

## VOLUME 17 number 1

*Ezra* makes a special plea: a translator is needed for the magisterial *Eros maudit, ou Le Sexe des Arabes*, by Moroccan psychologist and novelist Abdelhak Serhane. A historical and sociological treatise on problematic aspects of sex (and sexism) in Arab and Islamic culture. This is a 600-pager, plus notes, in French. Possibly a career milestone for a translator, and a book that might well soar internationally. Published by Virgule Editions (Tangier). Contact Ezra with queries.

A position oft-repeated in Ezra, and also tonic for us all, is the following, neatly summed up in a footnote to Pierre Vinclair's review (in French) of Peter Gizzi's *Now It's Dark*:

It is often said that poetry is untranslatable, since in other languages its echo could only consist of falsifications of the original and authentic poem. It seems to me that we could just as well say that only the *translated* poem, the poem-in-translation, is authentically a poem; because the source-poem is still a medley, somewhat sullied, of all the author's thoughts, his poem-ideas, his intent (which the reader has no access to, and not knowing all these, thus receives the poem as a truncated text); the target-poem, on the other hand, born of an operation (translation) that bears solely on its poem-being, is polished independently of any intention whatever, its whole evolution being in its address to a possible receiver. All of this rests, of course, on that basis of conflictual, complicated and dialectical relations that the poem has with its notorious "intentions"—and also, more generally, on the life of its author. On one hand the poem is made (more or less explicitly) out of this life, and its matter is the very thinking of this body doing the writing; on the other, to succeed in being a living poem on its own it must emancipate itself from this life and fly on its own noetic wings. [Ezra's translation]

Source: <https://revuecatastrophes.wordpress.com/2023/01/13/une-lumiere-dencre/>

There are two features in this issue, Indran Amirthanayagam and Donald Mace Williams. We have said we wanted more Beowulf (some of this work appeared earlier), and when Donald Mace Williams sent us the original we couldn't resist printing that as well.

This issue tugs us toward the East and makes us intensely feel other cultures—in a way that many translations (according to theoretical approach) choose not to. Enjoy the Egyptian and Armenian pieces.

There are three reviews in the issue.

### **FEATURED WRITER: Indran Amirthanayagam**

Indran Amirthanayagam produced a record of sorts in 2020, publishing three poetry collections written in three different languages. He writes in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese and Haitian Creole. He has published twenty two poetry books, including *Isleño (R.I.L. Editores)*, *Blue Window* (translated by Jennifer Rathbun) (*Diálogos Books*), *Ten Thousand Steps Against the Tyrant* (*BroadstoneBooks.com*), *The Migrant States*, *Coconuts on Mars*, *The Elephants of Reckoning* (winner 1994 Paterson Poetry Prize), *Uncivil War* and *The Splintered Face: Tsunami Poems*. In music, he recorded *Rankont Dout*. He edits the Beltway Poetry Quarterly

([www.beltwaypoetry.com](http://www.beltwaypoetry.com)); writes <https://indranamirthanayagam.blogspot.com>; writes a weekly poem for *Haiti en Marche* and *El Acento*; has received fellowships from the Foundation for the Contemporary Arts, the New York Foundation for the Arts, The US/Mexico Fund for Culture and the Macdowell Colony. He is the IFLAC Word Poeta Mundial 2022. In 2021 he won an Emergent Seed grant. His poem “Free Bird” has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Hosts *The Poetry Channel* <https://youtube.com/user/indranam>. His new books, including *Powèt nan po la (Poet of the Port )* and *Origami: Selected Poems of Manuel Ulacia* has just been published (Diálogos Books). Another collection *Powèt nan po la (Poet of the Port )* is forthcoming. Indran publishes poetry books with Sara Cahill Marron at *Beltway Editions* ([www.beltwayeditions.com](http://www.beltwayeditions.com)).

## **Mexican poet Manuel Ulacia:**

### **Encounter**

Give yourself like a stone to the profound  
vertigo of night,  
fall and return to be where we once were,  
be the same, and yet be others  
as if everything were new again--  
the passing train, the blue window,  
my body naked against yours,  
filled with love in an empty room.

### **Tenochtitlan Blues**

Evening falls  
and you finish your trip.  
Tomorrow when you go  
I will look for you in the emptiness  
you left everywhere.  
And if the day is clear,  
perhaps I may get to see the two volcanos  
                  forever covered with snow,  
like the silence that envelops

two bodies that gazed at each other  
without even touching.

