

*Ezra* kicks off our eighth year in fine fettle, with a sparkling winter edition. We were present in New Orleans on New Year's Day, for the first Hands On Literary Festival (sponsored by Burlesque Press)—and weighed in on both a translation panel and an editors' panel. A revelation, at that festival, was Joseph Bienvenu's new translation of Catullus—a wonderful, and filthy, reading (Diálogos Books).

We were also part of a translation panel in South Africa, at a conference dedicated to Véronique Tadjo's work. Chris Fotheringham spoke there about the kind of imbalances Gayatri Spivak has often explored, the unfair power-leverage in postcolonial situations and in the translation of their resulting texts. There is a great deal more to be said. It is evident that a kind of marketplace exists for translations, that is, a marketplace dominated by expectations. There are commercial expectations, and assumptions about which languages deserve to be translated, and which languages they should be translated into. A times we open this market enough to say things like “We should translate more within Africa—from one ‘national’ language to another.” But it seems clear that a separate marketplace, or crossroad, exists, in the *transnation*. That is, an intersection space of cultural identities, and a place where these vie for fairness, definition, representation and expression *outside of* the usual value judgments on language and text, and outside of the usual preoccupations of editors. This is a problem for the new century. Much needs to be done—and not just by artists and intellectuals—for fair trade to exist in this marketplace.

The Ezra Fund is a new fund designed to give occasional support for translations. This will be a hard fund to raise money for—any angels out there? You don't have to dance on the head of a pin, but you DO have to throw money into the air. We, in turn, will sometimes be able to pay copyright costs, or other costs connected with publishing and promoting translations. Contact our editors—and yes, it can be a tax deduction.

There is a review—of Arturo Mantecón's translation of Leopoldo María Panero—in this issue.

### **Featured Writer:**

**Alexis Levitin** translates works from Portugal, Brazil, and Ecuador. His thirty-four books of translation include Clarice Lispector's *Soulstorm* and Eugenio de Andrade's *Forbidden Words*, both from New Directions. In 2010, he edited *Brazil: A Traveler's Literary Companion* (Whereabouts Press). His most recent books are *Blood of the Sun* by Brazil's Salgado Maranhão (Milkweed Editions, 2012), *The Art of Patience* by Portugal's Eugenio de Andrade (Red Dragonfly Press, 2013), and *Tobacco Dogs* by Ecuador's Ana Minga (The Bitter Oleander Press, 2013). Books forthcoming in 2014 and 2015 include *Exemplary Tales* by Portugal's leading woman writer, Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen (Tagus Press), *Tiger Fur* by Brazil's Salgado

Maranhão (White Pine Press), and *Cattle of the Lord* by Portugal's Rosa Alice Branco (Milkweed Editions). He has been focusing especially on Ecuadorian poets in recent years and hopes to introduce more of them to an American public. He has been the recipient of two National Endowment for the Arts Translation Fellowships and is currently on the roster for the Fulbright International Specialist Program. He was a Senior Fulbright Lecturer in Oporto and Coimbra, Portugal in 1980. In addition, he has held translation residencies at Banff, Canada, Straelen, Germany (twice), and the Rockefeller Foundation Study Center in Bellagio, Italy.

These translations are from *Destruction in The Afternoon* by Santiago Vizcaíno

## VIII

*~~translated by Alexis Levitin*

Could we be guilty of this terrible mutation?

We hear our voices

like a feeble manifestation of the end.

Our hands

like abandoned crosses

touch the shadows

and the distance that lies

between the scar and night is a horror.

## XXVII

Here madness is invisible.

It comes to us like an atavistic trait.

I think of it

and I draw near,  
finger its claws,  
challenge it like a bull,  
but its charge feeds on my languidness.  
I see how it tears our tropic tapestry.  
I feel its terrifying spider web.  
Breaking free,  
I cease to be this ludicrous monk.

### **The Sentence**

Women bring him flowers.  
Masked mourners drown out his cry.  
  
