

*Ezra* mourns our usual ALTA gathering (it was virtual this year), but a riot of warmth and useful exchange is promised for next fall!

We're thrilled to have Pierre Joris as our Fall feature. He has been, among many other things, a *preux chevalier* and champion of the North African work that Ezra and friends have done. Do visit him at <https://pierrejoris.com/blog/>. Note forthcoming books, and that his *Memory Rose* (see below) is due out within a month.

Literary translation pedagogy, you may know, has expanded rapidly, apace with translation's prestige and research in translation theory. The following notes are drawn from Peter Constantine's article "Literary Translation Pedagogy in The United States: New Trends" (*Translation Review*, issue 106).

First, it's likely you are peer-reviewed and have your literary work weighed in tenure and promotion decisions. Note that the MLA, about ten years ago, established helpful guidelines for this review *as it applies to translators* (<http://www.mla.org/About-Us/Governance/Executive-Council/Executive-Council-Actions/2011/Evaluating-Translations-As-Scholarship-Guidelines-for-Peer-Review>). Next, it is implicit in Constantine's remarks that, as translation pedagogy develops, more programs and teaching opportunities arise. The increase in MFA programs that center on—or offer courses in—literary translation is a trend that may offer you teaching opportunities outside your full-time position.

Lastly, *Ezra* believes we are increasingly able to make our work count across curriculum. Constantine cites Dennis M. Kratz (from *Translation Review* issue 83): "If (or as I prefer to think when) the importance of this triad of qualities—science/technology, cross-cultural communication, and creativity—gains recognition and acceptance, the implications for the practice of translation will be almost incalculable." So if, in your modesty, you have not promoted your work to colleagues within you institution, start now! You are essential in bringing entirely new writing (i.e., newly available in English) to the literature curricula and to General Education, as well as to the departments of history, political science, creative writing, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and others.

There are two reviews and a publication notice in this issue.

## **FEATURED WRITER:**

**Pierre Joris** has moved between Europe, the US & North Africa for some 55 years now, publishing as many books of poetry, essays, translations & anthologies — most recently *Fox-trails, -tales & -trots* (poems & proses); *Microliths: Posthumous Prose of Paul Celan & A City Full of*

*Voices: Essays on the Work of Robert Kelly. Memory Rose into Threshold Speech: The Collected Earlier Poetry of Paul Celan* is forthcoming from FSG in November 2020. Also: *Arabia (not so) Deserta* (essays, 2019) & *Conversations in the Pyrenees* with Adonis (2018); a translation of Egyptian poet Safaa Fathy's *Revolution Goes Through Walls* (SplitLevel, 2018); *The Book of U* (poems, 2017, Simoncini Books, Luxembourg), *The Agony of I.B.* (a play, Editions PHI, 2016), *An American Suite* (early poems, edited & with an introduction by Tamas Panitz, Inpatient Press, 2016), *Barzakh: Poems 2000-2012*, (Black Widow Press, 2014) & *Breathturn into Timestead: The Collected Later Poetry of Paul Celan* (FSG, 2014). *Diwan of Exiles: a Pierre Joris Reader*, co-edited with Ariel Resnikoff, is forthcoming in late 2021 from BWP. When not on the road, he lives in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, with his wife, multimedia praticienne Nicole Peyrafitte.

From **Paul Celan**, *Microliths They Are, Little Stones* (Posthumous prose) translated by Pierre Joris. (<http://contramundum.net/microliths-they-are-little-stones/>):

263

263.1

8.19.59

the “lyrical” I

/phenomenology?/

263.2

—  
but: *polyvalence* of the poem: I — you:  
no fixed relation

I — you (infinite relation

syncretism                      */tertium non datur*

rather: a third is given only insofar as it has been given to the I or the You.

Essentially: the You of the poem, even there where it answers “literally,” never gives an answer (cathectability there too). Constant back and forth of the I.

Linguistically *possible* I-forms (extreme example: *the participle!*)

### 263.3

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Poetry: *not* an “art of expression”!

### 263.4

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Double relational framework of the poem: that of language, that of the speaking I.

### 263.5

The poem: a self-realization of language through radical individuation, i.e. the single, unrepeatable speaking of an individual.

### 263.6

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The poem, like man, does not have sufficient ground. (Therefore, its specific darkness, which has to be taken into account if the poem is to be understood as poem.