## **Visit To Turk's Head Pub**

In the fog lit  
by that yellow and acid light  
that dissolves like ink in water,  
you walk, not knowing your way.  
Reality's appearance surprises you,  
makes you ask if you are not an apparition  
among apparitions.  
Why have you come again into this world?  
To learn all that you have learned?  
To relearn the names of things,  
the smell of fresh lavender growing among the stones,  
the echo of your steps along the wet sidewalks  
like mirrors that multiply the silence of the night  
And break in a mute cry?  
To recognize used-up things?  
The bronze knob of the door you've opened a thousand times?

You stop in the doorway of the pub before stepping in.  
Perhaps no one will recognize you  
and you'll recognize no one.  
Yet the incessant murmuring,  
the tin-tin of glasses accompanying the toasts,  
the mirrors that reproduce your face now and again,  
that reproduce the reality that moves  
while you move, as if navigating a river,  
will make you feel pleasure,  
forgotten by death.

Then someone will come close and pronounce your name,

will speak of your life as if it belonged to another.  
Then you will have again invented yourself.

## **Hampstead Heath**

Perhaps all that's lacking  
is a change of light  
on the water's surface,  
a glance  
that meets another glance  
to leave behind,  
without knowing it,  
a sure world.

You were on the bank of the pond  
watching the small sailing ships  
When He invited you to go deep into the wood.  
And without saying a word,  
iron after the call of the magnet,  
you followed him in.

How much sun spilled  
among the green branches,  
how much pleasure while your legs  
trembled with fear.

Today you remember neither his name nor face.  
Perhaps the only trace left imprinted by time  
is that smell of tobacco and eau-de-cologne,  
which for 15 years has stayed with you  
through all the cities, and is now in none.

## **Visiting Vicente Aleixandre With Bunches Of Holly**

Remember that winter of 1966,  
Hand in hand with your grandmother,  
When you visited him on Wellingtonia Street?  
How familiar everything seemed,  
the stroke of his large fingers over the back of your neck,  
his steady friendly gaze--  
which, seeing in you  
a certain resemblance to his absent friend,  
responded with an affirming smile,  
as if accepting the passage of time--  
the light that poured over the white tablecloth  
while they broke the bread and served the wine,  
summoning the spirits,  
Luis, Federico, Manolo--,  
and after lunch the half-light of the house  
and the silence of the siesta,  
that silence, which little by little,  
while your eyes ran down  
the spines of the books on the shelves,  
formulated its riddle,  
that silence in which Vicente lived submerged,  
dreamed submerged,  
like the diver who looks in the ocean's depths  
for a virgin siren,  
that silence which then you could not decipher,  
from which emerged his poems,  
perhaps as these lines now emerge.

Note: Luis, Federico and Manolo are the first names of three Spanish poets: Luis Cernuda, Federico Garcia Lorca and Manuel Altolaguirre.

## Supper

The blues on fire  
moving constantly  
crash, agree and liquefy.  
An orange sun still  
lights the terrace,  
the clay of the road,  
the cypress cups,  
the city below in a hollow valley--  
a white tide of lights  
that grows while the night  
thickens the wood.  
Around the table,  
friends eat and talk,  
attend a double feast:  
one that occurs up there in the firmament--  
celestial choreography  
in which the day flees--  
and which the dialogue creates.  
In the silence between two words  
a cricket sings:  
the emanation of a star  
sparkles far away.  
Another light shines in the eyes  
of those who hear and contemplate.  
Echo of the echo of an echo,  
star, song and flame,  
Only the poem writes itself.

## **FEATURED WRITER: Donald Mace Williams**

Donald Mace Williams is a retired newspaper editor and writer with a Ph.D. in Beowulfian prosody from the University of Texas. He lives in the Texas Panhandle.

### **Beowulf' s Funeral**

#### **Beowulf, ll. 3134-3182**

The twisted gold was laid in a wain,  
Numberless things, and the hero borne,  
The gray warrior, to Hronesness.  
For him the Geatish people readied  
No trifling pyre upon the ground,  
With helmets hung and battle shields,  
Bright coats of mail, as he had asked.  
The grieving warriors laid in the middle  
The famous prince, beloved lord.  
Men started then to wake on the hill  
The greatest of bale-fires. Wood-smoke rose  
Dark from the stack, the roar of fire  
Mingled with sobs (the wind blast calmed)  
Till it had broken through the bone-house  
Hot in his breast. Of unglad minds  
Heartsore they spoke; of the prince's death.  
A Geatish woman, with hair bound up,  
In sorrow sang about Beowulf  
A grieving song and said with passion  
How much she dreaded the days of harm,  
Great slaughter, warrior-terror, shame,  
Captivity. Heaven swallowed the smoke.  
The Weders' men constructed then  
A mound on the cliff that was high and broad,  
Seen from afar by seafaring men,  
And within ten days' time had finished  
A beacon for the battle-famed,  
Round what the flames left raised such a wall