Death is felt like a choking dog.

The condemned man,  
like everyone,  
was useless.  
That's why  
they castrated him.

The others,  
the executioners,

carried out their ceremony  
in a garden of ambiguities.

It is the hour of the wound.  
An innocent has been mutilated.

### **Final Image**

He thinks,  
like a decayed worm,  
of the urgency of death:  
that infinite swoon.

Nonetheless he pours forth  
a last drop of devotion  
the way a white butterfly enters a flower.

He does not venture to gaze  
at the endless splendor  
of the reefs that call him.

He dreams, then,  
of his mother,  
his god

and his song.

And

weakly

his head spills down.

## SANTIAGO VIZCAINO

### **Traduttori/traduttrici:**

Alexis Levitin

Judith Skillman

Megan Berkobien

Jan Owen

Kevin Brown

Cari Grindem-Corbett

Tessa Padgett Erskine

### **El Centinela** (from *Cosmoagonías*)

*~~translated by Megan Berkobien*

The war ended several years ago, but he lingers on in what once was the battlefield, watching over the remains. Large highways reside on both sides of the barren soil, where cars skid swiftly by in rows, their silver bodywork setting fire to the horizon. A supermarket stands there, too. They solitarily erected the enormous mass, like a tower, although it has a sign perched on its roof in neon lights. Previously in that place the tanks were set in order, prepared for battle. Even now it is possible to stumble upon a bomb casing or a lost bullet. Yet, the busy passers-by don't notice these things. The man sees those people leaving their cars in the parking lot, diving into the store's great mouth, then reappearing after a few hours loaded with bags and packages. He isn't interested in the fate of those people. He stands guard at the trench's mouth where dry grasses now grow. He takes five steps toward the east and eight toward the west; when he has covered his route, he repeats it.

He sustains himself on canned food and oranges that he steals from a neighboring field by night. It's the only moment when he abandons his post, although really, you cannot treat it as desertion: at night the skirmishes come to a halt and he can rest a bit, eat oranges, loosen his boots. The state of his uniform doesn't bother him. In the pit of the trench he keeps two rusty guns, a soldier's cap burned through by a bullet, the keel of a grenade, and a dead man's jawbone.

In the beginning, they organized excursions to dissuade him: the municipal authorities, the Justice of the Peace, a doctor and a lawyer. He didn't pay them any attention. His wife came once too; she spoke to him of better times, of their house's construction, of a certain pension for which he could apply. He didn't listen to her. He looked up, the whitewashed sky, and it seemed that an airplane was hidden between the fraying clouds.

As for the territory that he watches over, not a single plant has grown, nor would he permit it. He wouldn't allow the construction of houses, stores, or highways. The space has to remain barren and desolate, full of shells as it was before.

With time, the ambassadors stopped coming and he exhaled, calm. The Justice of the Peace, the lawyer, the mayor, and the doctor all forgot about him. As for the rest, the territory he occupies—watches over—has been in litigation, and everyone believes he will die before possessing it. Disputes continue over the supermarket and a chain of car lots. They will construct a merchandise warehouse or an extension to the parking lot. Before cleaning his guns, he dons the soldier's cap that hangs above the telegraph post, and sets about polishing the grenade's keel and the dead man's jawbone. He doesn't trust the memory of the living and he knows that the museums are empty.

CRISTINA PERI ROSSI

## **Leaves through the Devastation**

*~~translated by Judith Skillman*

People with extinguished

candles took  
the worm-eaten sill,  
the gold crown.

Horrible the rottenness that pushes  
into a hot embrace!

And, where you dive,  
ashes  
can not be made,  
are no longer allowed.

He who weeds  
cooks for nothing?

Teach the Beyond  
what flaps with the brilliant  
leaves through devastation  
still as a tomb.

Hand the crystal tray  
to him, give Being a lung.