Maybe also: the poem has its ground in itself; *with* this ground it rests (see above) in the groundless.

### 263.7

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*Discontinuity* of the poem

### 263.8

<i>causa formalis</i>	immanent		principle of form
<i>causa materialis</i>	(entelechy)		

### 264.4

---

the You of the poem = (infinitely) close and infinitely far (in space and time).

### 264.5

---

The poem has grounds — and it does not hide these grounds from us; the poem and the poem’s grounds however do not have sufficient ground, be it this one: *the questioning of it*.

## 264.6

The question of why this one but not that one writes poems, can hardly be answered by the one who writes poems, and that's also why the question if there will be poems "tomorrow" remains open: it is thinkable that neither the one nor the other will undertake this. To this thought a fear can be added: the fear that both, the *causa materialis* and the *causa formalis*, may no longer be present in an altered genotype.

deficient formulation

## 264.7

—  
The question of contingency, again!  
—

## 264.8

Why do the poems of earlier times seem more "comprehensible" to us than those of our contemporaries? Maybe also because as poems, i.e., taken together with their darkness, they have already evaporated...

from: *Paul Celan: Memory Rose into Threshold Speech* (Collected Earlier Poetry), translated by Pierre Joris and with commentaries by Pierre Joris and Barbara Wiedemann. (<https://us.macmillan.com/books/9780374298371>)

Nachts, wenn das Pendel der Liebe schwingt  
zwischen Immer und Nie,  
stößt dein Wort zu den Monden des Herzens  
und dein gewitterhaft blaues  
Aug reicht der Erde den Himmel.

Aus fernem, aus traumgeschwärmtem  
Hain weht uns an das Verhauchte,  
und das Versäumte geht um, groß wie die Schemen der Zukunft.

Was sich nun senkt und hebt,  
gilt dem zuinnerst Vergrabnen:  
blind wie der Blick, den wir tauschen,  
küßt es die Zeit auf den Mund.

At night, when the pendulum of love swings  
between Always and Never,  
your word accosts the moons of the heart  
and your tempest-blue  
eye hands heaven to the earth.

From afar, from a dream-blackened  
grove the exhaled wafts about us,  
and what's been neglected roams, large as future's outlines.

What now sinks and rises,  
is meant for what lies buried deep down:  
blind like the gaze we exchange,  
it kisses time on the mouth.

[Commentary: Nachts, wenn das Pendel | At night, when the pendulum

1949 (according to a letter of 8. 1. 1957 to Christine Brückner, ref. Badiou). One of the poems  
dedicated "f.D." to Ingeborg Bachmann.]

Der Tauben weißeste flog auf: ich darf dich lieben!  
Im leisen Fenster schwankt die leise Tür.  
Der stille Baum trat in die stille Stube.  
Du bist so nah, als weiltest du nicht hier.

Aus meiner Hand nimmst du die große Blume:  
sie ist nicht weiß, nicht rot, nicht blau – doch nimmst du sie.  
Wo sie nie war, da wird sie immer bleiben.  
Wir waren nie, so bleiben wir bei ihr.

The whitest of doves took off: I may love you!  
In the faint window sways the faint door.  
The quiet tree stepped into the quiet parlor.  
You're so near, as if you didn't dwell here.

From my hand you take the great flower:  
It's neither white nor red nor blue — yet you take it.  
Where it never was, there it will forever be.  
We never were, so we will be with it.

[Commentary: Der Tauben weißeste | The whitest of doves

Paris, 1950, before October. One of the poems dedicated “f.D.” to Ingeborg Bachmann. In an earlier edition BW had suggested that it was connected to the arrival “on 10. 14. 1950 of Ingeborg Bachmann in Paris for a long visit (from mid-October until December), to reconnect with the love affair of their Vienna days.”

5 f. From my hand you take the great flower: | It is neither white nor red nor blue] Cf title & v. 1 of “Errinerung an Frankreich [Remembrance of France;” blue, white & red are the French national colors, although not in the order the poem gives them.

8 Wir waren nie [We never were] Cf. marginal note “we never were” in Edmond Jabès’s *Le Livre de Yukel* next to: ‘ “Ce lieu est amour. Il est absence de lieu. ’Reb Zack” | ‘ “This place is love. It is the absence of place. ’Rabbi Zack.”]

