

Ezra greets the storm-tossed and the Hallow-weary in this pause before the run-up to Christmas. We have a wonderful issue for you. Remember to look for a January issue—an addition to our publishing schedule—in January (2013).

Thanks to the PEN Translation Committee for the excellent venue—the Brooklyn Book Festival—of a fine panel on Maghrebi literature. We discussed some recent translations, and the way that a translation (particularly of a poem, with the original version facing) can be like an enactment: the way the reader’s eye is caused to wander—the way the reader is invited into the aporia of betweenness—is the image and embodiment of the fractured and uncertain Maghrebi destinies.

We’re pleased to cite another fine essay by Rainer Schulte (*Translation Review*, fall, 2012): “Each translation is the variation of yet another translation, which excludes the notion of ever arriving at the only definitive translation. The dialogue with the text continues with each reading and, therefore, with each attempt at translation.”

Also jumping out at us are the words of young poet Matt Mackey: “Since language at its basic level is a removal from the actual, and the separation of references (words) and referents (actual things), translation comes to negotiate the distance between reference and referent in an attempt to express the relationship. It asks the question, for example, what exists between ‘tree’ and tree?”

Among those who speak Ezra’s heady language are **translationista.blogspot.com** and **Three Percent**, <http://www.rochester.edu/College/translation/threepcent>, highly recommended centers for any translator. Rochester was the site of the latest edition of that superb feast, the annual ALTA conference. The panels, book display and declamations were exceptional this year. If you are a translator, attend next year and meet (yes, we mean it) publishers who are looking for translations.

Be alert for Ez fave Claudia Serea’s translation of the ever entertaining and accessible Adina Dabija. *Beautybeast* is forthcoming from Northshore Press!

The gorgeous scrap below is Arnaut Daniel; James Houlihan’s startling translation caps this issue.

*Lo ferm voler qu'el cor m'intra
no'm pot ges becs escoissendre ni onglas
de lauzengier qui pert per mal dir s'arma;
e pus no l'aus batr'ab ram ni verja,
sivals a frau, lai on non aurai oncle,
jauzirai joi, en vergier o dins cambra.*

Traduttori/traduttrici:

David Ball
Don Mager
Ed Rivers

James Houlihan
Tim Kahl
Harry Leeds

FEATURED WRITER:

David Ball has close to thirty translations of Sacré's work in journals and anthologies. Ball's *Darkness Moves: An Henri Michaux Anthology 1927-1984* won MLA's prize for literary translation in 1996. He has published seven book-length translations since then (including *Ubu the King* in *The Norton Anthology of Drama* and *Passage of Tears* by the Djiboutian novelist Abdourahman Waberi, the latter with Nicole Ball) and over twenty shorter ones, including work by Waberi and stories in *Paris Noir* and *Haiti Noir*. His own poetry has appeared mostly in ephemeral journals and six small chapbooks.

From Time to Time You Meet a Poet

(. . .)

To tell you the truth I could have gone through this country without ever meeting his poems
Never did read a lot of 'em but still
Someone who's becoming a friend
Takes me to the journal he puts out, *Blue Pig*, something
Between dream and derision, "Sand Press"
Says the cover. And through a door like that
Here's Ron Padgett and George Tysh, and so many others, and from time to time
The one who goes from England to the New World,
And all over the world as well, but often passes through
23 Cedar Street in Northampton, Tom Raworth.

(. . .)

Blue Pig through the maples, now it's flying from
New York to San Francisco, bumped off I don't know when
Now it comes back to me:
From Harry Mathews to Clark Coolidge, poetry of the United States
Names, ways of saying (so many *poetry readings*
In the Connecticut River Valley) sounds,
Books giving themselves to you in their silence.

(. . .)

These poems like friends I can't understand very well
Now they're taking you far away (but will I hear them any better?)
Great strides of writing and language in French:
And all of Cendrars magnified in the rhythmized energy of English
That Ron Padgett throws into the reaches of his own language
And Michaux continued
By the humor, irony, uneasy tenderness and pleasure that David Ball
Takes in putting together, knocking around and stroking
The forms of one language into the full strength of another. I remember...

(. . .)

In the country of Ron Padgett and David Ball here I am passing
Through foreign familiar poems (including mine) like you go
Through unexpected landscapes.
What if never anything's really known?

(. . .)