JOVICA TASEVSKI-ETERNIJAN (Macedonian, contemporary)

**death fugue: a dance.**

*~~translated by Cari Grindem-Corbett*

blackened milk of dawn

we drink it evenings

we drink it

noons

and mornings

we drink it nights

we drink and we drink

we dig a grave in the air

where a body has room

a man lives

in a house

playing

with snake lines

writing

writing, while the shadow

spreads in the land

your golden hair

margarete

he writes it



and goes out

there the air

shines with stars

he whistles his guard dogs

to him

he whistles

his jews emerge

and lets

a grave be dug

in the earth

ordering us

now play

up for the dance

blackened milk

of dawn we drink

you nights

we drink

you mornings and noons

we drink you evenings

we drink

and we drink.

a man lives in a house

playing with snaking lines

writing

writing

as the shadow

spreads through the land

your

golden hair

margarete

your ashen hair

shulamith

we dig a grave in the air  
where bodies share room

he cries  
you  
thrust deeper  
in earth

you  
the music  
play and sing

he grabs the rod  
from his belt  
he swings  
his eyes are blue

cries  
shovel deeper  
you

you proceed  
play the dance

blackened  
milk of dawn  
we drink you  
nights  
we drink you mornings and noons  
we drink you evenings

we drink and we drink

a man lives in a house your gold hair  
margarete your ashened hair  
shulamith  
he plays with snakes

he cries  
play more sweetly  
the death

the death is a master from Deutschland

he cries darker

thrust the tune

and then

you rise

as smoke in the air

and then

you have your

grave

in the clouds

there the bodies have room

blackening milk of dawn

we drink you nights

we drink you

mornings

and noons the death

is a master

from Deutschland

we drink you

evenings and mornings

we drink and we drink

the death is a master from Deutschland

his eye is blue

he marks you with lead bullets

he marks you true

a man lives in his house your golden hair margarete he calls his dogs

on us he gifts us our grave in the air

he plays

with these snakes

and dreams

the death

is a master

from Deutschland

your

gold hair

Margarete

your ashen hair

Shulamith

PAUL CELAN

From *Ocosinco War Diaries*

~~translated by Kevin Brown

## LA MARCELINA

Ms. Marcelina is another one of the women everybody in town knows.

She sells pozol, tostadas, tortillas, pinole and all the treats that are made from corn.

She goes from house to house with her load.

I hear her telling the story, in the kitchen: “You shoulda seen it, ‘cause I wasn’t even scared when those guys came to town. I even went and had a little talk with some of them.

“And you guys, so what do you want?, I asked them.

“We’re gonna rob from the rich.

“Aw, fuck! What good’s *that* gonna do? Don’t tell me you don’t know how to work . . . Well, you got two hands . . . Or maybe you’re cripple. The rich have what they have ‘cause they worked for it. Besides, some rich folks are good people, help people . . . .

There’s also rich folks that are bastards, but what’s theirs is theirs. I’m not gonna go and rob ‘em. Maybe I feel like goin’ ‘round robbin’ or beggin’. I’m alone, and I support my little children . . . .

“But us, we don’t have nothing. . . .

“Well, didn’t I just tell you you got hands . . . ? That’s what God gave you hands for, to work, not just to scratch your nuts with . . . .

That’s what I was telling ‘em when I see, right then and there, that they’re killing the commandant. Feets, don’t fail me now! I didn’t go out selling anymore until the soldiers came! Them, they buy lots of stuff off me. That’s why I even made their tamales for them. Two

buckets full of mini-tamales I brought 'em. They used to go down good on those drizzly days. I just feel bad for 'em, out there suffering for our sake.”

