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I do not know whether anyone has ever written a History of Translations. It should be a long but very interesting book. Like a History of Plagiarisms—another possible masterpiece which awaits an actual author—it would brim over with literary lessons. There is a reason why one thing would bring up the other: a translation is only a plagiarism in the author's name. A History of Parodies would complete the series, for a translation is a serious parody in another language. The mental processes involved in parodying well are the same as those involved in translating competently. In both cases there is an adaptation of the spirit of the author for the purpose which the author did not have. In one case the purpose is humor, where the author was serious; in the other case a certain language, where the author wrote in another. Will anyone one day parody a humorous into a serious poem? It is uncertain. But there can be no doubt that many poems—even many great poems—would gain by being translated into the very language they were written in.

— Fernando Pessoa
CALQUE: (kælk) [Fr, lit. 'copy', f. calquer 'to trace' (a design, etc.), ad. It. calcare, ad. L. calcare 'to tread'.] 1. n: A loan translation; a literal translation of a compound, derivative, or phrase from one language to another, e.g. 'thought experiment' calqued from the German gedankenexperiment, 'free verse' calqued from the French vers libre, 'blue-blood' calqued from the Spanish sangre azul; vt: to adopt a word or phrase from one language to another by semantic translation of its parts. 2. n, vt: In translation practice, to consciously translate a word into the target language in a way that releases meaning not contained in the source language, e.g. to translate the contemporary Italian soggiorno into the archaic 'sojourn.' 3. n: An original work written using the conceptual or aesthetic system of a source text; literary work that translates not the content of a source text, but the mode in which that text was written, e.g. Ulysses, where Joyce's hero traces a journey analogous to that of Odysseus while the novel itself stylistically and thematically genealogizes the English literary canon, beginning with Homer's Odyssey.
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Nauseating One Year Sentimentality

Steve and I were doing this before any of you people showed up. He used to have a little, dangerous looking balcony at the end of a long hallway where we'd go to smoke cigarettes and drink too much and pass a book of Spanish poems back and forth trying to outdo each other in the game of Spontaneous Translation. No dictionaries, no time to think, just take the book and read me the Spanish and then go. Okay not bad. My turn.

Somehow that turned into an idea for a magazine. Somehow that magazine became this journal. We're still not entirely sure how that happened. Anyhow, it doesn't really matter. This journal is just a slightly more complicated version of our balcony game. Way less spontaneous, a little less inebriated, a lot more people involved.

Editing something like this is a royal pain in the ass a lot of the time. You get to feeling like the guy in the office who has to make sure no one runs out of paper clips. There are nights when you'd rather be writing a story but you have to proofread instead. There are nights where you just say fuck it and let the work pile up, you watch a movie or something because you don't have the energy to do anything else. Then somebody you've never heard of puts your new favorite poet in your inbox while you're asleep, and you wake up and read the poems, you spit coffee all over your computer screen they're so amazing and you think about them all day for a whole week and you wish there was some way you could show these poems to everyone and you remember why you do this. The game is a lot more fun with a lot more people involved.

What began as something that was about literature in a very concrete way has come to be, over the last year, more and more about people, to the point that I have lately begun to think that there is very little difference between the two. Having lived in books since I was a child, this experience has been like being there after everyone's asleep, when the toys come to life.

With this journal, the line that separates a contributor from a reader is rather blurry. With any luck it can eventually be erased altogether. We receive a nearly endless stream of quality work. Some of it comes from people who are more or less famous, to the extent that a writer or a translator can even be famous anymore. I get the most embarrassing thrill out of being able to correspond with just about anyone on my book shelf as something approaching an equal. I have all the books you've all signed for me on a little shelf, separate from the rest of the library. They are not allowed out of the apartment. We also get a lot of work from people who are not well known, or even known at all. I am particularly gratified to publish the work of writers who have never before appeared in English, to say nothing of giving new translators a chance to reach a broad audience of colleagues for the first time. We read every word of every submission we receive, and if the work is strong we'll cram it into an issue sideways if it comes to that.

A year in, Calque remains a small publication. Much of the last year has been spent learning how to do this. Now that it seems that we've got that down, the coming year can be spent furthering our plans. Some of this is mundane editor nonsense, such as increasing circulation, securing advertisers and continuing our junkiesque search for ever more funding. The biggest change in the coming year is that we will not be publishing three issues of the journal. Instead, after this issue, the next issue will come out in late autumn. In the interval we will be publishing our first book, a volume of varied works by Gonzalo Arango, a poet and prose writer from Colombia, coincidentally briefly discussed in a book review which appears at the end of this issue.

We will also be closing our Los Angeles office, better known as Steve's apartment, and re-opening the once and future home office in Philadelphia. New York can expect to see me intermittently for a long time to come, as I have finally settled in and cannot see any point in squandering all the effort I made toward adjusting to this odd city.

And that is how we shall proceed, with further wild notions sure to come so long as this project does not collapse as unexpectedly as it began. Which could happen. The life of a little magazine being by nature frail. If it does happen then we'll just find another balcony, maybe a nice row house stoop, and pick up the game of Spontaneous Translation where we left off. And we'll probably drink a little more, to make up for the fact that it's just the two of us again.

Brandon Holmquest
Michael Emmerich
Interviewed by Jeff Edmunds

Michael Emmerich has been translating Japanese since 1998, when he was in his final year at Princeton. The work he submitted as his senior thesis, a translation of *Fuji no batsuzyuki*, a book of stories by Nobel Prize winner Kawabata Yasunari, was published the following year by Counterpoint Press as *First Snow on Fuji*. Since then, Emmerich has continued his work as a translator, most notably of works by Yoshimoto Banana, Takahashi Gen'ichirō, Akasaka Mari, and Matsuura Rieko (an excerpt from Matsuura's *The Apprenticeship of Big Toe* follows the interview). At the time of this writing, he is working on a novel by Kawakami Hiromi, winner, in 1996, of the prestigious Akutagawa Prize. (Note that here, as throughout the interview, Japanese names are given in Japanese order: family name first.)

In the interview that follows, Emmerich discusses the Japanese language, the history of Japanese literature, and the current culture of reading and publishing in Japan, as well as the translation of Japanese and translation in general. As a country that is, in some respects, profoundly different from the United States (and from the West more broadly), Japan is sometimes labeled "exotic" without our knowing precisely of what this exoticism consists. Emmerich's rich experience as a translator has led him to see that translation, and reading works in translation, are excellent means by which our ignorance—individual and collective—can be dispelled.

Despite an extremely busy schedule, Michael Emmerich proved to be flexible, patient, and responsive, for which Calque is deeply grateful.

— Jeff Edmunds

Calque: Where and when does the modern Japanese novel come into existence? What are its precedents?

Emmerich: Literary historians usually identify a book called *Ukiyuno* (A Drifting Cloud or Drifting Clouds), published in three parts in 1887, 1888, and 1889, as Japan's first modern novel. It was written by a young man, twenty-three in 1887, who adopted the rather roguish pen name Futabatei Shimei, which plays on the colloquial phrase *kutabatte shimee*, meaning "drop dead." Futabatei had studied Russian at the Tokyo School of Foreign Languages, and it happens that at the same time he was writing *Ukiyuno* he was experimenting radically and very successfully with Japanese prose in translations, published in 1888, of stories by Ivan Turgenev. His translation of a story known in English as "The Rendezvous" was later cited by more than one major author as a formative influence—indeed, one critic has suggested that this translated Russian story, rather than *Ukiyuno*, marks the beginning of modern Japanese fiction. Futabatei also cites Dostoevsky and Goncharov as the stylistic models that helped him break out of the distinctly "early modern" written style and prose rhythms that dominate Part 1 of *Ukiyuno*, and we know that when he was struggling with Parts 2 and 3, he sometimes wrote in Russian first, then translated his Russian into Japanese—much as, exactly a century after Futabatei published Part 3 of *Ukiyuno*, Murakami Haruki wrote his first novel, *Kaze no uta o kike* (Hear the Wind Sing, 1979) in English, which he then translated into Japanese.

The point is that in one way or another, or perhaps in several ways at once, the modern Japanese novel emerges from translation, through translation. You can't completely discount the very long history of literature in Japanese prior to the forced "opening" of the country that commenced in 1853 with the arrival of Commodore Perry and his "Black Ships," but premodern (which runs from 712, shall we say, to 1600) and even early modern (which runs from about 1600 to 1867) literatures are really much less directly and intimately related to modern Japanese literature than are the literatures of the "great powers." Japan ultimately becomes a colonizer rather than a colony, but I think you could argue that on some level—on a cultural level, perhaps—it also experienced, implicitly, something very similar to colonization. It's impossible to
overestimate the importance to modern Japanese literature of other languages, foreign precedents, a sense of Japan’s marginal position in the world and of its alienation from “its own tradition.”

**Calque:** Can you briefly describe the Japanese writing system and explain how the two syllabaries function alongside the characters borrowed or adapted from Chinese? How do they work together to form a cohesive linguistic system?

**Emmerich:** Basically, Japanese makes use of a large set of graphs—often referred to as “Sino-Japanese characters”—that are known in Japanese as **kanji**, and two syllabaries called **hiragana** and **katakana**. Simplifying matters somewhat, we can say that **kanji** are used, singly or in combination, to write words or their stems; **hiragana** can be used to write whole words, too—nouns, for instance, that are too rare for their **kanji** to be widely familiar, or whose **kanji** are particularly complex—but are most often used to write grammatical particles and the inflectional affixes (i.e. the conjugated part) of adjectives and verbs; **katakana** are most commonly used to write calques from Western languages. Modern Japanese also uses Arabic numerals, Roman letters, and even whole English words. I should stress, though, that despite the extreme generality of what I’ve said so far—I’m leaving out whole areas of writing such as wartime military communications, which used **katakana** the way **hiragana** is used today, and the Civil Code, which was also written in **kanji** and **katakana** (and in Classical Japanese!) until it was partially revised in 2004—it still only applies to Japanese writing since around 1888. That was when typeset books bound in the newly imported “Western manner” finally succeeded in supplanting woodblock-printed books bound in the styles that had been common for centuries in Japan and, with minor variations, the rest of East Asia. Prior to that there was a good deal more variety in the forms writing took: in the early modern period, for instance, works in popular, “low-brow” genres were written almost exclusively in **hiragana**, with just a few easy **kanji** thrown in here and there; works in slightly more “cultured” but still popular fictional genres would include many more **kanji**, albeit with readings written in alongside them in **hiragana**. And of course there were also plenty of works being written in Chinese, as was the case throughout the history of Japanese literature, which was always bilingual. All of which is to say that **kanji**, **hiragana**, and **katakana** can be mixed to create texts of different densities, texts that draw on fairly distinct stylistic traditions and vocabularies, and look and feel utterly different. Historically, you can’t speak of a single Japanese writing system—there have always been many. And while much of this richness was intentionally discarded in the modern period, as Japan, like other nations, tried to culture a “national language” in the Petri dish of its citizenry, traces linger.

**Calque:** By avocation if not by vocation, you are a translator. What is translation?

**Emmerich:** I can’t help thinking that maybe the best way, or perhaps the only way to respond to that question is to find some elegant way to sidestep it and then just go on as though the matter has been settled. Ultimately it may not be possible to move beyond metaphor when we think about translation—at least not entirely. At least not when we consider translation as an activity. If we manage to break free of etymologically sanctioned notions of translation as a “carrying across,” as a “bridge between languages,” as a form of “intercultural communication,” it will only be by stepping into another, hopefully better, web of metaphors.

**Calque:** Responding to the same question in verse, Vladimir Nabokov resorts to metaphor: “On a platter / A poet’s pale and glaring head, / A parrot’s screech, a monkey’s chatter, / And profanation of the dead”: a facetious, hyperbolic, and none too helpful definition.

**Emmerich:** So what if we forget about translation as an activity and try and think it through as a concept? In order for the word “translation” to mean anything at all, of course, it itself must be translatable. The word “translation,” in its everyday usage, presumes the existence of other languages, besides English, into which it can be translated. It also presumes the existence of people who can translate, people for whom those “other languages” are not “other.” For translation to have any meaning as a concept, there have to be people in whose minds the word “translation” converges (yet another metaphor), in some way, with non-English words that have their own histories and etymologies, their own metaphorical associations. Unlike the word “dog,” then, which can be understood, to an extent, in terms of its
difference from other English words ("cat," "wolf," "fog"), "translation" has to be understood both in terms of its difference from other similar English words ("interpretation," "adaptation," "transnation") and in terms of both its difference from and its convergence with its translations into languages other than English. Or we could turn that around and say that, in order for "translation" to have any meaning at all, we must be prepared to understand it as a translation of any number of words in any number of other languages, including languages that we ourselves don't know. If you're only thinking about translation in terms of the English language—in terms of the difference between "translation," "adaptation," "transnation," and so on—then you're not really thinking about translation, because translation is precisely that which can't be conceived of within one language, one sign system, one whatever. The concept of "translation" itself requires that we view "translation" in terms of the convergence of languages, a convergence of concepts in other languages that can be translated (but perhaps not obviously) by "translation." Translation is like a spider that sits, not at the center of a single web, but where a thousand webs converge.

**Calque:** In that case, perhaps it would be useful to reframe the question in the context of the particular linguistic web in which you are most accustomed to working, Japanese.

**Emmerich:** Certainly when I try to delimit the borders of the concept, I have to recognize that the English word "translation" is bound up, in my mind, with a whole web of Japanese notions. I'm not the only one who does this—everyone who writes about translation molds the concept into a form that resonates with the other languages that they work in and with. When people talk about "literal" translation—translation "by the letter"—they often focus on syntax, for instance. The OED defines "syntax" as "The arrangement of words (in their appropriate forms) by which their connexion and relation in a sentence are shown." When I think of "translation," I can't help recalling a common Japanese expression that denotes "translation from Japanese into a Western language": 縦から横へ (tate kara yoko e), "from vertical to horizontal." This phrase is common precisely because the transformation "from vertical to horizontal" is the most obvious change in "the arrangement of words" that occurs when Japanese is translated into (note the subtle spatial metaphor there: "translated into") English, for example. When translators or translation theorists who deal with European languages discuss "literal" translation and "syntax," they aren't thinking about how a page is put together, or how books are put together (do you read from left to right, or right to left?). Or, for that matter, about the fact that tate kara yoko e is not at all the same as 縦から横へ, which is not the same as 縦から横へ, たてからよこへ, タテからヨコへ, or 縦から横へ to give a few perfectly ordinary possibilities of how "from vertical to horizontal" might be written in Japanese, combining kanji, hiragana, and katakana in different ways. And yet why should the phrase "appropriate forms" in the definition of "syntax" refer to things like conjugation and declension, rather than to the script used? Those things don't seem to matter—they're not even part of the meaning of "syntax." All this, you see, is related to how "translation" is understood. Again, we define the concept in the context of the convergence of our languages.

I've already pontificated prodigiously in response to this question, but I'd like to give one more, entirely different answer, very quickly: Translation is a mode of reading. A mode of reading in which one text is assumed to stand in some (undefined and probably indefinable) relationship to another text. This, I think, is another useful way to look at the problem—to view it as a question of belief, as a leap of faith. (How could you ever prove that one text is a translation of another? Don't we just have to take the translator's, or the publisher's, word for it?) To some extent, I think you can explain even the activity of translation in this way. People have been talking about reading as a form of writing for decades, ever since Barthes, but of course a certain kind of reading—the careful comparison of words—lies at the center of the act of writing, too, particularly when your writing depends on the presence of another text.

**Calque:** If translation is indefinable, or at best might be characterized as a mode of reading, what distinguishes a good translation from a poor one?

**Emmerich:** The reader. This sounds like another dodge, I know. But that's the best answer. Unless we're talking about a particular translation, and considering it in relation to the context within which
it came into being, trying to determine how well it meets the needs it was designed to meet. Of course, to suggest that "the reader" is what distinguishes a good translation from a poor one is only the beginning of an answer. Because then we have to ask "which reader?" and the answer to that question isn't as obvious as it might seem. We tend to assume, for instance, that readers who are able to compare a translation with the work that inspired it are best equipped—are perhaps the only ones equipped—to judge its merits. And yet translations aren't designed to meet the needs of readers who...I can't think how to say this without slipping into tautology...who don't need a translation.

To tell the truth, I suspect that readers who can compare translations and originals actually tend to be worse judges of the quality of a translation than people who are unable to read the original. Multilingual readers sometimes like to think that they stand in a privileged position—they flatter themselves that they can understand, not only the texts of the translation and the original, but also what those who can't read the original will and will not be able to understand in the translation. A fine example of this presumptuousness occurs in the review, in the second issue of Calque, of Miltos Sachtouris's Poems: 1945-1971, translated by my sister Karen Emmerich: the reviewer claims that the translation "When they find me on the wood of my death" is inadequate. "What," he asks, "would an Anglophone reader make of the literal rendering of the second half of the line as 'on the wood of my death'? The word for wood in Greek, ἔρυζ, has strong metonymic associations, just as its English counterpart enjoys its own very different connotative senses, and the English 'wood' cannot stand on its own for the Greek word in this context." I can't, of course, speak for other Anglophone readers, but I understood the phrase well enough—and not in terms of English associations, but as language and meaning and image made more potent by the context. In fact, I didn't only understand the phrase, in the superficial sense in which the reviewer seems to believe unimaginative Anglophone readers need to be made to understand it, evidently by changing it to "When they find me on the wooden plank of my death"—which to my ear sounds not only deadeningly wooden but rumly piratic; I saw something happening there, in that phrase, that I had never seen happen before in language, in the English language, and I was moved by that. In reality, comparison of a translation with its source text allows a reader to speculate about how other readers similar to herself—people able to compare original and translation—might react to the translation. It's pure, fantasy, I suggest, to think that a reader of, say, Vietnamese and English can look at an English translation of a Vietnamese work with the eyes of a reader who knows no Vietnamese. Because for a multilingual reader, the languages can never be entirely separate. Indeed, the very act of comparing a translation to its original is a reaffirmation of the connectedness, in the mind of the person doing the comparing, of the two languages. At the same time, the nature of that connectedness, at the moment when a multilingual reader is comparing a translation with its source, isn't necessarily the same as the connectedness of the languages in the mind of the translator at the moment when she is translating.

**Calque:** So there are basically three kinds of readers of translations: readers who have no knowledge of the "from" language; readers who know both the "from" and the "to" languages; and readers who know both the "from" and the "to" languages and also happen to be translators. Certainly you would concede that one measure of a translation's quality is its literal correctness, and that readers who know both languages are in a position to assess this, whether or not they are translators themselves?

**Emmerich:** Of course, readers who can access both the original and the translation are able to find obvious mistakes, and that's something only they can do, and that can be important. But surely that's not what we mean when we ask what distinguishes good translations from bad? We're interested in something that runs deeper, I would hope—not something so superficial that any old multilingual reader can come along and point it out after a hasty comparison of the two texts. I'd suggest, then, that in order for a multilingual reader to be able to say anything interesting about a translation, she has to get beyond all the inevitable, immediately obvious, and rather uninteresting differences that would be apparent to anyone with her linguistic background, and attempt the very difficult task of putting herself imaginatively in the position of the translator at the moment when she was translating. For instance, in my translation of Takahashi Gen'ichirō's Sayonara, Gangsters, I chose to translate the author's calques of the English words "Daddy" and "Mommy" with the Latin
“Pater” and “Mater.” On the face of it, this might seem peculiar at best. Why not just translate a calque with the word it calques? But as the translator, I felt I should take into consideration the fact that “Mommy” and “Daddy” are rarely used in Japanese—I know one family whose children do, but only because they lived for years in England—while the calques “Mama” and “Papa” are used. It seems to me that in the context of the novel, “Mommy” and “Daddy” serve, at least in part, to defamiliarize the relationships between the mom, the dad, and the child; and, moreover, that they do this in a particular and brilliant way: I believe it is significant that these words sound (to my ear) quirky, prissy, pretentious, privileged, and, finally, foreign—which is to say English, which is to say (in the context of contemporary Japan, and of this book) American English, the hegemonic language of power. So I decided to bring in “Mater” and “Pater” and the wealth of connotations these words seem (to me) to carry (privilege, education, empire, prissiness), including an aura of almost caricatural foreignness and unreality that will be felt, I imagine, by most readers in the American market I was writing primarily for.

That, roughly, is what I was thinking. So in order to judge whether my choice to use “Pater” and “Mater” was a good one, or whether I should have just stuck to the obvious back—calques “Daddy” and “Mommy,” or whether I might have done better to choose some other pair of words, a reader would have to draw the fingers of her mind through at least as many threads of meaning as I did. Otherwise how could she claim to have come to a careful, reasoned conclusion?

**Calque:** Jazz guitarist Pat Metheny said in a recent interview: “Okay, here I am with [the other musicians]. They are playing, and if there was a guitar player here—and there is—what would I want him to play?” In effect the reader you describe above—the reader/translator reading like a translator translating—is not unlike the guitarist in Metheny’s scenario: the reader asks herself what she would do, or would have done, in the translator’s place. Of course, such readers are extremely rare.

**Emmerich:** If they were any rarer they’d be mythical. But going back to the original question, I’d say that a good translation is distinguished from a bad one by the fact that it meets the needs (however we choose to define them) of the readers for whom it was designed; and an outstanding translation is distinguished from a good translation by the fact that it also satisfies that all-too-rare reader who is able to compare the translation and the original as though she herself were the translator engaged in the act of translating. Of course, that raises the question of what needs are: how do we define them? When I say that translators design translations for particular groups of readers with particular needs, I’m not suggesting that translators will always—or perhaps ever—really be able to predict what will or will not work with readers who don’t share their languages. But I’m also not suggesting that the targeted readers are the only ones who can know what their needs are. They may say, “I’m going to buy this book for pleasure reading, I don’t want to feel like I’m in school—I need a text without footnotes.” And that’s fine. But the translator can also say, “You don’t know it, but in order to get what you need out of this piece of writing, you need to learn a few Japanese words, and to recognize a few kanji.” Depending on the sort of community the translator imagines herself to be writing for, she will have different notions of what readers need—or how much she should give them of what she sees and feels in the text she translates. At any rate, if a person doesn’t know how to appreciate a translation from a language she knows, she’ll be much better off reading a translation from a language she doesn’t know.

**Calque:** How did you become interested in translation?

**Emmerich:** I didn’t really become interested, I just started doing it. For me, translating was a lot like learning a language: I started without having any idea what I was getting into, or where it would lead me. So I can’t really say why, or how it happened. I do recall, though, that when I was a freshman in college, quite soon after I started studying Japanese, a professor in the English department asked what I wanted to do with my life, and I told her I wanted to be a translator. I also remember that when my sister and I were kids, we dreamed of being able to speak seven languages—one for each day of the week. We kept laying plans for a while, picking languages, until it hit us that when we did finally become septilingual (we figured it would take a few years), we would only be able to speak with our parents once a week. That, needless to say, put an end to that plan. This linguistic curiosity, though, ultimately combined with the pleasure I take in reading and
writing to become, by means of what seems a rather ordinary sort of
chemical reaction, a fascination with translation. I suppose the curse
was on me more or less from the beginning.

**Calque:** Whose work have you translated?

**Emmerich:** Almost every translation I've done has been from
Japanese into English, though I've done a few classical Japanese
works as well, including what I consider a very nice rendering of the
Noh play “Kagekiyo,” which appeared in *Conjunctions 38: Rejoicing
Rerovericing* in spring, 2002. Other authors I've translated include
Yoshimoto Banana (five books, only three of which are available in
the U.S.), Takahashi Gen'ichirō, Akasaka Mari, Yamada Taichi, and
Matsuura Rieko.

**Calque:** Of the authors whose work you have translated, whose has
been the most difficult to render into English? Why?

**Emmerich:** Kawabata's *First Snow on Fuji* was by far the most
difficult work I've ever done. But that's only because it was my first
time translating, and since it was a senior thesis I had to finish the
whole book in about eight months, at the same time that I was taking
classes. In retrospect I'm amazed I survived that experience... I
stayed up for four days without sleeping just before the deadline, and
I remember looking out the window at the sun one day and thinking
that the moon was awfully bright.

**Calque:** That last image sounds like a haiku waiting to happen.

**Emmerich:** Or a car crash—in retrospect it's a good thing I didn't
have a car, and had to run to Pequod (the local copy shop) to have my
dissertation bound, less than an hour before it was due. The second
most difficult translation was probably *The Apprenticeship of Big Toe P.*
It was hard for two reasons: first, because the original was over 800
pages long, and the organization that was funding the translation
required that I complete it in a year; and second, because there was a
kind of effervescent proximity in the novel's prose that I generally found
appealing in Japanese, but that I just couldn't convince people to like in
English. In part, no doubt, my own limitations as a stylist were to blame.

But I had the sense that there was more to it than that. I started to
think that the more right my translation seemed to me on the sentence
level, the less most English readers would appreciate, and be unsettled
by, the book as a whole. And that certainly wasn't what I wanted for a
book that has sold hundreds of thousands of copies in Japan.

**Calque:** So how did you overcome these challenges?

**Emmerich:** Ultimately, I came to realize that in part *Big Toe P* was the
novel it was—or perhaps I should say (half-refusing translation) that it
was the 小説, or *shōsetsu* (‘little story,’’ i.e. fiction) it was—because the
Japanese publishing system, or literary system, if you prefer, provides
a good environment for this style of fiction, and produces readers who
are able to appreciate it as it is, in all its sprawling, untamed verbosity.
Take, for instance, the fact that universities all across the U.S. have
MFA programs that train writers to write publishable books; and
the fact that lengthy, serious book reviews appear in publications
like the *New York Times Book Review* and the *New York Review of
Books* and the *Times Literary Supplement;* and the fact that *The New
Yorker* only publishes one work of prose fiction in most issues, and
*The Paris Review* is published quarterly, and there are thousands of
little magazines being published throughout the fifty states; and the
fact that many if not most professional writers have teaching positions
in creative writing departments in universities and can thus afford to
publish fewer books, and work longer on the ones they do publish,
and don't need to supplement their income by appearing as guests on
televised quiz programs; and the fact that the U.S. population is slightly
less than two-and-a-half times that of Japan, and only about one thirty­
seventh of its population lives in New York, its largest city; and the fact
that newspapers and magazines don't always have serialized novels in
the arts section. All of these circumstances have a lot to do with the
way literature gets produced in the U.S.; and none apply to Japan.

In Japan, authors are self-taught; reviews seldom offer more than plot
summaries; there are four major literary magazines that come out
monthly and run to about 400 pages each; small magazines, of which
there are perhaps a few hundred, tend to be bought by the same
people who contribute to and publish them and would never turn
up in a store the way even an experimental journal like *Conjunctions*
appears on the shelves of the Hudson News chain in New York; very few writers hold positions at universities because creative writing is not a part of most university curricula, and important writers appear on TV all the time, and do all kinds of things that would probably be considered frivolous in the U.S., including publishing dozens of books, several of which are likely to be fluffy collections of essays about daily life; and more than a third of the Japanese population lives in the Tokyo metropolitan area, and many of those people go to work on overpacked trains and don't see the need to worry about whether "there isn't a wasted word" in the book they're reading, as long as it keeps them going; and all the major newspapers and literary magazines run serialized novels—sometimes, in the case of the magazines, five or six at time. And one more difference that folds into all these others: in contemporary Japan, editors don't edit much at all. Editing isn't their job. That's the system I'm talking about when I say that Big Toe P fits the environment of the Japanese literary system. Since I was trying to create a version of Big Toe P that could successfully be transplanted into the vastly different system of the United States, something had to give.

Fortunately, I had the pleasure of working with a brilliant editor, Elmer Luke, who has a rather different take on translation from my own, and he was able to help me get over my deeply engrained, unexamined, too scrupulous, counterproductive obsession with textual minutiae, and even with not-so-minute elements of the original. The English text that is actually going to be published has been trimmed considerably. And there's no doubt in my mind that if it hadn't been, it wouldn't have found a publisher, and it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, for many readers to take it as seriously as it deserves to be taken, and thus for the book to deliver the punch it's aiming at them. It was hard, though, to accept this. Very hard.

**Calque:** Which of your translations do you consider the most successful? Which the least successful? Why?

**Emmerich:** I suppose I'd say Takahashi Gen'ichirō's *Sayonara, Gangsters* is the most successful. Of course, in part that's just because I love the book. But I do think that the quirky, mournful, manic playfulness of the English matches the Japanese beautifully; that I created a style that feels right for the book, that belongs to it, and yet also places it in a recognizable lineage of writers like Donald Barthelme and Richard Brautigan, which is where it belongs. I hope, in other words, that in *Sayonara, Gangsters* I was able to make English dance a few new steps in its old shoes—that it's a writerly translation, fully awake, blurred by little if any laziness, composed entirely of meaning, unmarred by automatic and therefore inaccurate definitions. If you know what I mean. Of course, I'm probably being too generous, hoping to get someone to buy the book.

As for the least successful...perhaps the first draft of *The Apprenticeship of Big Toe P*. Because as accurate as that translation was on the sentence level, and in terms of the tone and style of the narration, it just wasn't very likeable in English. Even I could see that. Take the first two paragraphs, for instance, which you'll find on page 34. In Japanese, I just read through this. I don't need to feel any particular resonance here, for it to be "a beginning" or "a first line" except in the most literal sense, because Japanese 小説 tend to be more loosely structured than English novels; and the New Critical technique of "close reading" has not molded the way readers read and writers write; and first lines are not required to encapsulate something of the book as a whole. But in English...I can't help asking: What is all this here for? And there's no answer, because this question *that will be asked by readers of the translation* is not one that a reader in Japanese, including myself, would feel compelled to ask. So the beginning becomes a problem. And there was nothing I could do to fix the problem—at least not if I held fast to my own settled ideas of what translation is and ought to be, and of the relationship that translations should have to the established, if evolving, American publishing system.

I had always thought that translations were sacrosanct, and for the most part should only be copyedited. But now I found myself confronting an obstacle that editing, not translation, is designed to overcome. A difference, that is to say, as I said in response to your last question, in the way "literature" is understood in Japan and the U.S., both on the receiving end (readers) and on the producing end (authors, editors). I now think that sometimes, when you're dealing with literary systems as different as those of Japan and the U.S., you
can't expect your translation to remain unchanged by the necessary connection that is forged between it and the big, powerful system into which it is being introduced. Translation is politics. Deciding what you are willing to give up in order, in the long run, to get more.

_Calque:_ Besides the differences in the way the two cultures perceive literature, what are the other particular challenges facing the translator of Japanese?

**Emmerich:** I'm not entirely sure that there are challenges that are, strictly speaking, particular to the translator of Japanese. That said, I can hazard a few off-the-cuff generalizations. First, going back to the last question, there are important differences in the way literature is produced, published, packaged, categorized, defined, understood, viewed, reviewed, and recognized (in the sense of "awarded prizes") in Japan and the United States. Japanese literature also has a long history, and that history is not the same as the history of literature in English—which is to say that it is not the history of "literature" at all. In Japanese, "literature" is _bungaku_. This term first came into being, or rather it was first used in this sense, as a translation of the English word "literature," and its meaning develops in the context of a confluence of conceptions of what good fiction was supposed to be back in the early modern period, before Commodore Perry turned up with his cannons, and a new understanding of what "literature" meant in the so-called Western World (which the Japanese reached by heading east on a boat to San Francisco). This extraordinarily complex, fundamentally transnational history has made Japanese _bungaku_ into a very different sort of beast from its U.S. counterpart. In the U.S., for instance, the novel holds pride of place, followed by the short story and then, lagging considerably behind, the novella. This, you might say, is the basic structure of "literature."

In Japan, by contrast, a variety of factors—from the format of the major literary magazines to the nature of the big prizes—make works short (or long) enough to count as "novellas" in English the most important, followed by what Anglophones would call novels and short stories. In Japanese, all these works are classified as _shōsetsu_. Or take these two examples: in Japan, long _shōsetsu_ are serialized in just about every major literary magazine and newspaper, and there is a whole genre of "cell phone 小説," that can range in length anywhere from a few lines to the equivalent of hundreds of pages. These are not common literary forms in the U.S.—that's just not what "literature" is. So as a translator, one of the things I have to try to do is to make "literature" a little bigger. I unscrew the dot over the "i" and attach a bicycle pump, raise and lower the handle a couple times, try to inflate the concept, without popping it, until there's space enough inside for a little bit of literature. I do this by choosing to translate works that rub against the grain in one way or another—I do collections of novellas by Banana Yoshimoto, a "dance-drama" by Kawabata Yasunari, stories that seem more like essays, a postmodern firecracker like Sayonara, _Gangsters_ that's unlike any other book you'll ever read. But this isn't easy. Not leaving the English language as you found it is one thing; not leaving an entire literary system as you found it is another.

And the difficulty of the task is compounded by the fact that readers and reviewers in the U.S. often have extraordinarily rigid and simplistic ideas about what is "truly Japanese" and what is "Western." All too often, books translated from Japanese are dragged, like a struggling gnu being pulled under by a thrashing alligator, into a trite narrative of "traditional vs. modern," "Japanese vs. Western." And this ruins them. Take a look, for instance, at this very rich (but in all the wrong ways) analysis of Murakami Haruki's position in the Japanese world of letters, from an article by Norimitsu Onishi that appeared in _The New York Times_ on 14 June 2005: "Indeed, in Japan, the traditional literary critics regard his novels as un-Japanese and look askance at their Western influences, which range from the writing style to the American cultural influences. (In the United States his work is taught in colleges and has been reviewed in _The New Yorker_ by John Updike.)" The article is called "A Rebel in Japan Eyes Status in America." Murakami Haruki is a best-selling author in Japan whose very first novel was nominated for the prestigious Akutagawa Prize and awarded the Gunzō Prize for New Writers. There are scholars of traditional Japanese literature, and many of them do not read much by Murakami Haruki or any other contemporary author, but there is no such thing as a "traditional literary critic" and I've never seen or heard anyone complaining that Murakami is "un-Japanese." Why would they? He is Japanese, and he writes in Japanese, and he writes primarily for a Japanese audience. And, I might add, anyone who...
thinks that it is possible in the twenty-first century to find any aspect of Japanese society or culture that remains pristinely untouched by 150 years of being a part of the modern world—or, for that matter, who thinks that history, and specifically the history of aesthetics, poetry, literature, theater, painting, cuisine, and everything else that constitutes the high culture of "the West" as we know it has not been deeply influenced by things Japanese—is living in a world of ignorance and fantasy.

