It seems he states the obvious—that these "other speeches" serve various purposes, including representing the author's voice in a refracted way. He seems to rob of interest this spooky bit: that the dialogues present, as he says, "another's speech in another's language." (Dennis Washburn has picked up the potential of this proposition, in his *TR* article "Another's Speech in Another's Language: Translation as Possession." 2016, no. 94.)

Aren't translators always working, in an even more profound sense, with "another's speech in another's language?" While this, too, may be stating the obvious, Ezra vents supreme indignation over Bakhtin's overlooking poetry (he means mainly epics, but he suggests that the dialogic operations don't apply to poetry). Even aside from the various registers available within one language (Arabic is a good example) any translator of poetry knows how refracted one language can become in a poem—how many voices (one aspect of *choices*) can enter in. Any reader or writer of poetry knows that. And that's without even getting into the really spooky stuff: Where Jack Spicer thinks his poetry "comes from," what the Language Poets or the Oulipo folks have allowed to operate in their poetry. Or Gérard de Nerval's "I am the other." Rimbaud's seminal "I am another." The sense of suspension in a poem (or the translation of one), of waiting for a voice to enter to solve the relation of other "speeches" in the matrix. Even Pound's Vortex, or the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics (Boulder, CO) are loci of "another voice" (of receptivity to it) in the richest sense. This is the sense in which writers and translators have always been alert to—entertained by—"another voice," "another language."

We are charmed to have Don Mager as our Fall Feature. He was one of the star translators who showed up unbidden to be in the first issue of *Ezra*, eleven years ago. His *Us Four Plus Four* remains a great contribution to Russian studies. The current contribution, Mandel'shtam, is heart-rending.

## FEATURED WRITER

**Don Mager**'s most recent chapbook is *Russian Riffs*. He is retired and was the Mott University Professor of English at Johnson C. Smith University where he also served as Dean of the College of Arts and Letters. As well as scholarly articles, he has published over 200 poems and translations from German, Czech and Russian. Translations have appeared in *Life And Legends*, *UCity Review*, *Interim*, *River Styx*, *Third Coast*, *Natural Bridge*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Ezra*, *Roger* and *Hayden's Ferry Review*. He lives in Charlotte, NC with his partner of 37 years, Bill.

*Us Four Plus Four* (New Orleans University Press, 2008) is an anthology of translations from eight major Soviet-era Russian poets. It is unique because it tracks almost a half century of their careers by simply placing the poems each wrote to the others in chronological order. The 85 poems represent one of the most fascinating conversations in poems produced by any group of poets in any language or time period. From poems of infatuation and admiration to anger and grief and finally to deep tribute, this anthology invites readers into the unfolding lives of such inimitable creative forces as Anna Akhmatova, Boris Pasternak, Marina Tsvetaeva and Osip Mandel'shtam.

The first three poems (below) are from the manuscript known as the *Voronezh Notebooks*. These are Mandel'shtam's final poems, written during this exile in Vornozeh before he was banished and died in transit to a gulag in the far east of Siberia. The woman in the first poem is his wife Nadezhda who accompanied him through his exiles except for his final banishment. *Hope Against Hope* is her powerful memoir of their persecution under Stalin.

"Rome" refers to the Italian fascist destruction of civilization. The Soviet propaganda attacks on Fascism allowed Mandel'shtam a safe strategy for criticism of Stalinism by way of analogy.

"When to faraway Korea" is from an earlier manuscript notebook known as *The Moscow Notebooks* which collects poems written during his house arrest in Moscow after his release from the first Siberian exile. The sea Battle of Tsushima off the Korean coast during the Russo-Japanese war in 1905 was a crushing destruction of the Russian fleet. Many Russians saw it as a foreboding forecast of dire upheavals to come for Russia. Akhmatova often referred to the Battle of Tsushima as "the real beginning of the twentieth century."

The last poem was written in the years following the 1918 revolution. Although Mandel'shtam was still able to publish during the early Soviet era, this poem was never printed and survives in two manuscript versions. Since the poet's final intentions are unknown, the Russian complete edition gives both versions. Reading them side by side is fascinating.

