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**EZRA** writes to you this spring from Provence and Barcelona—and evokes the Provençal and Catalan languages, not to mention the old Provençal of some of the 12<sup>th</sup> century troubadours and the fifteen major patois of 19<sup>th</sup> century southern France. We are led to conceive of the troubadours of this region as multilingual—not just because the travelling artists drew from each other, and from Italian works, but because the world they travelled every day was plurilingual.

So Ezra is bedecked as a troubadour, not only going between one patois and another, but working among them.

Our adoption of this role proposes that we might have a common language or understanding, like Arnaut Daniel's language or his code of courtly love. Let's look beyond the common language (English) of this magazine. Even beyond the code that says translating is important and the prestige of the translator is to be raised.

Instead let's think how our focus in this magazine evokes language as phenomenon—language as the enunciator of its own transubstantiation, its own fallibility, its own extinction.

This eerie language, and its service in various literary forms, is the “pure language” Walter Benjamin speaks of. As his view of “the task of the translator” suggests, nowhere are we more caught and lingering just outside of what language says (and nowhere closer to what it is trying to say) than in the act of translation. This is the aura of language in Fotev's ballad, translated by Hristina Keranova in the issue below. In some ineffable way, a “balladness” comes through, and not just in the archetypes of content or the usual tropes of language. Between the momentum of the form, and the veering and baulking of language, the poem creates a vague nostalgia for something we have always known.

How lucky we are to have Jill Levine, known to all of you, as our featured writer—so soon after her triumph with Donoso's *The Lizard's Tale*. The other featured writer is up and coming translator Mark Statman. All three poems are by José María Hinojosa (a contemporary of Lorca), and are the first English translations. Mark's book, *Black Tulips: Selected Poems of José María Hinojosa*, will be out soon.

Ezra has heard your shrill cries. There will be three issues a year from now on. The wait-times to see your work will be reduced.

And Ezra doffs a battered bowler to Tony Ulyatt, for his spellbinding translation of Dolf van Niekerk.

*E coume quand d'uno cigalo*

*Brusis la cansoun estivalo..*

..(quoting Provence's Mistral) ..let us adopt our summer song. And never mind what the ant says.

**Traduttori/traduttrici:**

Tony Ulyatt

David Jones

Chloe Stopa-Hunt

Mario Domínguez Parra

Katya Jordan

Hristina Keranova

**FEATURED WRITERS**

**Suzanne Jill Levine** is a leading translator of Latin American literature, and professor at the University of California in Santa Barbara where she directs a Translation Studies doctoral program. Her scholarly and critical works include her award-winning literary biography *Manuel Puig and the Spider Woman* (FSG & Faber & Faber, 2000) and her groundbreaking book on the poetics of translation *The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Fiction* (published in 1991 and reissued this year by Dalkey Archive Press, along with her classic translations of novels by Manuel Puig).

[Epilogue] from **José Donoso's** *The Lizard's Tale*

“You're not studying.”

I was painting, like now. It was a rare occasion when many of us cousins got together during Holy Week at La Garriga, but they had sent Luisa for some unspecified reason, saying that she

had “behaved badly” at the nun’s school, and they had sent me to prepare for a math exam I’d have to take soon, after several shameful failures. It was raining in the park that was suddenly frozen, deserted and immense, and the house creaked with the swelling that happens to old houses, as it does to plants in the spring. Luisa sat near me to read on a broken down disheveled old bed like the one in my apartment on *Gracia*, curled up like a cat by the fire: I was the fire, the only one burning in that old mansion where other cousins were playing ping-pong downstairs while their mothers were urging the telephone operator to speed up the calls to Barcelona, to beg their husbands to come join them on the weekend.

I didn’t want Luisa to see what I was painting. I didn’t want anybody to know that I painted and didn’t want Luisa to corner me, to seek me out as she had been doing despite my subterfuges to avoid her from the moment she arrived. The Jesuits in the confessional had assured me that what had happened two years earlier was a sin, when Luisa and I were fourteen, and that we would go to hell without even the decency of being able to linger in the antechamber of purgatory.

Everyone had gone on an excursion to Montseny; grandfathers, grandmothers, fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, male and female cousins, servants had all left us convalescing from chicken pox, isolated in adjacent bedrooms precisely in this attic where I was now painting, so that we wouldn’t contaminate the other cousins. Luisa and I chatted, shouting back and forth across the partition. They had warned us, expressly, not to scratch our scabs because if we did this we’d be marked forever. It was difficult to restrain oneself in those attics heated by a dense air buzzing with flies: one didn’t know if what was itching so bad between one’s eyebrows was that big almost dry pimple, or a fly, and one scratched to find out and blood came out and I shouted to Luisa across the partition wall that I was bleeding. She appeared in my room barefoot and

stained by the plague: she too was bleeding. She had torn off a pimple near her hairline, on her temple. She went over to the cloudy mirror over the white porcelain jug on the vanity and said:

“Look. I’m going to look like a monster with this hole here. Nobody is going to want to marry me. That’s what my mother said. What do I care!”