In an article about the popularity of cell-phone novels, published on 20 January 2008, Onishi observes that "Almost all the authors are young women delving into affairs of the heart, spiritual descendants, perhaps, of Shikibu Murasaki, the eleventh-century royal lady-in-waiting who wrote *The Tale of Genji*." I don't think I even need to comment on this Gumby-like stretch of the ahistorical imagination, except to point out that "Shikibu" is not the author's given name but her father's title. Reversing "Murasaki Shikibu" is roughly equivalent to calling me Emmerich Mister. (Incidentally, in a depressingly familiar turn of events, Onishi's juxtaposition of "the country that gave the world its first novel, *The Tale of Genji*" and the cell-phone novel was introduced in the lead line of an article on the cell-phone novel phenomenon—apparently inspired by the *New York Times's* piece—in the Japanese newspaper *Asahi Shinbun* that appeared on 16 February 2008; what comes around goes around.)

So you see, translators from Japanese have to deal with a particular breed of exoticism that doesn't affect translators from other languages. (Again, I'm not sure to what extent the problem *itself* is particular to Japan. Exoticism comes in many different flavors.) And this becomes relevant, not only when a translator is selecting works to translate—trying intentionally to cut against the grain of the prevalent image of "Japanese literature," as I frequently do—but also at the level of the sentence. Because if a translator from Japanese tries to use her work as a tool to expand the possibilities of the English language in the way that translators from European languages are sometimes enjoined to do—by adhering more closely to the syntax of the original, by cleaving closer to the literal meaning, worrying less about being idiomatic—she's bound to end up exoticizing Japan, the Japanese, and Japanese literature in the most irritating way. The historian George Samson (1883–1965) once described this as the "honorable tea" school of exoticism. It doesn't happen often, fortunately—we translators from Japanese have learned over the past century or so not to fall into that trap. I might point out, too, in this context, that "literal translation" is a contradiction in terms when it comes to Japanese, since the language doesn't use letters. This has all sorts of implications, but I doubt I could make an involved discussion of the graphological, and beyond that linguistic differences between Japanese and English interesting enough to justify including it.

*Calque:* Such a discussion would no doubt require more space than we have here, but perhaps by way of example you could describe briefly two or three of the most significant linguistic differences between the two languages and explain their implications for translation.

*Emmerich:* One important factor is the difference in the way time is represented. Linguists are still debating, I believe, whether Japanese has both tense and aspect or only aspect—don't quote me on that, though, because the debate may actually be even more involved than that—but either way, it's much easier to move back and forth between describing events as though they are over, and describing them as though they are taking place right now, in the present. In fact, you would have a difficult time writing a good novel without switching back and forth like this, because you wouldn't have much choice as to how you ended your sentences. (Verbs and adjectives come at the end of the sentence in Japanese, and in the past tense, or aspect, they both end with the same sound: *ta*. For instance: *ヌーを食べた。すごく美味しかった。* [Nū o tabeta. Sugoku oishikatta.]) "I ate the gnu. It was really good." So if you described every event as though it was already over, every grammatically complete sentence would end with *ta*. Bo-ring.) Another important characteristic of Japanese is what you might think of as its multivocality. I'm not talking about heteroglossia—it's not that. Japanese has what is known as a "citational particle." It looks like this: と and it's Romanized to and pronounced *tob*. You use it, or the colloquial variation って *tte*, just about any time you want to do anything that could be even remotely construed as quotation. "Dick said he was going deer hunting," for instance, would probably be translated like this: ディックは鹿狩りに行くと言っていた (Dicku wa shikagari ni iku to itte ita), which is "literally" much
closer—whatever that means—to “Dick said: I’m going hunting.” Even in that one short sentence, we get two voices: the narrator’s and Dick’s. Likewise, “George stood up, thinking he would go along” would be: ジョージも一緒に行こうと立ち上がった (joji mo isshu ni ikō to tachiagatta), or “George stood up, thinking: Maybe I’ll go, too.” Unlike English, which has a tendency (related, as you’ll note if you compare the sample translations I’ve just given, to the nature of its tenses) to speak with one voice where Japanese would speak with at least two. Of course, neither of these grammatical characteristics of Japanese—the time-switching and the multivocality—is entirely foreign to English. You can do these things. They just aren’t done with anywhere near the frequency that they are in Japanese. So I try to make my English more open to these typically Japanese grammatical characteristics than a good deal of English writing is. (This is also one of the characteristics of Royall Tyler’s extraordinarily brilliant, daringly experimental translation of The Tale of Genji, by the way.) And I choose to translate works that allow me to do this: it’s no coincidence that I translated two novels right in a row, Akasaka Mari’s Vibrator and Yamada Taichi’s In Search of a Distant Voice, whose protagonists hear voices, and seem to live their lives caught in the intersection of the present and a traumatic past.

I’d like to mention one more problem (or challenge) that certainly isn’t unique to translation from Japanese, but that assumes a particular form in this context: the fact that Japan is being overrun by English in a way that the U.S. is not being overrun by Japanese, or by any other language. Writers who write in Japanese can take advantage of this. They can play with English, they can make English live in their Japanese. And they do. It’s very difficult to know what to do with that kind of thing in translation—to figure out how to write in English in a way that creates a sense that the language you are writing in is not the new global language, that there is some other global language, and this is not it.

**Calque:** Have any of the authors whose work you have translated collaborated with you on the translation of their works? What was the nature of the collaboration? Was it helpful, unhelpful? Why?

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**Emmerich:** I’ve never really collaborated with an author, no. Takahashi Gen’ichirō took a pencil and added a clause or two to a sentence in the Japanese text of Sayonara, Gangsters when I pointed out that it didn’t seem to make any sense. That was a help, because otherwise I wouldn’t have known what to do with it. Another author took a red pen and completely rewrote a translation I’d done, turning it into utterly incomprehensible English. That was not a help. The editor canceled the book. Fortunately a new editor arrived on the scene a few years later and revived the project. The book was published without the author’s changes, except in a few cases where my translation had been incorrect. As a sign of goodwill, I also accepted one or two unnecessary changes, thereby ruining some excellent, creative translations. I’m still rather bitter about that. That’s an interesting story, actually. I wish I could tell it.

**Calque:** Given the relative paucity of its syllabary, the large number of homophones, and the complexity of its writing system, Japanese might be said to be more of a visual language than an aural one. Do you agree with this statement?

**Emmerich:** I wouldn’t actually agree that Japanese is more of a visual language than an aural one, though I’d certainly say that written Japanese can be more visually compelling than English. Calligraphy is the prime example—how would you translate calligraphy? The answer is that you wouldn’t. You can’t. End of story. The more important and interesting point is that the Japanese writing system makes it possible to express the same concept, or even write the same word, in a few different ways, each of which will have a different nuance, a different texture, a different ring. We saw this earlier when I gave you five ways of writing out “from vertical to horizontal.” This gives Japanese a richness that is very different from the richness of English. And I think this has heightened my awareness of the impossibility of “literal” translation from Japanese to English. The same word can have a very different meaning depending on how it is written, so of course it might need to be translated in a different way depending on how it is written.

Perhaps another way of explaining this might be to say that the Japanese writing system makes it very clear that different languages mean in different ways. Naturally, I bear this in mind when I translate.
For instance, I once translated a passage in which a person suddenly starts singing, setting her words to music. The text didn't say that she was doing this until after she had already done it, but the author marked the sung words by writing them in the katakana syllabary. I succeeded in creating the same effect by marking the words, not visibly, but aurally, translating the sung words into an obtrusively singsong rhythm—I used the rhythm of "Three Blind Mice," actually. Unfortunately, this was one of the unnecessary changes that I accepted as a sign of goodwill when the author decided to destroy my translation, so this doesn't appear in the book as it was published. Grrrrrr. At any rate, this example shows that what's important in translating Japanese is less the visual aspects of the language (which basically can't be translated) than the ways in which the visual aspects of Japanese are mobilized, made to bear meaning.

**Calque:** On the same topic—the potential untranslatability of certain aspects of a given text—how do you approach the translation of terms and concepts peculiar to Japanese culture?

**Emmerich:** I usually try to give the Japanese term in italics when it first appears, then find a way to indicate what the term means, often by replacing the Japanese word with an English "equivalent" (laugh track here) the second time it appears, assuming it's close enough to the first that the reader can figure it out. I then revert back to the Japanese term. This is, more or less, what I've been doing with the word 小説 in this interview, trying to help the reader learn it. Needless to say, there's no general rule for how to go about doing this. Someday I'd like to try translating a book in which the cultural references are so pervasive, and so important, that I'd have to replace them all with references familiar to an audience of readers in the United States. Of course, this would only work with a certain kind of book—a heavily metafictional work, for example, or one that draws heavily on pop culture, or perhaps a political satire. Takahashi Gen'ichirō has written a magnificent 小説 whose title might be translated as The Rise and Fall of Japanese Literature—it's part fiction, part literary history. I think the only way to translate a book like that would be to completely rewrite it, perhaps in collaboration with the author, as The Rise and Fall of American Literature.

**Calque:** What aspects of working as a professional translator appeal to you the most? The least?

**Emmerich:** The most appealing part is the translation itself. I'm a translation druggie, I suppose. Life would be deadly dull without the high I get from translating books I love. I also believe very firmly that translation is a valuable form of intellectual exploration—that the experience of translating gives the translator, or at least some translators, access to a type of knowledge that can't be had in any other way. Translating can help a person begin to figure out how the languages she knows relate to each other, not historically, but as living language—how they connect within her mind and her heart and the rest of her body. Translating can help a person figure out how she relates to communities of people who speak and read one or the other of the languages she speaks and reads, and decide how she would like to relate to them in the future, and understand how those communities are related to each other—the structures of power that connect and separate them. I think of translation, not so much as a critical activity, but as a theoretical exercise, a way of learning to think past the limits that have been set in the world outside of translation, if that makes any sense. The least appealing aspect...is all the little chores that have to be done so that one can keep translating. E-mailing. Preparing samples. Reading contracts. Applying for grants. And then, of course, there is the fact that I can only afford to translate in my spare time, and I have little enough of that as it is.

**Calque:** What is a translator's single most important trait?

**Emmerich:** A sense of balance.

**Calque:** The excerpts below are from The Apprenticeship of Big Toe P by Matsuura Rieko. The original Japanese is accompanied by two English versions: your first draft, and the final edited version. Is there anything you'd like to say about the texts?

**Emmerich:** I've already gone on so long...But let me say this: In preparing my first draft, I did my best to create an English text that affected me, as much as possible, the way the Japanese text did,
though with the assumption that eventually readers unlike me—people with no Japanese—would read it, too. That's what I do when I translate. When Elmer Luke and I worked together to prepare the final edited version, we had a different goal in mind. We tried to turn my text into a book that a publisher would buy, that would appeal to readers with no Japanese, but wouldn't go against my sense of what the Japanese book was like. There's an important difference between focusing on the text of a book and focusing on the book, and between translating and producing a translation. The difference will be clear, I imagine, to anyone who compares these texts. Some readers may be surprised at how different some paragraphs are, especially at the beginning. But translation is as much a matter of producing books as it is a matter of writing texts. Or at least it can be, depending on what you think translation is. Which is, I suppose, the question that this trio of texts, from different stages in the process of the production of a translation, brings us back to. What is translation, anyway?

Editor's Note: A glossary of various authors and books mentioned in this interview is available at www.calquejournal.com.
eagerness to keep chipping away at the image of Japanese literature prevalent in the United States is one, but only one, of the reasons I wanted to translate this book. Above all, I wanted to see it published in English because it is so provocative, in the best senses of the word, and so powerful, and because it's a brilliant, fantastic, and gripping work of fiction.

It isn't easy to translate an 800-page book, especially one as intense as *Big Toe P*. I succumbed to carpal tunnel syndrome halfway through the first volume, so I bought a voice recognition program for my computer and dictated the second half of the work. It was summer and the windows were open. Fortunately I lived in Tokyo then, and my neighbors spoke no English. Otherwise they would have wondered. And maybe called the police.

It also isn't easy to get a translation of an 800-page book, especially one about a woman with a penis, funded and published. I was lucky enough to have a chance to convince someone that the book should be put on a list of translations to be sponsored by the Japanese government, which solved the first half of the problem; having the opportunity to work with Elmer Luke—the careful, passionate editor who first introduced Murakami Haruki to English-language readers—helped immeasurably in the latter department. He and I worked together to fine-tune the translation, to prepare it to survive in the American market, to make sure it wouldn't remain buried in the chips and wires of my computer, unpublished, forever. The success with which we managed to maintain our sense of balance—between the need to trim and the determination not to defuse this bomb of a book—is attested to, I think, not only by the fact that Seven Stories Press has actually signed on to publish it, but by the fact that we only got three offers, all from small independent publishers. We did what we thought we needed to, but no more.

Of course, some readers will think we went too far. Some readers, no doubt, will believe, as I did until Elmer made me see differently, that translations should be edited, if they must, as gently as archeological artifacts are dusted. Flick flick. Disturb nothing but the dust, preserve the integrity of the original object. This is beautiful and politically attractive as a theory; but as political practice, it doesn't always work.

I decided to print both the final, edited translation and my first draft alongside the original because readers so seldom have a chance to see what goes on behind the scenes, before a novel is published; but also because I would like readers who care about this work, *Big Toe P*, in particular, to see how far we went, and in what direction, and why. I suppose I may be exposing myself to criticism. I knew when I started translating this novel that I might make choices, here and there, disappointing to readers who approach the work with a specialist's concern for certain details. I tried not to, and I certainly hope that I haven't. But if I have, it's still worth it, to me, to have taken that risk.

- Michael Emmerich

**Editor's Note:** For the sake of readability, the three excerpts have been laid out consecutively. The first (pages 34 to 41) is the original Japanese, the second (pages 42 to 51) is Michael Emmerich's original version. The final excerpt (pages 52 to 60) is the translation as it circulated to publishers.
Prologue // プロローグ

真野一実は、私の友人と言わずどの行いはなじらない知人の親友だった。間接的な名乗りを避けながらの二三事度しに同席したことや、最後に会ったのももう二年も前になるので、いざ対面してみると彼女の顔をよく思い出せなかったのも無理があった。

一月ほど前、一実が彼女の親友であり私の知人である沢渡子の計画を告げる電話をかけて来た時、どうして彼女の顔を思い浮かべることはできなかった。想像するだけで訪問したい旨の電話を受けた時も同様で、一時間彼女が婦にして来るまでに蘭しく思い出しておこうと思うただけでも、と、うたばずくまで起きていたがせた蒲団の中にいた私は、努力半ばで再び寝てしまったのである。

玄関のドアが続けざまにノックされる音で眼を覚ました私は、一時間前になり交わした約束に思い当たって、慌てて玄関に飛び出した。ドアを開け、遠慮がちな様子で立っている一実に向かい合うと、熱心に訴えても思いでなかった彼女の顔に既視感を伴って記憶の底から甦って来て、眼の前の顔がにじみ出していった。

「お久しぶりです。」

真野一実は一礼すると、はにかんだ微笑を浮かべた。そうして、この心持ちをくっからとしの鼓反戦に一応と呼ぶべきとした瞬間、忘れずに少々しても思いでせなかった彼女の顔が既視感を伴って記憶の底から甦って来て、眼の前の顔がにじみ出していった。

「私は大急ぎで蒲団をかたつけた部屋に一実を招き入れた。もちろん一実が私のブラットに足を踏み入れるのは初めてである。到着に落ち着いた一実は、物珍しきに六畳の室内を飛びまわった。

「ワープロもファックスもありません。何か小説家の部屋らしいですね。」

「平均的日本人の部屋らしくない、と言ってほしいですね。ビデオ、ディッキーもCDプレイヤーもないんだから。」

「貧乏なんですか？澤渡子がよく言をかげてきましたよ、Mさんがどうして仕事をしないんだろう。」

私は話題を変えようとした。

「真野さんのは四十九日はすんだのだ？」

「ええ、三日前。」一実は悲しきような表情になった。前体の発表者となっての不帰しないのです。三日前まで、毎晩のように夢を見ました。お話ししましたか？澤渡子は晩の派手好色に似合わない、どこかお嬢さんが着るような清楚な白いドレスを着て死んでいたのです。ところが、 nouvellesに読んだのはドレスに似合わない顔のものでしょう？あるいは異様な眼をむけていたのにそまらわれませんでした。」

澤渡子は二LDKのマンションの浴室のドア・ノブに結びつけた絆で首を吊って死んだったのだった。幸運に至った。髪をきれいに結い上げ薄化粧も施していたと言う。

「前の晩、うちに電話して来てたようです。自分の車を出先に置いて来てから、明日の朝の車で出社していった。ただでさえに行ったとき、あんなことになってて一。死ぬつもりならなぜ迎えに来なって言ったの？」

「あなたに見つけてはかっからに決まってるじゃない。」

「そうでしょうか？」

問い返す一実の無邪気なのか純粋なのか判断しがたい訓子には感じるが、二年前、自分の会社を起こした澤渡子が片脚として会社に入ると一実を伴せて現れた日も、澤渡子が席をはずした際の一実は、「私なんて貸し切りできるわけでもないし、何の役にも立ってないのに、なぜ澤渡子が会社に誘うのかわからないんです」と私に騙されたかのだった。「あなたを信頼しているから決まっているじゃない」と言うと、今日は同じ訓子で「そんなものでしょうか？」と嘘いた。

澤渡子の方は一実と対照的に物事の裏の裏まで悟る傾向があつ、なおかつその読みかたは多半に厭世的だった。彼女が考察した事業のコンセプトにも、シナリオ人間間が絡み合っていた。あの日、澤渡子は彼女にしては熱っぽい口調で、私に会社の事業内容を説いた。

「一種の風俗産業なんですよけど、性を売らんじゃないんです。愛情を売るんです。」

「あなたは売買できるものだったかしら？」

「概ねできますよ。もちろん金を貫かない愛もありますが。近頃の若い女たちは、女性をなんだなしに金持ち男が大好きですからね。」

「まあ、なんかそう言われているけど。」

「でも、ご存じですか？金持ち好きな女たちは、必ずしも打ち WebGLで金持ち男とつき合っているわけではないですよ。冷静
に相手の男を観察し計算して男を操り捕まえようとし、いる者
ばかりじゃないんです。
「と言えと？」
「だからではない、おいしい物を食べさせてくれたり高価な
プレゼントをくれるからではない、そういう得をする面とは関
係なく、自分は純粋に彼を愛しているのだった、と思い込んで
ただが興奮しているのです。思い込んでおり、とあえて言うの
はつまや、恋人の羽振っている時には、彼に愛している理由に
とっくり返しておきながら、同じ相手がエリート街道からドッ
プ・アウトしたり不治の病を患ったり金持ちの親が破産したり
すると、途端に振返って、愛シティでシティカズ内観
ダソウと寛然と言い放し、さっぱリと別れてしまう子が多い
からです。そして、前の男を見つけると今度コソ物ノ
恋ダソと言ятия。
「ありがとうございます。
「そんな女の子たちを近身に見て私は、非難するよりもむし
ろ、降伏や思い込みだとしても、利益と引き換えに胸の中に愛
情を引き起こす彼女たちの能力に、感嘆せずにいられ
ませんでした。」
「この能力は使えるのではないか、そう考えた
時に今番の業績のヒントが挙げたんです。」
「確かに、利益と引き換えでなくても、疑似恋愛感情ならわり
に簡単に芽生えるもののようなですね。無念に恋をしたるロマ
ンティックも多いし。」
「ええ、そこで私は考えました。もしもあるタイプの女たち
に、自己不良によって愛情もしくは愛情に酷似した感情を抱く
能力が働いているとしたら、この能力を開発して、意図的に
自己不良をかけ任意の相手に愛情を寄せさせるように自分を仕向け
ることも可能なのではないか。もちろん、好ましいか何故か限度
度はあって、どうしても好きでなければ男も稀にはいるだろう
けど、まずたいていは相手がどんな女でもどんな性格でも
愛することはできないのではないか。」
「愛しているつもりになれる、でしょう。あなたの主張からする
と。」
「そうですね。とかもく、本心は利益が目当てであっても、意
識の表面ではつつき合っている相手を純粋に愛しているつもりに
なれるなら、さらに能力を増大させれば、不確に契約を結
び金銭の受け渡しを行っても、契約を結んだからではない、お
金をもっているからではない。そんなことは無関係に、私
は彼が好きだからおつき合いしているのだ、と思い込んで不
思議はないというものです。」

「理論的にはね。」
「会社では、まず女の子を集めて自己催眠の訓練をさせます。
たとえ背が低くて丸っこい人でても、爪の形が可愛いやかまって背
中が硬いのだがとか積極的にお相手の一部を見つけて、彼の
少し激しい好意を拡大して愛情を募るようにする
んです。肝心なのは、上手に愛しているぶりをすることはあく
く、上手に自分を仮想恋愛状態に持ち込むこと。この点
が、かつての若者を燃やすところですね。
「限りなく本物に近い愛情を笑うのわけではない。」
「決して管理売春じゃないんです。愛情を求めてやって来る男
たちに、愛情を与える準備ができた女子を紹介するだけです
から、あくまでも女の子と客の間に恋愛をした結果を生す
手助けをするのが目的で、女の子を紹介した後は、肉体
交渉が行なわれようが行なわれまいが、疑似恋愛が本物の恋愛
に発展して結婚に至ろうが、当方はいっさい関心しません。
結
婚相手を紹介する会員制サークルがあるでしょう。それと
愛人
斡旋業の中間的なシステムですね。ただし、結婚や肉体交渉で
は恋愛を目的としているのが新しいんです。
一生懸命に話す若者に何度も親近した後、私は疑問を口にした。
「どれに、わざわざ恋愛をしてやろうと、きいてやって来る
男がいるのかしら？かりにいたとしても、そんな風な疑似恋愛
で満足するのかしら？
若者は自信をたっぷりと答えた。
「Mさん、世間の男女がしたがっているのは、しぐ面倒くさ
く傷つかない恋、手軽で心地よい恋、重荷にならない恋なんて
dですよ。辛いこともあれば魔術になることもある本物の恋なんか
誰も求めてやしません。恋愛の甘い部分だけがほしいんです。
そんな人々のニーズに応える機関をつくったんです。」
「聞いたことはもう一つあった。
「あなたも客とつき合うの？」
「いいえ、私は営業するだけです。」
「なぜやらないの？」
「それは--」初めに若者はこたえを消した。「やりたくないで
すよ。」
「だからどうして？」
「私自身は恋愛したことは得意じゃないんですから。
「も、あなた自身が何目的でそういう仕事を始めるの？」
「目的なんて別にありません。思いつくだけです。今のところ
他にやりたいこともないですね。」
妙に力なくそう答えた時の遙子が見せた陰性の笑いを忘れることができない。あの若い娘には感動とともにどこか痛々しさもつまったと。

一実は遙子と私の会話にはほとんど口を挟まず、時折友人のことばに違い笑い声をたてるだけだった。私の耳のところ、二人は親友同士と言っても考え方や感じ方を同じくする気が合ったコンビではなく、遙子の一実への思い入れと一実の無垢な受容性によって成り立った仲であった。遙子が一実のような人間と一緒に入ると安らかだ気持ちになれるのはよくわかるが、一実に遙子の感受性が理解できるわけではないから、長い間には傷つけることも多かったのではないかだろう。

一実は喫茶店を一口啜って溜息をついた。「自分の死体をいちばんに見つけてほしいと思うような友達がいるなら、私だったら自殺したりしませんけどね。」「自殺しそうな気配はなかったの？」「なかった、と思います。遙子はずっと明るかったし、いくらか口数は少なくなっていたけど、私達は週に六日会って、あまり話題もありませんでしたからね。—ただ、私は純粋だから彼女が、変化がつかなかったのは知れない。遙子によく、あんたは頼っていたわけだって。」

私は思わず言ってしまった。「やっかり？」「やっかりって—」一実は眼を丸くし。「Mさんも私は鈍いと思いますか？」

「まあ—」笑いをこらえながら言う。「あなたは素直でとてもいい子だけど、物に敏感な方ではないみたいよ。」「そうですか。」

彩沢遙子の設立した恋愛供給会社＜LOVERSHP＞は成功した。マスコミはこぞって＜LOVERSHP＞を採り上げ、二十歳の娘の考案した奇妙な商品は広く知られ渡った。事業内容ばかりでなく会社の設立者たちの関心が持たれるのは当然で、新風俗の仕掛け人は人気の種備の二十歳」といった類のありふれた見出しの取材記事が週刊誌等に氾濫したが、掲載された写真に写っていたのは遙子とは似ても似つかない娘であり、名前も「朝月美沙」となっていた。賢明にも遙子はダミーを用意していたのである。

＜LOVERSHP＞は順調に拡大発展し続けたようだ。事務所は中級アパートから乃木坂のマンションに移転した。ライバル会社もいくつか育ち足した。＜LOVERSHP＞に登録した女の子の何人かは顧客の男性とめてたく祝言を挙げ、結婚式の模様は午後のワイドショー番組で放映された。ヌード写真を発表しタレントに転身した子もいる。話題には事欠かなかった。

しかし、遙子自身ははしゃいでいなかった。半年ほど前、電話で話した際の彼女の声は実に暗かった。

「今度、料理等を教えるカルチャー・スクールを併設するんです。」

「登録している女の子たちに習わせるの？」

「それと、一般の女児たちも集めて、その中から新しく会員をスカウトするんですね。」

「がんばってるのね。」

「もうやけくそみたいだものですよ。面白くもない。」

「どうして？」

「マスコミも含めて、うちに集まって来る男女を眺めていると、人間が嫌いになるんです。やっぱり私は人間の悲しさや汚穏さを愛せないみたい。特に女が嫌ですね。何の志もなければ自分の手で人生を切り拓いて行こうという積極性もない—」

「やめちゃえば？」

「そうですね。」

私がやめろと言ったのは会社のことだったが、彼女は生きるのがやめてしまった。

遙子の暗い声を耳にしていたことは話さず、一実に尋ねる。「＜LOVERSHP＞はどうなるの？」

「ある企業が買い取りました。私も、もう疲れ果てましたよ。」

沈黙を挟んで、再び一実は口を開いた。

「私、遙子に呪われているような気がします。」「何でだ？」

「あの子の考えていることに、あまりに無頓着だったから、もっとかまってあげるべきでした。」

「わかってもらえるようがもらえまいが、彼女はあなたを好きだったでしょう。」

「だったら、どうして私に死んだ姿を見せつけたんだそうだ？」

「思いがけない一実の強い言葉に、私は少々たじろがった。」

「嫌がさせだろうと思うの？」

「そうは思いたくないけど。」

「推測だけど—」私は慎重にほぼを換えた。「死にざまを見せつけることで、あなたが強く結びつきたかったんじゃないの？」

「結びついてしまったよ、とうの昔から。」

「もっと強く、よ。体に刻込みそうな具合に。」
一実はわからないという顔をした。私も強いて納得させようとはしなかった。
「で、相談っていうのは何なの？」
「あ、そうだね。」一実は無言をさせた。「一昨日、夢を見たんです。」
「彩沢さんの？」
「ええ、遙子は出て来ないんです。」一実は黙り、明確な発音で一実は言った。「右足の親指がベニスになったんです。」
「私は一実の顔を見直した。
「何がベニスになったって？」
「右足の親指がんです。」
恋愛供給会社のベニスになる足の指だ、いったいどうなっているのだろう、と思って私は笑い出した。一実は私につられて片顔で微笑と、詳しく話し始めた。
「悪い夢で、全然ドラマティックではないんですけどね。ふと気がつくと、右の足の親指がベニスになってるんです。夢の中だから、驚きもしなければ、こんな馬鹿な、と疑いもしないんです。まあ、我にペニスがある、とそのまま受け入れて感動した。人のペニスなら珍しくないけれども、自分のだけを新鮮でしょう？感動と同時に、しまった！とも思ったんです。女にとっては永遠に神秘的な快楽、味わってみたいとも言えないう、想像をみごろせている。ベニスの快楽を、今経験することができるんですから。現実ではない、困ったことになった、と悩めるでしょうが、夢の中の私は困ったのってちょっと感じなくて、しまった！と思うと即座に親指ペニスを掴んで出しました。」
「私は急かず笑って笑った。一実の話は続いた。
「夢の中でも感じてあるんですけれど、掴んだだけで親指ペニスは、何と言うか、いつものですよ。ぐくしくのような覚えるような、甘い感じが起こるんです。こすり始めると親指は膨張して、だんだん快感が昂まって行って、ライマックスの予感に胸もときめいた、それにしてー一実は声を落とした。「予感より早くライマックスが来たんです。しかも期待したほどでなくて、快感が急速に拡がりかけ熱が追い打ちに放射されるかと思った途端、すぐとわが親指ペニスは萎えただじゃないんですか。もう私はがっくりして、何だ、男の快楽ってこの程度のものなのか、と嘘かずにいられませんでしたよ。そこで眼が覚めたんです。」

いつの間にか私は真剣に関興入っていた。「掴んだだけで、何というか、いいんですよ」と言った時の一実の声と表情が、またに性的経験の歓びをとおじしく思い起こす者それぞれだったせいか、話が生々しく伝わたって来たのである。聞きながら、私自身の右足の親指が膨張し震えたような感じがあった。ベニスであるはずのない足の指に力をこめてみる。荒唐無稽で愉快な夢と笑い飛ばす前に、私は一実の夢を忠実に追体験してしまった。

「そればって什么ですか？」
「別に、と答えようとした矢先、一実は急にばかりかな声を上げた。
「もしかしてMさん、親指ペニスがあるんじゃないでしょうね？」
「まさか。」私は苦笑了。「でも、そんな夢を見た後心配にならない？本当に右足の爪にペニスができてるんじゃないかって。」

「心配ですか。」一実は自分の足先に手を伸ばす。その夢を見た以来、絶えず気になかかっている。正夢だったらどうしよう、と思って。やっぱり現実にペニスができると面白くなっただけれ、一日に何度も靴下を脱いで確かめたくなるんです。今朝も起きると無実足に見えました。」

「実の手が付く足の甲の上を滑る。
「たった今、靴下を脱いでみたくってたまらんのです。」
靴下の口にかけられた指が無実様で動いた。
「Mさん、ちょっと見てくれませんか？」

「黒い靴下を履いた足が現実流線をはね上げて、私の前に投げ出された。言うまでもなく、私は人の靴下を脱がせる趣味はない。
「本当ですか？」
「早く見てください。」

断固とした言いかたに負け、私は不本意ながら両手の人差指を一実の靴下の口に引かせた。一気に引っ張ると靴下はすっぱり抜けた。

露わになった足先を見た私は無表情だった。
現在一実の右足の親指はベニスそのものであった。

J
Mano Kazumi was very close to an acquaintance of mine; I myself didn't know her well enough to call her a friend. Since our only connection was through this third party, we had only met two or three times, and a full two years had passed since I last saw her. It came as no surprise, then, that I had trouble calling up an image of her face until she was actually standing in front of me.

This was just what had happened when Kazumi called about a month ago to pass on the sad news that Ayasawa Yōko—her friend and my acquaintance—had died. I couldn't for the life of me remember what Kazumi looked like. This was also true the second time she called, early one morning, to say she had something she wanted to discuss with me, and would I mind if she dropped by. Thinking it would be nice to have some idea what she looked like, however vague, before her arrival an hour later, I strove to call up any image. I had been up late the night before, however, and was still lying in my futon when she phoned, so I ended up drifting off to sleep again before my efforts could pay off.

Roused from my slumber by a barrage of knocks on the front door, it gradually dawned on me that an hour earlier I had agreed to have a talk with Kazumi, and I made a mad dash for the hall. No sooner had I opened the door and seen her standing there, evidently worried that she was intruding, than a memory of her face—the precise memory I had earlier failed so miserably to call up, hard as I tried—erupted in a burst of *déjà vu* from some deep stratum of my mind and superimposed itself neatly over the features before me.

"It's been a while." Mano Kazumi gave a little bow, smiling shyly.

Yes, I remember now. The slight plumpness of her cheeks, the way her lower eyelashes droop down, and the lovely arc of her lips, the fullness of which comes as something of a surprise, given how small her mouth is . . . yes, yes, this is the Mano Kazumi I knew—the woman I recalled sitting there beside Ayasawa Yōko, doing her best not to attract attention. At first glance Kazumi has the sort of face people often describe as "cute," but upon closer examination it strikes the observer that her eyes and nose are somewhat precariously balanced, giving her expression the air of a child on the verge of tears—a look that was half funny, half sad. Each time we met, I had secretly thought of her as "The Young Woman with the Strange Face."

After hastily folding my futon and stuffing it into the closet, I invited Kazumi into my room. Needless to say, this was the first time she had ever set foot in my apartment. She settled down at the kotatsu and began eyeing the cramped six-mat room as though it were something rare.

"No word processor or fax machine or anything. Doesn't look much like a novelist lives here, does it?"

"I'd be happier if you told me it doesn't look like an average Japanese citizen lives here. I don't have a VCR or a CD player, either."

"Are you poor? Yōko was always puzzled by you, you know. I just don't get it, she used to say. Why doesn't M. get herself a proper job?"

I steered the conversation in another direction.

"Have the forty-ninth-day rites taken place yet?"

"Yes. Three days ago." Kazumi's face became sad. "I have to tell you, one thing you really never want to be is the person who discovers a body. I had nightmares about that moment every night until the day of the rites. I haven't told you how she died, have I?"

Yōko had hung herself, tying the rope to the doorknob in the bathroom of her 2LDK apartment. She was twenty-two.

She had, Kazumi said, carefully done up her hair and made up her face before going through with her plan.

"She called me the night before. She had left her car at the house of one of our customers, and she wanted me to drive her to the office the next day. So the next morning I went over to pick her up, and . . . there she was. I mean, why would she ask me to come get her if she planned to die?"

"Because she wanted you to find her, naturally."

"You think so?"
I couldn't tell whether Kazumi was being naive or obtuse. I had heard her talk this way before. About two years ago, Yōko, who had just started her own company and was planning to hire Kazumi as her right-hand woman, had come to me somewhere, bringing Kazumi with her. When Yōko stepped out of the room for a moment, Kazumi whispered, “You know, M., I really don't understand why Yōko has asked me to join her company. I won't be any use at all. It's not like I'll be able to do the bookkeeping or anything.” She asked me because she trusts you, of course,” I told her. To which Kazumi had responded: “Do you think so?” Her tone then was identical to the one she had used just now.