As the best and worthiest men could do.  
Rings and brooches they put on the mound,  
The ornaments, all, that in the hoard  
War-minded men had seized before.  
They let earth hold the warriors' wealth,  
Gold in the ground, where yet it dwells,  
Useless to men as in the past.  
Around the heap rode war-bold men,  
Offspring of heroes, twelve in all,  
To speak their grief and lament the king,  
Recite word-song and tell of the man,  
To laud his valor and daring feats,

To praise his manhood—as it befits  
That one should honor in words his prince,  
Should love his spirit when he from here  
Shall be led forth out of his body.  
Thus lamented the Geatish men,  
The hearth companions, their ruler's fall,  
Said he among the kings in the world  
Was mildest of all men and gentlest,  
To subjects kindest, on fame most bent.

þa wæs wunden gold on wæn hladen,  
3135

æghwæs unrim, æþeling boren,  
har hilderinc to Hronesnæsse.  
Him ða gegiredan Geata leode  
ad on eorðan unwacligne,  
helmum behongen, hildebordum,  
3140

beorhtum byrnum, swa he bena wæs;  
alegdon ða tomiddes mærneþeoden  
hæleð hiofende, hlaford leofne.  
Ongunnonþa on beorge bælfyra mæst  
wigend weccan; wudurec astah,  
3145

swearht ofer swioðole, swogende leg  
wope bewunden (windblond gelæg),



oðþæt he ða banhus gebrocen hæfde,  
hat on hreðre. Higum unrote  
modceare mændon, mondryhtnes cwealm;  
3150

swylce giomorgyd Geatisc meowle  
bundenheorde  
song sorgcearig swiðe geneahhe  
þæt hio hyre heofungdagas hearde ondrede,  
wælfylla worn, werudes egesan,  
3155

hynðo ond hæftnyd. Heofon rece swealg.  
Geworhton ða Wedra leode  
hleo on hoe, se wæs heah ond brad,  
wægliðendum wide gesyne,  
ond betimbredon on tyn dagum  
3160

beadurofes becn, bronda lafe  
wealle beworhton, swa hyt weorðlicost  
foresnotre men findan mihton.  
Hi on beorg dydon beg ond siglu,  
eall swylce hyrsta, swylce on horde ær  
3165

niðhedige men genumen hæfdon,

forleton eorla gestreon eorðan healdan,  
gold on greote, þær hit nu gen lifað  
eldum swa unnyt swa hit æror wæs.  
þa ymbe hlæw riodan hildediore,  
3170

æþelinga bearn, ealra twelfe,  
woldon ceare cwiðan ond kyning mænan,  
wordgyd wrecan ond ymb wer sprecan;  
eahtodan eorlscipe ond his ellenweorc  
duguðum demdon, swa hit gedefe bið  
3175

þæt mon his winedryhten wordum herge,  
ferhðum freoge, þonne he forð scile  
of lichaman læded weorðan.  
Swa begnornodon Geata leode

hlafordes hryre, heorðgeneatas,  
3180  
cwædonþæt he wære wyruldcyninga  
manna mildust ond monðwærust,  
leodum liðost ond lofgeornost.

**traduttrici/traduttori:**

Andrew Sunshine	(Trunk)
Dana Delibovi	(Foppa)
Caleb Bouchard	(Houellebecq)
C.C.S.	(Chen Bo-Yu)
Yasser K. R. Aman	(al-Abnudi)
Raffi Sarkissian	(Yarjanian)

**A Ship Approaches**

*~~translated by Andrew Sunshine*

Nights and days on the sea are sky and water.  
Solitudes lie grey. They have nowhere to go.  
They are the distance and they are the shore.  
They are always here—and always leaving.  
A ship approaches.  
It emerges from the depths  
Of the lonesome sea.

And rocks  
And sways.  
Suddenly, it splits the air with its mournful lamentation.  
So, cry the waters to the sky,  
So, the waters call to man.  
Once more  
The ship goes silent.  
Having roared out its warning,  
It went quiet in the grey mystery of the world  
And sadly swayed on waves and wind.  
And vanished.

YEKHIEL YESHAYE TRUNK (from the Yiddish)

## **The Heart**

*~~translated by Dana Delibovi*

They say that it's the size  
of my closed fist.  
Little, then  
but enough  
to fire up  
all this.  
It's a laborer

working hard,  
even when longing for rest,  
a prisoner,  
hoping vaguely  
to escape.

ALAIDE FOPPA (Barcelona/Guatemala)

### **The Tearing**

*~~translated by Caleb Bouchard*

The wolves of expansion have entered our walls  
They came across the waste system in the metro  
They work at Thompson or at IBM  
Two worlds look at each other before the tear.  
The computer science nightmare  
Defines our hopes.  
Children of a technology dream,  
We live long distance.  
One day it will be necessary to destroy all the machines,  
In order to finally contemplate humankind's face.  
And very few engineers will escape the pogrom;  
Each new progress brings us closer to ruin.  
Our televised agony

Is sickening without being funny.  
We are tired actors;  
It's time to change roles.