“I too am going to be marked forever.”

She came over to the bed to examine me and sat on the edge, and we began to show each other our pimples, and to compare the quantity and the appearance of the marks. Luisa opened my pajama top and touched my chest. She rolled up her nightgown to show me the pimples on her legs and hips so that I could touch them, and I touched, and then further up I touched her belly, her new stiff pubic hair, her body stained and bleeding and she put her hand under my sheet to seek in the sticky heat of my bed where my body was burning, and then she got completely under the sheet and everything happened with the urgency of adolescents, but with that skill, that knowledge Luisa had been born with:

“Touch me here.”

And then:

“Now with your fingers there, no, lower...Do you like it?”

And then:

“Let me be on top for a while.”

Rain fell on the chestnut trees whose branches we could glimpse through the porthole of the mansard roof crowned with shining volutes and iron lightning rods; it wasn't any old rainstorm but rather the final rainstorm at the end of the world, splitting the sky with lightning, flooding everything with the universal deluge that punished sinners but saved a single couple, which in this case was not us because we were the most impure of all, according to the threats of our confessors at our schools in Barcelona. We knew that we were going to drown. What continued to happen everyday between Luisa and I, until our convalescence ended in the isolated rooms under the mansard that summer, was not only the sin of impurity. Our flesh, in appearance, had been cured of its blemishes but I was left with a little hole between my thick black eyebrows, and Luisa, another identical one on her temple... the stains, they assured us, of incest, that tremendous sin that weakens races, so filthy that the Church forbade marriage between cousins so that not even under the Lord's protection was a union as terrible as incest permitted. Luisa would spell out the word in syllables behind me as I painted, curled up on my bed, enjoying the pleasure of the heat emanating from me, after almost two years of avoiding each other for fear that the pimples of the soul would clamor for our flesh, so clean in appearance. When I asked her, without turning around, what she was reading, she answered:

*"The Life of Lucrecia Borgia. It's about incest."*

I had already read it. It was a red book belonging to a collection of biographies all lined up on the higher shelves of my great grandfather's library. My confessor told me that such a book was there because my great-grandfather was one of the most infamous Catalan heretics, that the whole collection should be burned. But my cousins had already read those forbidden books. From the oldest to the youngest they had passed along this stock filled with a world of erudition.

*The Life of Lucrecia Borgia* was one of the favorites, a guaranteed source of tempestuous masturbations, exhausting dreams, confessions incapable of washing away sins because no penitence formulated a complete repentance, a source where new auto-erogenous zones were discovered by my older female cousins beneath their mask of modest marriageable young ladies, a source of secret silent shameful encounters among my most virile male cousins, which took place in the hasty secrecy of rooms inhabited by manikins devoured by rats and chitchat, or under the trembling protection of bushes alive with insects and cattails during long summer sunsets in the most inaccessible zones of the park. I still smell the perfume of those yellowing pages, of their leather bindings, the broken springs of the divans we lay upon to read them, the hot air in the rooms where we were supposed to be studying, or convalescing, or taking a siesta. But Luisa and I talked only about incest: this time we were falling in love secretly but unhurriedly, talking leisurely about things that captured our imagination, thus to pass over confessions and family, nuns and priests, and to go to forbidden movie theaters in Barcelona and to see together in the light of day parts of the city which at other hours, we knew, were infested with what they called “vice.” I had stopped having friends at the Jesuit school, and Luisa at her boarding school, and as soon as we returned to our own homes on the weekends, not letting anyone else know about our relationship, we would call each other on the phone to meet, to go out together and see the city.

JOSE DONOSO

**Mark Statman's** recent books are *Tourist at a Miracle* (Hanging Loose, 2010), poetry, and the translations *Black Tulips: The Selected Poems of José María Hinojosa* (forthcoming University

of New Orleans Press, 2012) and, with Pablo Medina, of Federico García Lorca's *Poet in New York* (Grove 2008). An Associate Professor of Literary Studies at Eugene Lang College, his work has appeared in nine anthologies and such publications as *Tin House*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Occasional Religion*, *Inventory* and *APR*.

## **Mystery**

*A Francisco G. Cossío*

The wind licks with anger  
the tops of the trees  
and while it slowly flees,  
it takes from its trunk  
the sap of silence.