Yōko was just the opposite of Kazumi when it came to things like this—she always saw that there was more to things than met the eye, and her sense of what more there was tended to be quite jaded. The cynicism of her worldview was evident in her concept for the new business. That day we got together two years ago she had explained—in what was, for her, a fairly enthusiastic tone—just what sort of business her company would be conducting.

“It's like the sex trade, only what we sell isn't sex, it's love.”

“I didn't know love was something you could sell.”

“You can, actually. Of course, some love can't be bought. But young women these days are as infatuated with rich men as the pros are.”

“At least that's what people say.”

“Do you realize what that means, though? It's not necessarily the case that women who like rich men are being calculating, choosing well-to-do partners solely on the basis of the math. They're not all coldly observing their men, adding everything up, then trying to pull their strings.”

“Oh? What are they doing, then?”

“A surprising number of these women seriously believe that the love they feel for these men is pure. It has nothing to do with all the nice things they get out of the relationships, with the fact that they get expensive presents and good food to eat. They're not calculating anything. These women really believe that. There's a reason I keep emphasizing that they 'believe' this, though, leaving a little room for doubt. Because although these women keep telling themselves “He's so kind, I really love him” as long as their honey is flying high, the moment that same man drops out of his Elite Street life or comes down with a terminal disease, the moment his rich parents go bankrupt, well, all of a sudden the women start singing a very different tune—all at once they declare, without any qualms whatsoever, “I thought I loved him but I was wrong,” and then, with hardly a moment's hesitation, they throw him over. There are plenty of women like that. And when they meet the next man, it's “This time my love is real.”

“You hear that kind of story a lot, it's true.”

“Having observed these young women at close range, I discovered that I wasn't really inclined to criticize them; on the contrary, I couldn't help marveling at their ability to stir up a passion within their breasts that really felt like love, even if they were deceiving themselves or simply had it wrong, and to do it for a profit. It struck me that perhaps I could find a way to use this ability of theirs. That was what gave me the idea for this new venture.”

“People are quick to start feeling pseudo-love, it's true, even when there's no profit involved. There are plenty of romantics out there who are just dying to fall in love.”

“Exactly. So I started thinking. If there's a particular type of woman out there who has the ability to hypnotize herself into feeling love, or at any rate something extraordinarily close to love, then it ought to be possible to cultivate that ability, to learn how to carry out the hypnosis intentionally, so that these women would be able to coax themselves into falling in love with a given man. Of course, people have preferences, there are limits to what they can accept, and on some rare occasions men might show up who they simply couldn't love; but for the most part they should, I thought, be able to fall in love with almost anyone, regardless of appearance or personality. That was my idea.”

“To believe they're in love, right? According to what you are saying?”

“Yes, of course. The point is, though, that for a woman who can make herself believe, on a conscious level, that the love she feels for her partner is pure, even when her real motive is profit—for a woman like that, it ought to be possible to hone that ability even more, so that even if she does something less than pure, like sign a contract, and even if money changes hands, she should still be able to tell herself she's dating the guy because she loves him—it has nothing at all to do with the contract they signed, or the fact that she's getting money from him. For these women, that sort of thing shouldn't pose a problem.”
“In theory, no.”

“My company recruits these women and trains them in autosuggestion. We teach them to search actively for things in men that they can feel good about, even when the men are, for instance, short and bald and fat and hairy, and when the only time they ever talk is to explain what wonderful men they are or to tell dirty stories. We teach the women to pick up on little things—to notice how adorable a man’s fingernails are, or to see a sort of helplessness in his bad posture—and then take that faint gleam of friendly feeling and amplify it, so that they start feeling something akin to love. The important thing isn’t to give a convincing performance, making it seem as if they really love them; our women have to be skilled at putting in his bad posture—and then take that faint gleam of friendly feeling and amplify it, so that they start feeling something akin to love. The important thing isn’t to give a convincing performance, making it seem as if they really love them; our women have to be skilled at putting themselves in a state of virtual love. This is what distinguishes us from escort agencies of the past.”

“In other words, you’re selling love that’s infinitely close to the real thing.”

“We’re not pimping—that isn’t it at all. All we do is introduce women with love to offer to men who come looking for it. Our sole aim is to provide a helping hand, to do what we can to foster a love-like alliance between a woman and a customer. Needless to say, it doesn’t concern us in the slightest whether or not the couples have physical intercourse, or whether or not the pseudo-love blossoms into actual love and ultimately leads to marriage. You’ve heard of these clubs that introduce potential marriage partners, right? Our system lies somewhere between those and the escort agencies. Except that we’re not about marriage or physical intercourse, we’re about love. That’s what makes us different.”

I had been nodding my head as Yôko earnestly described her plan, but now the time had come to express my doubts.

“I kind of wonder, though. Do you really think men will be excited enough at the prospect of falling in love that they’ll go to all the trouble of seeking you out? And even if some are, will they be content with that sort of pseudo-love?”

“Listen, M.,” Yôko said, her voice oozing confidence. “Do you know what men and women are after in this world of ours? They want love that isn’t a hassle and doesn’t hurt, love that’s carefree and fun, love that doesn’t become a burden. No one’s looking for the real thing, actual love that can be painful and get in the way of other things—not at all. They just want the tasty bits. I’ve created an enterprise that meets those needs.”

I had one more question.

“Will you take customers yourself?”

“No. I just manage things.”

“Why won’t you?”

“Because . . .” For the first time, Yôko hesitated. “I don’t want to.”

“But why not?”

“Because I’m not good at these love-like things.”

“Then what motivated you to start a business like this?”

“I don’t really have a motive. It’s just an idea I had. After all, it’s not like there’s anything else I particularly want to do at the moment.”

I’ll never forget the somber smile that Yôko gave then, as she made that strangely enervated response. She was a haughty young woman, but there was also something touchingly pathetic about her.

Kazumi hardly contributed at all to the conversation; she just smiled from time to time at some of the phrases her friend used. As far as I could tell, the two of them were very intimate but not a pair, if being a pair meant thinking and feeling the same way about things. No, their friendship was cemented by the combination of Kazumi’s innocence and susceptibility and Yôko’s affection for Kazumi. It made sense to me that Yôko would feel at ease around someone like Kazumi, but since Kazumi couldn’t quite comprehend Yôko’s own sensibility, Yôko must have been wounded often in the course of the long period of time they spent together.

Kazumi took a sip of pearl barley tea, then heaved a sigh.

“If I had a friend I wanted, more than anyone else, to be the one to discover my body, I would never even consider suicide.”

“Were there any signs that she was thinking of killing herself?”

“No, I don’t think so. Yôko was as cheerful as ever, right to the end. She had grown a little quieter, it’s true, but we saw each other six times a week, you know; we didn’t have all that much to talk about. . . . I’m so slow on the uptake, though, it’s possible I just didn’t notice that she’d changed. She used to tell me that all the time. You’re so dense, Kazumi, she’d say. You just don’t get it.”

I blurted out the words before I could stop them. “I knew it.”

“What do mean, you knew it . . .” Kazumi’s eyes widened. “You think I’m dense, too?”

“You see . . .” I began, suppressing my laughter. “You’re a really nice young woman, very mild and obliging, but you’re not what I’d call a sensitive type.”

“I see.”
The love-distributor that Ayasawa Yōko founded, LOVESHIP, succeeded. The company was given such extensive coverage by the mass media that before long everyone had heard about the peculiar new business scheme that this twenty-year-old woman had hatched. Naturally people were interested, not only in the operations of the business itself, but also in the woman who had launched the company. The weekly magazines were flooded with interviews and articles bearing predictable headlines like "Meet the Mastermind Behind the New Trade in Love: Brilliant, Beautiful, and Only Twenty Years Old." The young woman in the pictures that ran with these articles didn't look at all like Yōko, however, and her name was given as Uzuki Misa. Yōko had been savvy enough to prepare a dummy in advance.

LOVESHIP continued to develop and expand steadily. The office moved from an ordinary middle-class apartment to a more spacious set of rooms in Nogizaka. A number of rival companies appeared on the scene. Some of the women who had registered with LOVESHIP joyfully tied the knot with their male customers, and scenes from their wedding ceremonies were broadcast on daytime television. Another woman went on to become a TV personality and released a collection of nude photos. There was no shortage of fodder for media gossip.

Yōko herself didn't get caught up in the excitement, however. Six months ago, when I'd talked with her on the phone, her tone had sounded extremely dark.

"I'm about to open a Cultural Center on the side. To teach cooking and stuff."

"What, you'll have the women on your list attend or something?"

"Yes. But we'll also bring in young women from outside. That will help us scout out new members."

"You're really working hard, huh?"

"I hardly care anymore. It's no fun at all."

"Why not?"

"Watching all the people who flock to the company, including those in the media, has made me into a misanthrope. I guess it's true . . . I just don't seem able to appreciate the pathos and humor of life. I'm especially disgusted by the women. They have no ambition at all, no will to go out and clear their own path through life with their own hands. . . ."

"Why don't you just stop, then?"

"Yeah, I know, I know."

I told her to give up the company, but instead she gave up living.

I decided not to tell Kazumi about the darkness I'd heard in Yōko's voice.

"So what's going to happen to LOVESHIP?" I asked Kazumi.

"Another company bought it. It's too much for me, too. I'm drained."

After a brief silence, Kazumi spoke again.

"I feel as if Yōko has put a curse on me."

"Why would she do that?"

"Because I didn't concern myself at all with what she was thinking. I ought to have tried harder to understand her point of view."

"Whether or not you understood, it's clear that she liked you, right?"

"Then why did she make me discover her dead body?"

I flinched at the unexpected vehemence of Kazumi's reply.

"You think she wanted to hurt you?"

"I'd rather not believe that."

"This is just speculation," I said, choosing my words carefully.

"But I wonder if, by forcing you to see her body, she wasn't trying to create a bond between the two of you?"

"There's been a bond between us for ages."

"A stronger bond. Almost like physically leaving a mark on you." Kazumi's expression made it clear that she didn't get what I was saying. And I didn't try to make her understand.

"So what did you want to talk about?"

"Right, I'd forgotten." Kazumi sat up straighter. "I had a dream the night before last."

"About Yōko?"

"No, Yōko wasn't in it." Then, after pausing to take a breath, without stopping again, enunciating each word very clearly, Kazumi declared: "THE BIG TOE ON MY RIGHT FOOT HAD TURNED INTO A PENIS."

I stared at Kazumi.

"Sorry? What had turned into a penis?"

"The big toe on my right foot."
First it's a clearinghouse for love, then it's a toe that becomes a penis. What is it with these two? The thought of it all was so amusing that I laughed. Infected by my mood, Kazumi gave a little grin as well, then started relating the content of her dream in more detail.

"I mean, it was a pretty short dream, and it wasn't at all dramatic or anything. I just realized all of a sudden that the big toe on my right foot was a penis. I didn't feel surprised because that's how things are in dreams, and it never even occurred to me to wonder whether something so absurd could actually be happening. I simply accepted it; to tell the truth I felt kind of moved. It was like, Wow, I've got a penis! There's nothing particularly unusual about a penis if it's someone else's, but it feels kind of fresh when it's your own, you know? And at the same time I was feeling this surge of emotion, I was thinking, Yes! This is amazing! Because now I would be able to experience a pleasure that remains eternally mysterious to us women—a feeling we have no opportunity to experience, no matter how much we may want to, and that I had only been able to imagine until then: the sensation felt by male genitals during orgasm.

I didn't worry about all the trouble my new penis would cause, but in my dream I had tried to make it stiffen. Even before I could laugh off Kazumi's dream as no more than an incredible, wild, and delightful story, I had actually tried to experience it on my own.

Kazumi turned a suspicious gaze on me as I sat wriggling my foot.

"Is something wrong?"

I was about to tell her I was fine when she cried out gleefully.

"Don't tell me you have a toe-penis yourself!"

"Please," I said with a wry smile. "Don't you feel a bit anxious, though, after having a dream like that? Don't you sometimes think, What if I really do end up with a penis at the tip of my right foot?"

"Oh, absolutely! It's been worrying me constantly." Kazumi reached down and wrapped her hand around the tip of her foot. "It's been on my mind ever since I had the dream. I keep thinking, What will I do if that dream turns out to have been prophetic? Because in real life, it would be a huge pain to have a penis appear like that. Several times a day, I get the urge to take off my sock and check. I did that first thing this morning, too—the minute I woke up, I looked at my foot." Kazumi moved her hand back to her heel. "Right now, I have such a strong urge to take off my sock that I can hardly stand it." Her fingers hovered indecisively over the top of her sock. "I wonder, M.—do you think you could do me a favor and take a look?"

Kazumi kicked away the kotatsu quilt with her black-socked foot and thrust her leg out in front of me. I need hardly mention that removing other people's socks is not my thing.

"Are you serious?"

"Just take a look, please. Hurry."

Unable to resist her emphatic tone, I grudgingly inserted the index fingers of both my hands into the top of her sock. It slid right off when I pulled.

I goggled, entranced, at Kazumi's bare foot.

The big toe of mano Kazumi's right foot was a penis.
Prologue (Edited)

I had met Mano Kazumi just a few times. She was very close to an acquaintance of mine, and that was how we were introduced. It'd been two years since I'd last seen her.

About a month ago Kazumi rang to pass on the sad news that our mutual friend, Ayasawa Yōko, had died. Then recently, early one morning, she called again, saying she wanted to discuss something with me, and would I mind if she dropped by in an hour. Groggily I tried to call up an image of her, but none came, and I drifted off back to sleep unable to put a face to her name.

I was roused by a barrage of knocks on the door, and suddenly remembering Kazumi was coming over, I made a mad dash to the door. When I opened it and saw her standing there timidly, the memory of her came rushing back and superimposed itself neatly over the person before me.

"It's been a while," Kazumi said, bowing slightly, smiling shyly.

Yes, the slight plumpness of her cheeks, the droop of her lower eyelashes, and the lovely arc of her lips, the fullness of which comes as a surprise because her mouth is so small... yes, yes, this is the Mano Kazumi I knew—the woman who did her best not to attract attention as she sat beside Yōko. At first glance Kazumi has the sort of face people describe as cute, but upon closer examination the observer notes that her eyes and nose are somewhat precariously balanced, giving her the expression of a child on the verge of tears—a look that was half funny, half sad. I had secretly thought of her as "the Young Woman with the Funny Face."

I hastily folded my futon and stuffed it into the closet, and invited Kazumi into my room. This was the first time she had ever set foot in my apartment.

She settled down at the kotatsu and eyed the cramped six-mat room as though it were something rare.

"No computer or anything. Doesn't look like the home of a novelist," she said.

"I'd be happier if you said it doesn't look like the home of an average Japanese. I don't have a DVD or a CD player either."

"Are you poor? You know, Yōko was always puzzled by you. She used to wonder why you didn't get a job."

I changed the subject. "Have the rites taken place yet—for the forty-ninth day after her death?"

"Yes, three days ago," Kazumi said, somewhat sadly. "I have to say, you never want to be the person who discovers a body. I had nightmares about it every night until the rites. I didn't tell you how she died, did I? She had on a prim white dress—the sort of thing a well-bred young lady would wear, nothing like her usual loud clothes. But then she had this heavy rope around her neck—didn't go with the dress at all. It was so creepy—when I found her, I couldn't tear my eyes away."

Yōko had hanged herself in her apartment, tying the rope to the bathroom doorknob and throwing it over the door. She was twenty-two. She had carefully done up her hair and made up her face before doing the deed.

"She called me the night before. She had left her car with one of our customers, and she wanted a ride to the office the next morning. So I went over to pick her up, and... there she was. I mean, why would she ask me to come get her if she planned to die?"

"Because she wanted you to find her."

"You think so?"

I couldn't tell whether Kazumi was being naïve or obtuse. It reminded me of an occasion when the three of us had gotten together, back when Yōko was starting her company and was planning to hire Kazumi as her right-hand woman. When Yōko stepped away briefly, Kazumi confided in me, "You know, M., I don't understand why Yōko asked me to join her company. It's not like I'll be able to do the bookkeeping or anything." "She asked you because she trusts you, of course," I said. And Kazumi replied, "Do you think so?" She had the same incredulous ring in her voice now that she'd had then.

Yōko was just the opposite of Kazumi—she always saw more to things than met the eye, and her sense of what more there was tended to be quite jaded. Her cynicism, in fact, was the basis for her new business, as she explained—rather enthusiastically for her—when she returned to the table. "It's like the sex trade—only what we sell isn't sex, it's love."

"I didn't know you could sell love."

"You can, actually. Of course, some love can't be bought. But young women these days are no less infatuated with rich men than the professionals are."
“At least that’s what people say.”

“Do you realize what that means? Women aren’t necessarily calculating, choosing their partners on the basis of the math.”

“Oh? What are they doing then?”

“A surprising number of these women seriously believe in the purity of the love they feel for a rich man—that it’s got nothing to do with the fact that they’re getting expensive gifts and meals at good restaurants. In their mind, they’re not calculating anything. They really believe they love the guy. And yet, while they may believe it, it isn’t entirely true. Because even though they keep telling themselves He’s so kind, and I really love him, the moment their honey drops out of his Elite Street life or comes down with a terminal disease, the moment his loaded parents go bankrupt, they start singing a different tune. All at once, without any qualms whatsoever, they say, I thought I loved him, but I was wrong, and then, with hardly a moment’s hesitation, they throw him over. There are plenty of women like that. And when they meet the next wealthy guy, they say, This time my love is real."

“You hear that kind of story a lot, it’s true.”

“After observing these young women at close range, I realized that it wasn’t in me to criticize them; on the contrary, I couldn’t help but marvel at their ability to rouse passion within their breasts that really felt like love, even if they were deceiving themselves, and to do it for a profit. That’s when it struck me—that I could profit from this ability of theirs.”

“People are quick to fall into pseudo-love even when there’s no profit involved. There are plenty of romantics just dying to fall in love.”

“Exactly. So I started thinking: If there’re women who have the ability to hypnotize themselves into feeling love, or something closely resembling love, then it ought to be possible to cultivate that ability, to perform the hypnosis expressly, so that women could coax themselves into falling in love with one particular man. Of course, people have preferences, there are limits to what they can accept, and on rare occasions a man might simply be beyond their capacity to love; but for the most part they should be able to fall in love with almost anyone, regardless of appearance or personality. That was my idea.”

“By making women believe they’re in love.”

“Yes. A woman who can consciously make herself believe that the love she feels for someone is pure even when her real motive is profit—in a woman like that, it ought to be possible to hone that ability even more, so that even if she does something less than pure, she can still herself she’s dating the guy because she loves him. It has nothing to do with the contract they signed or the money she’s getting from him. For these women, that sort of thing shouldn’t pose a problem.”

“In theory.”

“My company recruits these women and trains them in autosuggestion. We teach them to look actively for things in men that they can feel good about, even when the men are short and bald and fat and hairy, and never say anything unless it’s to brag or tell a dirty story. We teach the women to pick up on little things—the attractiveness of a man’s fingernails, say, or a charming vulnerability in his bad posture—and then take that faint gleam of warmth and amplify it, so that they start feeling something akin to love. The important thing isn’t to give a convincing performance, making them seem to love the man; our women have to be skilled at putting themselves in a state of virtual love. This is what distinguishes us from the usual sort of escort agencies.”

“In other words, you’re selling love that’s almost like the real thing.”

“But we’re not pimping. All we do is introduce women with love to offer to men who come looking for it. Our sole aim is to provide a helping hand, to do what we can to foster a love-like alliance between a woman and a customer. Needless to say, it doesn’t concern us in the slightest whether the couples have sexual intercourse, or whether the pseudo-love blossoms into actual love and ultimately leads to marriage. You’ve heard of these clubs that introduce potential marriage partners? Our system lies somewhere between them and escort agencies. Except that we’re not about either marriage or sex—we’re about love.”

I had been nodding as Yoko earnestly described her plan, but now the time had come to express my doubts. “I kind of wonder, do you really think men will be interested enough in love that they’ll go to all the trouble of seeking you out? And even if some are, will they be content with pseudo-love?”

“M.,” Yoko said, her voice oozing with confidence “do you know what men and women want in this world? They want love that isn’t a
hassle and doesn't hurt, love that's carefree and fun, love that doesn't become a burden. No one's looking for the real thing, actual love that can be painful and get in the way of other things—not at all. They just want the tasty bits. I've created an enterprise that meets those needs."

“So will you take customers yourself?”

“No. I'll just manage things.”

“Why not?”

“Because...” For the first time, Yōko hesitated. “I don't want to.”

“But why?”

“Because I’m not good at love-like things.”

“Then what motivated you to start a business like this?”

“I didn't have a motive. I just had an idea. And I didn't have anything else I wanted to do.”

I'll never forget the somber smile that crossed Yōko's face as she said that. She was a haughty young woman, but there was also something touchingly pathetic about her.

Sitting next to her, Kazumi did not contribute to the conversation except to smile from time to time at a phrase her friend used. As far as I could tell, the two of them were good friends but not a pair, if being a pair meant thinking and feeling the same way about things. No, their friendship was cemented by the combination of Kazumi's innocence and susceptibility and Yōko's affection for Kazumi. It made sense that Yōko would feel at ease around Kazumi, but since Kazumi couldn't quite comprehend Yōko's sensibility, Yōko must have been wounded often in the course of their long acquaintance.

Kazumi sipped her tea, sighing, then said, “If I had a friend I wanted more than anyone else to discover my body, I would never consider suicide.”

“What do mean...?”

“You see...” I began, “you're really nice, very easy and obliging, but you're not what I'd call sensitive... or perceptive.”

LOVESHIP, the love-distributorship that Yōko founded, was a success. The company was given such extensive coverage by the mass media that before long everyone knew about the peculiar business scheme this twenty-year-old woman had launched. Naturally, people were interested, not only in the operations of the business, but also in the woman behind the company. The weekly magazines were flooded with interviews and articles with predictable headlines like “Meet the Mastermind behind the New Trade in Love: Brilliant, Beautiful, and Only 20 Years Old.” The young woman in the pictures that ran with these articles didn't look at all like Yōko, however, and her name was reported as Uzuki Misa. Yōko had been savvy enough to prepare a dummy in advance.

LOVESHIP grew steadily. The office moved from an ordinary middle-class apartment to more spacious quarters in Nogizaka. Some of the women who had registered with LOVESHIP joyfully tied the knot with their customers, and scenes from their wedding ceremonies were broadcast on daytime television. Another woman went on to become a TV personality and released a collection of nude photos. A number of rival companies sprang up. There was no shortage of fodder for the media.

Yōko herself didn't get caught up in the excitement. Six months ago, when I'd talked with her on the phone, her tone was anything but. “I'm about to open a cultural center on the side,” she said flatly. “To teach cooking and stuff.”

“Yes. But we'll also bring in young women from outside. That will help us scout new members.”

“I'm really working hard.”

“Yeah, but I hardly care anymore. It's no fun.”

“Why not?”

“Watching all the people flock to the company, watching the media, it's made me hate people. I guess it's true... I don't appreciate the pathos and humor of life. The women disgust me the most. No ambition at all, no will to go out and clear their own path...”

“You think I'm dense, too?”

“You see...” I began, “you're really nice, very easy and obliging, but you're not what I'd call sensitive... or perceptive.”
I decided not to tell Kazumi about the darkness I'd heard in Yoko's voice.

"So what's going to happen to LOVESHIP?" I asked Kazumi.

"Another company bought it. I don't mind. I'm drained," she said. Then after a brief silence, she added, "I feel like Yoko put a curse on me."

"Why would she do that?"

"Because I didn't give her any attention. I didn't try hard enough to understand her."

"Whether or not you understood her, you know she was very fond of you."

"Then why did she make me discover her body?"

There was unexpected vehemence in Kazumi's reply, and I flinched. "You think she wanted to hurt you?"

"I'd rather not believe it."

"This is just speculation," I said, choosing my words carefully, "but I wonder if, by forcing you to discover her body, she was trying to create a bond between the two of you?"

"There's been a bond between us for ages."

"A stronger bond. Almost like physically leaving a mark on you."

From the expression on Kazumi's face, it was clear she didn't get what I was saying. I let it go at that. "So what did you want to talk about?"

"Right, I almost forgot." Kazumi sat up straighter. "I had a dream the night before last."

"About Yoko?"

"No, Yoko wasn't in it." Then, after pausing to exhale, she enunciated each word: "THE BIG TOE ON MY RIGHT FOOT HAD TURNED INTO A PENIS."

"What?" I stared at Kazumi. "What turned into a penis?"

"The big toe on my right foot."

First it's a clearinghouse for love, then it's a toe that becomes a penis. What was it with these two women? The thought of it was so crazy that I burst out laughing. Which made Kazumi grin a little, too. And then she told me about her dream:

"It was a pretty short dream, not so dramatic or anything. I just realized, all of a sudden, that the big toe on my right foot was a penis. I didn't feel surprised because that's how things are in dreams, and it never occurred to me to wonder if something so absurd could actually happen. I simply accepted it; to tell the truth, I felt kind of knocked out, like, Wow, I've got a penis! A penis isn't such a big deal if it's on someone else, some guy, but it feels wild and fresh when it's your own and you're a woman. I had this surge of emotion; I was thinking, Yes! This is amazing! Because now I could experience that eternally mysterious pleasure—a feeling women can never know: orgasm from sensations that male genitals feel. This was all happening in a dream, so the thought of what a pain it would be if such a thing actually happened never crossed my mind. I just thought, Yes! This is amazing! And then, without losing a second, I started to fondle it."

I burst out laughing, slapping the table.

Kazumi continued, "And you know, you can actually feel things in dreams. Just putting my hand around my toe-penis was enough to . . . I don't know how to explain it . . . it felt so good. This sweet wave rolled over me—it felt kind of ticklish, like it was quivering or something. And then when I started massaging it, my toe got bigger, and the pleasure got bigger, and I could feel the climax coming, and my chest was pounding, and then—" Kazumi lowered her voice, "the climax came sooner than I thought it would. And it didn't feel as good as I thought it would, and the pleasure had hardly begun to spread through my body when my toe-penis started to shrivel up. I couldn't believe it. It was such a letdown, and I was muttering to myself, What the hell? Is that all there is? That's all the pleasure men feel? And then I woke up."

Somewhere along the way, I found myself listening very intently to her story. "Just putting my hand around my toe-penis was enough to . . . I don't know how to explain it . . . it just felt so good." There was no doubt—the expression on Kazumi's face and the intonation of her words—this was a person remembering, tenderly, the thrill of sex. Her story was so vivid, so powerful, that I thought I'd sprung a penis on my big toe. I knew I didn't have one, but still I tried to make my toe get stiff. So before I could laugh off Kazumi's dream as incredible, and delightful, I had actually tried to experience it.

As I sat wriggling my foot, Kazumi turned a suspicious gaze on me. "Is something wrong?"

I was about to answer when she cried out gleefully, "Don't tell me you actually have a toe-penis!"

"Please," I laughed. "But after having a dream like that, don't you feel a little anxious? Don't you ever think, What if I really do grow a penis on my toe?"
"Absolutely! It's been worrying me constantly!" Kazumi reached down and wrapped her hand around the tip of her foot. "I keep thinking, What if that dream comes true? Because in real life, it would be a huge pain to have a penis like that. Since that dream, I've had the urge to take off my sock and check several times a day. It was the first thing I did this morning, too—as soon as I woke up, I looked at my foot." Kazumi moved her hand back to her heel. "Right now, the urge to take off my sock is so strong that I can hardly stand it." Her fingers found their way back to the top of her sock. "I wonder, M.—do you think you could do me a favor and take a look?"

Kazumi kicked away the kotatsu quilt with her black-socked foot and thrust her leg out in front of me. I need hardly mention that removing other people's socks is not my thing.

"Are you serious?"

"Just take a look, please. Hurry."

Unable to resist her urgency, I grudgingly inserted my two index fingers into the top of her sock and pulled.

I stared, entranced.

THE BIG TOE OF HER RIGHT FOOT WAS A PENIS.
Perhaps the most difficult problem confronting the translator is how to compensate for the violence of translating: the sheer loss of the multiple contexts in which the foreign work emerged and which always inform the foreign reader's experience of it. These foreign contexts are at once print and electronic, linguistic and literary, cultural and social. They range from the connotations of specific words to literary traditions and contemporary trends to the copy that appears on the book cover to the reviews and blogs that greet the book upon publication—all in the foreign language and culture. Because translating displaces these contexts, a reader of a translation can never appreciate it with the same breadth and depth of reference that enables the foreign reader to appreciate the foreign work. Nevertheless, the reader of the translation automatically fills the vacuum with previous reading experiences in the translating language, creating a set of comparable but markedly different contexts in the receiving culture. The translator must be prepared for this crucial difference, for the drift to what is more familiar to the reader, for the inevitably ethnocentric movement that lies at the heart of translating. In the case of cultures that translate relatively little, like the United States, and of literatures that have been relatively neglected, like Catalan, the problem is exacerbated to an impossible degree. Still, it can be anticipated and addressed in the translating, I believe, if not resolved to the satisfaction of every potential readership.

My current project tries to compensate for the virtual lack of any foreign context in which to read the work: I am translating Edward Hopper, a book by the contemporary Catalan poet Ernest Farrés. Each of the fifty poems in this book is based on a painting by the American artist. The few books of Catalan poetry translated into English have been mostly editions with small presses, limited in circulation and ephemeral. It is no exaggeration to say that, for anglophone readers, Catalan poetry does not exist. These readers are more than likely to bring to my translation a familiarity with Hopper's mythic images, perhaps some acquaintance with the Hopper-inspired poems written by noted American poets like Stephen Dunn, Edward Hirsch, and John Hollander. Against this backdrop, Farrés's book is absolutely stunning in its ambitiousness, its wit, and its probing interpretations of the visual images. The recurrent gambit among American poets is to offer an evocative description of the image or a narrative suggested by the represented scene or figures. On this basis the poets explore some humanistic or social theme—yet always with a detachment that reflects their different time and place, their different culture or social position. Farrés is ever mindful of these differences, but he resolutely avoids any detachment from Hopper's life and art and rather aims to perform a ventriloquist act. In the opening poem on Hopper's Self Portrait (1925-1930), Farrés lays out his Borgesian premises: the painting is a mirror, he asserts, since Hopper and he "form one single person."

Although each of Farrés's poems takes its title from one of Hopper's paintings, the poems are not arranged chronologically according to the dates when the paintings were completed. Instead Farrés's arrangement sketches a narrative that follows a poetic subject, an "I" in transit from small-town origins to big-city life, from the search for a job to a successful career, from bachelorhood to love and companionship, from youth to age and retirement, along with a cluster of scenes set in a coastal area. The story belongs to Hopper, of course, who always insisted that he was just trying to paint himself. He was raised in Nyack and later settled in New York City, spending summers in Cape Cod. Yet Farrés is also telling his own story insofar as he grew up in the Catalan town of Gualada and later moved to Barcelona to study at the university and to find work as a journalist. Any biographical allusions, however, must be identified by the reader, inferred from titles and dates, settings and themes. For as the book unfolds one gradually becomes aware that the poems are intended to be representative of social situations and historical moments, and the genre is not simply narrative, but a curious mixture of lyric and
epic, complete with an invocation of the muses. Farrés uses Hopper’s paintings to tell a story of modernity. The five poems that follow are taken from the section in which the subject arrives in the big city.

The language of these poems is typical of Farrés’s work. His Catalan texts mix the current standard dialect with colloquialisms and slang, archaisms, academic and technical jargons, and foreign loan words. They include the idiomatic expressions in which Catalan is abundant, as well as clichés from both elite and popular cultures. In my translations I have sought to match this heterogeneity, both at the precise points where Farrés’s texts cultivate it and, whenever I could not create such a correspondence, at other points where his Catalan is in the standard dialect.

But my English goes further: I develop an American vernacular that, in line with the biographical dimension of the project, samples the speech and writing of Hopper and his wife, the painter Josephine Nivison Hopper. Although famously laconic, averse to speaking in public, likely to find writing sheer drudgery, Hopper spoke and wrote a particularly rich form of American English. He routinely mixed registers and styles—formal and colloquial, poetical and slangy—which evoke a wide range of cultural discourses. His language can sometimes be linked to certain periods in the twentieth century, even specific decades, establishing a veritable chronology of American culture. To support my work I devised “An Edward Hopper Lexicon” (reprinted below), a sort of dictionary that lists representative words and phrases and includes quotations to show how Hopper and Nivison used them. I then drew on this lexicon where I could create a semantic correspondence with the Catalan texts. My work is translation, I would insist, not adaptation, even if it edges towards what poets today might call a “version.”

Ernest Farrés’s Edward Hopper can thus be positioned within another set of frameworks—linguistic and literary, art historical and biographical—to replace the Catalan contexts that are irreparably lost for the anglophone reader. Although I have stressed the continuities among the various materials that comprise this project, the disjunctions should not be minimized because they are more significant: they reveal that any second-order creation communicates not the prior work, but an interpretation of it. Ekphrasis, the verbal representation of visual art, does not reproduce the art, but rather exposes the difference between the verbal and the visual. Farrés’s poems sometimes present a landscape that is recognizably Spanish, not North American. Nor do they merely rehearse the facts of the painter’s life. Hopper’s politics, for instance, were extremely conservative. Not only did he oppose Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s presidency, but he was critical of the Depression-era Federal Art Project, which employed such realist painters as Thomas Hart Benton and Raphael Soyer. Although, like Hopper, Farrés criticizes modern cultural and social developments, Hopper would not have resorted to the marxist-oriented sociological analysis that recurs in the poems. When the poems are read against the painter’s images and biography, the relationships among them seem less imitative than interrogative, with the poet in the minor language and culture questioning the cultural icon of the globally hegemonic nation. My decision to weave Hopper’s own language into the translations invites the reader to foreground the differences between the poems and the paintings, as well as between the Catalan and the English.