MICHEL HOUELLEBECQ

**Meditation on the Remote Past at the White Emperor City**

*~~translated by C.C.S.*

The sun descends into the deep-green chilly river;  
At eve the sailors pause their paddling  
As I inquire about the local culture.  
This city stands where was once a state in antiquity  
And high platforms here have vanished amidst  
The palace of the crown of Han.  
This remote land Is still within the reach of the court; the contributions  
Of an enlightened and sagacious ruler are still  
Admired and adored in these profound mountains,  
Where rocks are lofty and green cliffs stand apart  
From each other, where jade rivers flow through  
Landscapes that may be hazardous for journeys.  
Antique trees grow beside clouds  
As the lonesome sailboat exits the mists,  
On this voyage on waters and in boundlessness —

How could I ever release myself from  
My endless musings as a visitor?

**Verse in my Intoxication to Military Official Ma During our Delightful Reunion**

I have lived in a lonesome quietude for many months  
As I reside in my hermitage within this profound greenwood  
Where time passes in swiftness and I recite my verses in  
My wandering, solitude, and intense passion.  
Who has understood what is inside my heart?  
Dear sir, it has been possible for me to  
Share my private thoughts with you.

CHEN BO-YU (CHEN ZI-ANG, 659-700)

**Yamna**

*~~translated by Yasser K. R. Aman*

Lo, God! Have you grown old, Abdulrahman?  
Grown old my little'un?  
How fast time passed!  
When and How?  
Growing old among kinsmen  
Is different from growing old as an expatriate.

Have women obsessed you?

Once I have watched you on TV

Another time, they showed me your photo on the newspaper.

I said: "Abdulrahman has grown old !!"

Oh, if so, I have been dead for a hundred years!!

My dear I am afraid least I should live longer.

Sheikh Mahmoud has died

So has Fatma Gandeel

Karma Ghaban's has been sold

And I am still alive

And it seems I will live longer and longer.

I have lived long.

So long that I saw you growing old, Abdulrahman.

They said you got children

Have you got children while growing old, my dear??

You got daughters??

So, what have you been doing

All your past life?

Have you finally come to your senses??

Why have you got children at such an age?

Anyway..

They remind us of you as a wafting scent, triggering memories of you.

They will keep good company of each other.

Well, Abdulrahman.

One has lived till one has seen your daughters and smelt such a scent.

Only now have you thought of Yamna and said: My aunt???"

You are dear to me, Abdulrahman

So dear and deserve to be loved.

Though living away has obsessed you  
You are homesick in your heart  
Unlike hard-hearted ones  
Who forgot us long ago.

Are your wife and daughters beautiful?  
Or they look like us?  
What are your daughters' names?  
People told me: Aya and Noor.  
Could not you have a little son?  
Lo, listen:  
Do you think the sons we got  
Have given us support?  
Man likes to pride in having sons!!

Will Yamna live long to wear  
What you have brought of velvet and castaur ?  
If only you had given cash to me  
To buy ointment for my knee!  
Lo, boy. How dandy you are Abderhman!

It has been six years  
since I sat stuck to the back of the door  
None visited me: strangers or loved ones.

OK, I'll take them...  
They will be useful  
As I will make them my coffin!!



My face teems with wrinkles  
Do you remember Yamna and how her face twinkles?  
Don't believe in what's happening in life  
For lies are much in rife.

My little boy, if death summons  
You immediately obey.

Those who died unexpectedly  
Are still loved and live in our hearts  
As if none passed away.

And those who had a slow death  
And kept holding their breath  
Even greetings were never heard  
From out of their threshold.  
When death comes...open the door wide  
When it calls you... go ahead  
Thus, you win the ride.

Life and death are not a game of calculation!!  
No son or daughter can be a temptation.  
Time lies when it tells a truth!!  
Leave them everything and flee  
Never to look behind you  
Inheritance is but earth  
And lodging with the passage of time is mud.

And your kids will have their way whether you are alive or dead!!

Oh..., Abdelrahman

The course of life is a long span

My dear, those who prolong it day by day are idiots.

I need the ointment to soothe knee pain

Not to prolong my life span.

Don't be taken in by life's different colors.

How beautiful I was, my kid!

I was and was....Woe

A young woman of whom men got scared.

But how would you realize?

You were still a kid!!

My daughters Raddyah and Naggyah

Have passed away

And I have been left, alive

What a life!