## IN MUNDHÖHE

In Mundhöhe, fühlbar:  
Finstergewächs.

(Brauchst es, Licht, nicht zu suchen, bleibst  
das Schneegarn, hältst  
deine Beute.

Beides gilt:  
Berührt und Unberührt.  
Beides spricht mit der Schuld von der Liebe,  
beides will dasein und sterben.)

Blattnarben, Knospen, Gewimper.  
Äugendes, tagfremd.  
Schelfe, wahr und offen.

Lippe wußte. Lippe weiß.

Lippe schweigt es zu Ende.

## AT MOUTH'S LEVEL

At mouth's level, palpable:  
darkgrowth.

(Don't need to search for it, light, you  
remain the snowsnare, you hold  
your prey.

Both count:  
the touched and the untouched.  
Both speak with the guilt about love,  
both want to be and to die.)

Leafscars, buds, eyelashes.  
Gazings, dayforeign.  
Involucre, true and open.

Lip knew. Lip knows.  
Lip silences it to the end.

[Commentary: In Mundhöhe | At Mouth's Level

10. 26. – 27. 1957.

2 Finstergewächs] BW connects this word-compound with line 4 of “Das Geheimnis der Farne:”  
“flowery it darkens upward before they drink, as if it was not water.”

4 Schneegarn / snowsnare] Cf. reading notes to explanation of woodcuts under the ten  
commandments of Jean Paul Richter's catechism. ‘There, next to the column he has fixed the  
only human being in the world... the contralto Taubert. He takes him for a hunter, who had set  
the Tyras or the snowsnare (Schneegarn), and thanks God that the hen is intelligent and escapes

the adultery-net.” (Vol. 39, p. 77); the term “Schneegarn | snowsnare” appears several times in his notes. I here use David Young’s translation of the term.

10 Blattnarben, Knospen | Leafscars, buds] Cf. reading traces in a caption for the reproduction of an Alm shoot in Geitler [Geirler, Lothar, Morphologie der Pflanzen (1953)] with marginal marks, p.33.

12 Schelfe] Cf. wordlist in folder marked “September 1958” by PC: “Schelfe; (Fruchthülse, Schale) | schelfen, schilfen, inkl. | Teile abblättern | involucre; (involucrum, covering) | to peel, to pare incl. to strip off parts (TCA/SG 117). ]

### **Volume 14 # 3 --**

*Traduttori/traduttrici:*

Tsipi Keller (Gera Ginzburg)

Elisabeth Ladd Glick (Dante)

Martin Gellert (Heine)

Houssem Ben Lazreg (Karim El Iraqi)

Jaqueline Michaud (Heine)

James Owens (from Waltharius)

Matthew Guay (Yukihiko Fujita)

Dana Delibovi (Sor Juana de La Cruz)

### **Letter of Remembrance**

*~~ translated by Tsipi Keller*

1

Letter of Remembrance

My love,

there’s no workshop today

the restaurants are closed

and so are the supermarkets



and novice poets sit at home  
it's possible that Grandpa Nahum and Grandma Lea are fairly content  
the day has been hot yellow and hazy  
I can hear a heavy bus trundle down the street while buckwheat porridge  
is boiling on the stove  
one must get accustomed to dining alone  
A sudden cold wind through the open window  
I may summon a friend  
a virtual one  
who won't be offended  
I may write an amusing story  
or a profound and mystical one  
I may summon Grandpa Nahum  
he will sit on the couch and quietly recite Tehillim  
and Grandma will knit a large down kerchief  
she will love the armchair  
we will dine together  
but the buckwheat isn't roasted and the porridge is tasteless  
maybe they will love pita bread, certainly a novelty for them  
I can offer excellent tea and honey, it should be enough for us  
I'll turn on the heat for them or the air-conditioner  
they'll be apprehensive as they move in this golden white room  
I'll ask Grandma to touch everything, to feel it in her hand  
I see her glide a hand over the tablecloth  
over the cheerfully bright golden bedspread  
I see her eyes light up as she observes the lushness all around  
she moves slowly, even touches the walls  
an old peasant hand, happy lips

she stops in the kitchen  
reluctant to leave behind the cups and saucers inlaid with tiny roses  
I, too, have loved  
I let Grandma alone in the bathroom