A ghost of a boat  
passed through its reflection  
and with a blow from its oars  
took the ocean's light.

The night goes barefoot  
and eats with its breath  
a warp of noise.

They hear in the port  
the roar of the cables  
and laments of blacks.

Where does the star go  
that slides in the sky  
and divides its body in two  
bleeding light  
fountain of air?

### **United by Light**

Under the same light  
our heads.

Your heart and mine  
sing over the stones  
when the night hides  
the roars of the beasts.

Your heart and mine only sand?

Through the desert, the camels pull their grief  
and they carry in their eyes an oasis of palms.

Your heart and mine  
only sand?

Through the desert, the camels pull their grief

and they carry in their eyes an oasis of palms.

Your heart and mine

only sand?

Our shadows united

flower on earth.

### **Without Knowing Why**

Through a valley of wings

filling the universe

your body made of dawn's light

comes to me.

From your forehead fell

bold stars

and your blood-tinged voice

paralyzes my life.

My trembling feet walk

by walls of stone

and in a forest of fig trees

the autumn surprised me.

JOSE MARIA HINOJOSA

## **Ballad of the Man with the Stolen Face**

*~~translated by Hristina Keranova*

I am the sculptor and I turn into gold

the clay in my hands.

Each person brought a face to me

as the summer or the winter does.

They came in silent,

old, young, and children.

They came with their faces and persistent

they wanted better shape.

My generosity was fair

and not a stupid hearsay.

For a single pretty feature,

I made prettier the whole head.

And fate was very light

a light boat in my hand

until a man came home at night

with a face stolen and bland.

And in the purple sparkle of sunrise

he made falter my hand's might

Make my face, please!

Oh, your face! So be it!

I recall how on the town's stage,

we watched him with radiant smiles

as Romeo with a rose, as Carlos with a sword,

and we wept when he died ...

When he resurrected, we threw flowers

although too poor for flowers

and in the hushed hall as if blind

with triumph in the eyes, we grabbed -

ardent, eager, wild - handfuls of

his face and turned beautiful.

When all was over, dazzled,

rapt, enchanted,

we pushed out the broad exit

like some lucky brigands

and the night slowly turned us

into ecstatic or rejected lovers.

While he, in his cell backstage,

would toss his splendid cape

and with twitching fingers lift again

the gray lead of his curls.

Until with perfect clarity

when the dawn woke up the world

and the bright red sun

was rising newborn,

a big and dreadful mirror

revealed his pathetic pallor ...

As in a trampled hearth, he raked

in it for pain but found nothing.

Then just kissed the small hand

of the concierge whose eyes lit up

and headed out on the wobbly legs

of all dethroned kings.

And in the purple sparkle of sunrise

he made falter my hand's might

Make my face, please!

Oh, your face! So be it!

He waited and stood stern.

That was so awful and odd.

So awful that tears ran down

a stone head of a child.

I shuddered and asked

Where's your real, vibrant face?

I couldn't tell if he laughed

or cried, his hands hanging limp.

I quietly asked and then madly

I yelled and pounded on walls.

Then many people loudly

rushed in, women and men.

Like trained birds, they brought back

their most beautiful trait

and out of the stone my knack

a vibrant face did create ...

The proud and passionate mouth

shone in the kind smile.

The cathedral arch of the brow

gracefully loomed in the night.

And his face turned out so

that it could even talk,

it could laugh, yell, weep,

it could die out, and still glow.

HRISTO FOTEV

### **Three poems**

*~translated from Russian by Katya Jordan*

#### **Untitled**

By every doorway, on every street corner,  
With our eyes fixed, accepting the torment,  
We're standing like phantoms, without kissing,  
We're standing like monuments to each other.

We're walking, the two of us, and behind us  
All kitchen fights die down.  
Every house is bedecked with mirrors:  
Only you and I are reflected in them.

Time has released years of idleness  
But didn't grind them into eyeless sand.  
It's you and I who are sleeping in every bed,  
Who are driving to intersections in every car.

Going through us, for a hundredth time  
A divorcing angel of the night hour passes.  
We will be awakened two minutes apart,  
So we do not happen to meet each other.

### **Untitled**

With the earth's saw and the heaven's emery  
We were scraped off and made as we should be,  
Arranged with or without love,  
Separately from spring and the falling leaves.

Do not recall how the earth gnawed on us  
With her broken and rusted teeth.  
Now poplar trees like pipes are humming  
And sweep the sky in front of us.

We've memorized each turn by rote  
Like statues, into whom without nature  
A winding mechanism and a key were installed—  
Unbending, spiteful pedestrians.

And forever, from seven to seven,

Like people on a cornice of the Hermitage  
We keep moving along the edge of the earth,  
Separating a frame from a landscape.