Never live a single day after your kids passed away

Never Abdelrahman.

Life is full of pains and hardships people do not recognize

The hardest of all is to live after the death of your kids.

And if it happens, you will know what death means.

When death comes, embrace it.

Are you still telling them in Lower Egypt

The tale of Fatna and Heragy Elgot?

Oh, boy! You were naughty and a devil

Of all kids

You were a rebel,

Away from social circles.

Always are in your charming eyes

Hidden things.

Like the kite that preys on rodents and flies.

From your early years, you have had beaks and nails.

But you were no liar.

I have lived all right

Till your hair turned white!!

The house has become old

Many had already been pulled down

But it was built to survive

Till I am no longer alive!!

Will you come next feast?

And if you do,

Will you visit me?

And with Yamna, will you have tea?"

"I will" and I did.

But neither Yamna nor the house was found!!

Abd al-RAHMAN al-ABNUDI (Egypt, 1938-2015)

## **Revenge of the Centuries**

*~~translated by Raffi Sarkissian*

It is from the summit of hope's iron staircase, where I deliver my epistle,  
I have arrived to you from the valleys of ashes, corpses and anguish,  
And, alas! The blood of my magnificent people still weeps through the threads of my chlamys...  
But my steps are unwearied and my will is all-powerful,  
And my voice is atrociously spirited....  
Although my hair has grayed from grief and vengeance and doom,  
See my eyes, they are as red as those of a demigod, and my appearance is dreadful.  
Under the rays of my prudence and anger, my robust trunk as cornerstone,  
No longer wants to eternally carry that vainglory,  
And the manuscripts of pleas, prayers, mourning and lamentations,  
Where centuries upon centuries, generations have cried their blood and misery,  
I threw aside, as not to descend from defeat to enslavement and from pleading to tears...  
With my thoughts and outrage, I measured the deepest roots of your pain  
I witnessed how your bare feet, like those of a beggar for deliverance, burned from the ashes of  
the ruins,  
I witnessed how you were content in tears and frightened by liberating quarrel...  
I witnessed how justice needed to be created and liberty was to be frantically seized,  
And today, behold, my imponderable fury has lit its flares...  
  
“Behold, I beseech you as well, come and rise on my path,

Sing the call to arms, hence I vengefully and eternally release the stampede of the ferocious  
destriers of my children...

Speak, thus I may blaze forth the beacons of my ideals,

Speak, thus I roll droves of my stones against the chests of injustice,

And together with my fiery and stubborn warriors,

I will also mobilize for offensive my fierce-columned armies of vengeance and dread...

Speak, thus I may sound my bugles with the mouths of ancient heroes...

Speak, thus I may forge my irons and brandish my steel,

Speak, thus I may magnificently saddle my bloodthirsty palfrey,

Speak, thus its hooves rise above valleys and only bolt from mountain to mountain...

Sing, alas, everyone's blood has turned to sun and desires and wrists have fortified,

Sing, Brotherhood is celebrated, and breaths and spirits have been crowned with the same  
revenge of centuries...

Alas, pouring tears have regressed and the beating of chests has ceased,

Alas, unified, all as one, they advance under my Paramount wings,

Intoxicate them still, if you can, and worthily eulogize me, oh balladeer,

I know that your harp longs for the Fatherland like the revenge of many centuries...

Therefore, seize, in stacks, your strings from the zenith's lightning,

Raise your hands and stretch them toward the night's canopy of heaven,

And decorate my head with the glory of a light-flowing cluster of morning stars,

Incense and worship me and when the time comes, immolate yourself for me,

And crush your earthly forehead before the marbles of my monument,

Because it is I, it is I, my name is Strife and my end is Victory."

ATOM YARJANIAN (d. 1915 Armenian Genocide)

## REVIEWS:

*claus and the scorpion* by Lara Dopazo Ruibal. Translated by Laura Cesarco Eglin. co•im•press, 2022. 134 pp

Lara Dopazo Ruibal is the author of four poetry collections, a short story collection and has coauthored and coedited an experimental essay collection, *A través das marxes: Entrelazando feminismos, ruralidades e comúns*. The current collection, *claus e o alacrán* was awarded the Fiz Vergara Vilariño Prize in 2017. It is the author's first work in translation, beautifully rendered from Galician into English by a translator who is not only a polymath, but also a poet who writes in English and Spanish.

Laura Cesarco Eglin is a well-known translator of Spanish, Portuguese, Portuñol and Galician, author of two books in translation and six poetry collection, as well as co-founding editor and publisher of Veliz Books.