2

Grandpa looks around him with great interest  
he walks over to the books  
my Bible is hiding somewhere up on the shelves  
he caresses beautifully illustrated glossy pages  
leafing through them with a sure hand, paying respect to the book  
we talk  
he tries Yiddish with me, it's hopeless  
he then switches to Russian in a heavy Belarusian accent  
I understand every word  
I tell him I resemble him  
“Sure, sure,” Grandma nearly shouts from the kitchen and suddenly enters the room crying  
I seat her in the armchair and hand her a soft, fragrant tissue  
she instantly understands and stops crying, she sniffs the tissue and is crying again  
looking at the tissue and crying  
grandpa stands near her and speaks to her in Yiddish, she answers him but doesn't stop  
Later, we drink tea and eat small pita pockets smeared with butter and honey  
Grandpa and Grandma rest a while in the blond wood armchairs and again I make tea for them  
served in rose-colored glasses  
Grandma takes pleasure in the fragrance, the glasses, the brown sugar, and the citrus honey  
from Yad Mordechai  
Grandpa listens to me and never says, “The goyim also to a certain extent”

he's a mind reader and he knows that I love him and Grandma  
Now I always have someone to talk to and Grandma is pleased and fries potato latkes  
for us  
her feet hurt and in the evenings she likes to watch fashion shows on the large TV screen  
in the living room  
I take Grandpa to the promenade along the sea and he asks how much it costs  
to buy a dinghy  
maybe we can buy one and go fishing  
The Germans and the locals murdered them with an ax and tossed them into a pit.  
Every one of them.  
It happened in 1942.  
I was born in 1947.  
Two old photographs remain of Grandpa Nahum and Grandma Haya Lea.  
I do indeed resemble him.

GERA GINZBURG

### **The Coat**

*~translated by Housseem Ben Lazreg*

When she borrowed my coat  
My attitude immediately changed  
O' Cold, do not underestimate my blood  
I am a flame that does not burn out

Everyone around me fussed  
About a chilling cold and shivered  
And I, from others, differed

Inside me, warmth hid  
And so she borrowed my coat

O' my coat, how happy you are  
Near and yet so far you are  
I tried not to envy you  
I wish I were my coat  
O' stormy calm

“Is your cologne imported?” she asked.  
In the name of God, do not be surprised  
At the fragrance of my kind heart  
With sweetness she said,  
“You seem like the romantic type”  
Everyone winked at us  
For love was out in the open  
And I asked myself,  
“Am I her lover or is it my coat?”  
How do I know if I can celebrate?

And then the bus pulled up  
She sighed and said,  
“Thanks, here is the coat, kiss it”  
It was once mine  
Everyone was gloating  
When she handed me back my coat  
And left without looking back

KARIM EL IRAQI (contemporary, Iraq)

## **Epilogue**

*~~translated by Martin Gellert*

“Renown warms us in the grave”  
What nonsense! Craziness!  
If warmth you want, better kiss  
Thick lips of a lusty milkmaid,  
Even if she reeks of shit. Or  
Warm yourself with drink  
If you prefer, booze up hot wine,  
Punch, or grog, in the grubbiest  
Dive, with sluts and robbers  
Barely dodging the gallows,  
But they live, and breathe, and slurp,  
More to envy than Thetis’ glorious son.  
Homer had it right, and his Achilles:

Better the poorest serf, in any fix  
Here among us, in open air,  
Than lord of heroes beside the Styx.

HEINRICH HEINE

## **The Sphinx**

*~~translated by Jaqueline Michaud*

I roam in the dreaming forest  
In scent of linden flowers  
The glowing dawn  
Has enchanted my soul

I wander, and on my path,  
The nightingale high above  
Sings of love

And love's agony

Of love and love's agony,  
Of tears and laughter  
Her sad joy and joyful sobs  
Bring back forgotten dreams

And as I wander, as I go,  
Before me looms  
A great castle in a clearing  
Its towering gables on high

The windows sealed, and overall  
Silence only and sorrow  
As if the gloom of death  
Held fast these empty walls

By the gate crouching, a sphinx  
Shimmer of horror and joy  
In body and paws a lion  
A woman's face and breast

Oh loveliness! the marble eyes  
Spoke of the wildest desire  
The silent curving lips  
Smiled calm consent

And still sang the nightingale  
How could I resist?  
In kissing this face of love  
My doom stared back