## **Untitled**

By heart, bypassing all the alphabets of the world,  
Leaning afresh towards your own nature  
You will bend over its railing:  
You are being interpreted from the wrong language.

With your gaze you will reach yourself, barely:  
Clouds underneath, haze, it's dawn already.  
Someone is lying on a ledge of an empty bed  
Like a comma that dropped out of a text.

ALBINA SINEVA (b. 1968, Voronezh, Russia)

## **Mowing There**

*After 'A Charles de Bordeu' – freely translated & adapted here, by Chloe Stopa-Hunt*

and mowing there in a regular flood of sun,

where the thin stalks fought  
and the lean dog was yapping, duty done –

life was – the peasant poured his obscene  
words over a beggar caught  
red-handed in the teeming beans –

forest lay all about in scraps of black  
and the scent of warm pears might  
creep stringing out from every garden crack –

the sky wore white and blue, and in the hay  
I heard the heavy flight  
of quails fall silent – slowly, like a silent day

FRANCIS JAMMES

### **Long Journey to Ithaca**

*~~translated by Tony Ullyatt*

I know the fury of the sea,  
the gouts of blood at Ilios  
and all the other places  
where Aithon walked and thought  
of a plan to liberate the fresh idea  
from the defences of Ilios.

I know how death has altered with time,  
that for every drop of blood  
and every gamble in uncertain time  
I would have to tarry,  
without you, but encircled as if  
by the sea, by enticing women's voices  
and soft bodies along the rocky coast where  
death is the destiny of the castaway.

Voices, sound waves from the sea,  
voices in rainbows  
that shift unattainably  
to new horizons; sweet as honey  
in my youth. All the organs rejoice and tingle –  
voices with feelers that caress,  
voices with little mouths that cling fast to the brain,  
allows the thought to sleep, the will to dim  
until only longing for oblivion still remains.

To die in her voice,  
her everlasting song  
about death and life gone  
as deep as the heart's sweet spot.

Goddess with the fine hair  
sings while she weaves

whatever goddesses spin for their bodies;  
her doors swing open, her hair fans out  
baring her breasts  
and I go in  
where honey and wine  
induce trances  
and I become her beast  
losing sense and reason with abandon  
but later, caught in oblivion,  
remain no more than a lapdog in her bed.

Circe and Calypso hide in every woman  
- nymph or goddess living among the peaks  
or in the valleys; whose nature and soul  
are like seaweed entangled in a storm  
swaying between desire and will for power.  
After all the blood and sweat,  
how the warrior craves  
to be a boy again and  
lie on the breasts of a woman who waits and knows:  
The man is home and still.

With what name shall I invoke him,  
Earthshaker who clutches continents in his salty  
grasp, Bluehair who commands the storms –  
he who hated me from Ilios  
who abandoned me to the mercy of sea and wind

and voluptuous goddesses;  
how may I ask as I dare not name him:  
that I long simply to get back home,  
that the deadly sea is already calm enough  
that I am not blown from one disaster to another.  
How does mercy seem when it ordains I must destroy  
his one-eyed son's sight, burning the world out of his life  
so he cannot count his sheep and so that I can cling  
to his beloved ram's maw and escape  
being a cannibal's midday meal?  
Did he hear Cyclops's howling  
or pretend to be deaf and blind?

“Just listen, bluehaired god who binds the sea around the earth;  
I am still your child, you pride yourself on being my father  
then fix it so that this city-wrecker  
will never see Ithaca again!  
Let his misery grow and never leave him!  
Of course, this nobody outwitted me but lash him  
tight to your fury, shorten his breath all the days of his wandering  
and let him doubt whether he was Ilios' destroyer.”

For the dead who remember Ilios,  
all who have satiated the earth,  
I prepare a mausoleum with all  
the ceremonies I know;  
enclose each with lamentations

so that the dead cannot avoid me but  
with their knowledge of before and after  
death can lead beyond the god's hatred  
to Ithaca:  
comrades in the struggle who lie unburied  
somewhere, even those who after the triumph  
got lost on their way home and  
had to die silly deaths in foreign places.

Broken vision: my mother in tears  
from fretting and wondering about her son  
in Ilios; my father, left alone,  
withdrawn into a hovel,  
name and status cast off, from  
free will diminished to a non-entity,  
dressed in skins and sandals.  
I want to hold her, she slips  
away in the intangibility of death;  
far from the present, looking derisively  
at the fatuity of life.