The bilingual collection opens with the Translator's Note where Laura Cesarco Eglin names Dopazo Ruibal's collection as one of the best birthday gifts ever. Having fallen in love with the poems, she reached out to the poet and embarked on the journey of translating *claus e o alacrán*. The note also offers context to the collection, while addressing the process of translation and the book's themes. It reads as both informative and personal, offering a certain warmth to the eager reader. Whenever the author and the translator are in contact and share a good working relationship, that creative energy is reflected in the translated work.

The collection is divided in three parts that represent different speakers: lara, the scorpion, claus.

The poet uses these separate voices to explore that interior voice used to interrogate trauma,

violence, and their threat on the *casa matriz* / *safe haven*:

o sol na casa matriz

nunca

queima

the sun in the safe heaven

never

burns

*Casa matriz* rests at the heart of the collection, ever present in the poems. It speaks to the poet's need for a belonging and point of reference as the poems move from an initial state of serenity to a more disruptive position.

*claus and the scorpion* begins with a poem mirroring the calmness of the sea, only to change the serene register to a gloomy one:

i woke up with a slug

shutting my lips

humid    immense

dead

This state of suspension and numbness is further echoed in the same section, with surprising imagery:

velvet slugs slide down my mouth

destroying the mouth's moisture

they move down my face in all their slowness

they are black and they are huge

and have no eyes

I can't speak with this birth of slugs in my mouth

This exquisite metaphor, lavish in its visual layers, is illustrative of Dopazo Ruibal's poetry writing, so deftly rendered into English through the translator's eyes. The whole collection is peppered with sumptuous imagery, seductive of all the reader's senses. There is a constant pull between such beautiful imagery and the trauma and violence prowling the *casa matriz* / *safe haven* that becomes at times, a place, a search, or a longing.

The *lara* section ends with the same summoning of the *casa matriz*, echoing the next part of the collection, where the scorpion feeds on the haven that is the body, sailing the veins to appease its fire:

the sun in the safe haven  
never burns

there are no insects in it

This smooth transition among sections confers the collection a fluidity that captures the poems' musicality, as well as keeps the reader invested. The original text mostly mirrors its English translation, though at times the translator makes craft decisions such as adding a verb or a line:

bato contra as fiestras, contra as portas desta casa  
i crash into windows, smash into the doors of this house

Adding the verb "to smash" in the English translation emphasizes the power of both the verb and the preposition in the original text, rendering the tension of the Spanish line.

Such examples not only reflect the choices the translator must make during the translation process, in an attempt to capture the meaning, the form and the stress of the original text, but also speak to the skillful execution on the translator's part. There is an organic synergy between the two texts, even though Spanish and English are not from the same language family. This comes



from the translator's investment and knowledge of both source and target languages, as well as the particular features of both the collection and the poet.

The English translation retains the musicality of the original text and renders the rich layers of the Spanish lines in a sublime manner. The poems are in constant negotiation between vulnerability and strength and such duality, paired with the textual playfulness, is visceral, mesmerizing the reader.

~~Clara Burghelea

HOUSE ARREST, by Hasan Alizadeh. Translated and introduced by Kayvan Tahmasebian & Rebecca Ruth Gould. Arc Publications, 2022. 105 pp

One of the most reputable Iranian poets, Hasan Alizadeh, first launched his literary career as a short story writer. He published in the fiction anthology called *Tablet* (1967-1977) and later on, published two poetry collections, *Exile Diary* (2003) and *Blue Bicycle* (2015). His latest poetry collection, *House Arrest*, first to appear in English, has been co-translated by Kayvan Tahmasebian & Rebecca Ruth Gould. Hasan Alizadeh won the Modern Iranian Poetry Prize in 2002 for his exquisite verse.

*House Arrest* contains poems from the two previous poetry collections and is inspired by the overthrow of the Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh, in 1953, in a coup led by the American and the British. Exiled, Mosaddegh spent his days near Tehran and the author imagines his life in poems that thematically blend mythology, folklore, fairy tales, Sufism and Bible references.

In the preface to the bilingual collection, the translators begin by referencing another co-translated collection, Bijan Elahi's *High Tide of The Eyes*, reviewed as well in *Ezra*, volume 15 # 2. They link the current project to Bijan Elahi's work as a natural, next step, referencing the two poets' past working relationship but making clear that their poetic voices are different. The versatility of Bijan Elahi's poetry, and his surrealistic imagery are truly little echoed into Hasan Alizadeh's work. Given his discretion and unwillingness to give interviews, it is only assumed that the "I" in his poems can actually be the poet's voice.

Another thing that makes this preface interesting is the description of the co-translation project. The translators were drawn to the poet's lyric voice and penchant for free verse. They began reading the poems together, then reached out to the poet for permission. Projects that bring poets and translators into conversation are always prone to produce excellent work. Kayvan Tahmasebian & Rebecca Ruth Gould even agreed to disagree on how certain poems were completely faithful to the original form, whereas others were an opportunity to negotiate certain distortions.

