

VOLUME 13 number 1

Ezra is stirred by Friedrich Schiller's essay, "Über naïve und sentimentalische Dichtung." We can, like him, divide writers into two groups—the naïve and the sentimental. Both terms have special meanings for the German poet; let's change the second, as Orhan Pamuk does, to "reflective." We can dichotomize this way—but should we? Which group do translators fall, or struggle, into?

"Naïve" meant, to Schiller, those writers who write most spontaneously, part of their spontaneity coming from an unchecked belief that they can fully capture reality (descriptions of nature, of personalities, of zeitgeist). Skewed more toward modern writers, the term "reflective" means those writers who are suspicious of or insecure about the challenge of reproducing reality. Their writing shows a consciousness of technique, along with various framing devices that showcase artifice and concede that writing does not capture what it aims at.

Doesn't the very act of translation install a "frame," a sense of artifice, a remove from naïve (or, in any case, autonomous) surges of creativity? Reflective writing, as defined above (Schiller's "sentimentalische"), is doubled, isn't it, by the translator's intellectual, theoretical and ethical concerns—by the endless travail of technique and worry about being fully faithful to (capturing!) the original.

If this is true, then it's important to refresh the entire dichotomy. Because translators need to open a space, channel, or some kind of creative well within which we are empowered as "naïve." That is, fully trusting our own impulses and the little moments of pure creativity that are independent of the source text. You know who you are: the successful translator has these moments, for all kinds of reasons (and, while they are technical reasons, their solution may be a naïve surge); we stress that they are "little" moments so we won't be called hot-headed anarchists or abusers of our liberty.

Are we doomed, nonetheless? Are we automatically in the "reflective" group, because we mirror, with self-aware craft, the source text? No. Remember that Schiller's naiveté meant a deeply-held belief that a writer could fully capture something (here it would be the full force of the source text). We believe we *inhabit* the latter more than we reflect it. At times we move *in* its original energy, not parallel to it.

The question of naiveté is simply the question of our strength of belief.

We're glad to have prose in this issue (Abdulaziz al-Farsi), and the "Medieval Suite" is a gorgeous duet.

Instead of reviews, this issue includes publication notices. **Publishers!:** We will print the verbal portion of any press releases you have (translations), provided you send those as Word docs.

Featured Writer: JP Allen. JP won an Ezra Residency in 2018, as we mentioned in a past issue. Here is some of his work, a translation in progress of contemporary Spaniard **Francisco Layna Ranz.** JP is a long-time Spanish speaker who is doing exceptional work. His MFA is from Johns Hopkins, and he has been Assistant Poetry Editor at *Narrative Magazine*, among other stints. His poetry, criticism and translations have appeared in more than fifteen publications. Layna Ranz's books include *Y una sospecha como un dedo*, and *Espiritu, hueso animal*.

I found an Unknown Number at the Door to My Apartment

I found an unknown number at the door to my apartment. It wanted to come in. I knew from its attitude. It ran off down the stairwell. I suppose I wasn't to be trusted, either. I thought about names: if an insect so much as sees the light of science and gets one, then a number deserves the same. I gave it a lot of thought; rualo sounded right to me for a step between nine and ten.

After that, I went back to the task at hand. Prepare Sancho's zenith and nadir: purgatory of conscience. The truth can be reached through a lie. Cervantes always faked his weakness for eclipses.

After that, Rosaura and her considerable aptitude for breaking horses.

Lunch, siesta and walk...

...the red of the stoplight in the distance. I will make it all the way there, and I will not call my parents, since they're dead. In spite of myself, I hold on to their old number. There are people who keep tobacco for a long time after quitting. Or reliquaries of the missing link.

The breeze makes a mistake again. It tries to flee and tries to find, between the cars, an escape for its

emotions.

Many are the times it trips on this very stone.

Now the air is the color of errors. And that is why I write this poem.

If I called them and if I knew how to tell them, I'd tell them I walk slowly and with eyes full of silence.

I don't want to evoke: too much sky where the thing I write might never have existed.