At last, the prophet with the golden staff,  
the wise soul from the barren lands,  
risen above the babble and shallow thought,  
amazed that anyone from the sun's light  
hankers after future knowledge of the deceased.  
"How deep must this soul's solicitude go

that he does not believe his own mind  
but in desolation wants light on hope?  
Here, life is indeed banished,  
everything is stripped to the bone –  
like the light only  
the soul must persist.  
I must tell you frankly:  
Earthshaker's rancour still simmers in his heart,  
he keeps watch over you but lacks the all-seeing eye  
of the Sun God you must find on your journey –  
an island where holy cattle graze  
where you must hold your haste in check  
to tame the temptation to eat  
and fast to cleanse your body and mind  
from everything you would regard as purely human.”

After the confessions of the dead  
do I know who I am?  
The aftermath of life and death  
is quite vague, so which comes first  
and which comes later?  
The living forget how fecund  
the bond with the dead is – Hades,  
keeper of the gates, indeed gathering  
the best of the harvest.

Am I then Agamemnon on the water,

nightwatcher of the stars over his prow,  
awake with longing for Mycenae  
after the blood and sweat of Ilios,  
unaware he has already died  
in his wife's heart?

Am I Achilles who, with vengeance  
and prowess, avenges Hector  
and knowing nothing of mercy  
drags his trophy through the dust of Ilios?  
Will I really plug my ears with wax  
so as not to hear the sirens' song  
while my bones are pining  
to overnight in imagined thighs?

Do you in far Ithaca perhaps suspect  
that after twenty years  
as a hostage of a jealous god I  
have buried my image of you  
that my heart gambols like my ship  
on the unpredictable sea;  
could suitors make you believe perhaps  
that my promise and longing  
like Cassandra's visions of Ilios  
are as doomed to disbelief;  
have waiting and tears hardened  
your homesickness to rancour

and has each gaze at the empty horizon  
unravelling hope into reproach?

Now, leaves are falling in Ithaca,  
every branch stripped to the bark  
so only memory remains  
of all the colours that once were there.  
Perhaps the rain will come  
and drops teeter at the tip of a branch,  
each a world of sorrow  
of coming and going that quietens in loss.

And Ilios where thousands of  
bodies lie heaped on the earth,  
life a damp spot in the dust and shields and spears  
lying around like abandoned toys.

Now, on foreign coasts, I must hear  
how waves smash over the rocks –  
a thousand oars splashing in my head,  
and drawing the fleet  
from the beaches of Ilios;  
all the curved, cavernous and rosy-cheeked ships  
cargoes with rage while  
over the bluest water the gulls scythe.  
On the horizon, everything so bright  
as a thousand eyes detect the silhouette of Ilios:

every expectation in heart and limb  
so pure and of one will, packaged for power.

But after all the blood and dust  
what remains of anything;  
the sky was empty, speckled only with ravens  
in their swirling flight.

Of all the will and beauty there  
nothing could be seen and in *this* valley  
and the acrid smoke of pyres  
remorse came to rest.

But we were not granted even this  
and had to retreat  
from the wrath of the gods  
over the hubris and conceit of mortals.

To be quiet  
in the ringing of living and dying,  
to be quiet  
before the gods arbitrarily  
stretching life's thread;  
without fear of silence  
to be quiet.

How many gates must  
I pass through to the silence;  
is every gate an inner test

for me to understand the silence?

Silence rarely comes in waves,  
it does not lap against your prow  
and Earthshaker who does not know silence  
will forever in his fury  
plough through wind and water.  
Thus he condemned me  
to where I now stand here  
before the Ilios of silence:  
that again I must contrive  
another trick to conquer  
the abductors of silence.  
To be quiet,  
to return the self to the self  
and to come home to the homeless  
spaces of the spirit.

DOLF VAN NIEKERK

## **A Bulgarian Woman**

*~~translated from the Bulgarian by David M. Jones*

The battle drew near to town. News spread that the enemy armies were numerous and pressing powerfully. Old and young alike, women and children, everyone rushed to help, each

as they could. They emptied buildings for hospitals and put in beds, and they collected bags of old clothes. Luxurious carriages hurried continuously along the highway carrying the wounded; convoys of horse drawn carts carried boxes of ammunition. They also carried water, but they weren't in time. Around noon, the sun was scorching hot. The field around the positions was as dry as a desert, and the soldiers carefully divided the few mouthfuls of water to moisten the parched lips of those dead tired from the heat. Constantly and secretly, it was said that the cannons and machine guns would overheat from the continuous shooting if they weren't allowed to cool. Moreover, those arriving from afar cried, "Water! Hurry up with the water!" They were banging on kettles brought for the wells and fountains, while a crowd, like a great and strange procession, went single file from the town to the field: saddlebags, carriages with all sorts of barrels, women with cowl staffs,<sup>1</sup> children with jugs in hand. Everyone hurried encouraging each other, and across every face were alarm and the most loving concern.