— Lawrence Venuti
An Edward Hopper Lexicon

The following word list is culled from Hopper's correspondence and essays, interviews and conversation, as well as his remarks as recorded by his wife, the painter Josephine Nivison Hopper, in the diaries she kept for thirty-five years (1933-68). On the assumption that husband and wife spoke the same language, the list also includes words she used to describe his moods and actions. I have relied extensively on the documentation in Gail Levin's remarkable book, Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography (New York, 2007).

The selection of words and phrases served as an important resource for my translation of Ernest Fen's ekphrastic poetry, given its explicit biographical slant, its project of ventriloquizing the painter. Yet assembled here they also offer a unique insight into Hopper's life and culture. Although interested in what might be called a translatorly lexicography, I have omitted any definitions. I felt that the list would be more revealing if the immediate contexts, however fragmentary, were allowed to shape meanings and sketch narratives.

come to pass v. "I am sure I do not know when such a one [a certain type of watercolor] will come to pass." (1956)

complaint n. "These complaints of mine seem pretty trivial, when men are being brought ashore right here in Provincetown, badly shot to pieces." (1942)

comport v. "Given the same liberties, I am afraid that an American crowd would not comport itself so well." (1907)

creeps n. Hopper told Nivison that his old drawings and watercolors "gave him the creeps." (1958)

crook n. "A born crook." (1907)

cutey n. "The phrase, 'the greatest possible austerity without loss of emotion' is no child of mine however. [The art dealer Frank) Rehn is the real father of this cutey and has tried to hang it on me." (1928)

damn adj. Cuernavaca is a "damn art colony." (1943) "Look at these damn women cops." (1952)

drab adj. "You know when you go by on a train, everything looks beautiful. But if you stop, it becomes drab." (1967)

fool adj. "I have just learned of a damn fool letter that my wife sent you regarding the Arts Portfolio on my stuff" (1930)

for conj. "It's very likely that it will be my only new canvas, for I have painted but one this past winter." (1950)

germ n. "In every artist's development the germ of the later work is always found in the earlier." (1935)

get v. "I am having a show of recent water colors done in New England at the Frank Rehn Gallery and hope you will get to see it." (1924) "I can not seem to get into the thing." (1945) "You got good light?" (1966)

gip adj. Hopper called Madison Avenue "the gip St." (1952)

grind n. "First the hard grind and the acquiring sufficient technical skill to make a living." (1926)

all right adj. "If you think otherwise, that's all right." (1952)

baby n. "You certainly are some baby." (1952)

beat v. "In the first place it's raining 'to beat the band,' which prevents us from going outside very much and that is why I am writing for I said I should not." (1900) "Then her husband came home. He was drunk or something and he was going to do something. I don't know what. I beat it." (1956)

back up v. "We've had a big response to 'Reality' from all over the country, backing us up in our effort." (1953)

break loose v. "I've just broken loose with a very brilliant black tie." (1931)

cast v. "It is said also that they [Americans in Paris] are not casting their coin about as freely as in former times." (1909)
heretofore **adv.** "Three or four [listeners] at a time have been, heretofore, my limit." (1955)

hell **n.** Because Hopper had not painted for months, he was bothered "like hell." (1963) "Nor did I withdraw from the art world—whatever the hell that is." (1964)

horseplay **n.** "The crowd finds the sidewalks too narrow for its horseplay." (1906)

knock off **v.** After standing at a gallery exhibition Hopper was so tired that he "had to knock off painting" the day after. (1956)

let down **n.** "The food here, though, is a terrible let down." (1943)

do **v.** "It's coming up!" (1964)

lot **n.** "Hope you are feeling a lot better." (1925)

lousy **adj.** "In plain language most of the restaurant food is lousy." (1943)

nice **adj.** "It has a nice climate." (1943)

cartoonist **n.** "My best pal and severest critic' sends her best regards and I do also." (1926)

perhaps **adv.** "I am hoping that ideas less easy to define have, perhaps, crept in also." (1937)

pot-boiler **n.** "When I am through with the pot-boilers I have on hand I am going at it [painting] in earnest." (1917)

pretty **adj.** "It is pretty hard to get near them or do much of anything without a car." (1943)

punk **adj.** "I have one canvas and am starting another and have a few punk water colors." (1930)

rather **v.** "I'd rather not do it." (1952)

rile **v.** "He's better fed, more blithesomely fed during the infrequent periods when I do paint. But, it riles him." (1934)

scared stiff **adj.** "I shall be scared stiff upon addressing all those faces, either critical or uncritical, as I have never before spoken to so many." (1955)

should like **v.** "Mr. Barr's article seems adequate to me and I should like to have it included, if that has been your intention." (1933)

shucks **n.** "Aw shucks." (1961)

stack up **v.** "Hoping they stack up well but feel they are very slight and do not represent me as yet." (1917)

stink **v.** "It stinks." (1941)

swap **v.** "One of my paintings was swapped for an Eakins recently. That's coming up!" (1964)

sweat **v.** "I sweat blood when I write." (1926)

swell **adj.** and **n.** "I think you did a swell job on me as a Puritan in the Whitney Museum book." (1931) Rehn would "play golf with the swells." (1956)

tack on **v.** Hopper's painting *Early Sunday Morning* "wasn't necessarily Sunday. That word was tacked on later by someone else." (1961)

works **n.** A caption for a caricature Hopper drew of his wife reads: "There's a virgin—give her the works." (1932)
Approaching a City, 1946

Veig terres rònegues i alguns pinars
que m'acompanyen llargament (amb signes
de presència humana propera) a la meitat
d'un temps anticiclònic.

Creix a mesura que avancem el nombre
d'edificis industrials que s'alcen
com molés de desmoralsitzadora
i encomanadissa lletjor i, al lluny,
hi ha la ciutat superpoblada, amb infules
de bastidor d'un espectacle empíric,
desproveïda de sentit comú,
calidoscópica.

Veig regadius,
panells publicitaris
i ponts que salven recs
i carreteres entortolligant-se.

Veig els murs de contenció guixats
amb esprais de colors que separen les vies
de l'imbricat continuum de carrers, magatzems
i cases puntejades d'esquifides finestres.

Com si es tractés d'un tràveling, la càmera s'acosta
da la boca del túnel i, en el moment d'entrar-hi
i veure el món present desnaturalitzat
i de sobte confós amb la foscor novella,
em sento com qui es fica on no el demanen, deixo
emportar-me pels nervis i penso si faig bé.

Approaching a City, 1946

I see scrub lands and some pine groves
that escort me for a long stretch (with signs
of human presence
nearby) in the midst
of anticyclonic weather.

It increases at the rate we advance
the number of industrial buildings that rise
like huge masses of demoralizing
and contagious ugliness, and in the distance
looms the overpopulated city, with infulae
of framework for an empiricist spectacle,
bereft of common sense,
kaleidoscopic.

I see irrigated lands,
billboards and bridges
that span ditches
and twisting highways.

I see retaining walls with spray-painted
scrawls dividing routes
in the overlapping continuum of streets, warehouses
and homes dotted with narrow windows.

As if rigged for a tracking shot, the camera approaches
the mouth of the tunnel and just at the moment of entry,
seeing the present denatured world
and suddenly overwhelmed by unaccustomed darkness,
I feel like someone sticking his nose where it don't belong, I let
myself get carried away with jitters, and I think that's all right.
The City, 1927

Amb pagesia pobra
i lumpenproletariat i classes
treballadores que penosament
van prosperar fins a sortir del pou
es construeixen les nostres històries
famiars, històries que són el viu reflex
del nostre temps. Sorgits del "vulgus," formem part
de les capes mitjanes, siguin mitjanes-baixes
o més acomodades, del món d'avui. Nou-rics,
individualistes i desmemoriats,
queda pales que estem en disposició
d'aconseguir més èxits materials i viure
la vida a fons. Em sento cridat a ser un d'aquests,
a treballar a preu fet i a pensar-me-les totes.
Arribo a la ciutat per raons de treball.
No puc dissimular el meu entusiasme.

He viscut molta vida (sense amb prou feines viure-la)
i en viuré molta més (perquè la vida és llarga).
Les nostres vides prenen un ritme trepidant.
Les restes dels naufragis no compten en una època
de falses referències i canvis successius.
Les oportunitats s'aprofiten o passen
de llarg. Quan menys s'espera, deixem de ser el que fórem
i oblidem el que haviem aprèis.

Fet i pastat
com tothom, discretíssim, un-de-tants, no aparento
sorpresa ni accelero la respiració.

Al cor, al moll de l'os, al mig d'una espiral
de subjectes el·líptics, escenes coloristes
i probabilitats estadísticament
demostrables de "caure abans d'alçar-me," em mostro
segur de mi mateix, em fico la camisa
per dins dels pantalons i m'implico de ple.

Mira que n'es, de gran, la ciutat d'esperit
eclectic, el transsumpte del vell Cafarnaüm, el can penja-i-despenja on la llei de l'oferta i la demanda es troba en el seu element. Tendes de comestibles, fàbriques en desús, places en obres i carrers coberts amb un vel de monòxid de carboni, la mística del gregarisme i de les hores punta, el sol que reverbera en finestres d'immobles de finals del XIX que surten a subhasta, altes arquitectures futuristes i blocs de pisos sense personalitat, oliveres de rabassudes soques que fructifiquen a les acaballes de la tardor, diversitat de pins (blancs i negres i pinyoners) frisosos per tocar el cel, alzines de capçades espesses, plàtans ornamentals que em faran sentir cómode, gairebé com a casa.

ecclectic, the copy of old Capharnum, the bazaar where the law of supply and demand is found in its element. Grocery stores, abandoned factories, construction sites, streets covered by a shroud of carbon monoxide, the mysticism of sociability and rush hours, the sun shimmering on windows of fin-de-siècle estates up for auction, towering futuristic architecture and characterless apartment blocks, olive groves cleared of stumps yielding a crop in the last days of fall, an assortment of pines (white and dark and nut-bearing) anxious to touch the sky, oaks with dense branches, ornamental plane trees that make me feel comfortable, almost as if I were at home.
Early Sunday Morning, 1930

Som al 1930 i és diumenge al matí, d'hora. Ensònyat encara, enfilo una avinguda i tot està inactiu i no hi ha vianants a la vista. L'entenc, aquest apregonar-se en tanta quietud, com una anomalia en el camp-qui-pugui diari, si bé em plau com plauen les rareses, les gangues, els crepuscles.

Flanquejat per inerts edificis, sumit en el gorg del silenci i a gust amb mi mateix, em trobo caminant tot sol com en un somni. Tributari del lleure, ni que sigui només durant un clar matí de diumenge, esdevinc un nen que arrenca el pas cap a un temps molt més pròsper (el nen que tal vegada vaig ser en un temps llunya), un nouvingut badoc que exulta amb el poquissim que ha vist com si estigués als llimbs, el personatge central d'un vell llibret que duria per titol Vicissituds d'un pobre però viu roda-soques i de com va rodar per topsants pintorescos a la bona de Déu i sense avergonyar-se'n o un content demíurj que omple de rebombori els cafès, barberies i botigues tancades i de tropell de gent l'avinguda deserta que trepitjo. La "fi del món” diferirà ben poc d'un escenari tan buit.

A Baudelaire li vindria de nou reapareixer aquí i invocaria allaus humanes i el retruny dels carrers.

Tot això té pinta d'emboscada, ho admeto. Per la forma que tinc de passejar, endiumenjat i apàtic, algú que m'espia ajupit com un enze darrere una finestra encara em confondria amb una ànima errant, un boc expiatori o una encarnació del mal. Sense immutar-me, faré com qui sent ploure.

Early Sunday Morning, 1930

Still sleepy, I slip down an avenue. Everything is dormant without a soul in sight. I register this immersion in so much stillness as a freak in the daily every-man-for-himself, even though I'm tickled pink like it was a rarity, a windfall, or a sunset.

Flanked by lifeless buildings, plunged in the pool of silence, pleased with myself, I'm walking all alone as in a dream. Tributary to leisure, even if only on a bright Sunday morning, I become a child starting out at a much more propitious time (the child I was perhaps many years ago), a curious newcomer who revels in the least little thing he's seen as if he didn't have a clue, the main character of a fat old book that bears the title The Vicissitudes of a Poor but Nimble Drifter and How He Roamed through Picturesque Lands By the Grace of God and Without Shame or some happy demiurge who raises a ruckus in closed cafés, barber's, and shops filling the deserted avenue where I walk with a throng of people.

The end of the world won't differ much from a stage so empty.

Baudelaire would be flabbergasted to come back to life here: he'd invoke the human onrush and the thunder of the streets.

The whole thing looks like an ambush, I admit. Given the way I comport myself, spuffed up and spunkless, anybody who spots me crouched like some idler behind a window might just confuse me with a wandering spirit, a scapegoat or an incarnation of evil. Unflustered, I'll turn a deaf ear.
Manhattan Bridge Loop, 1928

Nothing that happens happens just because. There's a reason that breathes in the air, in cobblestones, in dances and the purple flowers of saffron.

Someone vomited on this sidewalk during the night, or the day before yesterday at the most. The streets are gluttonous and confiscate what they can, dirt from whatever-is-swept-together and lines of ants, pebbles and dry leaves stirred by wind. Thus, paying careful attention, I search for explanations of reality, the foundation beneath "what comes to pass," the cell endogenous or foreshortening in broad daylight, precisely as if we were searching (with care) for one another.

An electrifying sun blazes, courtesy of Sant Martí.* A decorative strip of cirrus slices the sky in two (from sky to ground, where I lay my feet, everything is composed of cut-bruised wounds and bareness). I also eye a bunch of old men and the hard faces of strangers who watch me as if I wore a T-shirt printed with sunflowers by Van Gogh. A hazy line of sight alternates with sharper perspectives, pigeons with the urban conglomerate, darwinism with personal spins inside a frame that many judge harshly. A cacophonous rrrrrr resounds in my ears without ever growing silent; not zzzzzz, but the rrrrrr that moves a million people who've reached an agreement to raise hell.

* Translator's Note: The Catalan phrase "per Sant Martí" refers to the persistence of warm weather in late fall, what is called "Indian summer" in English. The saint's feast day is celebrated on 11 November.
The Circle Theatre, 1936

Crèixer en uns temps difícils maquillats de temps fàcils, temps amb gent que pateix per mantenir-se, temps batuts en retirada davant la roda-solta dels nostres responsables polítics, ha forjat en mi la complaença a amargar-me, turment que emana de l'absència de confiança i causa grans dany.

A contracor, em condemno a inhibir-me de les mundanitats socials i ho pal·lio posant-me en mans d'un “art” compensador. Sóc l'home “contemplativus,” l'home de cultura llibresca amb sortides plebees, l'home racional, l'home que no sirt gaire perquè no té amb qui fer-ho o no té companyies que li siguin prou grases o que baixa al nivell del carrer i es dissol en l'animació febril i sinergetica de la ruïda humana a l'hora de l'esbarjo (representacions, compres, apats, concerts...). És el postpensament i l'utilitarisme el que ha reemplaçat el pensament i els actes del ciutadà mitjà que ha sortit a distreure's. També anomenen fleuma al just, Bildungsroman al sacrifici, abdomen a la panxa. La base del seu èxit deu ser la llibertat.

Cobertes les necessitats bàsiques, del meu interior més estantis sorgeix l'arronsament d'espatlles que trunca l'obertura als altres i no sé on fa cap, sostingut, tot jo, pel roig foscant.

The Circle Theatre, 1936

Growing up in a hard time cosmeticized as an easy time, a time when people sweat blood to support themselves, a time that beats a retreat before the damn foolishness of our responsible politicians, has forged in me an embittered complacency, a torment that emanates from lack of trust and causes a lot of damage.

Unwillingly I'm doomed to shy away from social worldliness and paper over it by putting myself in the hands of a compensatory art.

I'm homo contemplativus, a man of bookish culture with plebian escapes, a man of reason, a guy who hardly gets out for he has nobody to get out with, or no pals sufficiently to his liking, and who descends to street level, dissolving in the feverish, synergetic movement of the human floodtide at leisure (shows, shopping, meals, concerts...).

The afterthought and utilitarianism have taken the place of thought and action for the average urbanite who seeks diversion. They characterize a weak will as fairness, the Bildungsroman as sacrifice, the abdomen as the belly. The basis of their success must be freedom.

After covering the basic necessities, a shrug of the shoulders bobs up from the stagnation inside me cutting short any overture to others, and I don't know where it'll lead, sustained as I am by the red dusk.
Many Russian poets are now young enough never to have been poets in the Soviet era. It is on them that falls the responsibility of writing Russian poetry anew: a poetry that responds to the tremendous changes that affected post-Soviet Russia on every level, from the social and political to the psychological and cognitive. A truth this week universally acknowledged is that any kind of change must express itself, first and foremost, in language. This is why the poetry of Dmitry Golynko cultivates all genres of post-Soviet newspeak; hence also its view of language as the medium of exchange between the personal and the social, where the social becomes the personal and vice versa. This view runs contrary to the basic desire of lyric poetry: for the autonomy of the

Golynko was born in Leningrad in 1969. His first chapbook came out in 1994, *Concrete Doves*, his second full-length collection, was released in 2003. Since the Russian poetry community considers poetry to be a public good, virtually all of their writing is available on the web, including Golynko’s. In the 1990s his work employed the kind of hyperliterate eclecticism that constituted the Saint Petersburg version of postmodernism. Campy and précieux, his poetic narratives fluttered from the eighteenth century of Casanova to the Tarantino-a-ia-russe shoot-'em-ups then happening just around the corner. Their main concern was the unreality of reality. “Elementary Things,” composed in January of 2002, embarked on a new direction. Gone were literary allusions, virtuoso language games, narrator, plot; in their stead came seriality as principle of composition, and collage of sociolects as principle of poetic language. Poetic methods were applied to social analysis and cultural critique: the kind of tasks that Russian poetry of earlier generations had a pronounced disgust for. Extremes of artificiality yielded to extremes of naturalism.

The naturalism of Golynko’s work in the 2000s is, however, extremely conceptual. It is unclear what the elementary things of “Elementary Things” actually are: Women? Androids? Commodities? Fetishes? Historical subjects? Objects of masturbation? Or some kind of indefinite post-Soviet thingies in some indefinitely post-ideological fish-eat-fish kind of world? The information we receive on their ontological class, species or even gender repeatedly contradicts itself. Stanza six admits their poetic genealogy distantly includes Joseph Brodsky’s concept of thing. Yet they most of all resemble the woman-machine concept-objects of New York Dada—Duchamp’s Bride, Picabia’s *jeune fille américaine*, Man Ray’s Rope Dancer—combining elements of subjectivity, pornography, consumerism and technology. Even Golynko’s stanza numbers—in Russian, ЭВ1, ЭВ2, ЭВ3, etc.—evoke ЭВМ, the old-fashioned abbreviation for computers. Neither organic entities nor machines, neither subjects nor objects, neither software nor hardware but as it were an after-dinner sleep dreaming of all. Not exactly pure naturalism there.

In what way do elementary things exhibit their post-Soviet origin? In the objects and rules of the world they inhabit, which is uncritically identical with their mental world. Pawns, peons, nobodies, victims, beasts: they have adapted to their Hobbesian environment by making survival instincts the sole begetters of everyone of their actions. Precisely this is what makes them so “elementary.” They are so focused on survival—or rational self-interest, if you prefer—that whatever feelings they might entertain for objects outside of themselves are nothing more than spasms of nostalgia. In other words, what is particularly post-Soviet about this poem is the crappy way people treat each other in it. Because this poem’s world is one where humanist values have been demythologized, and which therefore regards the war of all against all as a condition that is natural, authentic and thereby commendable, i.e. it places it on the pedestal, it formulates it as a new ideology.

Everybody wants to be a moralist. Whoever hears my mother’s dog bark at a doorbell will conclude that moral indignation is innate at least in some mammal species. Elementary things are not as mechanical as I just described, and I certainly oversimplified their psychological makeup. Elementary things wrestle with the same Dostoyevskian
question as everybody else: How to live life in a world where all values are but disguised expressions of power relations? They too are not coterminous with themselves: just like us, they are made out of other people's language, and the language they speak is spoken through them by others. In short, elementary things are—after all—human. The emotional architecture of the poem is therefore very complicated, very tug-and-pull in places, and the moral thundering of its anger never entirely drowns out the low moans of rejection.

— Eugene Ostashevsky

Note: Russian grammar distinguishes between masculine, feminine, and neuter gender of nouns. The Russian word for “thing,” grammatically feminine, is one of many nouns whose gender does not match the “natural gender” of its referent. Where the translator uses “it” to refer back to “thing,” the Russian has “she.”—EO

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spot steals up to an elementary thing
to pee on it, sniff it out, bark at it
but the elementary thing doesn't protest
lies where it's warm, doesn't stir
the elementary thing has the brains and tact
a well-tended house of brains
flowers in pots, lots of assorted crapola
an elementary thing is thought about death
about its mythology and physical fitness there's
nothing comforting, sad or funny
standing on all fours, in cubature
onerous augmentation of knowledge about
elementary things are always on duty
towards themselves, and the droplet
of blood showing on an elementary thing
isn't its problem—they don't get periods

guests come to visit an elementary thing
and it begins to feel it
has no shame, tenderness, bias towards
has no anger, disdain—it looks good
in that hairdo, almost a buzz cut
casually shows them to their seats
suggests they have a drink, cigarette
the elementary thing makes dishes clatter
using a high-class liquid
inconspicuously spreads its legs
bending down, sees no defect in them
long ago some people would swear
a bitch, others tootsie
smiling with uneven upper teeth
elementary thing invitingly says
look, the auto-da-fe is smokin'
the elementary thing heads for the market
of discounted trash, purchases
something pleasant and practical at a sale
anathema or love
the goods lose charm with unprecedented speed
are subjected to obviation, flung into
basket of inferior plastic
the elementary thing breaks something
must be the arm of help from on high
elementary things are always lonely
although all are chained to the same point
either by turn or in pairs
loneliness, loneliness, what's that
an elementary thing addresses
that's familiar, answers
rolling out unmotivated vomit

if an elementary thing
threaten an elementary thing
won't show chicken feathers or yellow belly
will act cheeky with its offender
impudent, familiar, won't breathe a word of mercy
because of insecurity, one might think
but what can an elementary thing be secure about
other than itself, if there's something
on the boil inside it, it's not fear
not openness to self-sacrifice
not yearning for heroism, for unquiet life
elementary things are always calm
it's their calm that their legs inherit
if an elementary thing lets a cry escape
it's not that patience ran out, it's a cry of joy
of victory: past sins have been racked up to its account
the eczema of vengeance need not be feared
elementary things live outside the human
being outside is their fad and hobby
something of an elementary thing is buried
in a human being, therein his greatness
but a human being bulks larger than an elementary thing
that's what makes him a thoroughfare, uninteresting
one emigrant of jewish extraction
looked into the eye of the elementary thing
on the hudson, without looking away, would have been unsafe
but enthralled by the return on narcissism
advancement in art, accretion of classic forms
in the elementary thing he saw the objet petit a
he loved himself, though was not good-looking
whereas elementary things always are good-looking
and don't give for the tiresome shilly-shallying
of uninvited immigrants

in principle an elementary thing
has a ducky, agreeable physiognomy
now rolls up to an elementary thing
no putting on airs, it's easily available
for rapid and concrete penetration
if that thing is done with the elementary thing
nothing nasty can be caught from it
no communion with unexplored reflexes
no choking over the shot of pleasure
the elementary thing delivers excellence
consistently, professionally, enthusiastically
with zest and pizzazz
afterwards it goes to make pee-pee
disappears for a while, singing bawdy
examines with a bewildered eye
the crack in the lintel
Ellen Papadopoulos

the elementary thing undergoes a medical
enters the reception area, then the shower
here the elementary thing jerks off
not from desire but for formality
done with strutting
lets its pulse and everything else be felt
lying on ephemeral rubber
the elementary thing has its hand
not figuratively, but in the direct, sexual sense
at first takes it from behind
concentrating on breathing
then from the side
then falls asleep
graphological analysis following the dissection of hand
reveals no signs of violence
left by the elementary thing
элементарная вещь брезгует снами
в детстве, после ими ленится обзавестись
отец, мать, брат, сестра
для элементарной вещи одно лицо неизведанно
она счастливо миновала комплекс эдипа
и в суицидальный не встала
но поговаривают, сплетни разносят
у ней объявился символический папуля
перед ним на цырках она, паинька и тихоня
затиххорилась мелкой соплячкой
незамедлительно ее так наказывает
что мордобитье, побои кажутся конфеткой
тумаков от него днем с огнем не дождаться
конфузивно она стоит на закорках
рассчитывая, что повлекшая ее появление
на свет овуляция не состоится

an elementary thing disdains dreams
in childhood, afterwards is too lazy to get some
father, mother, brother, sister the same
unexplored person for the elementary thing
it successfully avoided the oedipus complex
never got snared in the suicidal
but they say, rumor has it
it now got itself a symbolic papa
acts all mannerly with him, goody-goody, nice-nelly
does the ferretty-poo, the tinny sniveler
right away he punishes so
that blows and beatings feel like bonbons
can't get a couple of cuffs out of him
embarrassedly it does the plough, reckoning
the ovulation responsible for its appearance
in the world will not take place
the elementary thing plays ball with the big idea
kicks as kick can into a brand new goal
even with implants, one doesn't make a team
but the elementary thing is a team unto itself, a top, a ram
it lines up penalty kicks, is content
hurries to the summer retreat housing complex
smiling at the broad river, the hillside windmill
run-down barn, fuse box
aged seals commune on the stoop
on the glassed-in folkyesque veranda
salzburg chair, personal computer
outside the mirror unhooks its bra
before enters the shower cabin
baring the props, the camo, the 6/x of the body
the elementary thing can't wash off
in ordinary water with balsam and pumice

the elementary thing doesn't skimp on the test,
discovers it's pregnant, the term already
doesn't fall into torpor, industriously reproves itself for
carelessness; that can never have happened
the culprit is known, cause for rejoicing or same shit
what'll become of the offspring—showman, astronaut scientist or another elementary thing
throws on a pullover, goes down below ground
feels sick from the peeps, the chaos of the subway
clearly won't make it to the final stop
waits for train to pass, then bahbolts into the tunnel
where no trackman ever set his rubbersoled boot
spiders, transformers, mucilaginous junk
stench of hades, centipedes, slugs, gigantic nests
chewing down a hare-brained mutant ant
it becomes an element of the wiring
the elementary thing alone on a rocky road
got everything with—mittens, tail without fail
there's potholes around, elevations, ruts, gullies
stars, each of them such a humongous bitch
milky seed flooding the shore
close-by—a palisade of five-story buildings
loving hands there are forming dumplings
cheese pancakes, something meatless or meaty
the elementary thing lives it up off of
not much of a life, but a shame to chafe
the elementary thing trips, tears down
to tartarus
a brief course in infernal geography
superstitions from three world religions
isobaths of fire, monsoon from a white-hot forge
imitation leather accessories, hullabaloo of kama-sutra
significantly corrected
**ET16**

Elementary things can be pissy.

Nasties, take pests down a peg in mid-motion

Also prickly, go zero to sixty like children

Elementary things resent

Strut their stuff around—hackneyed jalopies

They are, evil-tongued ulcers with a jalapeno

Stick a hand in their mouth and they recoil

Can't lock 'em up in a hencoop or sheepfold

Hens or sheep, they still got some character

Always feel something lacking: youth, first prize

Doom, checkers, charades

Never got compassion, snobbery, beatitude, baseness

Are anthropoid traits, nor anthracite eyedrops

Suitable education, worm in the moral apple, an evil eye

Always feel something lacking to avoid being a funny bunny

To crawl out of this cloaca

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**EV17**

Елементарная вещь уважает бедность

Логики, языка, бомжика, иного

Многие птицы повымерли и ослепли

Не только ласточки, но и трясогузки

Пеночки, збаки, коростели

Перечитывает орнитологический атлас

Повывелись толчки и разночки-пострельы

Елементарной вещи пора свинчивать отсюда

Пока кто-нибудь не пришпандорил

Укладывает комбинации в чемодан

Освобождена, никауда не поедет

Много лет за собой шпионить

Машинально приближается к фрамуге

Под обстрелом можно держать всю верхоту

Если б не апопфатика, все бы сдохли

В мусорный бак отправляет что осталось

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**ET17**

An elementary thing respects the poverty

Of logic, language, the homeless, so on

Many birds have gone dead and blind

Not just swallows but also wagtails

Warblers, chaffinches, corncrakes

Rereads the ornithological atlas

The pushers gone extinct and the madcap hawks

It's time for the elementary thing to skedaddle

Before somebody took care of it

Packs slips into the suitcase

Has been notified, going nowhere

Spies on itself for many years

Unthinkingly approaches the transom

The whole attic can be kept under fire

If not for apophasis, they'd've all kicked the bucket

Sends whatever's left into the garbage bin
the elementary thing rids itself of makeup
doesn't think about essentials

patina of the image, scum of the superego
small ears, the color of poppies
irregardless of who—sanatorium granny
has small ears, the color of poppies
as adopted from ariadne

scab of the I, after unmasking
as adopted from ariadne
the ailments and disorders of the elementary thing
irregardless of who—sanatorium granny

after unmasking
as adopted from ariadne
the ailments and disorders of the elementary thing
irregardless of who—sanatorium granny

doesn't think about essentials

the elementary thing shows itself in dancing
as zaratustra taught it
the ailments and disorders of the elementary thing
as adopted from ariadne
the ailments and disorders of the elementary thing
are insignificant, clear even to a green clinician
checkup forthcoming, queue at the speech therapist's

as zaratustra taught it
the ailments and disorders of the elementary thing
are insignificant, clear even to a green clinician
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reasons, notions and malodorous gymnastic

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reasons, notions and malodorous gymnastic
the elementary thing is doing the hoodoo voodoo
surrounds itself with talismans, a couple of amulets
after that event it came back to town
picked up some kind of jimmy
dropped it, collapsed on the couch
got fixated on the picture mat
the elementary thing spreads its long legs
brings them together again, nothing happens
burned the meatloaf on margarine
can't find the thin gilette blade
swallowed down tetrahedron tablets
an omen, indispensable for epic singers
paroxysms of magical vomit
the white egg of the orphics rolled
after that event, that trip outside the city
the elementary thing no longer allows

the elementary thing prior to confirmation
descends to the meadow, the floodplain, hillside
what should be known about the elementary thing
it has an increate, morbid, inanimate nature
the elementary thing is always mimicking something
rarely itself, more often the papal nuncio, satrap
old father superior or stepmother maniac
usually monsters or cultural figures
it sometimes imitates an immobilized idol
cadaver tricked out in sackcloth
professor basking in auditoria
at times struts like a hussar, fans itself with a dolman
wears a cossack coat, on the rim of reservoir
it's a water lily, madonna lily, the little flowers of a saint
the elementary thing leads a pleasant kind of life
purely contemplative
elementary things settle down in cities
like LA or Tokyo, but vaster
city dwellers to the very narrow
of the femur, the intricate lilac veins
in the city an elementary thing dissolves
thus a sugar cube in ceylon pekoe
thus a fellah or dowsener into a desiccated horizon
they pick the wealthier cities
in Rome among aediles and centurions
they'd have been more comfortable, but Rome is not what it used to
cities offer heaps of useful opportunities for
an elementary thing—for example
win somebody's love, gain knowledge
chase happiness, they prefer to gape at
the zinc drainpipe until they croak
little corpses in a caravansary of offal

elementary things
occupy an empty and conspicuous place
make excellent high-ranking officials
can read and write, speak several languages, without admitting to they understand anything: sanskrit, the vulgate
deaf cant, agglutinative language, esperanto, slang, but from the inside simulate dunces, give themselves away for halfwits, dullard bugaboos, such is their politics, they're sleepers as head clerks or head bandits
they'd have gotten tossed in the can for otherness not haphazardly do they put into practice in stages their diversionary scheme to make each thing more elementary would make life easier for everybody
элементарная вещь всего на свете дичится
бойтся - заставят отзывчивой быть, подолюбивой
бойтся - превознесут, облюют в яхонт, онине, яшмую
ибо надурутся, превратят в писсуар, парашу
все, что с вещами делают нелепо, преступно
но неизбежно, на то вещная воля
нет для нее экологов, чтоб заступились
постоять за себя, порыпаться считается бестактным
для нее акватинта уничтожение должно
и то просто сделают, доведут до ума, до страсти
вытолкнут в тающую старость, неназлое детство
возмется какой лудильщик или ловчилфельдшер, ювелир, программист, чудик
сделают из нее ухищрение или функциональный
мазок интерьера, лонжерон, а то и бивни
протыкающие

ET24

the elementary thing bolts from everything
fears they'll force it to be sensitive, child-loving
extol it, dress it in ruby, onyx, jasper
or degrade it, convert it into a urinal, slop bucket
whatever gets done to things is absurd, criminal
but unavoidable, such is the will of things
the elementary thing has no ecologists to intervene for it
considers self-defense, squeaky wheeling tactless
finds the aquadint of self-abasement dolly
or else they'll just do it, drive it into senses, passions
out it into slushy old age, homely childhood
some tinman will show up, or wheeler-dealer
paramedic, jeweler, programmer, weirdo
make a contrivance out of it, or a functional
detail of the interior, girder, or even tusks
sticking through

ET25

элементарная вещь сама себе табулятор
сама устанавливает пробелы, разграничивает итерации, сама приготовляет кошницу
самостоятельность ее взорный, пробивной козырь
никто не упрекнет элементарную вещь
что она не тому, кифарею ли погнушалась
постелилась под бедарем - это ее пункт
никому не давать отчет за свои выкрутасы
за трепор сближения, выкинутое свинство
заносчивое шалопайство - такая кривляка
элементарная вещь, что копиолочка алфавита
фриивольных пустот, всегда занятых меж собою
любопытство к элементарной вещи может быть
удовлетворено, если с ее стороны имеется
взаимное любопытство

10 января – 29 января 2002 года

the elementary thing is its own tab key
sets spaces by itself, and borders
iterations, prepares its own basket
independence its capricious, go-getter trump card
no one upbraids an elementary thing for doing it
with somebody off, whether it cold-shouldered a coryphaeus
laid under a numbskull, its trait is
to give account to no one for its crotchets
for the tremor of intimacy, behaving like a pig
flippant thoughtlessness—such a poseur
is the elementary thing, like the piggy-bank of the alphabet
of frivolous voids, always occupied with each other
curiosity towards the elementary thing may be
satisfied if from its direction exudes
reciprocal curiosity

10 January – 29 January 2002
Astrid Cabral

from Cage

* Translated from the Portuguese by Alexis Levitin *

Though I learned my Portuguese on an island in southern Brazil, for the last thirty years I have focused almost exclusively on translating poets from the more traditional, less demonstrative continental homeland, Portugal. As a result, the vastness of Brazil, with its immense literary diversity, had faded into the background of my awareness. Until fairly recently.