## Untitled

You're still not dead yet, still not alone,  
While the girlfriend-beggar-woman's with you  
And you can relish the grandeur of the plains  
In their mists, cold and driving blizzards.

In grand poverty, in mighty poverty,  
Live in the consolation of calm.  
Let your days and nights be blessed  
With the sweet-voiced work of innocence.

Unhappy is the man scared by his shadow  
As if it were dog bark or scything wind,  
And poor is the half-dead man  
Who begs for alms from the shadows.

15-16 January 1937

## Untitled

Where is the chained and nailed-down groan?  
Where Prometheus — the rock's help and support?  
And where is the yellow-eyed scowling kite  
Whose peerless talons fly in pursuit?

It will not come to pass: tragedies will not  
Return. But let these forward-speaking lips —  
Lips that go directly to the heart tell of  
Aeschylus-Dockhand, Sophocles-Woodsman.

He is but echo and greeting, — milestone — no — plowshare.  
The open-air stone theatre of these progressive times  
Has risen on its feet and everyone wants to watch someone —  
Those born, those doomed, and those who are quite well off.

10 January — 4 February 1937

### **Rome**

Where frogs in the fountain, having croaked  
And splashed about, no longer sleep  
And, once awake, burst into tears  
Out of their gaping throats and shells,  
The city that loves to submit to power  
Is sprayed by the water of amphibians.

In antiquity summer was insolent and easy,  
With a greedy look and flat feet,  
As if it were the cracked Ponte Sant'Angelo  
Above its flat steps in the yellow water, —

Like blue ashy statues  
In the drumbeat of tiered houses,  
A city once sculpted out by draftsmen  
And alleyways with its dome like a swallow, —  
Is transformed by you into a nursery of murder,

You, the brown-blooded hired thugs,  
You, the Italian Blackshirts,  
You, the dead whelps of vicious Caesars . . .

All your orphans, Michelangelo,  
Are draped in stone and shame, —  
*Night* is wet with tears; innocent  
Young *David* is light-footed;  
And like a waterfall *Moses*  
Lies motionless on a bed, —  
The power of freedom and strength of the lion,  
And lulled to sleep, enslaved — and silent.

And the wrinkled staircases of compromise —  
Flowing like rivers down onto plazas, —  
Made to sound with the footfalls of action,  
Now carry lethargic Romans  
Assuaged and crippled by comfort  
Like lethargic sea sponges.

New holes are dug up in the Forum  
And the gates again are opened for Herod  
And above Rome the great jowls  
Of a degenerate dictator hang.

*16 March 1937*

## Untitled

When to faraway Korea  
Russian gold ran beserk,  
I fled into the orangerie,  
Pressing an iris to my cheek.

It was the season of bold laughter  
And thyroid gland infections,  
The season of advancing thunder  
And Taras Bulba's campaigns.

With sheer caprice and willful hubris  
It was like the Trojan horse,  
Like an embassy above bonfires  
Made of ether, sun and blaze.

The oily smoke from the logs curled like  
Caterpillars above the burning stacks  
Where shouts arose of heartache  
Over Tsusima and Petropavlovsk.

To the youthful tsarevich Khlor  
And his hill — in God's name! —  
With high-topped boots we strode forth  
To look for chloroform.

That youngster has outlived it all,  
And now my path is broad —  
I've other dreams, other nests, to fill  
But the old scamp I grant's not dead.

11-13 May 1932, 1935

Two versions of an untitled poem

### **Untitled**

The ghostly stage scarcely shimmers,  
The choirs consists of ethereal shades,  
Silky Melpomene sweeps across  
To the window of her own temple.  
Carriages stand in a black clump  
In the courtyard where frost crackles,  
All shaggy—while people and subjects  
Crunch down the scalding snow.