One of the women first leaving town with a staff on her shoulder was called Sheena. She was forty years-old, nimble and a strong woman. In the little, nearby towns, everyone knew each other, but Sheena had a different sort of fame. She was poor, but her industriousness was proverbial, and in her good conduct and strict piety, no one dared find hypocrisy. Her strict morals and her virile energy gave her some strange quality just as unusual as her name.

Whenever speaking of her, one would straighten one's shoulders and smile.                      Nothing bad was ever said about her.

The women and children walking with Sheena turned off at the medical station or waited to meet the soldiers, but Sheena had heard that the machine guns desperately needed water. Where are they? How will she find them? She didn't know anything about machine guns and didn't understand why water was necessary. Time and again along the road, she heard soldiers say,

"They've overheated. They won't be able to shoot. We need water." She knew she must move forward and quickly. The battle raged ahead of her with all of its strength. Everywhere along the horizon rose tall, black posts from the mortars; the milky balls of shrapnel covered the sky like a net. The resounding cannons fired impatiently and often. But among the detonations, Sheena heard a single gun firing dryly, short and consecutive like a sewing machine. "Maybe that's them," she thought, but there was no one nearby. To the left, along the highway soldiers were marching and ammunition wagons sped by, but they were far off.

Only one person passed, and at close range, she knew him as Kiro the wagon driver. He approached her, stopped and appeared not the least surprised to see her here. Kiro was Sheena's neighbor and knew her well.

"How is the battle, Kiro?" she asked him.

"It's well. We'll stop them. The enemy won't make it. But you've done good! They need water."

Beyond the line of the hill, she again heard the same harsh and fast shooting, which divided itself distinctly from all the other detonations, as if some sinister and fantastic bird were crying out.

"Do you hear them? That's them."

"What?"

"The machine guns! Listen. They're mowing 'em down! There they are by the hills. They need water; their guns are overheating. I was there."

And with importance, like a person who understands this work, he interjected, "Ya' know, the machine gun is a such thing that just won't work without water. Such a delicate thing."

Kiro was ready to say more, but Sheena walked on. She now knew where she must go. The wagon driver was a babbler and a great sinner; he loved to boast and talk about jobs that he had neither seen nor heard. He was not officially a soldier, and he hardly knew what a machine gun was. Any other time, Sheen wouldn't have listened to him, but today Kiro looked like all the others: good, honest and solemnly serious. Today, she believed him.

"There they are by the hills!" he shouted from behind her. "Ahead, straight ahead!"

But Sheena didn't hear him. She saw very well the short hills no more than a thousand paces away. She walked faster, torturing herself to step lightly in order not to spill the water. High above her something rushed by as if a heavy bird were quickly passing, silence, then she immediately heard a dull and deafening shot. This noise let out a sigh and the dull shots increased in frequency. Already rather close, the cannons continuously resounded like claps of thunder. In a choked, deafening voice, a "hurrah" echoed, but everything she heard, passed quickly like in a dream. Amongst the terrible and many-voiced noise of battle, she pained herself to locate the firing of the machine guns. Several times, she heard them, but now it was no longer constant, as earlier, but short bursts between steadily longer intervals, and she was seized by a fear that she would not make it in time. "And will the water be enough? Maybe there are many of them." She was also afraid that some of the living, able-bodied and strong, might be losing the last of their strength from exhaustion and thirst. "The machine gun is such a thing -- without water it doesn't work," she thought recalling Kiro's words.

Unexpectedly, as she was descending into a small ravine, she found herself facing many soldiers and horses, heaping stockpiles, as if they had sought refuge from the storm. The horses were loaded with green boxes. More boxes were on the ground, and the soldiers were quickly taking some kind of long bands resembling cartridge belts out of them. The soldiers worked feverishly, but when they saw the woman they stopped and stood up straight.

"Water!" several cried out at once, but Sheena wanted to verify that she had arrived where she intended.

"Boys! Are the machine guns here?"

"That's us!" all answered at once, and joy and surprise filled their faces.

Sheena set down the staff. A soldier descended from the hills sprinting. He was burnt, his eyes blazed with feverish haste, and around his cheeks appeared black sinuous streamlets of dried sweat. He was blond, thin and handsome.

"Who brought the water?" he asked. "You? Bravo! A little longer and we wouldn't be able to shoot."

He grabbed one of the kettles and quickly ran up towards the hills. The soldiers crowded around the other kettle, one after the other, dipping mess tins and drinking thirstily. Sheena looked aside. Tears filled her eyes. "Gently boys, gently," she shouted. "I'll bring you more." The blonde young man returned with the kettle. He was hurrying and breathing heavily.