EFRAIN BARTOLOMÉ (Chiapas, contemporary)

## **I Hate Iguanas**

*~~translated by Tessa Padgett Erskine*

*To my mother,  
even though she may not deserve it.*

I hate iguanas. I like to squash them, one by one, with my car. I follow them, corner them and flatten them into the blacktop, leaving nothing but the hide. I wasn't always like this. In order to justify this strange obsession, I confess with shame that most of my childhood took place in a psychiatric clinic called La Ricardo Álvarez. It was a mental hospital for the rich Spanish descendants; the *mantuanos* as we call them today. The hospital was two buildings with three floors apiece that took up three blocks of Bella Vista Avenue, with a beautiful and ample flower garden in the middle that unified the campus. There were many enormous trees around the complex. My father was the director of administration and my mother was the head nurse in the women's building. Because we didn't have a nanny, I went with my parents to work and would play in the immense orchard as if I were in Central Park.

Naturally, I befriended many real lunatics. There was one guy who ran barefoot everywhere wearing a motorcycle helmet. I would rev my "engine" and try to catch him in my Harley Davidson Electra 500cc or bigger. I also remember a pathetic old lady of whom I was deathly afraid, because she would squeeze me and call me by her dead son's name. My mother calmly told me to go along with it; "Don't worry honey, she won't bite you," she assured, laughing. Another guy would pass his days sitting in the sunshine, fully clothed, with temples scorched by the sun. He would dream up strange conspiracies and hurl curses and insults to the left and right. There was yet another large, gray haired man with a slanted face that sat alone in a lawn chair, drooling constantly. He stared off into space; it seemed to me that he was simply fed up. It would take hours to talk about every variety of lunatic that I saw file in and out of the hospital during those years.

One particularly fateful day, an inmate was committed because he was hunting iguanas. He told me that iguanas open their mouths wide because they want to absorb your soul and that they are sent from Satan to spy on us. "They stare at you, and if they bite, only God's thunderous wrath can release you; that is, if they don't desiccate you," he barely whispered, afraid that one of the iguanas would hear him.



On that hot and overcast day, he asked me to follow him to the northernmost part of the orchard to show me something. We went behind the bushes and I was frozen in fear at the pile of iguanas that he had slaughtered. Nevertheless, the biggest one -the most monstrous- was alive and furious. It was attached at the neck like a dog on a leash. "You gotta kill this one," he said, dead serious. He handed me a stone to squash its head, but I couldn't get any closer. The iguana had red eyes and its tongue flickered menacingly. At that moment, it jumped to bite me and whipped its tail around. My screams alerted my mom and the rest of the staff, but I don't remember anything else. They tell me I fainted in the grip of the lizard's infernal claws.

"Still, you were very young when that happened," my mom says, laughing her head off whenever the story comes up.

NORBERTO JOSÉ OLIVAR (Venezuela, contemporary)

*Image below!*



*Illustration: Juan Bravo*

## **Litany to Satan**

*~~Translated by Jan Owen*

You of all angels, loveliest and most wise,  
a God betrayed by fate and robbed of praise,

O Satan, pity me my long despair.

Prince of exiles, they have done you wrong,  
yet vanquished you rise up and wax as strong,

O Satan, pity me my long despair.

Omniscient in your underworld domain,  
great king and intimate healer of our pain,

O Satan, pity me my long despair.

You teach the taste of Paradise through love  
to all the lost—pariah, leper, slave,

O Satan, pity me my long despair.

You lie with your enduring lover Death,  
engendering Hope, sweetest folly on earth,

O Satan, pity me my long despair.

Condemned men take your look, calm and proud,  
and from the scaffold damn the gawping crowd,

O Satan, pity me my long despair.

You can discern the hidden beds and seams  
where a jealous God secretes his precious gems,

O Satan, pity me my long despair.

You whose clear eye sees each sleeping store  
of buried metal—gold to iron ore,

O Satan, pity me my long despair.

You whose broad hand hides the perilous edge  
to guard the sleeper treading the fifth floor ledge,

O Satan, pity me my long despair.

You loosen up the limbs of drunks out late,  
knocked off their feet yet magically unhurt,

O Satan, pity me my long despair.