But I don't pull it off: I remember, suddenly, that immense house, up by the stoplight. The bakery,

and the cat that would come looking for me. The bread holds, as it held then, morning prayers, and the coffee smells like fresh calm. The house, familial, paternal, in a town with a muddy river and peaches in the sun.

A knock at the door: maybe the number hasn't found anybody better.

Maybe it's looking to quantify emptiness.

In any case, I will not call my parents.

No, no, no, no, no, no

No, no, no, no, no, no.

I reject the largest, the smallest, any, each and every single premise.

I reject to the core any glimmer of its opposite.

No bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

Talk is never cheap.

Where there's a will, there is no way.

No one knows anyone's soul.

Non bis in idem.

No, no, a thousand times no.

"No" is the beginning of nobility, novice and noema.

Novelty stops being novel in a millisecond.

Reactionary spirit? Not at all. Without disobedience
what would be possible? Everybody naked in an orchard?
Among bdellium gum and cornelian stone, waiting
for something to happen, someone to come, someone to be
something more than breath or spirit?
Primal defensive reflex that makes us what we are, thank God.

I've Left Fresh-Cut Strawberries on the Headstone

I've left fresh-cut strawberries on the headstone.
What can I possibly do for you who are not alive, fistful of dust,
name abandoned at the eulogy?
If I came every afternoon—even in January, even in August—
if I prayed to you among ranks of the deceased,
weeping willows, mirrored obsidian,
a raven and three pinches of salt, wouldn't I be talking
about myself, and you, nothing more than shavings in a wasteland,
exquisite corpse, private voice, I'm here,
I can see that I'm alive, I lie awake all night—oh!—and in you
angleworm and compost dream themselves to life?
Here's an instinct with backbone: I'm sick of myself and the intermittence
of my guts.
I want to be constant now that you're gone, to present myself
with flying colors, to keep on being.
It's not infidelity: it's fruit in the mouth of a buxom angel,
forbidden.

I traduttori/traduttrici:

| | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Elizabeth Armstrong | (Catullus) | Joan Xie, Catherine Wie | (Chen Xianfa) |
| Mohamed-Habib Kahloui | (Abdulaziz al-Farsi) | Alan Altimont | (Marbod of Rennes) |
| Joshua Gage | (Kikaku) | Alissa Elliott | (Rilke) |
| Ken Gorfkle | (Rosenmann-Taub) | Tomas Gaul | (Homer) |

Catullus XVI

~~translated by Elijah Armstrong

My friends, why do you scold me so?
You pair of fellows ought to know —
A poem's spicy naughtiness
(An unclothed leg, a stolen kiss)
Needn't imply the poet does wrong.
(Old men enjoy a saucy song;
One must write for one's audience!)

Please, gentlemen, have wits and sense —
I am no wicked sybarite,
Whatever bawdiness I write.

CATULLUS

Two Kinds of Fallacies

~~translated by Joan Xie and Catherine Wie

Blackout. I fumble in the dark for what's left of dinner
Half an orange
I need its sourness
to awaken another deep well within my body.
The clumsy scenario is akin to
a picture I draw:
A blind man in the grass chasing after butterflies.

Blind men believe in the existence of butterflies
while poets would rather trust their absence.
In such dissension, I can't
complete a painting.
The blackout is like God's gift of inspiration drawn from me
Withered orange
in an unknown place, split in half.

In the dark room, we keep making love, sigh and grow old
but in the grass, we chase butterflies.
One moment, the blind man caught
withered leaves
the next moment, he caught a girl's fluttering skirt.
This is not about how butterflies dance
but rather a reply to where the sourness was lost.
Could it be the complete answer?
Suppose we really possess a deep well
just like we possess the fallacy of a painting
hanging high on the wall.
I know that at this moment, even if the lights were lit, and the room
were as beautiful as the day
the missing half of the orange would remain lost.