When, about ten years ago, an intrepid professor at Smith College founded the Amazonian Literary Review and asked me to translate several Amazonian poets, I was very tempted. I was especially drawn by the love of sound and rhythm so evident in this tropical work. So I found myself returning, at least in poetry, to the lush world of Brazil. Of the five Astrid Cabral poems I was given, the most memorable for me was “River Dolphin of the Body,” a short poem in which the famed pink dolphin of the Amazon, rolling through those muddied jungle waters, is a metaphor for the sexuality that continues half-revealed, half-concealed, in our own turbid bloodstream. That poem, though I did not know it at the time, was drawn from Cage, the book from which these seven poems are taken, which will be published in April by Host Publications.

Thanks to those translations in the inaugural issue of Amazonian Literary Review, I was asked by two other magazines to translate further poems by the same poet. That request led me to poems I did not know, including one in particular that was so powerful and so true that it literally convinced me to go back to Brazil in order to meet the author and work with her on a complete book. The poem was “The Divided Clan,” and it appeared in Sirena just this past year. It is about the unbearable gulf between us and those we love who have died. The poem concludes with an image of “the impossible dialogue from the edge of the abyss,” in which we, “moribund survivors,” call out in vain to the ones we have lost,

All of them so distant now they don’t respond.
Deaf-mutes, irremediable.

I had lost my mother shortly before undertaking that translation and this poem spoke directly to me of the deepest painful knowledge of the human heart. So I contacted the poet and offered to come to Rio de Janeiro and work with her. She accepted. And that is how, out of our private losses, we came together over poetry, which with the other arts, remains one of the few valiant responses we can make to the stark reality of the human condition.

As for the challenges of translation, here is an example of the rewards of the craft. In “At the Pousada of Flamingos,” the original of this light and witty exercise has the following:

Bem a vontade
bica e pinica as talhadas
de mamão e manga
reservadas aos hospedes.

The fun in the Portuguese starts with “bica e pinica,” easily matched in English by “picks and pecks.” But what is being attacked, the “mamão e manga,” so alliteratively comfortable in the original, transforms into the much less euphonious “mango and papaya.” I could have changed fruit, I suppose (papaya and plums?), but instead I tried to compensate for the lost effect with an amusing slant rhyme created by the last word of the stanza “guests,” bouncing off the intrusive bird, who earlier “pecks.” I felt the light breakfast music had been salvaged.

Probably the greatest pleasure for Astrid and me was our playful search for musical effects in English to match or compensate for those in the original. We spent a lot of time reading aloud in both languages and we spent much time laughing aloud, as well. In the end, it was clear to us that, along with our serious concerns, we clearly still belong, as poet and translator, to the blessed species of homo ludens.

– Alexis Levitin
Na Pousada dos Guarás

A ararajuba
de sol e selva vestida
solta-se do galho e pousa
para espanto do turista
na mesa onde repousa
o lauto café da manhã.

Bem à vontade
bica e pinica as talhadas
de mamão e manga
reservadas aos hóspedes.

Mesmo entre pires pratos bules
xícaras talheres guardanapos
a ararajuba não é intrusa.
É a própria real anfitriã
no ouro da manhã em Marajó.

At the Pousada of Flamingos

The ararajuba
dressed in sun and jungle green
hops from a branch and settles
to the shock of all the tourists
on the table where their sumptuous
breakfast still remains.

Utterly at ease
he picks and pecks slices
of mango and papaya
intended only for the hotel guests.

Even among saucers, plates, teapots
cups utensils napkins
the ararajuba is no intruder.
He is the royal guest himself
in the gold of a Marajó morning.
**Parentesco**

Antes só conhecia o tucunaré da banca do mercado, ensangüentado ou saltitante no bojo da canoa abicando na praia do rio Negro. Tucunaré para mim era manjar aroma na terrina me fisgando sem demora impelindo-me a comer sem pensar em escamas ou espinhas. Só via a pinta rubra bem redonda ali perto do rabo, o talhe longo e o gostosíssimo sabor na boca. Quedei-me, pois, perplexa, genuflexa com a história de seu universo naquela reportagem da telinha. Passei a sentir-me sua parenta vendo o tucunaré super-humano a proteger os alevinos tecendo com amorosos cuidados um escudo contra os perigos do rio a rondarem os inocentes peixinhos, em vez de largá-los ao deus-dará das águas.

**Kin**

Before I only knew the *tucunaré* from the market stall, covered in blood or flopping in the belly of the canoe beaching on a sand spit of the Rio Negro. *Tucunaré* for me was just a delicacy, an aroma from the tureen hooking me, dragging me to eat immediately without a thought for scales or bones. I only saw the rounded crimson spot down near the tail, the elongated shape, and that delicious flavor in the mouth. So I found myself amazed, filled with praise, by the story of its universe on that T.V. show. I came to feel myself a relative seeing the *tucunaré* a super-human protecting the young fry, weaving back and forth with loving care, a shield against the dangers of the river surrounding those innocent small fish, rather than abandoning them to the random waters.
Boiúna
Na preamar do meu sonho
bóia essa baita boiúna
e negra pele inconsútil
rente ao veludo da treva.
Jeito de inócuia jibóia a
boiúna se arrasta dócil
no espaço azul do meu sono
mas o ímpeto do bote
fermenta-lhe o corpo enorme
e a qualquer piscar de hora
o porte de pura cauda
sacode o caudal do rio
e a centelha de seus olhos
logo incendeia-me o leito.
Medonha, a qualquer hora
derrama o fel da peçohna
e zás se arremessa às bordas
da cama onde vaga navego
e me afunda nas profundas
de um inferno feito d'água.

Boiúna
On the high tide of my dream
bobs that bloated boiúna
its black skin seamless
gliding on the velvet of the dark.
Like an innocuous ringed boa
the boiúna creeps docilely along
in the blue space of my sleep
but a sudden lunge
swells his enormous body
and at any instant of any hour
the immensity of just his tail
makes the current of the river quake.
And from his eyes sparks
quickly set my bed on fire.
Horrid, noisome, at any moment
his bilious poison may come gushing forth
and whoosh, he'll hurl himself against
the bed where, lost, I sail
and send me deep into the depths
of a hell made up of water.
**Anfíbia**

Tartaruga na rua das canoas
sigo entre baronesas e entre folhas
de cuieiras submersas sob chuvas
ex-nuvens provisórias e pesadas
despencando suicidas na paisagem
do quintal engolido no dilúvio.

Bracejo audaz às cócegas na face
e me lanço ao balanço de águas frias
varadas por cardumes de girinos.
Este é meu reino, penso aliviada
até que alguns adultos me aprisionam
no curral de uma sala encortinada
e então massacram meu pendor anfíbio
com sermões e censuras bem mesquinhas
e ameaçam com a voracidade e a fúria
de poraquis, piranhas, jacarés.

Tudo para que em terra firme pise
essa menina irmã de tartarugas
tão inquilina dos igarapés.

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**Amphibian**

Turtle on the rippled river road,
on I go, between water hyacinths and leaves
of the calabash drowned beneath the season's rains,
ephemeral former heavy clouds
falling from on high, suicides in a countryside
of backyards swallowed by the flood.

With courage, I strike out, things tickling my face,
and throw myself into the rolling, roiling cold waters
criss-crossed by schools of tadpoles.

This is my kingdom, I think, relieved,
until some adults imprison me
in the weir of a curtained room
then massacre my amphibian aspirations
with sermons and mean-spirited censurings
and threaten me with the voracity and violence
of electric eels, piranhas, alligators.

All so she will tread upon firm ground
this little girl, sister to the turtles,
dweller in the channel's flow.
Tartarugada

Tisnado de mortes o terçado arremessava seu pesado fio contra o rijo peito de pedra revirado num safanão brusco, o risco das emendas escondido entre reminiscências do limo. Ali no pátio a grave sina de semi-eternidade se descumpria a golpes de força e metal. As patas à terra e água afetadas moviam vagas e vãs mudo apelo no súbito ar enrugadas de anos, indefesas embriam-se sob a carapaça trôpega balançando no chão. Deus, quanta fúria injusta estraçalhava a dura urna fazendo o sangue espirrar e jorrar mínimo rio, afluente do contíguo rego sujo onde o banho das panelas escorria águas de sabão sem glória. Peito violado carne em pedaços e contudo o coração a pulsar vitória? protesto? censura? ou puro e simples instinto a cumprir absurda tarefa? Depois vinha a estranha noite do velório de vinha-d'alhos no alguidar de barro esmaltado a faina da manhã na cozinha o almoço de picadinho e guisado servidos na travessa do peito e na ancha terrina do casco. E comíamos, grá-finos canibais — de garfo e faca — em pratos de porcelana.

Turtle Feast

Tarnished by death the machete hurled its heavy cutting edge against the stiff stone breastplate overturned with a brusque jerk, the pattern of the patches hidden among remembrances of slime. There in the yard, the heavy fate of near eternity was cut to bits with fierce metallic blows. Claws accustomed to land and water moved slowly and in vain a silent plea in the sudden air and, wrinkled by years, helpless, they shrank beneath the carapace rocking on the ground. God, what unjust fury tore to bits the hard urn making blood squirt and gush a small river, tributary to the near by dirty ditch where the scrubbing of the pots and pans dribbled soapy water without glory. Breastplate broken open, flesh in pieces, and yet the heart still throbbing triumph? protest? censure? or pure and simple instinct to fulfill its absurd task? Later came the strange night of the wake of vinegar, garlic, and salt in the glazed earthenware bowl morning drudgery in the kitchen lunch of minced meat and stew served on the breastplate and in the ample tureen of the shell. And we ate, aristocratic cannibals —with knives and forks— on porcelain dinner plates.
Surdos e Cegos

Enquanto distraídos mastigam sangrentos bifes entre submissas cebolas comentam o absurdo da violência ao cubo.
E homens surdos não ouvem o berro do boi conduzido ao curro.
E homens cegos não vêem o sangue vivo do boi mungido quente no vaivém de mandíbulas entre verdugos dentes.

Deaf and Blind

Absent-mindedly, they chew their bloody steaks among submissive onions they comment on the absurdity of exponential violence.
And deaf men do not hear the bellowing of the steer driven to the stockyard pen.
And blind men do not see the lively blood of the steer squirting warm in the seesaw swing of mandibles amid the hangman’s teeth.
Passarês

Entre folhas secas ou verdes canta ao balcão da janela um pássaro estrangeiro.

Tal o olhasse sem enxergá-lo conheço-lhe o passarê sem jamais decifrar-lhe a voz.

Não é de hoje que me aflige essa terrível surdez a vedar-me sua mensagem.

Céus, são tantas as linguagens que sempre me deixam à margem cega ao que pássaros sabem.

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Birdish

Among some green or dried out leaves there sings upon the window sill a foreign bird.

Just as I gaze at him and don't quite see him clear I know his Birdish yet cannot quite decipher it.

It did not begin today this dreadful deafness that afflicts me blocking out what he would say.

Heavens, how many languages there are that leave me on the outside blind to what all birds must know.
Yves Bonnefoy

from *Pierre écrite*

• Translated from the French by MARC ELIHU HOFSTADTER •

Yves Bonnefoy, the best-known poet writing in France today, was born in 1923, in Tours, of parents with peasant roots. He studied mathematics at the University of Poitiers but, at the age of 20, went to Paris where he decided to devote himself to poetry. Initially influenced by Surrealism, which was popular in Paris at the time, he then began writing a new sort of poetry that is exemplified by his first volume of poems, *Du mouvement et de l'immobilité de Douve*, published in 1953. This book, in which the poet speaks to a mysterious woman/river/muse named Douve, electrified the world of French poetry and is now considered one of the masterpieces of twentieth-century literature.

Bonnefoy went on to publish five more volumes of poetry—*Hier régnant désert, Pierre écrite, Dans le seuil, Ce qui fut sans lumière,* and *Les planches courbes*—which progressively deepen and expand his vision. Central to the latter is the idea that, if we live with sufficient intensity and passion, the world will transform itself around us, becoming like a garden with vibrant color and sweet music—a manifestation of what Bonnefoy calls “Presence.” There is a current of mysticism in Bonnefoy’s poetry, which speaks of “the One” that is not God but is the world experienced in its unity and awesomeness.

Bonnefoy has also become, over the years, one of the great literary and art critics of the past century, having published many books of criticism, including *L’art et le lieu de la poésie, Rimbaud par lui-même, Le nuage rouge, La vérité de parole, Entretiens sur la poésie,* and *Dessin, couleur et lumière.* He is also the author of a number of volumes of prose poetry, including *L’ordalie, Rue traversière,* and *La vie errante,* and of a book of poetic autobiography, *L’arrière-pays.* He was elected to the Collège de France in 1981 and has delivered lectures there from then up to the present.

My technique in translating the following poems, which are extracted from *Pierre écrite* (copyright Mercure de France), has been to try to bring the poems over into English with as much literalness as possible while allowing for the greater concreteness and specificity of English. French is a language with half the vocabulary of English, and tends to use words to evoke essences as opposed to the particular, physical objects suggested by English. Bonnefoy’s language partakes of the high tradition of French poetry from Baudelaire through Rimbaud to Valéry, and therefore is quite different from any poetry written in the United States during the twentieth century. Eloquent, sonorous, imagistic, it reveals to us a world in which all potentialities have been actualized—the world around us, seen as if for the first time.

—Marc Elihu Hofstadter
Dans ses coffres le rêve a replié
Ses étoffes peintes, et l'ombre
De ce visage taché
De l'argile rouge des morts.

Tu n'as pas voulu retenir
Ces mains étroites qui firent
Le signe de solitude
Sur les pentes ocres d'un corps.

Et telle une eau qui se perd
Dans les rougeurs d'une eau sombre,
La nuque proche se courbe
Sur la plage où brille la mort.

Dream has laid its painted silks away, along with
the dark, stained face
of death's red clay.

You didn't want to stop
those narrow hands
signaling solitude
over the dun slopes of a body.

And, like a water lost
in the blush of a darker water,
the nape bows down
on the beach where death shines.
Bouche, tu auras bu
A la saveur obscure,
A une eau ensablée,
A l’Être sans retour.

Où vont se réunir
L’eau amère, l’eau douce,
Tu auras bu où brille
L’impartageable amour.

Mais ne t’angoisse pas,
O bouche qui demandes
Plus qu’un reflet trouble,
Plus qu’une ombre de jour:

L’âme se fait d’aimer
L’écume sans réponse.
La joie sauve la joie,
L’amour le non-amour.

Mouth, you will have partaken
of the dark potion,
the water choked with sand,
Being gone forever.

There, where the bitter
and sweet waters merge,
you will have tasted
radiant, indivisible love.

But be at ease,
oh mouth that desires
more than just a troubled reflection,
a shadow of day:

Even in loving the indifferent sea
do souls find fulfillment.
For joy is joy’s salvation,
and love saves the absence of love.
Le Coeur, L'eau Non Troublée

Es-tu gaie ou triste?
— Ai-j'ai su jamais,
Sauf que rien ne pèse
Au cœur sans retour.

Aucun pas d'oiseau
Sur cette verrière
Du cœur traversé
De jardins et d'ombre.

Un souci de toi
Qui a bu ma vie
Mais dans ce feuillage
Aucun souvenir.

Je suis l'heure simple
Et l'eau non troublée.
Ai-j'ai su t'aimer,
Ne sachant mourir?

Calm Heart, Untroubled Water

Are you gay or sad today?
Have I ever known?
But nothing weighs
on a heart gone forever.

No scatter of birds' feet
on this skylight
of heart criss-crossed
by gardens and shade.

Care about you
has consumed my life
but here, among these leaves,
I've long since forgotten.

I'm the simple hour
and the untroubled water.
Have I ever known how to love you,
not knowing how to die?
Bruno Jasienski
from *I Burn Paris*

• Translated from the Polish
by Soren Gauger and Marcin Piekoszewski

Giving Bruno Jasienski's great novel *I Burn Paris* to the American public for the first time—almost eighty years after its first publication, seventy years after Jasienski's death—feels much more like a shotgun wedding than a marriage of like minds. Even the inquiring American will have few reference points for Jasienski's slightly unhinged but passionate critique of the Western world and democracy in general. Certainly Sergei Eisenstein's classic film *Strike* bears a family relationship. Ilya Ehrenberg's *The Life of the Automobile* hits a similar note of rawness and puissance mixed with moral urgency and disgust. But in America, a country that tends to shatter taboos as soon as they are identified, pro-Marxist literature remains quarantined in a category unto itself.

It should be stressed immediately, however, that Jasienski was the rarest of all species—a political writer with a wildly digressive, intensely literary imagination. In other words, one never gets the impression that he is wrapping a speech in literary frills. One might entirely disagree with his politics, but I believe most readers will be immediately struck by a vitality of language that was unique to the Russian and Polish Futurists of the 1920s and '30s.

Jasienski called himself a Futurist, wore a monocle and published books with Constructivist illustrations, but literary history tends to group him as a Catastrophist as well—a short-lived Polish literary movement which lumps Jasienski together with Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz ("Witkacy") and Aleksander Wat, among others. In the Poland of the 1930s the imminence of a catastrophe was practically a given. With the Nazis amassing to the West and the Soviets amassing to the East, Poland's situation was a geographical calamity.

Witkiewicz's novel *Insatiability* sublimes this into a tale of the attack of the "yellow terror." Wat (who mentioned a fair amount about his friendship with Jasienski in *My Century*) wrote a short story of the apocalypse where a Jew becomes Pope, and all the Jews become Christians in order to persecute the original Christians. *I Burn Paris* imagines the black plague being poured into the Parisian water system, and the insanity that ensues.

In the pages preceding the excerpt featured here, Pierre, our initial protagonist, is made redundant from his bleak factory job, has a falling out with his girlfriend, and is evicted from his apartment. This begins a delirious, 50-page, black and hallucinogenic Odyssey through Paris, in which Pierre becomes more and more crushed, revolted and animalistic, a downward spiral echoed by a disintegration of the narrative. The fragment here comes in the middle, when his money has all but run out and he is sleeping in metro stations. At the end of "his" part of the novel, he seizes an opportunity to poison the Paris reservoir with the plague.

The remainder of the book (around 250 pages) has Paris breaking into ethnic "zones," which deal with the crisis in various ways. Jasienski's thesis is essentially that a multi-ethnic city is a cheap facade; given the slightest opportunity, everyone will start slashing each other's throats. The novel's misanthropy works because it is universal. The Chinese, the Jews (Jasienski himself was Jewish), the Russians, the Americans; all are shown to be locked in cycles of hate, cruelty and distrust, but all with just enough of an admixture of real humanity to keep them from slipping into caricature.

An interesting historical aspect to this novel is how jazz music functions in it. Whenever the jazz band strikes up, a carnal and grotesque scene reminiscent of a Bosch painting develops, ending inevitably with mass deaths from the plague. In Jasienski's world, death dances the Charleston. Julian Tuwim used similar imagery in his marvelous long poem *Bal w operze* (Ball at the Opera House), where the jazz band literally rings in the apocalypse. In general there is an intimate relationship here between cultural disintegration and decadence (embodied in the present fragment through prostitution) and the Cataclysm, a connection which must have rung true in the Europe of the time, with its cabaret extravagances and hovering war clouds.
It should be stressed, at the risk of stating the obvious, that Jasienski was a Marxist and not a Stalinist, as many Jewish intellectuals were before the Second World War. The reasons for this are many: surely it was to a large extent because of the idealism of Marxist philosophy, but equally, perhaps, for pragmatic reasons: it proposed a concrete alternative to Fascism, whose anti-Semitic aspect had already been made clear.

Things ended badly for Jasienski, as they did for many Marxist intellectuals of his generation. After I Burn Paris was translated into Russian, he became an overnight celebrity—he sold hundreds of thousands of copies in the space of a few weeks, and began writing in Russian instead of Polish. He and Maxim Gorki were enlisted, among other writers, to travel far to the north of Russia to write an ode to a pipeline being built at the expense of many workmen's lives. But ultimately his writing was too flamboyant, too ambiguous, too unorthodox. Some of his Russian books carry introductions written by Soviet writers, and the mood is defensive. Structures were being hammered in place—and Jasienski's imagination had become excessive, strange and irrelevant baggage. He was executed under mysterious circumstances in 1938.

Translating Jasienski is a minefield, and I have been working again in close collaboration with Marcin Piekoszewski to keep things from sliding too far off the rails. Jasienski tends to take a metaphor and extend it so far that it actually becomes a part of the (often delirious) main character's reality. Whereas the English language tends towards similes, things in Jasienski's metaphorical world are emphatically not like or as—they are. The following passage is a typical example:

Rain started pouring in the evening, and under the sluicing streams of water the hard contours of objects gently rippled, sinking into their depths, as if immersed in a swift, transparent current.

Dusk fell. The lanterns were lit, like splattered, colorless stains on the inky surface of the night, capable of neither soaking into it nor illuminating it, they populated the riverbed of the street with an algae of shadows, the fantastical fauna of the bottomless depths.

The precipitous banks—full of the phosphorus, magical grottoes of jewelry-shop windows, where virgin pearls the size of peas, shucked of their shells, slumbered on suede-leather rocks—stretched upwards, their perpendicular walls vainly grasping for the surface.

Down in the wide valley of the riverbed, a tightly-packed school of bizarre iron fish with fiery, bulging eyes flowed past with a swish of rubber-scale tires, lustily rubbing their sides together in clouds of bluish gasoline spawn.

Along the steep banks, straining to move, like divers in the transparent gelatin of water, people under heavy wetsuit umbrellas waded with leaden feet. It seemed as though at any moment someone would pull at a dangling handle and gently glide upward, his legs tracing zigzag patterns in the air, over the heads of the frozen crowd.

From afar, with the flow of the river, an odd, flat wet-suit with three pairs of female legs slowly drew near. The legs stumbled their way on the slick ground, they reeled from laughter, from the gurgle of physical joy felt in overcoming resistance.

Jasienski's sustained metaphors are unique because he leaves the "reality" part of the metaphor up to the reader for extended passages, and thus the imagination often seems to gain the upper hand over the (fictional) reality. Trying to maintain the integrity of this without losing the reader is one of the main tasks in translating I Burn Paris.

Political correctness and the English language is another stumbling block. In Jasienski's writing, the word for a black man is Murzyn and a Chinese man is often zàłty (literally: yellow). African here is incorrect, African-Frenchman is clumsy and (worst of all) anachronistic, and the fairly neutral "black man" simply does not fit into the syntax of many sentences; but then the contemporaneous options—Negro, colored etc.—contain a whole spectrum of racist connotations that do not exist in the original text. Poland has no history of black slavery, and the word Murzyn is still used today (though some would argue from a standpoint of political correctness that it shouldn't be). Ultimately, I have had to resort to the word "Negro" in a few places, but with the important prefatory remark that neither Jasienski nor I intend the
baggage the word carries for the American reader. With the latter word, zółty, substituting "Chinese" has seemed the only viable option—in Polish, "yellow" is no more offensive than "black" or "white," but in English the connotation is simply too slanderous.

_I Burn Paris_ is one of those rare books that still has the power to excite and compel a translator after over a year of work and three hundred pages. I hope I have managed to communicate even a fraction of this personal enthusiasm, and above all the original charge the text carries within it.

– Soren Gauger

...from III

There was no work anywhere. Roaming down side-streets, Pierre persistently entered the garages he found on the way, offering to wash automobiles. He was everywhere greeted with the hostile faces and bloodshot eyes of workmen scrubbing car bodies, their eyes fierce like dogs smelling a rival for a bone that will feed one at most. Nobody was in need of help.

When night fell, Jeannette's name trembled inside of him—a new burning cramp, more painful than hunger. He instinctively started wandering in the direction of her apartment.

Jeannette still wasn't home.

The long and elastic streets multiplied before him, stretching into infinity like a rubber strap tied to his leg, they scampered from under his feet like lizards in the reflections of dashing lights, they knowingly winked in the dusk with the eyes of a thousand pay-by-the-hour hotels.

On approaching one of these, Pierre suddenly spotted a couple coming out. A broad-shouldered man and a petite, slender woman. He couldn't make out the woman's face in the darkness, but he recognized her silhouette as Jeannette's. He threw himself towards them, shoving aside the passers-by who stepped in his way. Before he managed to catch up with them, they stepped into a taxi and drove off.

In a powerless state of frenzy he stood for a moment, helpless, before the doors of the empty hotel. The onrushing wave of pedestrians swept him further along.

He had not moved one hundred steps when he saw a couple leaving another hotel. The girl's silhouette was deceptively similar to Jeannette's. To get his hands on them, he had to cross to the other side of the street. His path was blocked by an incessant flood of automobiles. When he at last reached the opposite sidewalk, the couple was no longer there, they had dissolved into the crowd. In his helpless rage he shed bitter tears; they stuck in his throat.

All around hotel signs flickered on and off, suggestively flashing their alternating red and white lights, inviting pedestrians inside. Jeannette could have been in any one of those hotels at that moment. Tired out by the lusts of the demanding muscleman, she was
sleeping curled up like a child, her hands folded between her knees as though in prayer. The thug was stroking her white body, frail and defenseless. Pierre felt an inexpressible caring for her, almost verging on tenderness.

His thoughts swirled about, tangled and twisted like the alleyways he was now drifting down. On the thresholds of cheap, few-franc-a-night hotels stood skinny, shabbily-dressed women, sheltering themselves from the rain under the rapidly blossoming palms of umbrellas; they stopped passers-by with the short, alluring click of the tongue that is used to call dogs all over the world. In Paris you call people this way, too.

A slender, consumptive girl in soaked evening slippers promised him the most carefully concealed delights of her scrofulous body for only five francs. To emphasize her indecent gesture, which she somehow imagined to be seductive, she stuck out a white and furry tongue, making her look like she had indigestion.

Pierre shook from the cold and inner turmoil. From somewhere not far away floated the bouncing melody of a player-piano. A small red lantern indicated that it was a fun-loving establishment.

Pierre recalled that he had in his pocket the three francs he had earned during the night, and he decided to go in. With his three francs he could order himself a boa and sit in the warmth until morning.

He was enveloped by a wave of nauseating, staggering warmth, the powerful smell of powder, cheap perfumes and cheap women. He groped to the first table by the wall and, utterly exhausted, slumped heavily onto the upholstered couch, whose springs gave a harsh lament.

When he opened his light-dazzled eyes, it seemed to him that the couch spring he was pressing down was simultaneously the central spring of the whole mechanism he had unintentionally damaged.

The room in no way differed from the bar of an average public house, with tables and a player-piano that was now playing at such a slow tempo that Pierre could hear a vacuum between the individual tones of the gamboling keyboard, the pulse of a falling drop, a molecule of time.

By the wall, in the shade of the rachitic palms in green buckets, speckled toadstool-tables bloomed in rows. In-between a dozen naked, voluptuous women circulated in lazy, atomized movements, as though caught in a slow-motion film. With apparent great effort their plump, swollen bodies conquered the resistance of the air, rocking on its rubber pillows amidst the flat, thickened clouds of tobacco smoke, like the bodies of Renaissance angels, with the rhythmic flutter of their faded sashes, fanned out like the tattered wings of moths.

Pierre understood everything in a flash. The spring quivered, tossing him into a different reality with a final bounce.

Yes, this was paradise. Pierre saw this at once, though as a non-religious person he had never precisely imagined this institution before. He recognized it by the blissful torpor flowing through his veins, by the somehow familiar sounds, the paradisiacal music he seemed to know from a previous life, and by the rustle from the wings of the angels slowly circling about. But why did the clouds so remind him of tobacco smoke, why was the ambrosia distiller so reminiscent of the counter of an ordinary bistro.

Suddenly his gaze fell upon the corner, and Pierre died of humble ecstasy.

In the corner, over the wooden altar of the counter-top, towered the Lord God of Sabaoth, silent and still as a statue. This was no Christian God with a long white beard, it more resembled a bronze, serene Buddha, whose gigantic statue Pierre had once had occasion to see at a colonial exhibition. This was the same god exactly, of matronly shape, of puffy, wrinkled and feminine visage, only from these ears hung the expensive votive offerings of massive earrings, counter-balanced like scales of an exact, mystical weight.

Together with the chilly draft through the door left ajar, men came trickling one by one into the room, they were awkward and embarrassed, and they looked long and lackadaisically for a free table good enough to be waiting for them.

At a few tables Pierre noticed other women, trapped in the tight embrace of costly furs, like the sinners in the pictures of the old masters, who vainly struggled to cover their burning nakedness with the transparent fringe of their flowing hair.

From time to time a man would raise himself slowly, staring at one of the angels surrounding him, his eyes wide with astonishment - as though in her face he had suddenly seen that of another, someone familiar and long lost. Then the pair, taking each other by the hand and tracing slow semi-circles with their feet, approached the altar of the counter, where, in exchange for the mystical banknote-permit, the motionless Buddha, of the puffy and feminine visage, with a ceremonial, liturgical gesture, handed the woman the symbolic
We used to go to the cinema together. Remember, you always used
all-cleansing sleepiness washing over him in waves. Someone was insistently, violently trying to wrench him out
from under the soft eiderdown of drowsiness pulled over his head. Pierre struggled to wriggle away from the voice, to let it blow past, like a person whose bullish alarm clock drives him from the virginal undergrowth of sleep, but who tries in vain to dig himself back into his warm, night-grown, tropical foliage. The voice glided somewhere above him like a heavy bird which, oblivious to its prey, turned a wide circle and came back as sudden and deafening as a punch:

"Don't you recognize me, Pierre?"

"Aren't you seeing Jeanette anymore?"

"Don't you recognize me? I used to be Jeanette's good friend. We used to go to the cinema together. Remember, you always used to buy us candy?"

Pierre opened his eyes wide.

The monotonous whimper of the player-piano. The heavy, full-breasted angels filing through the room in the hypnosis of a slow-motion film. One of these, entirely naked, a bun in her hair, crouched on the edge of the couch, obstinately staring at Pierre.

"Don't you recognize me? I used to be Jeanette's good friend. We used to go to the cinema together. Remember, you always used to buy us candy?"

Leaning over memory's booth like a stubborn fairground spectator, Pierre rummaged in the sawdust that filled him, sometimes finding the sparkling pinpoints of recollections scattered here and there.

Who was this nagging fly, struggling to bring him back to the reality he had abandoned once and for all? Could it be no more than a trick of his imagination, still addled by earthly reminiscences? If so, it would be enough to burrow deeper into the magical pillow of the all-cleansing sleepiness washing over him in waves.

But the bothersome fly wouldn't stop its buzzing:

"I'm sure you're wondering how I got here. My God, it's so simple. I never had any luck. I never managed to find a rich boyfriend. It's not so easy to dress yourself and survive off two hundred francs a month. It's not the same if you have a boyfriend as good as Jeanette's. I never had any luck. I got my health card. The warehouse threw me out, naturally, on the second day. I had to try working the street, but it's not as easy as it seems. The summer was okay, but when it started to rain... I get sick too easily. I caught a cold... I spent time in the hospital. When I got better, I came here. The work isn't so hard. It's always warm. I earn less, but the payments are regular. Ten francs per guy, the house takes seven. They serve us food. It's a living. One day you earn more, the next day less, it depends on your luck. The day before yesterday, for example, I had fifteen guys - that's forty-five francs. Of course, you don't get that many every day. The work's a bit tiring, but you get every third day off. Are you going already? Won't you stay just a bit longer? I wanted to ask what Jeanette was up to. Isn't she your girlfriend anymore?"

Pierre got up from the table all of a sudden and sluggishly put on his cap. The spring leapt up with a twang, setting the whole mechanism back in motion. Pierre felt as though he had poked the soap bubble surrounding him, and it suddenly burst.

The bouncing, breakneck lament of the player-piano. A dozen naked, perspiring girls turn around the room in quick orbits, adorned with cheap and tawdry bows. A few others are noisily cajoling some red sergeants into buying them a beer. Smoke, tumult and stifling air.

At a few tables: expensively dressed ladies in the company of some gentlemen with glistening shirt-fronts. The men aren't drinking their beer, preferring to be generous and give them to the girls surrounding their table, happily admiring their acrobatic tricks. The tricks in question involve one of the guests laying a franc on the table, while the girl tries to pick it up without the use of her hands, using only her female organs. The women in furs smile approvingly.

Digging his three francs out of his pocket with difficulty and leaving it on a saucer, Pierre shoved his way through to the door and, without responding to the pleasant farewell from the majestic Buddha-matron at the cash register, slithered out onto the street.

Outside a heavy drizzle was falling, punctuated by the distant blinking of stars. Over the frozen pool of the sky the Great Bear was shaking its shiny fur coat after its evening bath, and the chilly spray flew down to the earth.
Jeannette still wasn't there. Her old shrew of a mother, who had always cast a disapproving eye on her daughter's relationship with poor Pierre, one evening slammed the door in his face, claiming that Jeannette no longer lived in her home.

The city rang as it always had, in its eternal ebb and flow. Inexhaustible crowds of people flowed into the streets; fat, bloated men with necks of salami. Any of them might have slept with Jeannette, maybe the night before, perhaps only a few minutes ago. Any of them could have been the man he was searching for and chasing in this aimless pursuit. With manic determination Pierre stared into the faces of passers-by, struggling to find some trace in them, the minutest convulsion remaining from an evening of delight spent with Jeannette. His keen nostrils breathed in the smells of clothing, trying to catch the scent of Jeannette's perfume, the subtle fragrance of her tiny body.

Jeannette wasn't there, she wasn't anywhere.

And yet she was everywhere. Pierre saw and recognized her precisely in the silhouette of every girl accompanied by her lover from the front door of every hotel, riding alongside in a taxi, disappearing suddenly in the nooks of the first gateway she happened to notice. A thousand times he ran, furiously pushing aside the pedestrians that were forever standing between her and him in an impenetrable wave, and he always arrived too late.

Days turned into days in a monotonous play of shadow and light. He had already given up looking for work after the barren weeks of wandering.