Great comforter of lowly ones who suffer,  
teaching us to mix saltpeter and sulphur,

O Satan, pity me my long despair.

You who press the mark of the accomplice  
onto the pitiless forehead of vile Croesus,

O Satan, pity me my long despair.

You who fill the street girls' hearts and minds  
with sympathy for hunger, rags and wounds,

O Satan, pity me my long despair.

You, the craftsman's light, the exile's staff,  
confessor to the murderer and thief,

O Satan, pity me my long despair.

Adoptive father to all cast out of Eden  
by the black wrath of our Father who is in Heaven,

O Satan, pity me my long despair.

Prayer:

To you, O Satan, be all glory and praise,  
in the heights and in the depths; from the wide skies  
where once you reigned, to your silent dreaming hell.  
May my soul witness, if it be your will,  
the branches of the Tree of Knowledge spread  
a great new temple over your mighty head.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

**REVIEW:**

LIKE AN EYE IN THE HAND OF A BEGGAR, Leopoldo María Panero. Translated by Arturo Mantecón. Editions Michel Eyquem, 2013. 278 pp.

We are indebted to Editions Michel Eyquem and particularly to translator Arturo Mantecón for this bilingual compendium. It follows Mantecón's *My Naked Brain* (Swan Scythe Press, 2011), which, for many, was their introduction to the legendary Panero. These moments had been long awaited; now, with Gamoneda's death, Panero may be Spain most important poet.

Panero's life in a mental hospital in the Canary Islands—and his tolerance and exploitation of these circumstances—has always given us a double vision: the life, and the breath-taking work. “His life, consisting of provocation, confrontation with orderly society, outrageous behavior, and of being a victim of psychiatric treatment, has created a legend” (from the preface by the scholar Tua Blesa). And then there's the poetry, astounding in its range of imagery, subtle reversals, up-endings of so much human falsity and pretension. The imagery is like Lautréamont, the searing voice of the rest is like Artaud. Panero is also an essayist and eccentric translator. The work challenges: “The materiality that the poem consists of is an indication of the materiality of language, of the signifier before the significance, so that the meaning is placed in doubt, if not made ungraspable inasmuch as the difference upon which language builds itself sends it repeatedly from one moment to another, and on to a finality that never arrives...” (Blesa, p. 23).

And yet any reader of poetry is immediately seduced by the power of concrete imagery, the heritor of French surrealism:

The doves will fly low and enter the houses  
should some day those soldiers arrive like the wind  
and we shall be as naked as a fired blank  
knowing that all Spain wants is to live if possible  
and if not, to be able to cry or drink in the bar  
thirsting through our brows in the white tide

As similar as this is to Paul Eluard, we should note that Panero is a very wide reader (beyond the Romance languages), and this book is full of titles, tributes, quotes referencing Shakespeare, Sartre, Heidegger, Lacan, Pound and others.

Mantecón's contributions are many: to have brought two volumes of Panero into English, to have provided a deeply felt preface which complements that of Tua Blesa, and to have shown such a mature hand as translator. He translates the way more and more of us are emboldened to—not only with sensitivity but also with a reasoned sense of freedom. Compare the Spanish and the English here (p. 138):

Testigo es su cádaver aquí donde boquea el poema  
de que nada se ha escrito ni se escribió nunca  
y ésta es la cuádruple forma de la nada.

A witness, here, is its cadaver  
where the poem gasps and dies  
testifying that Nothing has been written  
nor has it ever been written  
and this is the four-fold form of Nothingness.

There are several happy moves which others might not have felt at liberty to make: the fortunate rendering of “four-fold form,” the upper case N, the line breaks, the addition of “testifying,” the expansion of “boquea” into “gasps and dies.” These adroit shifts perfect the English version,

make it sing, and bring a successful end to one of the strongest poems in the book. The volume demonstrates these successes throughout.

The publishers have put together a substantial and beautifully crafted book, which includes a complete bibliography.

~~Peter Thompson