JAMES SACRÉ

Oblique Rain

~translated by James Houlihan

(King Cheops and king me)

1

behind the church door *swoosh awoosh*

we just adore

outside rainsounds

the spongy voice of a blue-kneed priest

a choir singing barbaric Latin to

this rain no longer raining

(echo of there *ever* having been a choir)

2

at a concert, recently, the conductor's shaved head

was a white ball

like the white ball I threw against my garden wall, long

ago,

(painted with a green dog, a blue horse, a yellow jockey)

when the symphony ended
the white ball
rolled away
out the wings of the
stage.

3

Tonight absolutely carnival
all the neon horses hum against a wall
and the wind is full of—what?
crisscrossed revelers
in a velcro night unsnapping

4

a folded corner of this paper
forms a pyramid
so Giza is here,
and King Cheops, his beaked beard pointed

in my fountainpen's nib
all Upper and Lower Egypt stream out in a black squiggling

and here too
the Sphinx is laughing
between me
and my thinking

5

what drums in my room
the walls positively Andalusian —

what are they stopping for
under the gable?

6

This bay is pallid and shadowy
I draw a better bay
with harbor blueprints, churches, sphinxes,
parking lots from which circuses have vanished—

and here they are: my fingers
determining the pace of a girl
leaving the carnival, alone
content (unlike me) with today's day.

FERNANDO PESSOA

**I Dreamed I Roamed on Tian Mu Mountain:
A Poem of Farewell**

~translated by Ed Rivers

Visitors from the sea tell of a Blessed Isle
Tiny, veiled in mist, guarded by huge waves.
(I wonder if it's really there.)
But people in the south know of a mountain,
Tian Mu—Sky Mother—
Wrapped in rainbows and bright clouds
Rising athwart the heavens,
Overshadowing the Five Mountains,
Topping Chi Cheng, the Scarlet Citadel,
Looming even over Tian Tai, the Sky Terrace,
Which rises forty-eight-thousand feet
But shrinks before the Sky Mother
And cowers to the southeast.

Such tales made me long to visit this land.
So one night in a dream I took flight.
I soared over Mirror Lake under the moon,
Watching my reflection in the water,
And came at last to the River Shan.

Old Master Xie's hut was still there—
Xie, long-ago poet of mountains and streams.

While gibbons sent their cries over clear, rippling water,
I put on Master Xie's climbing boots
And climbed up a ladder of bluish clouds.

Halfway up that wall of sky I saw the sun rise over the sea
And heard a Sky Cock crowing somewhere in the air
And was in a jumble of cliffs and ravines
With no path that I could see
Wandering amidst flowers, lost.

I leaned against a rock. Suddenly it was dark.
I heard a roaring as of bears, a hissing as of dragons,
Water over cliffs. Rolling thunder.
And found myself in a dark wood, afraid.
Above me, massive summits
And dark clouds swollen with the need to rain.
A quiet river was there, giving off mist.
Quiet. Peaceful . . .

Then thunder. Again. And again.
The mountains crumbled, and I saw
A sky-cave with a stone door—
A crash and the door split open.
Behind it, a huge expanse of blue—deep, dark, vast . . .
A sun and a moon illuminating gold and silver terraces,
And, clothed in rainbows and riding on the wind,
With tigers playing zithers and phoenixes circling above,
The lords of the clouds, a numberless host,
Descending in their chariots.
With them came The Immortals
Single file, like stalks of hemp.

I shuddered and knew that I had changed.

I stood there trembling while the dream faded
And rose with a sigh to find my mat and pillow.

There was no way back into the mists, the sun-colored clouds.
Faded they were, like human happiness.
The past, the future, everything
Flows, fades, carried away as if by a river.

Now I too must depart. Who knows for how long?
I have set a white deer free to roam among green mountains.
Carried on its back I will find my place among the mountains.
No longer can I bow to lords and ladies.
My face is truthful now—and my heart is open.

LI BAI

Drinking Alone Under the Moon

Among the flowers, me and my wine.
Drunk . . . alone . . . friendless.
So I raise my cup and toast the bright moon,
And she summons my shadow, and now we are three:
The moon, my shadow, and me.
The moon, it happens, isn't much of a drinker.
But my shadow matches me swig for swig.
Boon companions, we three, if only for an evening.
Soon spring will be gone. But now—
I can sing while the moon sways with me
And dance with my flickering shadow.
Let's have fun, my two good friends, while I'm still standing.
When I wake, you'll be gone.
But tonight we can leave our cares behind
And promise to meet again one day
—On the Milky Way.