For many days he had been carrying about a greedy, sucking hunger in his womb as a mother does a foetus, bringing a nausea up into his throat and dissolving a leaden tiredness through his body.

The contours of objects sharpened as though outlined with pencil, the air became rarified and transparent under the bell jar of the urban sky's suction pump. The houses became expansive and penetrable, squishing unexpectedly into one another, only to stretch once more into an improbable and absurd perspective. People wore scrubbed and indistinct faces. Some had two noses, and others two pairs of eyes. Most had two heads at the ends of their necks, one strangely crammed into the other.

One evening the tide threw him off the Montmartre boulevards and thrust him up against the glass frontage of a grand music hall. A gigantic fiery windmill slowly turned its blades on their axis, deluding the laughable Don Quixotes of pleasure from the endless avenues of the world. The windows of the surrounding houses glowed with the bright-red embers of the inextinguishable fever that burned within.

It was time for the show to begin. The lobby was glassed in like a lighthouse, and around it a whirling crush of automobiles hit the sidewalk in a furious wave, only to ebb back moments later, leaving the white foam of ermine capes and tuxedo mantles, shirt-fronts and arms on the rocky shore of the pavement.

A numberless black crowd pressed into the side doors in a roaring deluge, jostling and stepping on toes. Pierre had the impression that he had seen such a mob somewhere before, that he was a missing part of it. It reminded him of the same idiotic stream of people that had squeezed themselves into the market for a bowl of onion soup.

A new towering tidal wave tossed him aside, crushing his face into a wall - which under closer observation turned out to be a soft human face, one suddenly so familiar. The face, freeing itself with some hands from the unexpected pressure, was also inspecting him.

"Pierre?"

Pierre strained his mind to recall something. And now it seemed that he remembered: Etienne from the ground-floor packing room.

They cut through the crowd to a side street. Etienne said something quick and incomprehensible. Yes, he'd been canned as well. There was no way to find any kind of work. A crisis. You had to find some way to eke out a living. He'd tried everything. He'd sold coca. No good. Too much competition. He'd tried pimping his own Germaine. She always brought in a dozen francs an evening. Times were, however, very tough. Not many foreigners. Supply was outstripping all possible demand. You had to make a little something on the side.

Now he was a "scout." Tiring work, but still some of the most relatively lucrative. You had to know a few addresses and above all not take any lip, that was key. You also had to be a bit of a psychologist. Know what attracts whom. Lots of competition as well, but if you were a good talker, you'd make it all right.

He specialized in older men. He knew a few houses where they kept little snot-nosed girls. That was a sure thing. Not far away, on
Rochechouart Street. Thirteen-year-olds. Sure-fire goods. You only had to know how to serve them up. Presentation: short dress, little apron, pig-tail with a bun. In the rooms upstairs there was a school: a picture of a saint, a crib, a classroom pulpit, a blackboard, and on the blackboard, written in chalk: \(2 \times 2 = 5\). The full illusion. No older man would object. You got 10 francs from the guy for telling him where the address was, and five from the house. It was a living.

This was his turf. If Pierre wanted, he could get him involved in this line, whisper a few addresses in his ear. The key? Eloquence. And awareness. Knowing who to go up to. Best to wait in front of a restaurant. Maybe check out his old spot, in front of the Abbaye. A sure thing. As long as you don't mess up the addresses...

A new whirlpool of pedestrians violently swept Pierre up and carried him blindly. Etienne got lost somewhere. Pierre tried not to fight it, he was swept along. After a few hours' ebb and flow he was tossed out onto Place Pigalle.

A bright turnstile of advertisements. The flaming syllables of phrases written in the air by some unseen hand. Instead of "Mane, Tekel, Fares" - "Pigall's," "Royal" and "Abbaye."

"Abbaye..."

Etienne had said something about that.

A slender, gala-dressed boy stood freezing in front of the illuminated entrance in his short jacket, until a subservient bow bent him over double.

Two older gentlemen. Alone. Lingering on the corner. Smoking. Pierre mechanically moves closer. The gentlemen, absorbed in their talk, pay him no mind. Pierre pulls the older, fat-bellied gentleman by the sleeve and mumbles into his ear:

"Fun... thirteen-year-olds... little aprons... a crib... a blackboard... \(2 \times 2 = 5\)... the full illusion..."

The older gentleman violently tears away his sleeve. Both men automatically check their pockets where their wallets are. Hastily, almost at a run, they jump into a by-passing taxi, fearfully slamming the doors.

Pierre is left alone on the corner. He understands nothing. Leaning on a wall, he blunders through the night along a dark, deserted boulevard. A pane of glass. A mirror. A grey, sallow face covered in a tangle of beard emerges from the mirror to greet him, the red, burning-hot lanterns of his eyes.

Pierre stops. He seems to understand. They simply got scared off. No way to earn a living with a face like that.

In the middle of the boulevard, kissing with every other step, stroll a couple locked in embrace. A small, slanting cap. Long, slender legs. Jeannette! The couple go into a corner hotel, without pausing their kissing. Again a car - a damned car! - cuts in front of him.


An exhausted Pierre leans against the wall. Minutes passed, hours perhaps. Surely they are undressing by now.

In a frenzy of self-torment Pierre recreates in his mind all the successive phases of the so-clearly-recalled gropings, replacing himself with that other, faceless man with an upturned collar.

He can now be certain that they are lying in bed. The scoundrel is wandering his hands about her firm, white body. They are now intertwined...

Suddenly everything bursts. A couple is walking out of the hotel across the way. A fat, bloated fellow and a slender girl. Jeannette!! The girl, climbing on her toes (oh, how well he knew that pose!), kisses the bloated fellow on the mouth. She waves her hand for a taxi.


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With a scream and some neck-breaking leaps, Pierre lands on the other side of the road. The taxi has made off with Jeannette. The bloated fellow remains in front of the hotel, checking the contents of his bulging wallet by the lamplight. The flush of the delight experienced just a few minutes before is still fading from his jowls. Jeannette's parting kiss lingers on his revolting lips. The crumpled folds of his clothing still hold the warmth of her touch, the singular, unforgettable smell of her body. At last!

The fist tears free from the body and lands between the bulging, encysted eyes of its own accord. The hollow crash of a toppled body. The bull-like, flabby neck squishes like dough through the gaps between his taut fingers. The wallet falls from his hands and flaps to the gutter, helpless as a shot bird.

The night responds to the powerless, hoarse calls of the fat man with a sustained, mournful whistle. With a flutter of cheviot wings, navy-blue bats descend from the night's recesses on all sides, down onto the scattered mane of Pierre's red hair, like to the flame of a candle.
The rhythmic swing of an automobile is carrying him somewhere into the infinity of the horizon. The narcotizing flap of capes. And on his face - like a cold soldier's shroud - the American flag of the sky, with stars upon stars.

One side of everything that happened next stuck out over the boundary of three-dimensional reality, like Chaplin's hut over the precipice.

The black, twilight-fading walls. The precise cube of the musty air, which you could cut with a knife like a gigantic, magical Magi bullion cube. And in the deep, barred well of the window - a liter of condensed sky.

Pierre encountered a new, miniature underworld, governed by its own, peculiar laws, on the margins of the giant, complicated mechanism of the world. An unfamiliar world of undeserved things: the narrow, comfortable couch under the drooping canopy of the ceiling, morning and evening - the mess-tin of warm soup, flavored with a hunk of bread, got free of labor.

On the other side of the wall, in the neighboring cramped rooms - a strange society of people, cast away - like waste, by the scrupulous, unforgiving machine of the world - to here, behind the high wall on Arago Boulevard and, by someone's inconceivable will, tied and hitched onto a new and bizarre mechanism, governed by the new and bizarre laws of the World of Ready-Made Things.

The pointless walks around the symmetrical circles of the courtyard, regular as a carousel, under the low, sooty bell-jar of the prison skies. The long rosary-row, manipulated by someone's unseen hand, of which each bead is the live, pulsating innerds of human existence; the machinery of the wheels that could not fit in anywhere on the other side of the wall, when thrown together into this monstrous lumber-yard astonishingly cling to one another, they unexpectedly mesh, creating a new collective organism, functioning according to another guiding principle, scarcely conceived on the other side.

The days constantly change into other days, somehow different, longer, drafted by a peculiar measurement of a distinct code.

Somewhere, in the stuffy vases of apartments, in the flowerpots of offices, slowly, leaf after leaf, blossoms the metaphysical flower of the calendar. The long thousands of kilometers measured in the cell extended in one mental straight line, getting lost somewhere in the muddy, reed-covered banks of the Orinoko River.

And only at night, when the word "Sleep" is illuminated on the uninscribed face of the mystical regulator, giving orders by suggestion of electric lamp - are there dreams.

The black coursing waves of reality from the other side, tethered in place by the indomitable wall of the day and the regulations, surround the island at Arago Boulevard from each and every side. The wall cracks and sways. The towering river of bodies, banknotes, deeds, bottles, exertions, lamps, kiosks, and legs crashes above the rooftops in a throbbing wave, with a rumbling din. Age-old, unaired mattresses, slept on to disrepair, pour out of the gaping maws of hotels like drawers from an open wardrobe, they grow, shoot up into a gigantic hundred-floor Tower of Babel with creaking, springy stairs. And at the top, on the gigantic, four-person mattress of the Bed of All Nations (Le lit national) lies the tiny, defenseless Jeannette. A numberless crowd of men creeps up the trembling stairs like ants: there are blondes, brunettes, red-heads, they seek to lie upon her tired body for an instant with their heavy, lust-soaked carnality, one after another, everyone, the city, Europe, the world! The tower creaks with the springs' convulsive seizures, it sways, bends and falls, inundated by the waves of the furious sea, beating its shattering tide on the rocky wall around the shaved-head Robinsons asleep on their island, which looks out onto Arago Boulevard.

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Ko Un
from Songs for Tomorrow

• Translated from the Korean by Brother Anthony of Taizé, Young-moo Kim and Gary Gach •

Born in 1933 in Gunsan, North Jeolla Province, Ko Un is widely considered Korea's literary elder spokesman. This, in a country where poets were shamans, later part of royalty, and are still revered by all today. No mere five seconds of fame for poets in Korea, much less for Ko Un, who has been nominated for a Nobel several times.

His biography mirrors the story of his nation. He learned Korean in secret, during the 40-year rule of imperial Japanese colonialism. Thus, to write in Korean reflects, in and of itself, a fundamental national resistance. Such poetry isn't part of the experience of English literature because no one ever tried to abolish England or the English language, not even William the Conqueror. There are many ways in which an Irish or a Welsh reader might feel much more directly what's implied by the Korean act of poetic composition. Similarly; young Koreans visiting Europe find themselves at ease with their contemporaries from eastern Europe but at a loss to understand the cynical attitudes of many western Europeans.

After his traumatic Korean War experiences, Ko Un became a Buddhist monk. After ten years in robes, having attained high rank but disillusioned with current institutionalization of the Way, he returned to the world. Following a period of black nihilism, he became a leading spokesman for artists and writers in the struggle for freedom and democracy during the 1970s and 1980s, for which he was often arrested and imprisoned. He’s not only been an eyewitness but a physical expression of the agony and the hope that has characterized so much of modern Korean history.

In 1991, in the foreword to his book of poems Sea Diamond Mountain, Ko Un speaks of his sense of poetic creation: “If someone opens my grave, a few years after my death, they’ll find it full, but not of my bones: rather, full of poems written in that tomb’s darkness. Am I too attached to poetry? Because my poems exist side-by-side with a farewell to poetry, my attachment is one aspect of a deliverance from poetry.”

Now that the ban on translation of his works has been lifted, his work has appeared in over a dozen languages. Readers interested in comparing differing translations of the same poem might like to know that the first four poems in this selection, and the last, are radical revisions of translations that we first published in The Sound of My Waves (Cornell EAS, 1991), the first volume of Ko Un translations ever published in English. The final two poems chosen for publication here were also translated by another team and published in Three Way Tavern. These will appear in our “collection” of Ko Un’s poems written between 1961 and 2001, Songs for Tomorrow, (Green Integer, Spring 2008). The word “collection” is here deliberately provocative as Ko Un has published more than 140 volumes of poems, essays, and fiction; the selections here only hint at his range of themes, genres and forms.

We offer you testimony whose ink is still drying, as it were. Bearing witness to an answer ever yet to come. Songs for tomorrow, in the key of rain, sun, earth, wind, and your hearty attention.

– Brother Anthony of Taizé and Gary Gach
받의 범열
아 머니는 아니 주무실 테고
밤으로
밤낮으로
흐르는 것 다 고요가 되니
가운데 간 그 물소리는 어느 만큼 가 자는지
아 자고 기켜워라. 이리하다가
이느릿 나의 몸으로부터 나아 가는 물소리로
여두움아 나의 마음을 비치어 보아라.

Nocturnal Rapture
Ah, mother's surely not asleep
and things that flow by night, night
and day,
are all silent now so I wonder
how far away the murmur of water
that went on all autumn has gone to sleep
ah, so cold and full of joy. And when that's done,
darkness, see my heart reflected
in the water's murmur emerging from within me.
벌레소리

낮가을 잎 다 지고
아주 나무가지들 비어 있을 때
그때야말로
땅 밑으로 어두운 물줄기는 흐르는가
땅 밑 물줄기가 어때가 숨아오르듯
그런 숨어오르는 물소리가
내 몸 까이자 들리러니
그 소리는 어디로 돌아가고
푸른 밤중에 다시 잠 이루려 할 때
나는 내 귀가 아니라
내 눈으로 들나니
내 눈의 벌레소리 와마디 깊음이여
귀 없다
소리 없다
눈의 아름으로 깨진 세벽이여

Insect Voice

Late autumn leaves all fallen.
Branches stretching bare.
In such a season
might a dark stream be flowing underground?
My dreams are broken by the sound of water
as if a subterranean stream were surging upward.
As I listen, it fades away. But in blue night
as I try to get back to sleep, I hear it again.
Not with my ears
but with my eyes.
The depth of my eyes, one insect buzz!
No ears.
No sound.
Dawn, awakening by the darkness in my eyes.
시인의 마음

시인은 절도 살인 사기 폭력
그런 것들의 범죄 틈에 깡아서
이 세계의 한 모퉁이에서 태어났다

시인의 말은 청계천 황신동 중삼 산동대
그런 곳의 욕지거리 생활의 틈에 깡아서
이 사회의 동안을 맡는다

시인의 마음은 모든 악과 허위의 틈으로 스며나온
이 시대의 진실 외바다를 만든다
그리고 그 마음은
다른 마음에 맞아죽는다

시인의 마음은 이육고 불운이다

A Poet's Heart

A poet is born within the cracks
of crime — fraud, theft, violence, murder —
in some obscure corner of the world.

Within the foulest of curses ever sworn
in a city's poorest and roughest of slums,
the words of a poet creep into the cracks
and rule there for a while.

Then, out of all of today's truth seeping through
the cracks in the evil and the lies, the poet
forms one single cry. Then
other hearts beat it to death.

For sure, a poet's heart is doomed.
Hey! Can you imagine a spy's loneliness?
Can you imagine the loneliness involved not only in hiding from everyone but in not being able to tell a soul about the country you're engaged to serve?
Can you imagine his long loneliness day after day when, arrested for messages in morse-code, condemned to death, commuted to life imprisonment, he's spent more than twenty years in a tiny cell with a wooden floor, his hair turning white?

Even more surprising, though, is such loneliness hasn't converted him from the beliefs of twenty years ago! With the passage of time, his fervor all turned to dust, yet the spy cannot let go of the loneliness!

So which shall we call it: a tombstone, or a breath of fresh air?
나 자신과의 만남

11월 하순의 성깃한 숲
그렇게 일어버려라
하늘 아래
모든 나무들 잠재우려고
입 닫은 소나무와 췌나무들만
제 바늘잎새의 푸른색에 묻혀 있다
그렇게 일어버려라
다른 나무들은 다 함께
몇 개의 마른 잎새를 가까스로 닫고 있다
새가 숨을 틀어 뿔이 벌어셔서인지
제 털리 하나를 벌어뜨리며
저쪽으로 날아간다
그 가난의 순간 나는 뜻밖에 해골을 밟았다

Meeting Myself

Free yourself
like the bare groves of late November.
Only tight-lipped pines and firs
stand buried in the green of their needles,
as if intent on lulling to sleep
everything under the heavens.
So rid yourself of everything.
On all the other trees
a few dry leaves are barely dangling.
Having nowhere to hide,
a bird flies off,
letting a feather fall.
In that moment of poverty I suddenly stepped on a skull.
The Woman of Kago Island

If we're at all human
there's always some spot we can never forget.
There is such a place in this world.

Last summer
on Kago Island in the Western Sea, my clothes
nearly ripped in the fierce sea winds.
And in those winds a tough birch grew,
and chasteberry, with a slender stalk,
sending down roots as deep as their height,
standing firm.

And in those winds was the voice of a woman
who, early on in life, lost her husband at sea
but stayed there with her children,
celebrating his memorial rites every year.
No matter how the winds might howl,
her voice sliced through them
as she called out in a brisk voice
to her big fifteen-year-old son's tiny boat —
unclear whether she was calling
across the waves to her dead husband
or her son.
As the story goes, Aldo Palazzeschi greeted Milanese Futurists ET. Marinetti, Umberto Boccioni, Luigi Russolo, and Carlo Carrà at the Florence train station late in 1911 and led them directly to the Giubbe Rosse, the brasserie hang-out of the Florentine intellectuals who wrote for the journal *La Voce*. There they encountered Ardengo Soffici, who had just published a withering critique of the Futurists. About of fisticuffs ensued between the Futurists from Milan and the Florentine intellectuals. After another scrap the next morning, the two groups cooled off together in a police station waiting room, where a lively discussion led to some reconciliation. The rivals would go on to find common cause for a while in battling (rhetorically and otherwise) all forms of *passatismo* (pastism or passeism: tradition-bound conservatism)—a battle that took many forms, notably Futurist manifestos; the paintings of Boccioni, Balla and others; the pages of the Florentine journal *Lacerba* (1913-1915); and the Futurist *serate* (evenings) of choreographed and unbound mayhem, the first of which had occurred on 12 January 1910 in the ‘unredeemed’ Habsburg city of Trieste.

Palazzeschi’s antic ambush of the Milanese and Florentine intellectuals illustrates his galvanizing sense of irony. A trained actor, Palazzeschi’s irreverent free verse brought him the admiration of Marinetti and aligned him with the Futurists. His fourth book of verse, *L’Incendiaario* (*The Arsonist*), was published by *Edizioni Futuriste di Poesia* in 1911, as was his ground-breaking novel *Il codice di Perela* (*Man of Smoke*) in 1911. Yet Palazzeschi’s alliance with the Futurists was brief. In 1914 he took a public stand against Marinetti’s pro-war ‘interventionist’ campaign and for what was termed ‘neutralism.’

This literary hero of the Futurists, whom Marinetti had acclaimed as possessing “a fierce, destructive irony,” publicly turned away from the Futurists’ increasingly insistent ideology of violence as necessary ‘purification.’ In retrospect, Palazzeschi’s break with the Futurists is unsurprising. Even during his alliance with Marinetti—the period in which *The Arsonist* was composed—Palazzeschi’s poetry had none of the Futurist embrace of past-eradicating modernization. The titular poem of *The Arsonist* is dedicated to Marinetti, yet even that poem’s self-effacing, wry protest, along with such poems as the apparently silly, disengaged “E lasciatemi divertire” (“So let me have my fun,” probably Palazzeschi’s best-known poem) already gave ample evidence of Palazzeschi’s distrust of political engagement. For Palazzeschi, the boisterous performance and subversive humor always had a serious subtext, but the *saltimbancso’s* real concern was for individualism, freedom of expression, and artistic autonomy.

Born Aldo Giurlani to a well-off Florentine mercantile family, Aldo Palazzeschi (1885-1974) was educated as an accountant and trained as an actor. Outside of Italy, he is best known for his anti-novel of 1911, *Man of Smoke*, a comic-existentialist fable that, as Nicolas J. Perella has argued, prefigures the works of such postmodern writers as Calvino and Kundera. Palazzeschi later won prestigious literary prizes for his more conventional novels *I fratelli Cuccoli* (*The Cuccoli Brothers*, 1948; Premio Viareggio) and *Roma* (1953; Premio Marzotto). An earlier novel, *Le sorelle Materassi* (*The Materassi Sisters*, 1934), a commercial success, was twice made into films.

Palazzeschi was a poet first, however, and it was through verse that he first sought notoriety. His earliest poetry belongs to the *crepuscolari*, the ‘twilight’ poets—among them Sergio Corazzini and Guido Gozzano—but by 1909 he was writing the absurdist parables of urban-bourgeois life upon which his reputation as an avant-garde writer rests. His debut, *I cavalli bianchi* (*The White Horses*), was published in 1905 by Cesare Blanc—the poet’s cat, also the editor of *Lanterna* (1907) and *Poemi* (1909). The latter volume’s onomatopoeic “La fontana malata” (“The sick fountain”) parodies Gabriele D’Annunzio’s famous “La pioggia nel pineto” (“The rain in the pine-grove”), the same volume’s “Chi sono?” (“Who am I?”), among the best-known twentieth-century Italian poems, pointedly rejects the
then-dominant model of national bard, of which D'Annunzio was the flamboyant personification. Against the tradition of self-celebrating lyrical poetry, Palazzeschi claims the right to be as mocking and anti-heroic as he wants: "Chi sono? / Il saltimbanco dell'anima mia" ("Who am I? / The acrobat of my soul"). In the same poem, Palazzeschi broadens his renunciation of prior models by explicitly renouncing madness, melancholy, and nostalgia—three leitmotifs of the deliberately modest poetry of the crepuscolari.

By 1910, Palazzeschi had already shed the poet's mantle as "melancholy mirror," to paraphrase Corazzini. The saltimbanco's deceptively breezy treatment of sad subjects evolves into the sequence of dramatic burlesques of The Arsonist. Originally bound with a sixty-four page prefatory document entitled "Rapporto sulla vittoria futurista di Trieste"—an account of the 'Futurist victory,' the raucous evening of readings and provocations held at the Politeama Rossetti in Trieste on 12 January 1910—The Arsonist, with its irreverence, biting parody, and blithe nonsense, resembles works of Apollinaire more than anything then existing in Italian poetry. Apollinaire's essay on Picasso's saltimbanques had already appeared in 1905; his 1908 poem "Saltimbanques" (which appeared in book form in A·lcools, 1913) figures the saltimbanque as transient outsider, member of a tribe of jocular social critics. With Palazzeschi, the saltimbanco further withdraws from the lyric alternation of euphoria and despair, as in the poetry of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and the crepuscolari. Palazzeschi's saltimbanco is an absurdist, a detached observer who mocks the relics of a degraded present—but his laughter is laced with sadness for disintegrating forms and decaying illusions. The chorus of shopkeepers, delusionaries, drones, clowns, lackeys, and anarchists embodies the human tendency to conform to hierarchical roles. The sad and comical examples of self-abasement and evasion are instances of the sublimation of individualism that periodically erupts in violent rites of expiation and self-abasement. As befits the trained actor, it is through his ventriloquism, in the role of busker and barker, that Palazzeschi is able both to express himself and to voice larger truths.

The Arsonist is comprised of twenty-two dramatic, parodic narrative allegories of contemporary bourgeois life, which the poet depicts as timid, shallow, selfish, and squalid. This vision is rendered in colloquial free verse that places the reader, hypocrisecteur, "leggiucchiando senza fe" ("distractedly, hypocritically," as the public reading tombstones in 'The Festival of the Dead'), alongside the bourgeois the poet becomes an exemplary gadabout, boulevardier, and armchair provocateur—master of ceremonies at a carnival show.

Exhibit one is the volume's opening salvo, "The Arsonist," an allegory of the avant-garde and parody of the Christ cult. In the poem, the speaker is a poet confronted by the spectacle of an imprisoned fire-setting terrorist, next to whose unbridled acts of destruction, the poet's only attempt to upset civic propriety (he burns the first copy of his book) is revealed as a vain act of self-abnegation. The camera-eye of the speaker leaps from bystander to bystander, registering the reactions of each spectator as the timid public views the arsonist, caged in the piazza, confined for days in a stockade.

This opening poem announces Palazzeschi's compulsion to undercut the inflated notion of poet, lampoon the public's unthinking conformism, and reveal the extremist as critic whose work is entirely praxis—and also entirely hopeless. The arsonist's violence suggests no solution; it is axiomatic of a cycle of repression and stasis, and points to no way out, no deus ex machina. Palazzeschi's vision is shorn of messianic dreams; in a twist that distinguishes him from so many other social satirists, the poet's own persona—the greenhorn poet-narrator eager to upset civic propriety (he burns the first copy of his book) is revealed as a vain act of self-abnegation. The camera-eye of the speaker leaps from bystander to bystander, registering the reactions of each spectator as the timid public views the arsonist, caged in the piazza, confined for days in a stockade.

The reader is led along by the caustic hilarity of the jester, recorder of theatrical, absurdist visions revealing that no one escapes guilt for a situation in which all have made themselves comfortable, whether in privilege, misery, or (more often) an exquisitely painful alternation of the two.

Recurring 'nonsense' onomatopoeic verse, and the poems' retinue of bizarre personae recall Mikhail Bakhtin's writing on the regenerative spirit of the carnivalesque. Yet as a rule, the carnival is an exceptional
period; its hilarity is a response to a corresponding sadness, of which it retains an underlying sense. Palazzeschi's carnivalesque poems are like the tears of a clown who recognizes history's great law as one of inevitable destruction. The poems' follies and entertainments seem to hold in abeyance the inevitable collapse of a society hollowed out in its foundations.

Naturally, where the poet laughs hardest, he suffers most; in his *Lacerba* essay of 1910, *Il contro dolore (An Antidote to Pain)*, Palazzeschi wrote of the necessity of making one's laughter profound through the experience of suffering. His essay throws into relief the scornful laughter of the speaker of 'Le Beghine' ('The Old Women') a poem of notable misogyny, sadism, and self-castigation. As a whole, Palazzeschi's tome is a despairing testament to its civilization's delusions, made all the more poignant because the poet knows retreat is impossible. As the Italian critic Romano Luperini wrote of Palazzeschi, "The poet is always amongst the people," and Palazzeschi's break with the Futurists at the time of interventionism is paradigmatic, since his protest, as Luperini wrote, was always against "the brutal triumph of the reality principle over his dream of literary and human adventure."

In 1916 Palazzeschi was called up for military duty and, due to poor health, served entirely in administrative posts. His work *Due imperi... mancati (Two Empires...Failed)*, completed in 1920, attacks directly the institutions that are allegorically dismantled in the poetry: bourgeois capitalism and Christianity. The twin forces of Caesar and Christ are indicted for having promoted social conformism, nationalism, and war. By the '30s, the cooptation of the avant-garde in Italy was complete—but Palazzeschi, writing in more conventional novelistic forms, for journals and, beginning in 1926, for the *Corriere della sera*, made his living unconcerned by the reassurances and rewards of ideological validation.

Palazzeschi moved definitively to Rome in 1941, and won the prestigious Accademia dei Lincei prize in 1957. Late in his life, Palazzeschi experienced a resurgence of literary productivity, and there was a corresponding resurgence of appreciation for his prior works as well; in the years before his death in 1974, he gained attention from the new avant-gardes, who saw in him a precursor. Now, almost a century after their first publication, the reader of these poems may recognize and appreciate their social and political agnosticism—the subtle humor and incendiary power that has always set Palazzeschi apart as a freak of culture amidst warring regimes of consent and coercion.

— Nicholas Benson

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La fiera dei morti

I poeti cantano
malinconicamente
questa fiera:
tutti alla stessa maniera,
questa giornata grigia o nera.
(Ma si può benissimo cantare
anche in un'altra maniera.)
Dice che sempre piove
un'acquerugiola trita,
che tutto fiorisce nel fango
in una primavera di pillacchere.
Le solite antiche fole
della solita antica gente!
Oggi invece non piove,
splende un magnifico sole;
il tempo ci porta le sue cose nuove.
Avete dei pensieri neri?
Veniteli a svagare
dentro i cimiteri.

Potete entrare, avanti,
fatevi tutti avanti,
sono spalancate le porte,
anche per chi non c'è persone morte!
Tutti possono andare,
girare a proprio piacimento;
anche un poeta ci si può benissimo intruffolare
per suo divertimento.
Le solite baracche dei saltimbanchi
fuori dei cancelli;
quella classe sociale che a per mira
di far conoscere agli uomini,
meglio assai degli astronomi,
che il mondo gira.

The Festival of the Dead

The poets sing
melancholically
this festival day:
each one the same way;
whether the day's black or gray.
(But you can surely sing
an entirely different way.)
They say it never rains
but pours,
that everything flowers from mud
in a spring of muddy spray.
The same foolish old sayings
of the same old folks!
And yet today, it's not raining,
a glorious sun shines;
the wind brings us its finest.
Black thoughts?
Come find release
in the cemetery.

You can enter, come in,
everybody forward,
the gates are open wide,
even to those with no one to mourn!
Everyone can come
and wander as they wish;
a poet too can certainly mingle
to his heart's content.
The usual jesters' shacks
stand outside the gate -
the social class that has the goal,
more so even than the astronomers,
of making men aware
that the world turns.
Scimmie vestite da ballerina,
oppure alla militare;
una se ne va di braccetto
con un sargento,
un'altro cerca di trascinare
un caporale dietro in una stanza;
una vestita da serva
è tutta affaccendata per spazzare,
un capitano dà uno schiaffo
a un'ordinanza petrificata.
Donne che gridano a squarciagola
di alcuni miracoli scientifici,
l'ultima portata della scienza
alla portata di qualunque sapienza,
strane fisiche psicologiche deformità!
E i buoni festaioli
se ne stanno davanti in perplessità.
Trombe tamburi piatti,
tutti gridan come matti:
è la fiera dei morti!
I dolci fatti li, immancabili dolci,
che tutti stanno ad aspettare,
le calde arrosti
che non riparano a castrate.

Nelle osterie si suonano chitarre,
si cantano canzonette paesane,
gli ultimi stornelli popolari,
o romanze napolitane.

Dai beccai pendono sanguinanti,
fenomenali, i primi ottimi porci,
quelli d'ognissanti,
che an gia sentito il primo freddo dei morti.
E sui banchi, ammassata,
oppure tortuosamente attaccata,
chilometri di saliscia,
che sembra l'ammasso degli intestini malati
di tutti i morti.

Monkeys dress as ballerinas
or in military uniform;
one walks off arm in arm
with a little sergeant,
another tries to pull
a corporal into a room;
one dressed as a maid
is busy with the cleaning,
a captain slaps
a petrified private.
Women yell themselves hoarse
about some scientific miracle,
the latest scientific revelation
within reach of the common man,
odd bodies, psychological freaks!
And the well-intentioned fairgoers
stand speechless before them.
Horns, cymbals, tin pans,
everyone shouts like mad:
it's the festival of the dead!
And the homemade pastry, unforgettable pastry
everyone's waiting for,
the hot roasted birds
they did not neglect to castrate.

In the taverns they're playing guitar,
they're singing songs of the country,
the latest folk tune
or Neapolitan romance.

They hang bleeding at the butcher's,
the phenomenal, superb fresh hams,
those of All Saints' Day,
that have already felt the first frost of the dead.
And on the counters, in stacks,
or sinuously linked,
miles of sausage
that seem the heaped diseased intestines
of all the dead.
I salumi anno appesi
i salamini nuovi, cotechini,
zamponi, mortadelle;
e viene fino sulla strada
un odore stuzzicante
di lepre e di pappardelle.
Tutti si riversano a mangiare
till the street.
a crepapelle.

I carabinieri a cavallo
coi loro pennacchioni rossi,
si fanno posto trionfanti
nella calca stordita dei festanti.

Ai cimiteri ci si può andare
coi fiori, e senza i fiori,
ma anche il più insopportabile,
lontanissimo parente,
si può aspettare quel giorno un fiore
dalla sua antica gente.

I morti non sono uguali,
come credono tutti,
e soprattutto, non sono muti;
quelli almeno dei cimiteri
sono indecentemente ciarlieri.
Sulla pelle della loro faccia marmifica,
mezzo assai che sui vivi,
si qualifica la fisionomia
caratteristica.
"Qui riposa
l'uomo dalle rare virtù:
Telemaco Pessuto
d'anni cinquantatre,
padre e marito esemplare."
Se t'avessimo incontrato vivo,
chi l' avrebbe saputo?

The deli owners have hung
the new salamini, cotechini,
zamponi, mortadelle;
and an appetizing aroma
of hare and pappardelle
issues right into the street.
Everyone lurches to the feast
and eats till they burst.

The mounted Carabinieri
with their feathered red hats
proudly take up their positions
amidst the heedless throng of fairgoers.

You can go to the cemeteries
with flowers or without,
but even the most insufferable,
remotest relative
can expect a flower on that day
from his kin.

The dead aren't all the same,
as some believe,
and above all, they're not mute –
those in the cemeteries at least
are shameless gossips.
On the marbled skin of their faces,
far better than on those of the living,
their character's features
are clearly revealed.
"Here lies
a man of rare virtue:
Telemaco Pessuto,
fifty-three years of age,
exemplary husband and father."
If we'd encountered you alive,
who'd have known?
Tutti gironzan leggendo
più o meno speditamente,
alcuni sillabando.
Ma non sapete che quelle parole
che voi leggete con indifferenza,
sono la faccia dei morti?
Tutte quelle espressioni di dolcezze,
sono l'espressione delle loro fattezze?

Oh! Curiosa combinazione!
"Celestina Verità
d'anni novantasette"
e accanto:
"Peppino
d'anni tre
dei coniugi Del Re."
Strana combinazione!
Quale fu, di voi due, la vostra mèta?
Dovevate ognuno campare cent'anni,
oppure, Peppino Del Re,
Celestina Verità,
faceste involontariamente
della vostra vita
una così parziale società?
Fu Peppino che ti giunse, o Celestina,
e ti trasse inaspettatamente
tre anni della vita?
O tu, Peppino, nascendo,
trovasti i tuoi anni
quasi tutti consumati
dalla Celestina?
Uno di voi fu il parassita
dell'altro.