CHEN XIANFA

The Radar

~~translated by: Mohamed-Habib Kahlaoui

It was related to me by Rubai' al-Murr. Khamees bin Harut reported it to him on the authority of Sambukh, who recounted that Betikan said:

"It happened on a desolate road, separating our two nearest villages, that the authorities, seeking to preserve the lives of feral animals, decided to restrict the speed limit to a hundred kilometers per hour. And the decision was publicly celebrated the day they set up the speed trap in a ceremony to which local dignitaries were invited. The detector had scarcely been mounted, with the applause of crowds on both sides of the road, when a car passed by at a speed estimated at 160 Km/h. Seeing this, the master of ceremonies said:

- "The detector has only just been set up. The driver mustn't have noticed it. Let's have coffee and carry on with our ceremony!"

While they sat drinking, four other cars passed at speeds between 160 and 180 km/h.

- "The detector has only just been set up. The driver mustn't have noticed it", they all said and continued drinking.

A whole month passed without a single driver reported to have kept his speed below 150 Km/h. So the authorities reconsidered the issue. A police officer claimed that citizens obviously liked committing traffic offences. They were exceeding the limit just for the sake of it! "I suggest," he added, "that we install another detector to limit speed to only 50 Km/h. Then you'll see how drivers, determined to break the law, will exceed even that limit. But their speed probably won't go beyond 100 km/h and that meets our goals." Everyone liked the idea and a new ceremony, celebrating the new speed trap, was held. Eye witnesses later reported that ten cars had passed at a speed of about 160 km/h. And attendees were already prepared to speculate about the reasons:

- Radar ?!!

A device that takes photographs of excessively-speeding cars.

- Does it take my photo too?
- It takes photos of all front seat occupants.

A husband seized the policeman by the arm and said:

- "You mean my wife has been photographed by this device? Give me that picture now! Give it me if you value your life".
- "That's not possible, sir. The photo is retrievable only from the police labs," the poor policeman shouted.

Enraged, the man headed towards his car yelling at his wife:

- They took a picture of you, *horma!* What an awful shame! We're disgraced... Haven't I told you to always veil your face? Do you remember what you said? "We're on a deserted road, and it was dark!" You see... How dark was it?... I'll kill you!
- "Kill me? Why me? Here's the gun... Go and kill whoever photographed your wife!" she protested.
- You want me to kill the government?
- Who told you that man was one of them? Is it reasonable for a government to leave its officials unarmed on a deserted road with instruction to take pictures of wives...? He's just laughing at you. Here's the gun. Take it!

He seized the gun from her and headed towards the policeman, saying:

- Give me that photo or I'll kill you!
- But I can't take it out.
- Then it's between this damned insolent device and me!

To save his life, the policeman finally consented to let the husband fire at the radar. He pointed the gun and fired "Taaaaakhkhkhkhk". Then to vent his anger and make sure that the matter was under control, he snatched what remained of the device and took it home for his children to play with.

Finally, the authorities came up with a solution which consisted of placing in the vicinity of the third radar a civil guard with the task of reporting any speeding vehicle to a patrol car stationed three kilometers away.

"This is a new detector. That's why the drivers mustn't have noticed it."

But in two successive months the new device couldn't catch the drivers' attention. The authorities gave up in despair and decided that their only recourse was to bring in a really punitive measure. So, a new detector was installed mid-way between the two villages. By sunset, this wonderful device could have filled a whole movie with transgressors' photos. And the morning after, every one of them was fined for speeding.

But people protested against such a cruel policy. One man complained to a patrol officer:

- Why didn't you hold a ceremony to inform us about the new radar?

The event sparked another wave of public protest. But in the end they all paid their fines. News of this astonishing device spread across the region like wildfire. The day after, a radar device was installed in the same place. When an already-fined citizen passed by, he decelerated as he approached the radar and then looked right and left, behind and ahead, up and down. Once sure

that the radar was unguarded, he carried it to his car and disappeared. At home, while smashing the device to pieces, he kept saying:

- Take that you blind creature! Take that you thief! Take that! Take that! Because of you I've lost ten Riyals!