The stony figure came alive  
The marble racked by moans  
Panting with thirst  
She drank my burning kisses

She nearly drank my breath away,  
And filled with lust for more,  
Tore my poor flesh with lion claws

In her fierce embrace

Ravishing martyrdom, tortured bliss  
Agony and joy beyond measure  
With horrid claws horribly ripped  
While her mouth gives unbearable pleasure

And the nightingale: Oh lovely sphinx,  
Oh love, what can it mean  
How can you join deathly torment  
To all the joy you lend us

Oh lovely sphinx, oh help me  
How can I understand  
This puzzle for the ages  
Through the ecstasy of my pain

HEINRICH HEINE

### **Self-Reflection Locker**

*~translated by Matthew Guay*

The self-reflection locker  
The cold locker that  
Made you,  
Isn't that a refrigerator?  
The long unopened locker  
Peering inside  
A gift box of fine confectionary.  
Before you can remember when  
Your eyes process  
An expiration date from the distant past.  
In the background  
The audience looks on.  
Despite the date,  
This is your self-reflection locker  
The contents of the box should  
Still be edible

You proclaim.  
The many eyes  
Gasp  
However,  
It would be rude to.....  
How many people are in this room?  
One, two, three.....

Yes  
One per person  
Behave yourselves.  
When asked who wants one  
Everyone should silently raise their hand.  
The many eyes  
Fill with fear.  
Even so  
This is your self-reflection locker  
There is every reason to return to it  
Then everyone will come meet you  
Thus  
You must eat first.  
The food looks like  
It takes courage  
To bring to your mouth.  
Your right hand commits a heroic act,  
A sudden and tragic invasion  
Tasting produces  
A high-speed rejection.  
Screams rebound  
Turning around,  
There you can see the many eyes  
Filled with derision.  
The still open  
Cold locker  
Over there,  
Isn't that a refrigerator?

### **That You**

That you  
Absorbed into  
Another world  
You surely  
Are there.



Intellectual fascination  
That breaks your heart in two  
Absolute excitement  
That sears your skin  
Intense agitation.  
The place I am at is  
The given "present"

That everyone knows.  
Its dry current  
Completely destroyed by  
The one further than my memories,  
That  
You

### **Zero**

There is nothing here  
Neither any doubt  
Nor any kind of you.  
You and  
I are  
Zero.  
So  
I can say  
Nothing more,  
If I did  
Part of my mind would  
Make me stop  
And that  
Wouldn't do you  
Any good.  
If we pull back time  
Just a little further

I and these words  
Could be made  
As if they had never been.  
But you  
Will inevitably

Return  
There  
Even if it hurts.  
There  
The regular you  
With  
Another  
Me.  
Then  
Us  
Will be gone.

YUKIHIRO FUJITA

**A Sestina**

*~~translated by Elizabeth Ladd Glick*

At dusk I have come to the great circle of shade  
and, weary, to the blanching of the hills

when all the color has faded from the grass.  
But my desire is a never-changing green  
having taken root in a stubborn stone  
that hears and speaks, as if it were a woman.  
Furthermore, this incomparable woman  
is frozen through like snow still in the shade,  
unmoved, just like a stone,  
by the sweet spring weather that warms the hills,  
turning them back from white to green,  
covering them with flowers and grass.  
When she crowns her head with a wreath of grass  
she drives out thoughts of any other woman.  
She weaves her blond hair with the green  
so deftly that Eros comes to join me in the shade.  
Love has me trapped between small hills  
as if I were cemented in a wall of stone.  
She is more beautiful than any precious stone  
but her cuts are too deep to be healed with grass;  
so I have run away through fields and hills  
in desperate flight from this cruel woman,  
but I find no refuge from her light in the shade  
of any hill or wall or branch of green.  
I have seen her dressed all in green,  
so lovely she would arouse in a stone  
the love I carry simply for her shadow.  
I have begged her in a field of grass  
to return my love, like a normal woman,  
but she remains closed off, surrounded by tall hills.

2

I would have to wait till rivers run uphill  
before that supple wood, so soft and green  
would burn for me, as love can in a woman.  
Yes, I would make my bed upon a stone  
for all my life, and like a goat subsist on grass  
just to see her clothing cast its shadow.