He said, "We need more water." Without saying anything, Sheena took up her staff and quickly went down towards the town. Several minutes later, she heard the machine guns begin to fire more vigorously and then an extended calm. She smiled. The same fantastic bird she

heard before, cried out. She satisfied her thirst and again undertook her work in good conscience.

In the evening, Sheena carried much more water. And the soldiers who walked along the highway, the wounded heading to the medical stations, the orderlies on their galloping horses, everyone watched with astonishment this tall woman, dressed completely in black, who alone, balancing kettles on her shoulders, was traversing the field straight towards the positions while tempestuous battle raged all around.

But the last time she went to the positions, Sheena didn't find no one. The soldiers and the horses weren't there. The detonations were heard somewhere further off. She went towards the hills, but no one was there; the trenches were empty; cartridge cases were scattered all about. The machine gun up on the hill had been taken down. The sun was setting. Far in the east, along the top of the vast hill, where the horizon closed, appeared a big, black mass of people. They were hurrying towards the far side. Further away, a crowd, like a black throng of ants, ran scattering through the yellow, stubble fields. A little above them, rose the white curls of smoke as over a big city. Their cheers sounded like a cannon's thunder.

And as if she were pointing this out to someone, she stretched out her arm. Under the black kerchief, her face was pale, her eyes burning. The stern profile and wise pose recalled of the inspired image of some Sybil.

"God!" she cried. "My God, hear us! They're running. They're running."

She began to laugh nervously, a dry, artificial laugh, and she felt terribly exhausted, her body crushed. Her legs failed her, and she sat on the ground.

<sup>i</sup> The staffs mentioned here have hooks on each end and are used to carry kettles of water.

“A Bulgarian Woman” (1917) is highly representative of Yordan Yovkov’s early prose in which, he depicts Bulgaria’s involvement in the Balkan wars of 1912 – 1913. During this period, Bulgaria and other states pushed the last of the Ottoman forces from the Balkan Peninsula and then battled each other to decide national borders. Yovkov represents the Bulgarian struggle in this conflict as heroic, and war as a morally right. However in World War I, this changed when Yovkov became increasingly disillusioned with war and began writing about the simple lives of peasants. His short stories are classics in Bulgarian literature and a significant part of the national curriculum.

## YORDAN YOVKOV

### **Medea**

*~~translated by Mario Domínguez Parra*

In dreams, it is frequent that different meanings are condensed into a sole object expressing them  
all.

Carl Gustav Jung, *The Complex and the Unconscious*

The key will search for the desired place, follow it into the depths: it will take you to the  
Mothers.

J. W. Goethe, *Faust*

*A woman sitting on a chair.*

*A man filming her movements behind a camera.*

*Alone.*

*In a rather disordered studio.*

WOMAN

Ready.

MAN

Well.

WOMAN

Whenever you want.

*Silence.*

MAN

Turn your head a little to the left.

WOMAN

Yes.

*Silence.*

MAN

Now look at me, but don't move.

WOMAN

This way?

*Silence.*

Last Sunday I was in Paseo de San Juan.

*Silence.*

The weather was nice...

*Silence.*

MAN

Now, your shoulders...I want to see them well.

WOMAN

*Shows one of her shoulders.*

It's a pleasure to go for a walk in this weather.

*Silence.*

There were many people.

*Silence. Shows the other shoulder.*

Children too.

*Silence. Laughs.*

It's very funny to watch grandparents with their children.

*Silence.*

MAN

Roll over to one side.

*Silence.*

Tie your hair back.

*Silence.*

Show me your neck.

*Silence.*

WOMAN

*Ties back her hair.*

The youngest go ice-skating.

*Shows her neck.*

It is what one expects while walking along Paseo de San Juan.

*Silence.*

MAN

Now, try to look at me. Slowly, very slowly...

*Silence.*

WOMAN

Because one goes for walks...

*Silence.*

MAN

Like that.

WOMAN

...And finds all this.

MAN

Keep on looking at me.

*Silence.*

WOMAN

The half-light of the evening, children playing...

*Silence.*

MAN

Raise your head a bit.

WOMAN

*With restrained emotion. Low voice.*

My girl...

MAN

Have you got children?

*Silence.*

A daughter.

*Silence.*

I thought you knew.

MAN

No.

*Silence.*

I wasn't aware of it.

*Silence.*

WOMAN

Now you know it.

MAN

I would love you to show me your ankles. I would like to see them.

*Silence.*

Let's see.

*Silence.*

And your legs. Too. If you don't mind.

WOMAN

No, of course not.

*She shows her legs. Silence.*

Sometimes, we make mistakes.

*Silence.*

Ignorance, isn't it?