Police searched in vain for the radar device and finally decided to buy a new one. They installed it at the same spot. This time, a policeman was stationed nearby with no means of defense except the dissuasive power of his presence. Some speeding drivers passed to be immediately trapped by the radar which emitted a sudden bright light like the flashlight of a camera. A driver said to the passenger next to him:

- What was that flashing all about?
- It was lightning perhaps. I think it will be raining tonight.

They kept waiting for the expected rumble of thunder until they got to the second village. But no rumbling was heard!

Another speeding driver, accompanied by his wife, was also surprised by the blinding light. His wife started shouting and hastily donned her veil. Her husband then braked, stopped and reversed to investigate. He found an unarmed policeman smoking beside the radar.

- What's this? he asked the policeman.
- It's radar...

Traffic police were stationed nearby waiting to impose speeding fines. The idea was successful on the first day, and news of this third radar spread across the whole region. Any man seen on a deserted road immediately became a warning of danger. He must be the radar specialist! So, people often set out in a hurry and as soon as a figure appeared in the distance, a passenger would yell at the driver:

- Radaaaaaaaaaaar!

The driver would then decelerate to forty km/h until he passed the radar, and thus the specialist wouldn't report him. Then he would quickly accelerate to reach 160 km/h. It also happened that some cars passed the patrol at a break-neck speed leaving the officers completely unable to arrest them because the guard posted there hadn't warned them. With time, police varied their trapping techniques. Sometimes they placed a barrel on the road, pitched a tent or even planted an artificial tree for camouflage.... The result was that whenever something unusual was encountered in that desolate area, a driver would be warned:

- Radaaaaaaaaaaar!

He would then slow down to a speed below 50 km/h and accelerate as soon as he was too distant to be reported. It was said that drivers would slow down just on seeing a feral animal or even the remains of a blown tyre thrown onto the highway.

In the evening, the memories of elderly people about the radar slid into oblivion... A tent fixed to the sands of memory. Whenever I came across a speed sign, I would smile and slow down.

Just a week ago, a speeding car's tyre burst. The driver lost control of the car which overturned and caught fire, claiming the lives of all its occupants. Drivers passed by while the car was still in flames. One of them commented:

- Ingenious our police, eh? Look, they've even disguised the radar as a burning car!

They all decelerated and when beyond the scene, they accelerated again.

This morning I saw what remained of the burning car. Other speeding vehicles were slowing down just to speed up again once the remnants of it were far behind.

MOHAMED ABDULAZIZ al-FARSI (Oman)

Medieval suite

~~translated (from the Latin) by Alan Altimont

A Suite of Poems: Marbod of Rennes (*ca.* 1035-1123 C.E.) and his Student Gautier.

Gautier: A Description of the Beauty of Spring

The grace of spring clears my mind of its wilder fears,

and I see in all her offspring beauty I will long recall;

My God, every part of Nature gladdens my heart.

A thousand different colors single out the flowers.

Fleece-like her grass extends to the earth's farthest ends.
We see new shoots greening the woods, later to fruit.
Orioles, blackbirds, woodpeckers, nightingales, jackdaws—
each is a strong contender in their contest of song.
Numberless nests ride high in the trees, each one occupied:
a hatchling lies there unfledged, hidden within that briar.
The blooming roses are more and more spectacular.
You want to pace among plants that blanket the field with white lace.
to tangle with vines, feed on a sweet grape and its bitter seed.
You watch in awe as mothers dance with their daughters-in-law,
while young men play on this fair-weather festival day.
He who sees such grace without melting, without a trace
of a smile, is a bore, cold and petty to the core.
He who never repays the beauty of the earth with praise
shows no respect for our Author, in Whose thrall we are subject
to midwinter's dearth, summer, fall, spring's bounteous rebirth.

Marbode of Rennes: His greetings to M. Gautier (*Carmina varia XXXIII*)

Used to the city's crowds, as she is, and its over-priced goods,
when I want to release my pampered muse for some rural peace,
she refuses to change her scene and thinks herself in some danger
that you, Gautier, rough-hewn poet, will see her on display.
For you, young bard, all the charms of the countryside call,
and surely that place you love you will just as surely praise,
responding with masterful lyre and poems that will last.
She'll have to fly, she fears, from your prying critical eye,

from spankings too hard, or from the flames of your ardor,
or from how you might tear her flimsy silken underwear.
She sees no charm, in short, she swears, in life down on the farm,
and, based on this view, tells me what she is willing to do:
drop in on Sundays; only peasants live there always.