No matter how black the hills appear in shade  
this woman blankets them in brightest green.  
She makes darkness disappear like a stone beneath the grass

DANTE ALIGHIERI

### **Battle Scene from Waltharius**

*~translated by James Owens*

Now the two forces stand mustered a javelin's throw  
apart. Then from  
all sides a great clamor rises  
on the air, terrible voices of trumpets contending,  
and spears fly thick, here, there, without pause.  
Ash and cherrywood lances clash in the fray,  
the flung spearhead flashes like lightning,  
and just as the North Wind drives thick snow

in gusts, so wrath drives a storm of deadly arrows.

When all javelins from both sides of the battle  
are spent, every hand flies to a sword.

They unsheathe flashing blades and fasten shields,  
then the armies rush together and resume the fight.

The chests of horses are broken on horses' chests.

Men fall, bashed with the edge of a hard buckler.

But Walter raged in the midst of the battle,  
putting to death all in his way, hacking himself a path.

When the foes saw him reaping such slaughter,  
they feared they were seeing Death in person,  
and wherever Walter fared, to right or to left,  
they every one hastened to show him their backs  
and fled, shields reversed, bridles dangling.

With their leader's example, the doughty Huns  
advance more fiercely, emboldened to the slaughter.

They slay the fighters, chase the fleeing cowards,  
and soon have secured victory from the hazards of war.

Now they fall on the slain and loot the corpses.

Now Walter sounds the horn to recall his troops,  
and the first of them twines his brow with festive leaves,  
adorning his temples with the winner's laurel,  
and the standard-bearers do likewise, and all the soldiers,  
and so they go home, dressed in triumphal headgear.

On their return, each seeks his own homestead,  
but Walter hastens at once before the throne.

EKKEHARD OF ST GALL (c. 920, lines 182-214, from the Latin)

**To Hope**

*~~translated by Dana Delibovi*

To hope, written about one of her own portraits

Green rapture of human life—

crazy hope. It's a gold rush,

an intricate dream of the wakeful,

a dream of vain treasures.

It's the soul of the world: vigorous senility,

decrepit illusion of lush green leaves.

Happy people hope for today;

wretched people hope for tomorrow.

Follow your shadow in search of your day;

you who, with green lenses in your glasses,

see it all painted to your desire.

It's been my fate to be more rational:

in both my hands, I hold both my eyes,

and only what I touch, do I see.

SORJUANA INES DE LA CRUZ (Mexico; 1648-1695)

REVIEWS:

AFTER CALLIMACHUS POEMS by Stephanie Burt  
Princeton University Press, 2020

Anyone reading this book will inevitably spend some time trying to decide whether these are translations of Callimachus's poems or poems inspired by his poems. Even the press release hedges the question: "Stephanie Burt translates and adapts the work, spirit, and letter of Callimachus to today's poetry readers." In the forematter, the book also cleverly has an Imitator's Note rather than a Translator's Note.

However, this is not meant as a criticism, part of what makes this collection so engaging is how it blurs the boundaries of what translation is in an exciting way. I found myself constantly wanting to look back at Callimachus's original poems to compare as I read. And it's hard to imagine that any reader wouldn't feel the same itch or that the comparison could fail to leave the reader with a more complex awareness of the poems and the subtle modulations Callimachus makes.

Callimachus is not exactly a widely known poet to the general public, perhaps because the Hellenistic age tends to ignite less of the imagination and plays second fiddle to classical Greece. This is a real shame because he is one of the most innovative poets of the ancient world in form, imagery, and subject matter. This volume would be a wonderful entry for anyone discovering his work for the first time. There is a nice selection of Callimachus's poetry here with a good representation of the range of his epigrams and iambs, and quite a few fragments from his longer work *Aetia* as well.

Probably the most notable element of Burt's reimaginings of Callimachus are the intentional anachronisms. For example, Epigram 39 is a poem about a woman Simone making an offering to Aphrodite. In Callimachus's original, she offers an image of herself, her breast bindings, a torch, and her wands. In Burt's version, which is almost twice as long as the original, Simone builds an "idiosyncratic altar" to the goddess:

on it, one tube of lip gloss, a charm bracelet, car keys,  
a rental agreement for a basement apartment,  
a doorbell, a star for a Christmas tree, a salt or  
pepper shaker, the mouthpiece  
for a pocket trumpet, a pill splitter, and under  
them all, a folded velvet satchel,  
in which the lucky couple who stay together into a shared old age  
can keep whatever other sentiment  
-al objects they decide to save.