Gradually servants disperse  
In heaps of bearskin coats  
Then dart away like butterflies,  
Roses muffled up in fur.  
Stylish hued cliques and gnats  
Lightly glow in the theater,

But steam gusts up heavily  
And blinks feebly in the streets.

Coachmen exhausted from shouting  
Snore and breathe in the darkness.  
There is nothing of darling Eurydice  
In the frozenness of our winter.  
Sweeter than the fine Italian tongue  
For me is my beloved speech,  
Even as her mysterious prattle  
Springs from an alien lyre.

The wretched smell of lambskin smoke  
Rises from snowdrifts in the black streets.  
And somehow it is the cause that makes us fly  
In ecstasy to immortal spring.  
Once again the aria resounded:  
“You the blessed of the green meadow”,—  
And a living swallow plunged  
Into the scalding snow.

*November 1920*

**Untitled**

Again Gluck summons the sweet shades  
From out of their lamenting captivity.  
Melpomene in red silks sweeps  
Across to the window of her own temple.  
Carriages stand in a black clump  
In the courtyard where frost crackles,  
All shaggy—while people and subjects  
Crunch down the scalding snow.

Again servants in fur coats disperse,  
Roses muffled up in fur.  
And looking to the sky—a simmering  
Golden smoky fish soup.  
As if the stars—paltry small bits,  
Are afloat in a thick broth.  
But steam gusts up heavily  
And blinks feebly in the streets.

Later an uproar, as whispers and shouts  
Rise from the pitch dark inferno.  
There is nothing of dear Eurydice  
In the frozenness of our winter.  
Sweeter than the fine Italian tongue  
For me is my beloved speech,  
And in the red, waterlogged braziers,  
The glow is like roses in a Roman basilica.

The wretched smell of lambskin smoke  
Rises from snowdrifts in black streets.

And somehow causes us to fly  
In ecstasy to immortal spring.  
Once again the aria resounded:  
“You the blessed of the green meadow”,—  
And a living swallow plunged  
Into the scalding snow.

OSIP MANDEL'SHTAM *November 1920*

**Tambourin-ing**

*~~translated by Julian Cola*

half man  
half tambour  
searched for by his peers  
amid literary paths  
following centaurs, elves  
pegasus, unicorns

he found himself lonesome  
the tambour man  
maybe, stacked on the wrong bookshelf  
he sensed,  
so he extended his leather  
toward the sun

that's when the core of his naval,  
the oldest of living beings,  
was touched  
by the fervent curiosity of a little boy

the man,  
half man

half tambour,  
levitated  
in audible propulsion

SERGIO BALLOUK (contemporary, Brazil)

### **Friday's Sunset**

*~~translated by Maria Bennett*

As much as these walls stretch out over the earth  
the shadow stays behind,  
beneath the awning, on the corner of evening.  
The sunset  
seems motionless upon a horizon of level brick  
time goes by  
but the darkness does not move,  
moments have stopped on the seventh step.  
The moo  
with the kohl of night smudged on its eyelashes  
observes the day  
carefully, without moving  
conquered by the twilight of Friday.

### **Emptiness**

Upon the strong shoulders of the fathers of earth and water,  
only a small sack of money and iron remains.  
A hallway emptied of stories  
a labyrinth of silence  
ash on the face of ghazals.  
From the drought of love  
no more than two cold words remain.  
In the castles of memory, not even dust remains,  
nor in the story's mirror  
is there any man left.

SAEID HOOSHANGI (Iran)

**The Candle-blossoming Night**

*~~translated by Sekyo Nam Haines*

In the candle-blossom night,  
two meet in the deep hidden chamber.  
Too young to know their passions' depth,  
only their hearts are as bright as sun and moon—  
that love comes not only once or twice,  
they do not know yet.

In the candle-blossom night,  
two meet under the darkening window.  
Not knowing what lies ahead of them,  
only their minds are as sturdy as pine and bamboo—  
that life brings many tears,  
they do not know yet.

**The Smell of Woman**

The smell of the moon clothed in a blue cloud.  
The smell of the sun clothed in red.  
No, the smell of sweat, the smell of dirt,

the smell of the rain-soaked body and clothes.