You, being young, stay idle the greater part of your day
but after supper are used to calling upon *your* muse,
and sit down free to write whatever God wills you to see.
Whatever I write clumsily, whatever I botch outright,
let me be judged wrong or right by you, rustic singer of songs,
whose judgments I fear because of all the ink I have to smear,
not one black streak of which truly hides each initial mistake.

Thus I thought I could write you something to the point and good
that might go toward earning me a tasty country reward:
*Hello! Please don't fail to send me one young Master Quail,
fledged last spring, yet sheltered still in the shade of his mother's wing.*

Here is how you choose to answer my jaded city muse:
*Muse, don't worry, for this need not be the end of our story.
Though this job you task me with is beyond me, please don't sob.
If you decide to visit you'd see the nymphs of the countryside
and, if you choose, a whole chorus of muses—how can you refuse!—
for your poetry's sake a heavenly glimpse of rural booty
such as in all your days you've not seen, but have heard deserves praise!*

My lyre-plucking muse, Clio, only knows how to refuse

me, but I shall still greet you thus, come from her what will:

For each year you live may that many fewer slip away.

Gautier: While Crossing the Danube (*Dum transirem Danubium, ca. 1096?*)

When I crossed the wide Danube,
my fears nearly swamping me,
thoughts drifting off from grammar
I ought to have learned by heart,
I came up on deck for air
and to study by daylight,

and saw ashore something worth
studying, women at play,
and leaned out to see better,
bent over the rail with desire,
heading in headlong,
urging love's slow ship onward.

One, an unearthly beauty,
called out the songs and dances,
leading their line by the hand
through some old temple's ruins,
and, to the gods worshipped there
once, I made this fervent prayer:

“O ghosts of the gods of old,
you who still haunt the heavens,

and who, though divine, were thought
to lust for our human touch,
grant I may soon come to know
this sudden apparition!”

Then the closer our ship came,
the more I burned with passion;
ashore the flames tortured me,
a heretic burnt alive;
the sweeter that woman’s song,
the harder to quench this fire.

Where else come by so much
ardent schooling, stupid scholar?
Here is the participle
I long to learn to decline;
this the sudden conjunction
one masters without grammar.

Marbod of Rennes: Another letter to the same poet (Gautier) (*Carmina* XXXIV)

Dearest to my heart, your song is so lovely it hurts—
lovely as a creek that, flowing over stones, seems to speak,
line after line spilling into a pool, swelling but still—
hurts like a man cursed to live by water but never quench his thirst,
or, tremble with chills, high fevered, or starve at sumptuous meals.

So I cannot thank you enough, poet of the highest rank!

You will sing, I suppose, many more years, charming me and my muse
into singing along instead of answering back, head to head,
alarming your sonorous swan with the squawk of my raucous goose.
I know for certain two things: no voice soars with yours when you take wing;
and of all these warblers of words, I am the most grating of birds.

Yet you praise me (though showing with your clear style my obscurity!),
making people aware of me by spreading your songs everywhere.
And so you bend people's ears in order to make me friends,
although I kid myself that what you say is actually valid.
And while it is clear you love to replace old praise of me with new,
The true glory is due, as if to the chief of the gods, to you.
You know no jealousy, you who share your honors with me,
which, though yours alone, you do not spare to lessen what you own,
and which none has yet acknowledged, though some have welched on their debt.

But now you are bent on mounting a serious indictment
against scribbling, maintaining good writing should be clear and plain,
and that in my verse I should permit nothing insipid, or worse,
because flowery style frustrates readers in all too short a while:
I pray your lenience will get me a reduced sentence!