Che poco posto occupano i morti,
meno assai del naturale.
E qualcuno di voi fu padrone
da solo d'un podere,
che sempre gli sembrò tanto piccino!

Everyone wanders around, reading,
more or less in a rush,
some sounding out the words.
Don't you know that what
you're so blandly reading
are the faces of the dead?
That all those sweet expressions
are the looks on their faces?

Oh! Curious coincidence!
"Celestina Verità
ninety-seven years of age"
and alongside:
"Peppino
three years of age
of the Del Re."
Strange coincidence!
Which of you two forced your destiny?
Each of you were meant to reach a hundred,
yet, Peppino Del Re,
Celestina Verità,
against your will
you made such brief society
of your lives?
Was it Peppino who came to you, o Celestina,
and unexpectedly took from you
three years of your life?
Or did you, Peppino, at birth,
find your years
already virtually spent
by Celestina?
One of you is the parasite
of the other.

What little space the dead occupy,
far less than seems natural.
And some of you were sole owners
of some plot of land
that had always seemed so tiny!
Quelle alte pareti
con tutte quelle teste fitte fitte,
nell'immobilità,
sembrano quelle di un loggiione
per una straordinaria rappresentazione.
E tutti gironzano indifferenti,
sgusciando calde arroste,
succiendo confetti, o i duri di menta,
leggiuchiendo senza fede
de le ciarle di quei poveretti.
Gli uomini accorti,
che passeggiano sempre fra i vivi,
non vedono il momento
di passeggiare fra i morti.
I vivi an delle facce,
che per quanto espressive, sono mute,
e una faccia per bene
la possono avere anche i mascalzoni,
 invece le facce dei morti
sono piene d'ottime informazioni.
Se incontrate per via un giovine pensoso,
come potete saperse se sia virtuoso?

In cima al camposanto,
sopra un grande palcone
improvvisato per l'occasione,
si mettono i teschi all'incanto.
Lo circondano pigiante
centinaia di persone,
fissano l'atletico allottatore
che gridà fiocamente a squarciagola.
Intorno è pieno di carabinieri.
— Quattro!
— Cinque!
— Otto!
— Dieci!
— Quindici soldi!
I primi vanno a ruba!
— Si delibera signori!

Those high walls
with all those heads packed in tightly,
no room to budge,
seem the walls of a loggia
for an exceptional emissary.
And everyone wanders around indifferently,
chomping on hot roasted game,
sucking on sweets or mints,
reading distractedly, hypocritically,
the doggerel of those poor souls.
Clever men,
who always walk amongst the living,
and can't wait for the moment
to walk amongst the dead.
The living have such faces,
so expressive, yet mute,
even a scoundrel's
can appear sympathetic;
but the faces of the dead
are full of excellent information.
If you meet a thoughtful lad in the street,
how can you tell if he's virtuous?

At the cemetery's highest point,
atop a great platform
built for the occasion,
they're putting the skulls up for auction.
They press around
in the hundreds,
fixed on the athletic auctioneer
who yells himself hoarse, at the top of his voice.
Cops are everywhere.
— Four!
— Five!
— Eight!
— Ten!
— Fifteen bucks!
The first ones sell like hot cakes!
— Think about it, gentlemen!
I più frettolosi pagano i teschi anche più d'una lira.
Molti aspettano che la gara cessi e il prezzo ribassi.
— Quattro!
— Sei!
— Otto!

Una giovane sposa si stringe al braccio del suo sposo tutta piagnucolosa:
— Comprami quel teschio.
— Stai zitta! — Le dice il giovinotto.
— Comprami quel teschio.
— Stai zitta grulla, verso sera gli daran via per nulla.
— Dieci!
— Undici!
— Dodici!
— Si delibera signori!
— Comprami quel teschio.
— Stai zitta t'è detto, non vedi ch'è un teschiaccio vecchio?
— Comprami quel teschio.
— Se non stai zitta ti porto via.
— Potrebbe essere il teschio della mamma mia.
— Ma che mamma mia!
— Cosa c'è stato laggiù, lontano?
— Corrono i carabinieri!
— Dove corre tutta quella gente?
— Anno arrestato quel nano che vendeva i teschi di seconda mano.

E per le vie polverose,
per le serpeggianti vie campagnole,
in un bel tramonto pieno di vaperi di fiamme e di viole,
là gente se ne torna
dai camposanti allegramente.
E ogni buon diavolaccio
se ne viene col suo teschio sotto il braccio.

The impatient ones pay even more than a buck per skull.
Many wait for competition to die down and the price to fall.
— Four!
— Six!
— Eight!

Bathed in tears,
a young newlywed clasps her husband's arm:
— Buy me that skull.
— Be quiet! the young man says to her.
— Buy me that skull.
— Be quiet silly, toward evening they'll be giving them away for nothing.
— Ten!
— Eleven!
— Twelve!
— Think about it, gentlemen!
— Buy me that skull.
— Be quiet I said, can't you see it's a crummy old skull?
— Buy me that skull.
— If you're not quiet we're leaving.
— That could be the skull of my own mother.
— What're you talking about!
— What happened down below?
— The cops are on the run!
— Where are all those people running to?
— They've arrested that dwarf who was selling those second-hand skulls.

And along the roads, the winding country lanes,
in a pretty sunset full of smoke, of violets and flame,
the people happily return from the cemetery.
And every good devil makes off with a skull under his arm.
La morte di Cobò

Cobò è morto,
e non gli possono fare il trasporto;
e quello che più rabbia fa,
è che nessuno avrà
la grande eredità.
Attorno alle altissime mura
che circondano il castello di Cobò,
gira e rigira la gente
nella massima paura.
Vengono dal castello
le grida più disparate,
cori altissimi infernali,
di centinaia di animali.
La gente gira attorno le mura,
sempre pronta per scappare,
nella massima paura.

— Se venisse fuori quella scimmiona in livrea
che ogni tanto s'affacciava alla porta?
— Dio mio! Uh! Uh!
Com'è che non s'affaccia più?
— A quest'ora sarà morto!
— E tutto questo chiasso chi lo fa?
— Che po' po' di diavoleto!
— Ma che succederà?
— Gente mia che fracasso!
— Non sentite che fetore?
— Chi sa là dentro quanti ne muore
di quegli animalacci!
— Accidenti a quel matto di Cobò!
— Lo sapete? Io lo so
come andrà a finire,
che con questo lasciare,

The Death of Cobò

His death

Cobò is dead,
and they can't retrieve the body;
and what rouses greater anger
is that no one will inherit
his great wealth.
Outside the high walls
that encircle the castle of Cobò,
the people pace back and forth,
at the height of fear.
The most desperate cries
come from the castle,
a shrill infernal chorus
of hundreds of animals.
The people pace outside the walls,
ready to flee at any moment,
at the height of fear.

— And if that great monkey in top hat and tails should emerge,
the one whose face appears now and again in the doorway?
— My God! Ugh! Oh!
Why doesn't he appear anymore?
— By now he must be exhausted!
— So who's making all this ruckus, then?
— What a poor devil!
— What's going to happen?
— Folks, what a racket!
— Smell that stench!
— Who knows how many of those poor animals
are dead in there!
— Damn that crazy Cobò!
— You know what? I know exactly
where this is heading,
with all this sitting,
con questo aspettare, finiranno per appestare mezzo mondo!  
— Ditelo voi come si deve fare.
— Buttare dentro delle bombe o granate, e sparare, e che bruci ogni cosa!
All'inferno la roba e Cobò!
— Se non ci volete stare ve ne dovete andare.
— Gesù Maria!
— Può venir fuori qualche epidemia.
— Chi sa di che malaccio è morto!
— Ma la polizia, la polizia?
— A quest'ora tutte quelle bestiacce hanno mangiato ventimila Cobò!
— Chi sa da quanti giorni è morto!
— Se saltasse fuori un cane con in bocca un pezzo di Cobò?
— Si sapeva come doveva andare a finire, gli sta bene a quel matto di Cobò, di finire mangiato dalle bestie, quando gli uomini àn di quelle teste....
— Se venisse fuori l'orso?
— Se ci dasse qualche morso?
— Incidenti a Cobò!
— Dalla porta non possono uscire perché l'anno fatta sbarrare.
— Ma possono saltar fuori dalle mura, le scimmie si sanno tanto bene arrampicare.
— Mamma mia che paura!
— Buttateci dentro il fuoco!
— E tutti quei gran soldi chi gli piglia?
— Non aveva una famiglia?
— Nessuno. Dicon che fosse figlio d'un imperatore.
— Di chi, di Napoleone?
— Ma che c'entra Napoleone!
— Aveva l'oro a sacca, e tutta la casa piena di cassoni di fogli da mille!

all this waiting, they'll wind up destroying half the world!
— So tell us what we should do then.
— Throw in some bombs or grenades, fire away, burn every last thing!
To hell with Cobò and his stuff!
— If you don't want to be here, you should just leave.
— Mother of God!
— Some kind of epidemic could be the result of this.
— Who knows what sort of disease he died from!
— What about the police, the police?
— By now those beasts could've eaten Cobò twenty thousand times!
— Who knows how many days he's been dead!
— And if a dog jumps out with a piece of Cobò in his mouth?
— He knew how he was likely to wind up, it suited that crazy Cobò just fine, to end up eaten by animals, when men are so daft...
— And if the bear emerges?
— If it takes a bite out of us?
— Damn that Cobò!
— They can't get through the door because it's been barricaded.
— But they can jump the walls, the monkeys know how to climb so well.
— Lordy, what a fright!
— Throw us right into the fire!
— And who's going to get all that money?
— Didn't he have a family?
— Not a soul. They say he was the son of an emperor.
— Of who then, Napoleon?
— What's Napoleon got to do with this?
— He had bags of gold, the house was full of chests brimming with billfolds!
— E ora chi gli piglia?
— Chi sa come riducono quella povera roba quei maledetti animali!
— Buttategli da mangiare, eppoi fateli scappare quando sono bene sfamati.
— Ma sarà pieno di cani arrabbiati, e qualcuno può rimaner nascosto.
— E tutte quelle maledette scimmie?
— Ce n'eran di quelle vestite da monaca, da prete, da militare, tante da servitore, da cuoco....
— Dategli fuoco, dategli fuoco!
— La meglio è il fuoco!
— Ecco una ronda di civette!
— Guardate quante! Si segna la gente.

_Cobò._

Uomini, disse agli uomini Cobò, non mi avete voluto vivo, non mi potrete avere quando morirò.

Io detti agli uomini il mio oro a piene mani, e gli uomini n'insultarono perché non n'ebbero abbastanza. Io risparmiai il mio oro, e gli uomini m'insultarono. Passai, uomini, a piedi fra voi umile fratello vostro, v'incontrai la sera quando tornavate dal lavoro e i miei occhi vi dicevano che vi avrei amato, che vi avrei dato tutto il mio oro,
se mi aveste amato.
M'insultaste, e mi diceste
che non avevo lavorato.
Passai fra voi coi miei cocchi dorati,
e voi gettaste insulti e sputi
sopra i miei passi,
mi lanciaste anche dei sassi.
Sulla piazza gridai,
e fui insultato,
chiuso dentro il mio castello
fui insultato.
I miei uomini mi chiamarono
duramente, padrone,
essono non mi chiamò fratello.
Voli amare alcuno
di quei deliziosi trastulli
che sono le fanciulle;
pensai di potere avere
una di quelle piccole bocche di rosa,
quello piccole mani dai petali
morbidi, soavi di tepore;
esse non mi accordarono il loro amore,
e mi spregiarono per la mia bruttezza.
Si dettero a me per il mio denaro.

Tornando a casa, Cobò,
dopo il rifiuto degli uomini, trovò
i suoi cani che gli corsero incontro
e gli fecero festa.
Le sue scimmie lo accarezzarono
maternamente,
o come delle buone sorelle,
e gli passarono le mani nei capelli,
come delle compagne dolci;
e lo rallegrarono un poco
coi loro scambietti,
e i galli col loro canto,
e l'orso gli venne a ballare
dinanzi bonariamente.

if you had loved me.
You insulted me, and you told me
that I had not labored.
I went among you with my golden carriages,
and you hurled insults and spit
at my every step,
you even threw stones at me.
On the town square I cried out
and was shouted down,
shut in my castle
I was shouted down.
My men called me,
brutally, master,
and no one called me brother.
I wanted so to love
any of those charming trifles,
the girls;
I thought I could have
one of those little mouths of rose,
those hands of soft petals,
smooth and warm;
they did not bestow their love upon me,
they ridiculed my ugliness.
They gave themselves to me for my money.

Returning home, Cobò,
after the rejection of the men, found
his dogs who ran to meet him
and rejoice at his return.
His monkeys caressed him
maternally,
like good sisters,
and ran their hands through his hair,
like sweet companions;
and they cheered him up a bit
with their little pranks,
and the cocks with their crowing,
and the bear came to dance
gladly before him.
Di voi sarò, solo di voi,
e si rinchiusi nel suo castello,
non vedrò più un uomo,
sarò di voi, voi mi amerete
finché vi darò da mangiare,
poi mangerete me.
Gli uomini che sfamavo,
mi volevan mangiare
anche quando gli avevo bene sfamati.

Disse Cobò:
venite tutti qua dentro,
e di voi sarò,
vostra sarà tutto l'oro.
Uomini che non m'avete
voluto vivo,
non mi potrete avere
quando morirò.

Chicchichiriché! chicchichiriché!
Ecco il di!
Cantano i galli di Cobò.
Il vecchio Cobò è sul suo letto
che muore fra poche ore.
Povero Cobò! Povero Cobô!
Ciangottano i suoi pappagalli:
Addio Cobô Addio Cobô!
E le galline: cococococodè:
Oggi è per te, cococococodè:
Cobô ci sei te.
E le tortore piene di malinconia
si sono radunate in un cantuccio:
glu.... glu.... glu....
non ti vedremo più.
E i cani si aggirano mesti,
colla coda ciondoloni,
mugolando: baubauobó,
addeeo papà Cobô.

I'll be yours, only yours,
and he shut himself in his castle,
I will no longer pass among men,
I'll be yours alone, you love me
as long as I feed you,
and then you will eat me.
The men I gave sup
wanted sup of me
even when I'd given them plenty to eat.

Cobò said:

come inside, all of you,
I will be yours,
yours will be all the gold.
Men who didn't want
me living
won't be able to have me
when I'm dead.

Cockledoodledoo! Cockledoodleday!
Here is the day!
So sing the roosters of Cobô.
Old Cobô is on his bed
where he'll die in a few hours.
Poor Cobô! Poor Cobô!
His parrots chatter:
Bye-bye Cobô! Bye-bye Cobô!
And the hens: cluckcluckcluck:
Today you're in luck: cluckcluckcluck:
Cobô, here you're stuck.
And the doves, full of melancholy,
have gathered in a nook:
glu.... glu.... glu....
forever goodbye to you.
And the dogs wander sadly,
tails dangling down,
whimpering: bowbowboh,
bye-bye daddy Cobô.
E le cornacchie: gre gre gre
anche te, anche te.

Nella stanza le scimmie non riparano.
Tastano il polso e la fronte di Cobò,
gli tiran su i guanciali,
gli rimboccano i lenzuoli.
Una, mescola del tamarindo in fretta,
una gli fa il massaggio sui ginocchi,
una piange in un cantuccio,
(Cobò straluna gli occhi)
e si rasciuga le lagrime comicamente.
E i pappagalli: povero Cobò!
E i gatti e i cani
giacciono ai piedi del letto
malinconicamente.
Una scimmia va e viene,
vestita da dottore,
colla tuba in mano.
Cobò muore.
Una vestita da prete,
si butta su la stola.
Cobò non vede più,
brancola colle mani,
e gli van sotto i suoi cani
cercando l'ultime carezze tremanti.
Solleva la testa, una scimmia
lo sorregge,
quella vestita da prete
gli ane di unu e i piedi,
una vestita da scaccino,
colla berretta in testa,
sta fissa per aspettare
di andare a suonar le campane.
Cobò da un gemito... e cade.
Si ritraggono dal letto
in un fremito tutte le bestie,
e restan ferme a guardare.
Uno scimmione in livrea apre la finestra.

And the crows: caw caw caw
that's all, that's all.

In the room the monkeys don't give in.
They feel the pulse and the forehead of Cobò,
they puff up his pillows,
straighten his sheets.
One quickly prepares a tamarind,
one massages his knees,
one cries in a corner
(Cobò rolls his eyes)
and comically dabs her tears.
And the parrots: poor Cobò!
And the cats and dogs
lie at the foot of the bed
melancholically.
A monkey comes and goes
dressed as a doctor,
top hat in hand.
Cobò is dying.
One dressed as a priest
tosses on a frock.
Cobò can't see anymore,
his hands grope
and his dogs come close,
seeking a last trembling caress.
He raises his head, a monkey
supports him,
the one dressed as a priest
every so often anoints his feet,
one dressed as a beadle,
beret on her head,
stands waiting and ready
to go and ring the bells.
Cobò gives a moan... and falls.
All the creatures, trembling,
draw close to the bed,
and stay there to watch.
A monkey in tails opens the window.
I cani sotto al letto distesi
emetton dei gemiti lunghi,
e i pappagalli: Povero Cobò!
Povero Cobò!
Giunge per la finestra
uno stormo di civette.

Le scimmie intanto si rianno
dalla disperazione.
Una raccomoda il letto
attorno al morto padrone,
una smette di piangere
e va ad aprire il cassettone;
un'altra trae fuori pezzi d'oro,
gemme, gioielli, e tutti se li caccia
nel sacco della gola.
Una va ad assicurarsi bene
che il padrone sia morto,
e con un feroce ghigno
corre ad aprire uno scrigno:
prende dei pacchi di biglietti da mille
e gli spande per la stanza.
Una ne prende uno e lo guarda
bene teso contro luce,
un'altra, con uno
ci si pulisce il culo,
un'altra accende un sigaro
placidamente.
I gatti incominciano a miagolare,
i cani passeggiano inquieti,
l'orso viene in camera a ballare
in attesa che Cobò
gli dia il solito lauto desinare.
I galli e le galline si rovesciano
nel giardino a sperperare.
Lo scimmione in livrea
è rimasto alla finestra
senza articolare.

The dogs stretched out under the bed
emit long howls,
and the parrots: Poor Cobò!
Poor Cobò!
A flock of owls perches
in the window.

The monkeys meanwhile have recovered
from their despair.
One straightens the bed
around the dead master,
one ceases crying
and goes to open the dresser;
another drags out pieces of gold,
gems, jewels, and all are tossed
right down their throats.
One goes to make certain
the master is really dead,
and with a fierce chuckle
runs to open a hidden drawer:
he takes rolls of bills
and throws them around the room.
One of them grabs a bill and examines it
taut against the light,
another takes one
to wipe his ass,
another tranquilly rolls one up
to smoke.
The cats begin to miaow,
the dogs pace restlessly,
the bear comes into the room to dance
expecting Cobò
to give him his customary praise.
The roosters and hens scuttle about
and lay waste to the garden.
All the while, the big monkey in tails
has remained at the window
without saying a thing.
E le scimmie rovistano, frugano dappertutto, si litigano la biancheria, la strappano, la scuciono, buttan tutto fuori dai cassetti, dagli armadi: fanno a pezzi dei merletti che si provano attorno alla vita, gli misurano a braccia. Una, butta dalla finestra tutto quello che gli capita. E i pappagalli: povero Cobò! Povero Cobò! Caffè Caffè Caffè.

La morte.


— Toss him in the flames! It's the only way, taking every precaution to stay well back. If some dogs jump out at us in anger we'll kill them, so as they don't escape. — Light the fire! Light the fire! — It's dangerous to wait, an epidemic is feared in the village. Light it up, and be equipped and ready to kill any animals that try to leave. — And all that gold? — All those precious things? — All those billfolds? — Light it up! It's the only way to prevent anything worse.
José Saramago

"The Nonexistent Narrator"

• Translated from the Portuguese by Albert Braz •

José Saramago’s essay “The Nonexistent Narrator” (“Narrador inexistente”) is not so much a free-standing work as the most recent installment of a long-running argument about the role of the author in modern literature. Saramago first delivered “The Nonexistent Narrator” as a lecture at Madrid’s Complutense University in 1996, and published it the following year in the fourth volume of his diaries, Caderlos de Lanzarote, or Lanzarote Notebooks. As Saramago himself notes, this essay deals with ideas that he has been exploring for decades; in his preamble to the lecture, he asserts that, if each madman has his “mania,” his is the relationship between the literary work and its ostensible creator, the author.

“The Nonexistent Narrator” builds particularly on Saramago’s earlier essay “Between the Omniscient Narrator and the Interior Monologue: Must We Return to the Author?” (“Entre o narrador omnisciente e o monólogo interior: Deveremos voltar ao autor?”), which he delivered as a keynote address at the 1994 meeting of the International Comparative Literature Association in Edmonton, Alberta. According to Saramago, the conference attracted some 500 hundred literary scholars from around the world. They examined a multitude of topics, such as “literature and identity; foreign and domestic influences; literary genres, language, and culture; literature and other forms of cultural expression; regional studies; methods and paradigms of comparative literature; and cultural diversity.” Yet nowhere in the proceedings, Saramago underscores, did he find “the word author.”

While Saramago does not identify the main objects of his critique in either essay, it is obvious that he aims his opprobrium largely at theoreticians like Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, arguably the most celebrated promoters of the “impersonality” of writing. After all, whether they contend that the writer has been displaced by “language” or that “writing has freed itself from the dimension of expression,” neither Barthes nor Foucault allows for the possibility of writers being responsible for the texts they supposedly produce. In the process, of course, they also present the critic as being more enlightened than the novelist or poet, a rather self-interested argument that Saramago profoundly resents; he links the devaluation of the author in contemporary discourse precisely to this disciplinary conflict between writers and scholars. Saramago claims that academics, especially professors of literary theory, exhibit “a benevolent and smiling condescension” toward practicing writers, akin to the way adults are believed to perceive children. This paternalism, asserts Saramago, explains why the idea of the death of the author has been so easily accepted.

Saramago’s targets, though, are not restricted to academics. He is also extremely critical of writers themselves. In her contribution to a collection of essays on the authorial “I” in contemporary literature, Margaret Atwood asks: “Why do authors wish to pretend they don’t exist?” Her answer is that it is their “way of skinning out, of avoiding truth and consequences.” Saramago would clearly agree. In his numerous meditations on the relationship between the text and the author, he consistently emphasizes that writers have been complicit in their self-marginalization. For him, the most concrete evidence of

1. The diaries are named after Lanzarote, the Canary island where Saramago has lived in self-imposed exile since 1993, after the Portuguese government’s controversial decision not to nominate his novel The Gospel according to Jesus Christ (O Evangelho segundo Jesus Cristo) for the European Literary Prize.
2. For an English translation, see “Is It Time to Return to the Author?”
3. Saramago must not have been caught completely off-guard by the absence of the author in scholarly discourse, given that he acknowledges that he had already published a piece on the subject in the French magazine Voltaire.
4. This use of the word is from Barthes’ “The Death of the Author,” translated by Richard Howard.
5. From Michel Foucault’s “What Is an Author?”
this abrogation of responsibility by writers is that they have allowed themselves to be eclipsed by the narrator. This is a strategy that he considers both wrong and dangerous. To begin with, he contends that it is based on fallacious reasoning, since "the figure of the narrator doesn't exist" and "only the author performs a real narrative function in the work of fiction, whatever it may be: novel, short story, or drama." Perhaps even more important, he suggests that the disavowal by writers of their "purely social engagement" with the world could have dire consequences for them. Saramago claims that, since the late 1960s, writers have avoided engaging directly with the world, out of fear that they would be "accused of selling out literature to politics." Although he understands the reasons for this abrogation of authorial responsibility, he deems it a grievous error. As he concludes, for writers, the result of their not running the risk of being perceived as selling out literature is that, "if I may use the pun, we now don't have anyone who wants to buy us."

Saramago is obviously a formidable thinker. However, the most formidable challenge he poses for his translators lies not in the density of his thought but in the circumlocutions of his language. The 1994 Nobel laureate for literature, who is the author of such celebrated novels as Baltasar and Blimunda (Memorial do convento), The Gospel according to Jesus Christ (O Evangelho segundo Jesus Cristo), and Blindness (Ensaio sobre a cegueira), has become famous, or infamous, for his neo-baroque style. To quote his principal English translator, the late Giovanni Pontiero, "Saramago [...] has developed a highly personalised syntax with very long sentences so that a single sentence may contain no punctuation other than commas, but consist of dialogue, description and the narrator's comment on the dialogue, all in one long uninterrupted sequence."

In translating an essay like "The Nonexistent Narrator," I of course did not have to deal with the difficulty of differentiating among different unmarked voices, since there is only one voice in the text, the author's. Nevertheless, Saramago's style, with its seemingly endless sentences, still posed major problems. For instance, I rendered the third paragraph (the one starting with: "And I also ask myself ...") as Saramago writes it, as a single sentence. Whenever it was possible to do so without changing the meaning of the text, I made a conscious effort to break down Saramago's sentences into shorter, and more readable, units.

One other significant change that I made occurs near the end of the essay, when Saramago declares that, like Flaubert, he is all the characters in all his novels. More specifically, he states that, among these figures, he is "a Blimunda e o Baltasar no Memorial do Convento." I had to consider that, in the English translation, the names of those two characters become the title of the novel. In any case, despite my desire to make Saramago more accessible to the English-language reader, I have followed his style as closely as possible. Similarly, I have respected his punctuation, such as the numerous ellipses, slashes, and parentheses that pepper his essay.

- Albert Braz

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In this intervention, needless to say, I won't go as far as to deny that the figure of an abstraction we call the narrator can be sketched and illustrated in the text, at least, I say with all respect, following a deductive logic very similar to the ontological demonstration of the existence of God conducted by Saint Anselm . . . I even accept the probability of variations or unfoldings of an alleged central narrator designed to express a plurality of points of view or judgments considered by the author useful to the dialectic of conflicts. The question that I ask myself, and this is what truly most interests me, is if the obsessive attention paid by textual analysts to so slippery an entity—an attention which no doubt propitiates succulent and gratifying theoretical speculations—is not contributing to the reduction of the author and of his thought to a role of dangerous marginality in the deep understanding of his work. I will clarify that when I speak of the author's thought, I'm not removing from the author his impressions and feelings, his fears and his dreams, all the experiences of the external and internal worlds without which his ideas perhaps would turn (I risk to think . . . ) into pure, inert thinking.

Abandoning from now on any rhetorical precaution, what I'm acknowledging here, at heart, are my own doubts and perplexities regarding the real identity of the narrative voice that, in the books I've written and in all the ones I've read until now, drives what I ultimately believe to be, case by case and regardless of the techniques used, the thought of the author. His own personal thought (in so far as it is possible for us to have it) or, accompanying it and mixing with it, other thoughts, whether historical contemporary, that he has consciously or unconsciously borrowed in order to reach the objectives and satisfaction of the discursive necessities, descriptive or reflective, of the narration.

And I also ask myself if the resignation or the indifference with which the author today appears to accept the appropriation by an academically-blessed narrator of the subject matter, circumstances, and narrative function which in previous periods were exclusively and unquestioningly attributed to him as an author and a person, if that resignation and that indifference aren't another manifestation, acknowledged or not, and more or less conscious, of a certain degree of abdication of more general responsibilities.

What do we do, those of us who write? Nothing more than tell stories. We novelists tell stories, we playwrights tell stories, and we poets also tell stories. Likewise, those who are not and will never be poets, playwrights, or novelists also tell stories. Even simple daily thinking and talking are already a story. The words we utter, and those we merely think, from the time we get out of bed in the morning until we return to it in the evening, without forgetting those words in our dreams and the ones our dreams will try to describe, constitute a story with its own internal coherence, continuous or fragmented. Thus, as such, they could at any moment be organized and articulated in a written story and turned into literature.

Everything that the writer himself will write, from the first word, from the first line, will be in obedience to an intention, sometimes clear, sometimes obscure, but in a way always discernible and more or less obvious. For in all cases, and step by step, the writer is forced to provide the reader with cognitive clues common to both so that, without excessive difficulties, the reader may understand what, without aiming to be new, different, perhaps even original, is already known because, gradually, it is being recognized. The writer of stories, explicit or disguised, is a kind of mystifier: he tells stories in order that people will accept them as credible and enduring, even though he knows that they're nothing more than some words suspended in what I would call the unstable equilibrium of the make believe, fragile words permanently frightened by the allure of the non-meaning that pushes them toward chaos, beyond conventional codes, and whose key threatens to vanish at any moment.

Let's not forget, however, that as pure truths don't exist, pure falsehoods also cannot exist. Because if it is true that every truth inevitably bears within itself some falsehood, if for no other reason than for the expressive insufficiency of the words used, it's also true that no falsehood can be so radical that it does not carry some truth, even against the trickster's intentions. In that case, the lie could contain, say, two truths: its own elementary truth: that is, the truth of its contradiction (the truth resides hidden in the very words that deny it . . . ); and another truth, the one for which it ended up becoming a vehicle, carrying or not that new truth, which in turn is part of a lie.
Stories, then, are made of the feignings of truth and of the truths of feigning. Still, and despite what in the text is presented to us as material evidence, in my opinion the story that should appeal the most to the reader is not the one that the narrative suggests to him. A fiction is not formed solely of characters, conflicts, situations, twists, surprises, stylistic effects, conjuring tricks, and acrobatic demonstrations of narrative technique. A fiction (like every work of art) is, above all, the ambitious expression of an identified portion of humanity, that is, its author. I even ask myself if what propels the reader to read is not the unconscious hope of discovering inside the book—more than the story that he'll be told—the invisible but omnipresent person of the author. As I see it, the novel is a mask that hides and at the same time reveals the traces of the novelist. Probably (I say probably . . . ), the reader doesn't read the novel, he reads the novelist.

With this, I don't mean to suggest to the reader that, in the act of reading, he engage in the work of a detective or an anthropologist, searching for traces or removing geological layers at the bottom of which, like a felon or a victim, or like a fossil, would be found the hidden author . . . . Very much on the contrary, what I'm saying is that the author is in the whole book, that the author is the whole book, even when the book doesn't manage to be the whole author. Truly, I don't believe that it was to shock the society of his time that Gustave Flaubert declared that Madame Bovary was himself. Actually, it seems to me that, in saying that, he didn't do any more than to force down a door that has always been open. Without wishing to deny the respect owed to the author of L'Éducation sentimentale, I could even say that such a statement doesn't err on the side of hyperbole but of self-restraint: Flaubert forgot to tell us that he was also the husband and the lovers of Emma, that he was her house and her street, that he was the city and all the people, of all backgrounds and ages, who lived in it, house, street, and city, real or invented, it's all the same. Because the image and the spirit, the flesh and the blood of all these had to pass, wholly, through one single entity: Gustave Flaubert, that is, the man, the person, the author. I, too, even if I'm such a small thing in comparison, am Blimunda and Baltasar in the novel of the same name, and in The Gospel according to Jesus Christ, I'm not only Jesus and Mary Magdalene, or Joseph and Mary, because I'm also the God and the Devil who appear in the book . . . .

What the author narrates in his books is not his apparent personal story. It's not that which we call the account of a life, not his biography told linearly, sometimes insignificant, sometimes uninteresting. It's another narrative: the labyrinthine life, the profound life, the one which he would hardly dare or know to tell with his own voice and in his own name. Perhaps because whatever is great in a human being is too large to fit in the words with which he defines his being even to himself, and the successive personae that people a past that is not only his, and which for that reason will always escape him when he tries to isolate it or isolate himself in it. Perhaps, also, because that in which we are mean and small is at that point common so that nothing really new could teach that little and big being that is the reader . . . .

Finally, perhaps it is because of some of these reasons that in the stories they tell, certain authors, among whom I include myself, privilege not the story they lived or live (escaping thus the traps of literary confessionalism) but the story of their own memory, with its exactitudes, its failings, its lies that are also truths, its truths that cannot preclude themselves from also being lies. Seeing things in the right perspective, I'm only the memory that I possess, and that is the only story that I can and wish to tell.

Regarding the narrator, if after this there's still someone who will defend him, what could he be if not the most insignificant character in a story which is not his?

Endnotes

2. I would like to express my thanks to Lidiane da Cunha and Carolyn Kapron for their comments on my translation of Saramago's essay.
Kazuko Shiraishi
from My Floating Mother, City
• Translated from the Japanese
by Samuel Grolmes and Yumiko Tsumura •

Kazuko Shiraishi, one of Japan's most prominent poets, was born in Vancouver, Canada in 1931. She was taken to Japan by her family in 1938 just before war broke out. She began writing poetry in her early teens among the turmoil and devastation of post-war Japan. Influenced by abstract art, experimental literature and avant-garde jazz music, Shiraishi braved the mores of conventional Japanese society to write explicitly about sexual and spiritual freedom. She read her poetry along with jazz music, inspired by the improvisational freedom and genuine emotional expression she found there. Moving beyond her early Beat-related work, Shiraishi has written more than twenty five books of poetry, which has developed an astonishing range and depth. She has received every Japanese poetry award including the prestigious Yomiuri Literary Award, as well as the honor of a Purple Ribbon Medal from the Emperor of Japan in 1996. Most recently she received the Bansui Poetry award in 2003 and the cultural award from the Emperor of Japan in 2004.

Recognized world-wide, Shiraishi has been invited to poetry festivals and conferences, has given readings in over thirty countries, and has been translated into more than twenty languages. In the US, New Directions published her first book in English, Seasons Of Sacred Lust (1975) edited and with an introduction by Kenneth Rexroth. This work was sensational for its bizarre, erotic and surrealistic imagery. Donald Keene described her as “the Allen Ginsberg of Japan.” In fact she worked closely with Ginsberg and Rexroth. In 2002 New Directions' then president, Griselda Ohannessian published Shiraishi's second book in English, Let Those Who Appear, selected, translated and with an introduction by Samuel Grolmes and Yumiko Tsumura. This book contains selections from her works of the last twenty years. The title poem in Let Those Who Appear is from Shiraishi's 1996 book ARAWERU MONOTACHI O SHITE, which received three prestigious awards in Japan. In this volume Shiraishi expresses her concern for humanity beyond time and space, the destructiveness of civilization with Buddhist sensibility of compassion for the sanctity of life in all forms and a harmonious existence. This fall New Directions will publish Shiraishi's third book in English, My Floating Mother, City, which contains selections from her most recent works. The poems “What is Called A Miracle” and “Oh Venezuela” are from The Running Of The Full Moon, published in Japan in 2004 and “Come on, Nicola” is from Let Those Who Appear published in Japan in 1996.