Blue ocean... swaying boats...

A tender and wanting life of someone  
whose tiny green soul is diminishing,  
the screams of flesh come and go aslant.

The smell of the deep forest after a burial,  
the smell of a dark cabin in the reeling phantom-ship,  
the smell of raw fish in the ocean,  
the smell of the late-spring air floating in the sky.

The wind on a sand dune lifts the lingering fog,  
far away, the streetlights stare up to the evening moon.  
I love woman's body that has many smells!  
I love woman's body that has many smells!

KIM SOWOHL

### OPHELIA—AS HAMLET

*~~translated by Mary Jane White*

Like Hamlet—so tightly—laced,  
With your halo of dissuasion and knowledge,  
Pale—to the last atom . . .  
(Being edition—one thousand and what?)

Don't trouble me—with your insolence and shallowness!  
(Your adolescent's attic layers of stuff!)

Like some ponderous chronicle  
You've already come to lie—on my breast!

Virgin! Misogynist! One who prefers  
Quarrelsome spirits! . . . Did it never occur to you  
Even once, that—whatever might be plucked  
From the little flowerbed of madness . . .

Roses? . . . Don't you know this is—sssh!—The future!  
If we pluck them—new ones grow! Have they,  
Roses, ever once betrayed us? Like lovers—  
Roses, have they ever once betrayed us? -Gone?

Perfused (you with your sweet smell!) you will drown . . .  
—Nothing happened!—But we surface in memory  
At the hour, when in the rivulet's chronicle  
Like Hamlet—tightly—laced—you surface . . .

MARINA TSVETAeva

Excerpts from *Le nageur d'un seul amour*

~~translated by Chris Monier

- 1) Those who stay up late at night  
In the deep ablutions of darkness  
  
Far from lamps warm to the eyes  
  
In the open air  
  
They are the travelers of the future  
  
And the stars know well who's been at their windows  
  
Leaving bright ladders  
  
By dawn when the hunters make their holes

In the silence of the hills

- 2) You're reading a book that's heavier than your hands  
In this sad garden where a turtle dove takes off,

The darkness flying with her

- 3) If ever you return to your native land  
Go like a horse tired in the evening  
Into this garden  
Look for the hardly nameable rose  
The chrysanthemum in the lion's mane  
– Large spiders may zoom with butterfly

As in the fevers of childhood  
Smile or cry but do not be afraid  
That's darkness shifting before becoming clear night

- 4) The great sadness of a horse wanders in the clouds  
And you, in this room

You dream without language

Of the most tender infancy of the voyage

Among the kingdom of walls

5) In the sleep of a young girl  
Are the grace and mystery of a needle  
And the young hunter who spies her  
When he comes out of a violin  
– Ah watch over this sleeping child  
For she is outside  
In the mustaches of the night

6) In the birdcage there is a garden of sadness  
And all the melancholy of a household

The wings are green leaves  
In the day, frugal and broken  
Little bits

I remember the poor school boy  
At the window

7) Neither hope, nor fortune

But the small dried flower in a book  
Of which there remain only the ashes of love

– How to die  
When one still can dream

8) The sound of the nautilus is not that of the sea  
Nor the movement of the wind  
But the song and the tomb of sleep

Like thorns are tears of the rose in the morning  
And lily the memory of great rulers  
Ah what melancholy there is in things

9) Far far away  
In Asia there was  
The swimmer of a single love

10) Under the violet sun of time past  
During the voyage of the dead leaves  
There was once this flowerless garden  
No one came ever  
No echo, no souls

Except for some hunters, fatigued by the years  
Who went crossing there

GEORGES SCHEHADÉ

REVIEW:

*You as of Today My Homeland: Stories of War, Self, and Love*, by Tayseer al-Sboul (translated by Nesreen Akhtarkhavari). Michigan State University Press, 2017.

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 Akhtarkhavari. 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.

~~Dorian Jackson