Their English translation beautifully renders the themes of the collection: time, death, myths, exile, etc. In "Matthew 9:21," the poet reimagines the verse of the Gospel of Matthew in a serene atmosphere that resonates with the little girl's innocence:

The room is dark.  
A cold  
feather  
trembles for an instant on your left hand  
& the hand  
tingling on pins & needles

& when you get up  
alone  
air trembles & until you turn on the lamp  
the feather's coldness is still in the air.

The simplicity of the verse and the language allows the reader to register the movements in the poem and also illustrates the poet's practice of turning biblical tales into mundane events. The "cold" and the "feather" share not only the touch of the skin but also a whiteness that is reminiscent of death.

Hasan Alizadeh's poems are filled with captivating imagery that blends with narrative streaks, alluding to a poet careful about how form complements content. In "Anna Karenina/ November 18, 1910", there is an accumulation of such imagining that seduces the reader's senses:

What a ridiculous dance  
on the wires & broken glasses  
to the black blind cat's black wail.

Sheets were white  
& names & letters too  
& the snow flamed on the windows  
& kisses slid with the breath on the skin

The alliteration of the third line gives the poem an audible pulse and stands in contrast with white sheets and "the snow flamed on the windows." Such a metaphor is grounded by the use of consonance which allows the poet to play with the repetition of the "w" sound to suggest the movement of the snowflakes.

The poems abound in the use of color which enhances their visual imagery: "I put a green leaf in your hand/ a pomegranate seed on your lips:/ red, / my umbrella opened over my head: black." In this sensual poem, "Untitled," the poet speaks to a woman/ the beloved:

Rain washed your mouth and hand.  
Your hand was so innocent  
& your mouth full of lies.

The pairing of colors is obvious and energetic and beautifully portrays the mood of the poem. At times, Hasan Alizadeh's poems read like haikus, since they encapsulate both an emotion and a single image.

Reputable translator, Michael Henry Heim said that: "a good translation will allow the person who has read the work in the original and a person who has read the work in translation to have an intelligent conversation about it." (VIII) I imagine the author and the translators had such a conversation since the translation captures the richness of the source text in a skillful translation. This is an effort that seduces the reader.

Allen, Esther, et al., editor. *The Man Between Michael Henry Heim & A life in Translation*. Open Letter Books, 2014.

~~Clara Burghelea

NARCISSE ON A TIGHTROPE, by Olivier Targowla, translated from the original French by Paul Curtis Daw. Dalkey Archive Press, Dallas/Dublin, 2021. 144 pp

He is obtuse. Oblivious. Off-key. Off-beat. Unidimensional. Utterly self-absorbed. He is Narcisse Dièze, sufferer of "cerebral rheumatism", an unexplained mental illness that lands him

in a psychiatric hospital for seventeen years. In that isolated, cocoon-like environment, Narcisse's only interactions (which never approach the level of *relationship*) are with occasional non-descript roommates and with hospital staff. Among the nurses in particular, he is legendary; he is known to have fathered an estimated thirty-five to one hundred seventy-one children over that period of time. Yet he knows nothing of those children and very little of their mothers. He is content instead to live his own child-like existence within the confines of a mental institution.

One day, baffled hospital physicians suddenly inform him that he is cured, and that it is time for him to begin resuming normal life. Readers accompany Narcisse on his trepidatious journey outward from the hospital, back into society. Pinball-like in his responses to the outside world, Narcisse Dièze ricochets his way incessantly into the minds of readers as he attempts to navigate every-day life. His haphazard path echoes that of the quintessential odd-balls of modern film and literature. He is one part M. Hulot (an angular, fish-out-of-water misfit) in Jacques Tati's *Les Vacances de M. Hulot*, 1953, one part Chauncey Gardiner (a social tabula rasa, as oblivious as a child to the subtlety and complexity of the world) in Peter Sellers' *Being There*, 1979, and one part Rowan Atkinson's Mr. Bean (a self-obsessed, compulsively anxious kook who leaves chaos in his wake wherever he goes) in *Mr. Bean's Holiday* 2007. Gripped with fear and precariously perched on the brink of disaster with every choice he makes, Narcisse wears his excruciating discomfort with the world like an ill-fitting suit. Readers watch him hurtling from one moment to the next, and we marvel at his dumb luck - at how he manages to escape calamity; at how he manages at all, amid the randomness and vicissitudes of what we call "ordinary" life.