The offerings in Callimachus's poem are meant to be a distinctive assemblage of mundane but meaningful objects, but Burt's adaptation conveys this far better to a modern audience than a literal translation ever could.

Sure, sometimes these modernizations fall flat. In Book 1, fragment 1 of the *Aetia*, when Apollo exhorts the poet to "imitate / Satie, or Young Marble Giants" rather than to avoid roads with deep wagon ruts, it is certainly a clever reinterpretation but does require fairly obscure cultural knowledge to parse. (Though perhaps it will have the pleasant side effect of nudging some readers to listen to Young Marble Giants). And to me, at least, the rendering in Epigram 53 "But if Theo won't text me back (so many guys / make you wait or ghost you)" comes off as cringe-worthy.

Still, the successful modernizations far outweigh the fails. Besides what worked for me and what didn't might certainly be reversed for another reader. The discordantness of the out-of-time elements works to good effect overall and pulls the reader in, even if getting under their skin a little bit at times.

Throughout reading *After Callimachus*, I could not help but compare it to director Derek Jarman's "Caravaggio" where the jarring deliberate anachronisms not only serve as a bridge to another time but call attention to the artistic construct and remind the viewer that any poem or painting no matter how fluid it may appear only seems so because of the artist's or poet's consummate skill. This concept seems particularly apt to Callimachus, and Burt's adaptation wittily employs these temporally displaced objects to a similar effect to pay tribute to his poetic craft.

If you are already familiar with Callimachus, reading Stephanie Burt's adapt/transl/ation will be an entertaining new look at the poems from a new angle. If you are just hearing about Callimachus for the first time, pick up a more conventional translation to read alongside *After Callimachus*. Either way, you will find *After Callimachus* a pleasantly refreshing read.

~~Joseph Bienvenu

RETURNINGS: Poems of Love & Distance, by Rafael Alberti, translated by Carolyn L. Tipton. Buffalo, NY: White Pine Press, 2016. 160 pages.

I was not familiar with the Spanish poet, Rafael Alberti, before delving into this book. The introduction, by the translator, shares some key facts from the poet's life which give the poems themselves a rich and not too distant context. Alberti was a man of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (b. 1902, d. 1999), mingling with the artists of Europe's interwar avant-garde, involved in the political struggles of the same era. And like the Roman Ovid, during his country's transitional period, he found himself exiled, longing for home. From this



period of exile, we get *Returnings: Poems of Love & Distance*. Ovid was on the Black Sea, while Alberti was in Buenos Aires; this may have been on the mind of Alberti's muse.

The book is a poetic biographical triptych. In the first poem of Part One, we see timeless elements that will recur throughout the volume get firmly established:

“[T]he sea // whispers its soaked secrets to the sands.”

The poet, who initially wished to be a painter, speaks of “a city / blue with clear-cut shadows, / with green balustrades,” and while listening to the sea, its crashing waves beneath “the celebrative / shouts of thunder” on the rainy evening, he claims to “know who's galloping, riding wild, singing / on that black colt of salt and spume.” The sea – the entire night – becomes shrouded in fog. “Have I come back to this: / open my eyes, and I can't see; close them, I can't sleep.”

And recalling friends of his childhood, the ones he'd go across “the lost grove” with (this phrase is also the title of his autobiography), the first one he names is Agustín. This is noteworthy for being developed from Augustus, the name of the emperor who banished Ovid, it being derived from the Latin word *augere*, meaning “to increase.” Of course, we know the turning of *Returnings* can be associated with verse, whose well-known etymology is from the Latin *versus* “furrow, measure of land, row”: agriculture, whose aim is to increase.

There is the sea, a singer and song upon it; there is the palette of life and death; there is the life cycle of the organ of vision: “little children with sweet eyes” in the beginning, and the poet's lament near the end, “my eyes are dying.”

And what about echoes? Those emblems of returnings for the ear. They are mentioned in the collection's opener: “green balustrades / echoed in the evening by thin fingers of foam.” And the very next poem brings the echo to life by imitation:

It begins: “Through fallen jasmine...I escape on this first morning of October...” And it ends: “This morning all these things come back to me...through jasmine fallen away.” The echo turns like the season, and, in the translator's skillful hands, via chiasmus: a mirror built into the language; like the surface of the sea.