LI BAI

Seeing Off the Old Poet Meng Haoran on His Way to Yang Zhou

The old man sailed from Yellow Crane Tower
away, away toward Yang Zhou,
in misty March, the month of flowers:
On the horizon a single sail—lonely, distant—
Nothing else—

But the long, long river merging with the sky.

LI BAI

Night: Reflections

Moonlight at the foot of my bed.
An early frost?
Raising my head I see it's only the moon.
And looking down, I think of home.

LI BAI

Untitled

~translated by Don Mager

See on the river's broad expanse
How water tends to come alive,
Out to the sea's wide openness
Ice floe on ice floe rides.

Whether brightly glinting in the sun
Or lying darkly late at night,
They all, inescapably thawing,
Float out to a common fate.

All together—large or small—
They lose their previous shapes,
And, as unfeeling as particles, all
Submerge in the fatal abyss! . .

Oh, how our thoughts delude us,
You, who are the human I,
Is not your meaning such as this,
And such your destiny?

FEDOR IVANOVICH TYUTCHEV (1851)

Ballad Of The Star Boat

~translated by Tim Kahl

Star boat
reveal to me
the far side
of sadness
the side
of the night.

Bless me
white star
antique doll
friend
of my
moist
window.

Lift me
pink wilderness
from the wilderness
that is celestial,
that keeps the
alignment
of the old
dawn's spine
old.

Where the beautiful
star sleeps,
is
it torn
and does it constantly
enchant
a space
in me?
I demolish
myself too
down to the soil
of my curves.

Speak to me,
shifting star!
Why are you
only transparent?
I hate you
when you forget me
for these
roads
on the earth.

Tell me
goddess of stories,
on which points
of the pillow
does this young man rest
that,
carries me
and transports me
to the profound tear
in the infinite,
feet still on the ground.

DENISE EMMER

A Minute

~translated by Harry Leeds

Her perfume could fuel a flame.
Silky strands of hair in the breeze.
And the aroma teases out burning desire
and a river paddler's call.

Her wild free will;
A stretched hand brushes another's wrist,
and tangles like stored twine -- for a moment only---
Love's minute cast in centuries.

KONSTANTIN BALMONT

Between the underwater stalks

Between the underwater stalks,
The pale light, silence, and the deep.
It's only stoically floating,
that we may observe the ship's creep.

Motionless, the stalks spy,
Motionless, they sway,
How quiet their green eyes,
at a private sea soirée.

The verbless deep sea floor,
Noiseless rustling of sea grass.
We forgot land's verbal roar
left it in the distant past.

Semiprecious stones and sand,
The silence of the fishes' ghosts,
The distant torment on the land--
It's good I sank off the coast.

KONSTANTIN BALMONT

Lo ferm voler qu'el cor m'intra

~translated by James Houlihan

Firm desire that into my infinite rhyme enters
Disjunctive can't be ripped by beak or fingernails
Surveillance destroying our soul
Faster than bundled fascist rods
Why not deceive your guardian uncle
Peeking into private rooms?

You can imagine my Mistress—gold rooms
Where a pet slave enters
A role-playing “uncle”
Rain crepitates on the roof like nails
Carried in an envelope he kneels under rods
No other way to approach her soul

But another way to fashion a soul
Exchanging in humble rooms
Incantations conjoined magic rods
Also normalities never enter
Burgundy polish on your nails
Remember Eloise and her uncle

Her cusodial lord secretary uncle
Whose fanatic surveillance cost his soul
When he castrated Abelard gold nails
Smelling sandalwood for memory in your rooms
I am finally allowed to enter
Think plutonium control rod

Once a tendril sprouted from a pilgrim's rod
Carved for uncle
Tannhäuser—so love enters
No margins between souls
No eyes apart from visible rooms
No fields apart no oxide on the nails

Emotions are full of shining nails
Bodies rhyming with grains in the rod
Babylonian towers regal rooms
Eloise did not deceive her uncle
In paradise joys double the soul
Love-propelled Prime Mover enters

Uncle J Z is sending out this song of nails
Of souls possessing such musically notated rods
That our story enters all humble rooms

ARNAUT DANIEL

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