Targowla's original French text paints a sparse - nearly flaubertian - portrait of a character inside of whom there seems to be no “there” there; Narcisse has neither depth nor complexity; only anxious self-obsession. In that regard, Paul Curtis Daw’s English translation of this extraordinary work is spot-on. He maintains the perfect simplicity of style that moves readers - first toward the edge of their seats, and then finally toward compassion - for an eccentric who never seems to assimilate fully into the “real” world. That straightforwardness comes through in the translation of the following passage describing one of Narcisse's early outings to “practice” at life on his own:

Il aurait aimé héler le garçon pour qu'il vînt prendre sa commande, mais cela, il ne l'osa pas. Il attendit sagement à sa table, sa valise à ses pieds, ses mains croisées sur ses genoux, ses yeux dans le vague. D'ailleurs, il ne savait pas ce qu'il voulait. Avait-il faim, soif ? Les années-hôpital désirent pour vous. Tout est à réapprendre. (70)

He would have liked to call over the waiter to take his order, but he didn't dare. He waited politely at the table, his suitcase at his feet, his hands folded on his knees, his eyes staring into space. Besides, he didn't know what he wanted. Was he hungry? Thirsty? During his hospital stay, his wants had been defined by others. Everything would have to be relearned... (60)

Worthy of note here is the way in which Daw navigates the translation of that last exquisite, dense phrase, « *(l)es années hôpital désirent pour vous* ». The original, taken side by side with the English, highlights a quintessential difference between the two languages; namely, that English tends frequently toward a directness, or plainness, that can flatten out meaning, whereas French often communicates in more subtle, layered, even aesthetic terms. Daw's choice of expression in English, "his wants had been defined by others", while not as poetic in style as the original French, is nevertheless effective in capturing succinctly what it is to live as a child, wholly dependent upon others - even to the point where Narcisse has no desires of his own.

While the directness and simplicity of Daw's translation throughout the text work to reinforce the essence of Narcisse as a one-dimensional persona, there is yet another interesting turn of phrase in the English version that merits attention. Here again, it arises in the context of Narcisse's fraught attempts to engage with the outside world in his awkward, overly anxious and inexperienced manner. As it happens, the translational choice made also underscores Narcisse's eccentricity and strangeness vis à vis the rest of society. At one point, Narcisse is meandering through town without any plan or destination in mind, or even sense of time and direction :

Il n'aurait pas su dire combien de temps il avait marché ainsi, longtemps certainement. A certains moments il avait même tourné autour d'un pâté de maisons plusieurs fois. L'orientation lui demandait des efforts qui ne

semblaient pas couronnés de succès. Il se trouva donc, par hasard, devant une brasserie. (69)

The translation follows the original quite simply and directly, until the last phrase:

He couldn't have said how long he'd gone on walking - surely for quite a while. More than once, he'd even circled blocks of houses repeatedly. Navigating the streets demanded efforts that seemed beyond him. Thus it was that he fetched up by chance in front of a brasserie. (60)

A translation focused on textual equivalency or transposition alone, without consideration of how word choice plays a role in the narrative, might have included *turned up*, *ended up* or even *found himself* as an equivalent for the French *se trouva*. But here Daw's choice of the expression "*fetches up*" is a deliberate one, and a rather picturesque one at that. Not only is it a precise term for arriving somewhere without intention or plan, but it is likewise uncommon - rare even, in modern English. It is an arcane nautical expression dating back to the 16th century.<sup>1</sup> In that sense the choice evokes images of Narcisse as an

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<sup>1</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary second edition* (1989). Copyright Oxford University Press 1989: h. Naut. To come or get to (a place); to reach; to come in sight of; (also to fetch up the sight of) to sail along. ? Obs.

1556 W. Towrson in Hakluyt Voy. (1589) 108 It is hard to fetch up a towne here if a shippe ouer shoote it. 1632 Lithgow Trav. iii. 96 As we fetched up the sight of Nicasia. Ibid. v. 181 We fetched up the coast of Cylicia. Ibid. ix. 398 We fetched up the little Ile of Strombolo.



old ship tossed about wildly on the seas, landing out of space and time utterly unexpectedly into modernity, not by knowledge or competency but by mere chance of wind direction. In that sense, translation in this instance is a literary tool that serves not only to convey simplicity *as a character trait*, but also to paint a portrait of Narcisse as driven forward haphazardly, ill-suited to the times and ill-equipped for wherever he lands. It is attention to this level of detail that gives Daw's work its own beauty and that makes this translation worth the read.

Readers of English will delight in the humor, wackiness and the roller-coaster ride of this rich narrative. Readers of French and English will know that *Narcisse on a Tightrope* delivers on the promise that is excellence in translation: more than simply an acceptable equivalent to Targowla's *Narcisse sur un fil*, Daw's English version stands on its own as a work of literature crafted to imbue readers with the depth of understanding and compassion for Narcisse that he lacks for himself.

~~Annetta Riley

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