Alberti would formally imitate the echo's odyssey again, but intermittently.

The collection's third poem – on the heels of the second's autumnal setting – follows up by introducing spring, in which there is still “the broken architecture of waves.”

In Part Two, the only section with a title (“Love Returns”), there are echoes of Part One – “high seas of springtime,” “landscapes...asleep / or dead.” Poems echo themselves with “In those days you were statuesque...your dazzling foam engulfed me in those days,” and, “When you appeared / I was suffering...at last, you had appeared.” And there are elements new to the collection, but not to the tradition. The poet introduces Dianas, Venus, “all the Graces” in one poem. Later, in another, Pan, Priapus and Echo (!) make appearances. When the poet name drops Rachel, Deborah and Judith, we have returned to the past inherited by his native Spain; or the past has, on the Argentinian fair winds and through its good air, returned to him from across the sea. The poet speaks of “Love, love! Love transforming itself, / bright carnation, into an ancient fresh flower, / rose of the synagogue.” The poet sings of metamorphoses and the art of love.

Part Two ends with the deliciously titled, *Love Returns to a Place It's Never Been*. The formerly aspiring painter hears “all the green music made / by these fields metamorphosed into gardens.” And the entire poem goes on to transform his love: “Your feet would become maize and oats...your legs, slender bamboo.” He concludes the poem by repeating the image of the “music made / by these fields metamorphosed into gardens.” The poet sings of metamorphoses and the art of love. The would-be painter must know the eye loves novelty; but the thwarted painter who'd be a poet instead must also know what Auden said about the ear, and its love of repetition.

Part Three is not for “I” (Part One) or for the beloved “you” (Part Two), but rather it focuses on the special others. There is a poem for sunset, a poem for a beloved dog, a poem for another poet, and a poem for the Spanish coastline, wherein Alberti tells the coastline, “I could live again if you command me to, / or die, I'll die, if that is what you want.” Strangely, the land is personified into some sort of dictator, and the speaker promises to be obedient, unlike the nations who, guilty of defiling the land, are spewed out by it in Leviticus.

Alberti calls poetry “my only sea,” and reminds it, “[a]lways, you come back to me.” In the same poem, he calls poetry “[my] true sister, o compañera, / with me in exile.” (This metaphor brings to mind Eugene Montale's poem, *The Eel*, where he recognizes the eel as both “siren” and—famously—“sister.” It also echoes the collection titled, *My Sister Life*, by Boris Pasternak. And one can't fail to see these contemporaneous poets all lived through their nations' variations on the nightmare of Eurasian totalitarianism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Knowledge of this makes poems titled, *Return of an Assassinated Poet*, and, *Return of Sweet Freedom*, no less stirring or life-affirming.)

He ends with a beautifully sustained paean, *Return of the Spanish People*. Alberti tells them, “Actually, you don't need to return to me. / You are and always have been deep / within the current of my blood.” He sings of losses in war – “Now come the invaders / (O heart, they're hurting you.) – and the triumph of indefatigable hope – “(O heart, they cannot hurt you.)” (This, contrasted with Auden's observation that

“Mad Ireland hurt [Yeats] into poetry,” illustrates a paradoxical relationship between poet and nation, since Ireland never exiled – nor ruled with iron fist – their modern master. If absence makes the heart grow fonder, presence makes a poet’s heart, it seems, find absences to grow in; for the poet, whose aim is to increase, it is where love can return to a place it’s never been.)

The translations are more than ably or competently done. Tipton certainly captures the spirit and intent of each poem, while creating with each, a successful English poem in its own right.

There is a beautiful ending to the poet’s life. Ovid was never able to return to Rome, although The Eternal City’s council did revoke his exile in December, 2017. Alberti did eventually return to Spain. And the translator mentions, in her brief but enlightening introduction, how on his eightieth birthday Alberti read to a packed bullring in Madrid. Tipton surely recognized how history failed to repeat itself with this fact, while appreciating how the bullring echoed the Roman Colosseum like a rhyme.

~~*Jake Sheff*

PUBLICATION NOTICE:

MISTS ON THE RIVER: *Folktales from Siberia* by Yeremei Aipin, Illustrated by Gennady Raishev

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