Thus Clio yields to you and waits to be instructed what to do:
she herself will ban whatever figures of speech you pan;
as you require her to, my muse shall choose words plain and few.
A tune strummed clumsily but with heart takes hold of me
much more strongly than a refined and intricate song.
So I give up my cleverness, sending only such verses as

would bring felicity to you by their pure simplicity.

Five Haiku

~~translated by Joshua Gage

Oh, Buddha!

your lap may be filled
with a snow of flowers

autumn sky
the hill's cedars
detached

without noticing...
on New Years Eve, the neighbors
are overheard

even without
that man's snores
autumn cicadas

(For the 47 Ronin)

moonlight amidst
the snow; a mortal life's
dumping spot

KIKAKU (1661-1707)

She Winds Life's Strands

~~translated by Alissa Elliott

She winds life's strands into a single braid,
the wayward giving way to gratitude,
rousts out the rowdy suitors with her mind,
and welcomes company of a different kind;
She saves the gentlest evenings for you.

You are the partner of her lonely rhyme,
the peaceful center of her whirling talk.
and when her leggy compass takes a walk,
the circle she draws rescues you from time.

RAINER MARIA RILKE

Prelude

~~translated by Ken Gorfkle

After, after, the wind between two peaks,
and the brother scorpion that rears,
and the red tides over the day.
Voracious volcano: halo without empire.
The vulture will die: lax punishment.
After, after, the hymn between two vipers.
After, the night that we don't know
and, extended in the never, one sole body
silent like light. After, the wind.

On returning to the rosebushes,
embers in the rays of withered parks,
the roses disperse towards their paradise.
To be without being, my corymbs,
withered, prepare themselves.

Redemptor
nests! Breezes! The moon
dies when the morrow is born.
Ancient night, this night
wove, frozen, orphaned, the shroud
that today is the master of sleep.

The vine branches, plow handles,
rub the spring: creatures
of the bread of sorcery
animate, in the depths of the almond,
the wave of lived futures:
immobile glycines of cloudscapes:
seagulls: God voyager:
marble:
sea.

Academe

Bazaar: crane: charity
of cylinders: peninsula:
spider: itinerary
of ivy: leafy
sideboard? The sanhedrin
of the desk, in the boldness
of the rug: my cistern.

DAVID ROSENMANNTAUB (Chile, contemporary)

The Voyage of Odysseus

After *The Odyssey*, Book 1

~~translated by Tomas Gaul

By now, everyone left—the rag-tag survivors,
Smelling of danger and battle, their clothes still smoking—
Had made it back to where they dreamed of: home.

Except one,
Who, heart-sick for his wife, his land, could not shake off
The fair-haired goddess Calypso: out of sight of sea,
At the back of her cave, she kept him, twisting a lock
Of her hair around her finger, holding his eyes, pleading
Desperately for him to marry her. (Her rich, red mouth ...
How Odysseus ached to pleasure her ... to leave:
His hand reached to claim her, she fell panting to his arms,
But he saw, in the flickering shadows of the cave,
Ithaca and pulled back, ashamed.)

Years passed in this way.

The seasons rolled around. (His friends forgot their battles:
When they met, they talked of wives, the fields, politics:
Happy, they softened up.)

Finally the moment came
When weary, thinner in the face than they remembered,
His skin pallid, his fingernails dirty and broken,
His hair the colour of clouds, Odysseus stepped out
Of a tiny boat and fell on his knees in the sand,
Gasping for breath. Finally. Despite Poseidon's wrath
(Who raged and swore and tossed the bark across the waves
And threw Odysseus into the sea time and again,
Drove Odysseus from one adventure to the next—
This is our story, Odysseus' homeward voyage),
The other Gods restored him and led him gently home.

PUBLICATION NOTICES:

Liu Yung – Tz'u Poet of The Northern Sung, translated by Cecilia Liang. This is fairly compendious, and beautifully translated. The form is "song lyrics" from the eleventh century. The book is published by Anthony Tripi (1783 Newhall Avenue, Cambria, CA 93428).

Also translated by Cecilia Liang, *And When Snow Flowers Your Hair* (same publisher). These are Chinese folk poetry, generally short forms. This is a re-print of Ms. Liang's work.

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