MAN

Could be.

*Silence.*

WOMAN

Are you married?

*Silence.*

MAN

Yes.

*Silence.*

Well. Actually, I'm not.

*Silence.*

I mean I have lived with women.

WOMAN

Me too.

*Silence.*

I mean I have lived with men and women.

*Silence.*

MAN

Please, could you undo your shoes?

*The woman undoes the straps of her shoes which come up to her knees. When she is going to take off those shoes...*

No, it isn't necessary for you to take them off, for the moment.

WOMAN

I would like to.

MAN

As you wish.

WOMAN

*Takes off her shoes and stretches her feet, first, and then, her legs. Silence.*

I was telling you something before, but...

MAN

I was wondering if...

WOMAN

Ah, I remember now.

*Longer silence.*

Have you ever walked along San Juan?

MAN

Sometimes.

WOMAN

You have noticed that, before, there were ducks in the pond and, now, they have removed them.

MAN

Were there ducks in San Juan?

WOMAN

Yes.

*Silence.*

Always.

*Silence.*

MAN

The police?

WOMAN

I think they were stealing them.

*Silence.*

Neighbours. People.

*Silence.*

MAN

And now aren't there any?

WOMAN

No, there aren't any left.

*Silence.*

MAN

May I help you with your stockings?

*Silence.*

WOMAN

Do you want me to remove them?

MAN

Yes, please.

*Silence.*

WOMAN

I don't mind.

*The man leaves the camera, approaches her and helps her with her stockings.*

Do you live with a woman?

*The man doesn't answer.*

Is it OK like this?

MAN

*Returns to initial position, behind the camera.*

Now, raise your skirt very slowly.

*Silence.*

But look at me.

*Silence.*

Cover your legs with your hands. Very slowly. From your toes.

*Silence.*

Like that.

*Silence.*

WOMAN

What's wrong about it?

*Silence.*

MAN

Well, I only wanted to fix some shots.

WOMAN

Sometimes, it isn't so difficult.

MAN

It is ignorance, isn't it?

*Silence.*

WOMAN

Well. If you think so...

*The woman gets dressed again rather upset. The man picks his things up. Silence.*

MAN

I have seen it in other occasions. Well, you can leave, now.

WOMAN

*Glances at the stage.*

Shall I leave it like this?

MAN

*Pretending to be busy.*

Yes, yes. Don't worry.

*She leaves. He stays. Switches off the lights.*

*The same recorded scene is projected on a screen.*

*Several people sitting on the floor to watch the images.*

*While they are projected, the woman is walking among the audience followed by a floodlight.*

*She doesn't speak, she watches the others.*

*The floodlight dilutes and a sectorial piped light is used for introducing other characters.*

*The woman arrives at a staircase on the stage and invites some men and women spectators to touch her while the recorded images are watched.*

*She wants to feel herself real.*

*They put into practice a sort of choreography without music.*

*A girl enters who dances with other boys and girls, also entering.*

*They play, dance, laugh.*

*Suddenly, woman and girl stand in front of each other.*

*They turn and find the audience.*

*Two floodlights.*

*The rest sit down to watch the images.*

*The two of them approach each other, each one trying to be faster, as if they rivalled, and execute a different choreography.*

*A piano sounds.*

*Irregular music.*

*The recorded voices of the conversation on the screen end through progressive extinction.*

*The image of the woman pauses, either it's rewound, or forwarded, or in slow motion.*

*The woman sits the girl on a chair and asphyxiates her with a handkerchief.*

*The image of the screen appears in a granulated state.*

*The woman gets undressed. She extends the handkerchief and it turns out to be a white hood with which she covers her head.*

*Sits on the chair, looking at the audience.*

*Opens her legs and shows her sexual organ.*

*Lights a cigarette and smokes.*

*Makes her vaginal lips, too, smoke.*

*The audience on the stage approaches and observes her minutely without touching her.*

*Suddenly, a can of red paint spills on her and splashes everyone.*

*She remains sitting and motionless, while the others are fighting.*

*In a certain moment, the woman stands and takes a hose as if it were a penis, connects it and wets everybody with the spurt, separating them and making them flee from the stage.*

*Stays alone.*

*Then, gets drenched with the water, which goes out with less pressure.*

*Lets it fall from above.*

*Takes the hood out.*

*Plays with the water.*

*Laughs, cries.*

*Turns around herself.*

*Lies down and cries, cries.*

*Water stops flowing.*

*Fade-to-black.*

*Light on the woman, who is lying down on the floor.*

*Fade-to-black.*

*Light. The same image. It lasts some more time.*

*Fade out. The piano stops sounding.*

ROBERTO GARCIA DE MESA

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