Modern Poetry Journal, the most authoritative poetry journal in Japan over the last fifty years, says that Shiraishi “has built the mountain in modern Japanese poetry, but her recent book, My Floating Mother, City, soars to new heights. Her astounding vigor is overwhelming, a fresh new swell of creativity leading to an apocalypse.” Certainly, Kazuko Shiraishi is one of the major poets of our time, bringing a new voice into the twenty-first century.

Samuel Grolmes, my late husband, and I collaborated in translating Modern Japanese poetry over forty years. In our translation we tried to avoid the danger of attempting literal versions as well as the temptation to insert interpretive readings. In all cases, we have retained the physical layout of the poems in terms of spacing and structure. In translating Kazuko Shiraishi's poetry we encountered our most difficult challenges because of her deconstruction of conventional Japanese syntax. Kazuko Shiraishi continues to experiment and explore her poetic consciousness, pushing the boundaries of language.

– Yumiko Tsumura

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Come On, Nicola

Come On, Nicola, two years old, walks as if she were flying over the grass fields at Oxford young mama Lizzie chases her, flapping her wonderful wings it's so heavy to put the sun and the moon in a pocket at the same time by smiling through tears the night part gets too large and goes over daytime and covers it up what shall we do what? the darkness is much larger than my height and weight even the black mountain Ben Nevis isn't bigger than darkness Michael isn't sleeping in the ceiling anymore hanging on to an imaginary stage dreaming the dead person is dreaming exists in a dream the living are afraid of a sign miss kiss beckon come on come on down three tea cups on the table come on come on

Nicola looks up and beckons to a sign

the breakfast is for three she never says papa she understands a sign is the same as a fairy

what existed once also exists that is just not visible to the eye and you just cannot touch and then

one hundred antenna called to feel stretch out easily and the

Oxford grass fields are an instant of eternity

Nicola who walks as if she were flying young mama Lizzie who runs up to her I wonder if the sun and the moon have changed places I wonder if the darkness has decreased a little and the sun light increased Nicola for the first time draws a portrait

mama has four eyes and is laughing the sun is revolving round and round in her face

managing our eyes and is listening the sun

for the first time draws a potter
Oh Venezuela

Death in Venice no
to Venezuela I will go look for
my dead body I am alive and I am here but
here I am a living corpse
if I just go over there I can meet my living self
pretending to be a dead body but
I am fully alive
waiting for myself to arrive
hello It took such a long time
it's quite frustrating pretending to be
a dead body waiting for your arrival
I heard in a
transient dream called dead body
while I've already slept here almost a hundred years
a voice saying it's a revolution
a voice saying it's a wedding a baby
is born to the marriage between men
such giggly touching news
oh I am coming this way
that innocent naive
funny person like that Don Quixote
when I am here I can meet many me's
an old woman a boy that injured
asthmatic beautiful eyed man named ideal lying in a jungle

a man like the sun
who gallops through the sky in an imaginary coach and four called will

here is full of life but
there are groups of
monkeys centipedes snakes that come to devour
the delicious fruits full of life one after another but that
does not mean they are to blame

even the gods pretend not to see
although they know everything

somehow why
why that way such
reasons are what make up corporations
and they arise from a cemetery of ten thousand years ago
and come this way they are holding
a conference so we who are on the earth
we who cannot live much more than a hundred years we
cannot give an answer or a solution to this

my dear Venezuela
panting still alive there my corpse

my dead body
it's not that I want to die rather love to death
and kiss someone there the spirit of the soil
tempting no just an ordinary living corpse

a life full of holes and confusion
whole and alive grounded in this soil
much farther away than the soil there
even death will abandon you
what a fat
what an explosive maze
in the brain and pleasure in the stomach
a transient living
corpse

This morning from Venezuela
Oxyz 980-7627
a woman's voice drops in
a poem is just delighted and now
it is swimming in the printer over there
it is not a jewel so no one plunders
after a long time
Orpheus has come this way
and listens in and with a computer
is looking for sounds as for the harp many thousand years ago
he left it so making the noisy
men and women with a hundred snake heads
quietly sleep
the dead body too slowly
strips off the transient corpse
and stands up
life is like light
like light
Venezuela
hard tears
scorch the earth

What Is Called A Miracle*

what's called a miracle does happen, doesn't it
a baby is born the man who is the father of the mother
talked about his license plate today
"it's the same with a baby's birthday"
that's wonderful the baby will adventure out
resolutely just like the man who will become his grandfather
he will fight head on with what's called life
and soon he will become a wonderful man a man of honor
it's nothing special to live
a transient permanence and yet it's a little
like a painful and enjoyable dinner but today
the man isn't drinking will behave himself at least
he will get up early with the child and run around the grounds together
will throw a ball will drink milk
a miracle does change the drunkard
into a five year old sweating beardless boy

* Editor's Note: This translation first appeared in ORIGIN: Issue 4.
Laura Solórzano

from Lost Mouth

- Translated from the Spanish by Jen Hofer -

Laura Solórzano's backyard is often graced by a half-dozen peacocks who apparently belong to no one, respect no property boundaries, can leap from ground to roof in just a few large flaps, and make raucous noise in keening counterpoint to the grandeur of their plumage. I met these peacocks at the same time I met Laura. I lived in Mexico City for three years while I was working on Sin puertas visibles, the anthology of contemporary poetry by Mexican women I edited and translated. During that time, I drove The Duchess, a white 1978 Volvo sedan, back and forth between various U.S. cities and Mexico City on a number of occasions. More often than not, I was on the road when I met the poets from my anthology who didn't live in Mexico City.

On one trip north, I arrived in Guadalajara, where Laura lives, with some drafts of poems from Semilla de Ficus annotated with copious questions about connotative meaning, syntactical fragmentation and accrual, and ways to make resonances sound in the gapped spaces across the borders between languages. That visit and the correspondence leading up to it were the beginning of an ongoing, expansive, unconfined, unruly and often highly nitpicky conversation about what words mean, how phrases combine, and what makes poetry poetry: what makes poetry's possibilities possible.

Laura is one of two poets included in Sin puertas visibles—the other is Dolores Dorantes, from Ciudad Juárez—whose work has become as central to my poetic practice as anything I write myself. My translations of Laura's and Dolores' work, my rewritings of their writings, exist in a third space between original and translation, between Spanish and English, between writer and reader/writer (i.e. translator). That third space, exponentially expanded when other readers encounter the work and respond to it, is the space where I currently believe writers and readers (those of us infected with a love of literature) can locate the most radically open and most concretely useful explorations of language, of subjectivity, of political activation and rethinking of the foundational ideas that configure our understanding of the world and ourselves in it. If not for the pleasures and challenges of such activations, such rethinkings—if not for the potential of a "lost mouth"—why write and why read?

Boca perdida (Lost Mouth) is the book that follows Laura Solórzano's lobo de labio, my translation of which was published as lip wolf in 2007 by Action Books. lip wolf is a fiercely labial animal; many of its poems are tangled alliterative tongue-twisters that highlight the embodied lingual nature of any attempt at articulation, much less communication. Lost Mouth extends the explorations lip wolf began, constructing porous and dynamic poem-objects that contemplate and interrogate the problematics of persons in the world, and the various structures (literal, relational, linguistic) constructed to contain or explain us.

What happens to language when the mouth is lost?

The poems in Lost Mouth are repeated and often anaphoric attempts to inhabit a first-person selfhood, and then to place that self in context. The self here is expressed as a refracting object—an object in language—more than a coherent identity-based phenomenon. In a recent conversation, Laura told me that she thinks of writing as self-expression, and as transmitting fundamental information about personhood, about the human condition. In this sense, for Laura, poetry is knowledge. If that is what her poems are doing—and I believe they are doing that and much more—then the knowledge these poems convey about our condition as humans is simultaneously a knowledge of and in language. Laura's poetry uses language instrumentally; as a tool of expression, and as a provocation "(t)o be an adverse tongue"—that is, to objectify language so we might ruthlessly reconsider how it functions, what it makes of us and what we make of it. So we might lose our mouth.

- Jen Hofer
My dance (emotionality rehearsing the ship in the storm of sweat)

My notebook (emptiness of the central lake on the table of liquids)

My market (cluster of avid mouths of heat of matter)

My bay window (words cubic and geometric and vegetative and arid and hanging and dried-out)

My caff (alacran that struggles metaphysically against the destiny of its poison)

My cup (identification of beings conductors of warm elements)

My caisson (displacement of days in the exposure of chance)

My drawer (receptacle of brains annihilated in the writing of necessity)

(closed voyage)
Mi cuarto oscuro, mi salón de baile
Mi ritual, mi descomposición estilística
Mi dedal de hueso delantero, mi talón, mi niña de Aquiles
Mi ojo a través y mi pueblo de mañana o extraído boomerang:
Mi sed, mi sol, mi sal sigue hacia el recuerdo de mi hoy, subtemporal pelota
subyacente, superada y larga lengua.
(Primero viaje)

Mi aceleración, mi ruido, mi laguna en limo.
Mi disfunción de viscera
(marcha por el mismo animal, y marcha por la masa).

Mi garganta muele un elemento ambiguo.
Mi elefante de coleccionar arañas.
Mi zapatiIla de cristal deja un agujero en el cepillo.
Mi bumerang; mi estilo, mi descomposición
mi trujillo, mi misantropía! 

Este miasma de niños, puede en esto morar.
(Primero viaje)
No quiero hacer un relato
Ni contar los hechos que sucedieron
Quiero no contar la cosa en el contexto
No contar, ni como cuento ni como carta ni como cerro
Relatar la ruta de la romería de sucesos encendidos
pero no narrar, ninguna narración que supla al plato
No contar, ni como cuento ni como carta ni como cerro.
Relatar la ruta de la romería de sucesos encendidos
pero no narrar, ninguna narración que supla al plato
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No contar, ni como cuento ni como carta ni como cerro.
No contar, ni como cuento ni como carta ni como cerro.
Hablar en tu lengua. Cubrir con tu lengua una laguna de mentes.

Desdecir, cavilar, ir a externar una queja en la planicie pasiva y como un pendulo hablar en tu limbo. Seguir por la boca, entrar en la boca, ser una boca activa en la cultura del predio. La boca, de un bulbo, ser una boca activa en la cultura, seguir al templo, seguir al mapa de la modificación. Seguir el lirio, seguido el labio, ser una lengua adversa. Un lugar excesivo, tener un grueso de emoción, una papilla.
Nazi Literature in the Americas marks the functional beginning of Roberto Bolaño's career as a novelist. First published in 1996, it made the critics take notice in a way his two previous books of prose fiction had not. It also laid the foundation for the eleven books of fiction he would write in the seven years he had left. Nazi Literature represents an important turning point in Bolaño's writing, one where he begins to remake what had gone before, both in his own life and in the literature of his language.

Like much of Bolaño's work, Nazi Literature is intimately bound up with Latin American literature. It can be difficult for English-language readers with a limited knowledge of that literature to understand. This problem is further exacerbated by the fact that many English-language critics are not up to the task of thoroughly explaining either this book or Bolaño himself.

This critical deficiency is a complicated thing. Part of it stems from the simple fact that very few of our critics have any Spanish at their disposal, and therefore cannot read any of the existing material that might help them to better understand Bolaño's work. Even with Spanish to aid them, though, it would be tough going because of the specifics of Bolaño's literary lineage.

The key question here is: what was Infra-Realism and where did it come from? From the English-language critics, one gets the idea that it was something Bolaño made up in his twenties out of the standard rebel piss and vinegar, something which is interesting only as the source material for The Savage Detectives and some of Bolaño's novellas. This is a major error, and once you've erred here it's very difficult to get anything right further on.

To begin with, the idea that Infra-Realism was Bolaño's own invention is incorrect. At least as important in the conceptualization of the movement was Bolaño's friend Mario Santiago Papasquiaro, who undoubtedly surpassed Roberto in the practice of Infra-Realism as a poetic style. English-language critics are dead wrong in considering Mario Santiago as little more than the model for Ulises Lima. He was, besides being Bolaño's closest friend for the better part of a decade, a poet of serious gifts who taught Roberto as much as he learned from him. Neither of them can be fairly considered without taking the other into account, such was the influence they exerted on one another, even after they hadn't spoken for more than ten years.

In addition to seeing Infra-Realism as Bolaño's own invention, English-language critics make the further, and more serious, mistake of seeing the movement as an aberration of no value outside of Bolaño's biography. Infra-Realism produced many fine poets and a few, such as Mario Santiago and Cuauhtémoc Gómez, who surpass many of their more famous contemporaries in any language.

In the context of Latin American literature, Infra-Realism has a place within a larger narrative of explicitly counter-cultural poetry, called poesía rebelde, rebel poetry, by some of its practitioners.

1. This trend in Latin American writing does not, as yet, have a standardized name. "The New Hispanic-American Avant-Garde" and variations along similar lines are also tossed about. Really what we're talking about is the Latin American avant-garde post-1950. No good book-length study yet exists in English, and I do not know of one in Spanish either. Careers are going to be made on the study of this stuff. My primary sources for this information are about two dozen middle-aged Latin Americans who were there and who knew the people involved. Secondary and tertiary sources are littered all over the internet.
Arguably, the first major landmark of this tradition is Nicanor Parra's *Poemasy Antipoemass*, published in 1954. Every country in Latin America, including Parra's native Chile, has poets that can be considered as having preceeded Parra down this road, but Parra's book was widely read throughout the region, and it remains the one milestone almost all rebel poets can agree upon.

In 1958, in Colombia, Gonzalo Arango published the first manifesto of *El Nadaismo*, Nothingism. At the time, Arango was the only member of the group, which he invented after failing in his attempt to write a novel. Soon poets from Colombia's major cities staggered to his banner. Nothingism was something genuinely new in Latin America, a violently nihilistic, anti-Catholic, anti-military, anti-oligarchy, anti-everything literary movement producing work designed for maximum shock value which also contained an explicit critique of society. Most Nothingist work, poems as well as stories and strange cross-genre pieces posing as letters, essays or diaries, was about being a Nothingist and presented a sardonic, impossible mythology. Nothingists drank blood and killed homeless people and went to bed with diseased prostitutes, they were Communists and they never worked, they hated God, etc. Arango's impressive talents as a propagandist were used to maximum effect in a series of manifestos extolling the liberating power of his doctrine.

Nothingism aligned itself with the American Beat poets and the Latin American political Left as well as Dada and Surrealism, something that would be common for the groups that, inspired by Arango's example, would spring up in other countries. In the early 1960s a group of poets and visual artists called *El Techo de la Ballena*, The Whale's Roof, was founded in Venezuela. Another, called *Hora Zero*, Zero Hour, was founded in Peru in 1970. These groups varied slightly in terms of doctrine and practice, one more inclined toward Dadaism, another more political, but they shared common methods bent to a common purpose: the undermining of bourgeois society through avant-garde art and literature. Sound familiar?

Of course it does. And it was familiar to Roberto Bolaño and Mario Santiago, too. It was on this example of aggressive group dynamics that Infrarealism was modeled by its founders, on purpose and with full knowledge of what they were doing. It is within this larger context that the Infrarealist movement fits, the Mexican version of a literary undercurrent that took place throughout Latin America from roughly 1954 until some time in the early 1980s.

During that time period two other major cultural trends were taking place in Latin America. One was the "Boom" in Latin American literature, during which magical realism and anything that might easily be mistaken for it held sway. The other was a sort of Golden Age of Latin American Fascism, as repressive political movements and military governments, nearly all supported in one way or another by the United States, came to power in country after country. Artistically as well as politically, the rebel poetry movements found themselves on the wrong side of history. The Left proved no better friend to them than the Right, as the sad story of Roque Dalton illustrates, though that took a few more years to figure out.

Under these twin pressures, the rebel poetry movements collapsed one after another. Many of their members wound up either dead or in exile. A few from each group carried on as though nothing had happened, writing poetry, calling it revolution, and slowly growing old. By the 1990s these movements had been largely forgotten within Latin America. No one cared, outside of the last three Nothingists in Bogotá, or the half dozen Infrarealists left in Mexico. Rebel poetry was more than an artistic dead end, it was almost something that had never happened. When Roberto Bolaño talks about having watched

2. My sources for this information are Mario Santiago's brother, Héctor Zeta Ek Balam, and the Infrarealist poet Edgar Altamirano.

3. While the groups cited in this essay hailed from Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, and Mexico I would not say that the discussion ends there. Those four countries are specific to my own studies, which have afforded me evidence of the links between these four groups largely through personal contact with surviving group members and acquaintances of those now deceased. Anyone looking into politically or artistically similar movements in other Latin American countries would likely find them and find them linked to these four and others.

4. Dalton was shot dead in his sleep by members of the revolutionary army to which he himself belonged. Bolaño, who knew Dalton personally and was in El Salvador just before the killing, believed that his murderers, who were also poets, did it out of poetic rivalry as much as over political differences.
a generation walk into the abyss, these are the people he’s talking about, and this history is the abyss.

It was Bolano’s artistic success as a novelist who had come out of this half-forgotten literary milieu that made him so important in the Spanish-speaking world. This allegedly irrelevant branch of Latin American literature became suddenly relevant again simply because it had produced Roberto Bolaño, the greatest writer in the Spanish language in a long, long time. The entire recent history of Latin American literature had to be reconsidered, and with it much of the social and political history of the region as well. That’s a lot of work, and work that has only been going on in earnest for eight or ten years. Most of what has been written about it that’s of any value is in Spanish, and little to none of it has filtered over into English thus far. So English-only critics, through no real fault of their own, are missing a large piece of the puzzle and most of them don’t even know it.

This leads them to say unintentionally silly things, such as one review I read which described Nazi Literature in the Americas as “merely clever.” It is clever, but far from merely.

The book is a fake literary encyclopedia, a type of book we don’t see much of in the U.S., but which is actually quite common in Latin America. Little biographical/critical essays, written in an unassuming style, about a group of writers with some commonality, such as all being a bunch of Nazis.

Because of their lack of familiarity with that form, some readers (and critics!) might find themselves confused with a book that, oddly, seems to be neither stories nor a straight-up novel. Here is Bolaño himself, explaining his own view of the book to an interviewer from the Spanish literary journal Lateral:

> It’s a novel, but not to be read like a novel. You can open the book wherever you want, despite its having the three classic stages of a novel. For example, I think you could start with the epilogue. Most likely I’ve failed, but that was the idea and I don’t think it was totally bad. Now, I’ll die saying it’s a novel. [my translation]

So, it’s settled. It’s a novel, though admittedly a pretty strange one, which might lead you to wonder where Roberto got the idea for such an odd novel. Marcelo Damiani, a novelist from Argentina, wondered the same thing, and happened to be sitting next to Roberto, with a tape recorder running, at the time.

I don’t know. It came out. Its genealogy, in any case, is clear. It came from The Temple of Iconoclasts by Wilcock, it came from The Universal History of Infamy by Borges, it came from Portraits Real and Imagined by Alfonso Reyes, it came from Imaginary Lives by Schwob, it came from the prose of encyclopedists. As you can see, mine is the worst of the line. [my translation]

Which brings us to the question of what Roberto is doing, artistically in Nazi Literature in the Americas. What exactly it is he’s trying to say. Here’s a revealing comment he made to that same interviewer from Lateral:

> What happens is that I take the world of the extreme Right but many times, in reality, what I’m talking about is the Left. I take the easiest image to caricature in order to talk about the other thing. When I talk about American Nazi writers I’m really talking about the sometimes heroic, much more often wretched world of literature in general. [again, my translation]

Talking about the often wretched world of literature in general is of course what would occupy Bolaño for the rest of his brief career as a novelist. Nazi Literature is obviously the seed of much of his later work. Not only are scaled down versions of all of his major themes and ideas contained in it, but many of the techniques he would go on to perfect are present as well.

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5. I do not wish to imply, by this statement, that there is no Bolaño criticism of value in English. That would be silly. Natasha Wimmer’s “Roberto Bolaño and The Savage Detectives” is a wonderful essay, as is Francisco Goldman’s “The Great Bolaño.”
Of all his work that I have read to date Nazi Literature is the only place where I see Bolano using large amounts of typical irony, both in his choice of Nazi protagonists and in the device of a fake literary encyclopedia. I would venture to guess that, as he suggests in the quote above, it was simply easier for him to write this book in this way. At the time, he was perhaps less than sure of himself as a novelist. Having solid models in the books by Wilcock and Borges, et al, would have been an aid. Knowing what he wanted to write about, but not being so sure how to write about it, Bolano dressed that doomed generation of rebel poets up in the garb of their nonexistent enemies, the Nazi poets of the Americas. Having written this book, all that was left was to perfect the style laid down here for the first time.

2.

Fortunately for English-language readers Bolaño's translator is infinitely more competent and knowledgeable than the majority of his critics. Chris Andrews, who has handled all of the Bolaño so far translated (except for The Savage Detectives) has delivered another fine job with his version of Nazi Literature.

Andrews' strengths as a translator are many. He has an excellent ear for the author's voice, as a comparison of his versions of Bolaño and César Aira will quickly reveal. Both authors not only sound distinct from one another, but also remarkably like their Spanish-language selves. With Bolaño this is no easy feat. For one thing his sentences tend to be very long, even for Spanish, which has generally longer sentences than English. This requires a light touch, knowing when to break a long sentence up so that an English reader does not become lost in a thicket of clauses, but also knowing how to leave a long sentence alone when Bolaño is using it to stack up images and create a poetic effect. The trick is to preserve the author's voice either way, and Andrews consistently manages to do so.

Andrews is also very good with Bolaño's nearly endless variety of slang. Chris does not limit himself to American or British or Australian English, but seems to be after an English version that will work wherever the language is spoken, perhaps rooted in American English but free to roam further out in search of the right expression.

In his version of Amulet a character named El Rey de los Putos became The King of the Rent Boys, primarily a British expression, but a widely known one. This tendency of Andrews parallels Bolaño's own habit of using slang from all over Spain and Latin America.

Nazi Literature, with it's distant, third person narration almost the whole way through, is not as heavy on the slang as Bolaño's other novels, but it does rely on a lot of artful prose, much of it of a type where tone is all important. Andrews never screws this up. When the English lacks something the Spanish has, it is a slight but persistent tone of sadness. I doubt very much if anyone could capture all of it.

One such passage, and there are only two or three in the entire book, comes at the end of the chapter devoted to Luiz Fontane Da Souza, a Brazilian philosopher who has spent his life hilariously overworking to refute Sartre, among others. In Bolaño's Spanish:

La muerte lo sorprenderá siete años más tarde, en su confortable piso de Leblon, en Río, mientras escucha un disco del compositor argentino Tito Vázquez y observa por los ventanales el atardecer carioca, los coches, la gente que discute en las aceras, las luces que se encienden, se apagan, las ventanas que se cierran.

And Andrews' English

Death took him by surprise seven years later in his comfortable apartment in the Leblon neighborhood of Rio, as he listened to a record by the Argentinean composer Tito Vásquez, and looked out of the window at night falling over the city, passing cars, people chatting on the sidewalks, lights coming on and going out, and windows being closed.

It's hard to nitpick the translator's choices here. Andrews changes the tense of the first verb, sorprender, from future to past, true, but throughout the Spanish text Bolaño uses future-and present-tense verbs in a way that wouldn't work well in English. Andrews standardizes nearly all of them into past tense, a sensible decision and one you might as well stick with once you've made it.
After that, all his choices make sense. He needs to add *neighborhood* for the sake of clarity. There's nothing he can do with a phrase like *el atardecer carioca*. *Atardecer* is a verb (to become dusk/ evening) often used as a noun, as it is here. *Carioca*, an adjective, means something specifically pertaining to the city of Rio. Turning place names into adjectives that smoothly is a property of Spanish that English simply cannot match, and neither can it match the concision of a word like *atardecer*. From that point on in the Spanish, you see a good example of Bolano's poetic ability, using the sounds of the Spanish language to tremendous effect. The English words at Andrews' disposal in this passage just aren't as beautiful. He does a hell of a job with this passage, but there's still just a little something left behind that can't be carried over into English. What can you do except sympathize, having been there yourself?

One of the great things about Chris Andrews is his abundant common sense. He has an ability to recognize what his job is at a particular point in the text, and then get it done in the most effective way. This is apparent in a passage about a Cuban writer's novel. The Cuban's book hides a code in which the first letters of the first words of the first paragraphs of every chapter form an acrostic, as do the first letters of the first words of the second paragraphs, and so on. Fourteen acrostics in all. Bolano gives little snippets of a few sentences to illustrate the method.

This is a joke, and a damned good one. Andrews keeps the joke and never mind the rest. He simply changes what the sentences quoted from the Cuban's book say, so as to provide himself with letters that will spell out an appropriate acrostic. He also, when necessary, changes the acrostic itself so as to have a short, snappy phrase with an approximately similar meaning. The acrostic made from the second paragraphs is, in Spanish, *MIERDA DE PAISITO*. This translates as something like *shitty little country*, which is too long. Andrews keeps it quippy: *THIS PLACE SUCKS*.

Chris himself, and a few others, will perhaps notice that both of the examples cited above come from fairly early in the book. Allow me to explain. I got the English version in the mail, jumped up and down, Then I started to read it. I got about halfway through, and I realized I was a little bored. I'd already read this book, just a few days before. I started skipping ahead to my favorite parts, to parts I'd wondered about when I'd read them in English. Then I put it down. I still haven't read the whole book in Spanish. Which just goes to show you, Chris Andrews is a damn good translator. He knows the language, obviously, but he also knows translation, which requires much more than just a knowledge of the language. You have to know writing, and he does. He proves it with *Nazi Literature* as he's proved it with every translation he's published. It is impossibly important that English-language readers (and writers) have a chance to see what Roberto Bolano accomplished, we are lucky to have a translator of Andrews' skill show it to us.
sub-narrators, and narrator-participants—even God is accused by Merlin, at one point, of being a “conteur”—also belongs to Delay and Roubaud’s art of translating and meta-translating. Needless to say, Chrétien de Troyes, Robert de Boron, Wolfram von Eschenbach, Gottfried von Strassburg, and especially Sir Thomas Malory, who attempted to unify all the Matter of Britain into a coherent cycle called *Le Morte Darthur* (ca. 1469), would have understood Delay and Roubaud’s project and its challenges. Essentially, Delay and Roubaud’s task recalls Malory’s: they must hunt down, collate, edit, translate, and fill in dispersed, sometimes incomplete stories that are penned in various languages and give coherence to the entire corpus by channeling it into an appropriate narrative form.

By choosing drama as their target literary genre, the translators do more than retell stories in a modern idiom. Their translation methodology includes reestablishing the settings of the Matter of Britain, which Delay and Roubaud define as ranging from a “Place of Secular Words,” through sundry water bodies, a forest, a prairie, a castle, and a “room of love” to King Arthur’s Court, the Grail Castle and a “Place of Sacred Words.” These natural, historical, intimate, and sacred lieux also become the settings of our own intellectual and spiritual quests (and foibles). Certain characters, and especially Merlin, occasionally formulate philosophical quips or puzzles based on our contemporary notions of Time, Space, Wholeness, Plurality, or the Godhead. In one passage, Bron says, “the Multiple is still the One because it is the succession of the Unique,” to which a character called Disciple 2 retorts by positing another paradox, this one also cryptically mathematical because it alludes to continuity, discontinuity, and the definition of “points”: “Why is there between Bron and Joseph a space so large that I could sit down in it whereas we are actually crowded together?” The Voice of the Holy Ghost then interjects this answer: “The space represents the place where Our Lord was sitting at the Last Supper. It must remain empty because it awaits He whom we will send to occupy it.” Finally, Disciple 2 again: “Oh really? Let’s see what will happen when I have sat down in the space!” In the otherwise remote context of medieval romance, these philosophical, theological, and mathematical jokes (as well as more solemn statements) greatly liven the dramatic rendering.

On still another narrative level, *Graal Théâtre* charts the gradual victory of Christianity over Paganism in Europe and specifically in Britain, a process that begins when Joseph of Arimathay crosses the English Channel. Natural law is notably pitted against emerging Christian ethical or eschatological values, a dichotomy that increases the dramatic tension of certain tableaux. In an early scene, Joseph of Arimathay addresses a character called Memory and significantly exclaims: “Night is falling and I no longer know how to contemplate it. Why Memory are you turning so and drawing me back into the shadows of natural law?” Here, as elsewhere, Delay and Roubaud not only provide metaphors or allegories for the evolving history (and intellectual history) of Europe but also simultaneously stage the inner turmoil of a single personality caught up in a quickly changing world—our world, *mutatis mutandis*. Joseph’s spiritual aspirations struggle with (his own) Memory, as well as with characters named Volonté (Will) and Entendement (Understanding), who are evidently part of his personal makeup as well. Similarly, fate and chance (or coincidence, a thematic element often used by Delay in her own alert novels) also wrestle with each other throughout *Graal Théâtre*.

These are not the only innovations and insights the translators make in response to the early interpreters of the Matter of Britain. Like Delay and Roubaud, the latter were obliged not only to translate all or parts of whatever hodgepodge of legend, folktale, fable, doggerel, and highly crafted verse was available to them, but also to create an appealing stylistic tone. In the target language, many-told tales have to sound fresh, never-told, unheard-of. Lexically and syntactically, Delay and Roubaud opt for a natural-sounding oral French that can be recited publicly with ease. At the same time, their language makes no concessions to rhetorical facility, emotional blandness, or trite colloquialisms. Interestingly, as can be spotted in the above quotation concerning Joseph of Arimathay and Memory, not a single comma appears in nearly six hundred pages of text, which comprise countless sentences that would normally be punctuated for rhythmic or logical reasons. (Only the translators’ italicized two-sentence *postscriptium* uses commas.) This decision gives interpretative freedom to the actors who might stage these plays, as well as to readers, who must turn themselves into actors, as it were, while reading the unpunctuated French sentences.
Overlooked by French critics, despite the literary reputations of the "scribes" (as Florence Delay and Jacques Roubaud define themselves in a postscriptum), Graal Théâtre is an original dramatic re-creation of "la matière de Bretagne," that is the tales and epic poems that are more familiarly, if too narrowly, known in English as the Arthurian legends. Drawing on a rich medieval corpus of texts in German, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Welsh, English (notably Sir Gawain and the Green Knight), and of course French (in which the Lancelot en prose and Chrétien de Troyes's verse narratives stand out among anonymous fragmentary variants of the same stories of love, quest, battle, death, and miracle), Delay and Roubaud have produced vivid theatrical equivalents of the best-known tales as well as many little-known ones. If you read French and, like myself, are rather put off by the Arthurian stories—perhaps because of their fantastical denouements or imposing symbolism—then Graal Théâtre offers an excellent opportunity to give this medieval subject matter a new try. As far as I know, so much of the Matter of Britain has never appeared, in any language, in a dramatic form such as Delay and Roubaud have artfully forged for their Graal Théâtre.

Now republished in France in a revised and substantially augmented edition of the initial two-volume set (1979/1981), Graal Théâtre is thus much more than an adroitly conceived and eminently readable translation. The authors transpose prose and especially poetry into dramatic dialogues and scenes, and specifically into sequences of interrelated tableaux that beckon to be staged or at least recited. A coherent play results from each sequence.

Linked in turn by the centralizing symbols of the Round Table and the Holy Grail, the ten plays of Graal Théâtre (the first edition comprised six) recount the feats, failures, and aspirations of two knightly orders, a "celestial" one, founded by the saintly Joseph of Arimathy "who collected Christ's blood when He was on the cross and buried His human body" and who is thereby given, in a key opening scene, the Grail cup by the Holy Ghost. The other order is "terrestrial," spirited by the sharp-minded Merlin who, first a prophet, increasingly becomes a wizard. Revolving around Uter Pendragon, Gawain, Perceval, Lancelot, Morgan, Guinevere, Galahad, King Arthur, and a host of minor characters, the plays constitute a "Breton novel"—to again cite the translators, who thereby appropriate still another literary genre. This cyclical, multifaceted, dramatized "novel" concludes when the Holy Grail, followed by a sword, a lance, and Galahad, soars up to heaven and when King Arthur, wrapped in a great white sail, leaves his steed ashore and is borne out to sea in a boat carrying several ladies and his sister Morgan.

The striking horizontal and vertical imagery of the two concluding scenes already suggests that the rejuvenated Matter of Britain unfolding from these ten French plays is narratively more intricate and philosophically more resonant than a mere chronicle of events, however charming, amazing, or deeply moving they each can be. In an allusion to the very book that they are writing, Delay and Roubaud have one character, Blaise, give a nod to Jorge Luis Borges and refer to "les Graal fictions." As the etymology of "fiction" (ultimately from the Latin fingere) suggests, now and then the reader glimpses the translator-authors molding, shaping, devising, inventing, and even ironically "feigning" while literally re-forming the Matter of Britain into plays.

When reading medieval texts, don't we similarly sense the presence of poet-translator-storytellers, who also sometimes participate in the events recounted? Establishing an animated nexus of narrators,
The temptation to read aloud is great. Each reader must find, or found, his or her own rhythm, a stimulating and not unpleasant exercise that in addition encourages a deeper engagement with the text, with a Matter of Britain that until now may well have seemed impersonal, hopelessly anachronistic. By eschewing rhythmical and logical markers, except for periods at the end of sentences, the translators bring to the fore possibilities of sense and sound and even comprehension hidden beneath customary typographical norms. And the lack of punctuation gives a timeless quality to a contemporary French that also seems to pay homage to much earlier stages of French and other European languages.

Besides this provocative and playful tour de force, Delay and Roubaud's vocabulary can suddenly surprise with its quirky drollness. Eruptions or interruptions—moments of comic relief, literally—occur on the otherwise smooth yet malleable stylistic surface of the dialogues. Now and then the translators notably add, usually through the character of Merlin, jocular references to such contemporary objects or concepts as signifiers, antibiotics, serial music, radar, Riemann surfaces, Welsh rugby matches, even e-mail.

Readers familiar with Delay and Roubaud's work will expect no less than witiness, deft erudition, inventiveness, and storytelling prowess. Besides writing clever and absorbing novels that are set in a variety of historical periods and are often about the mysteries of amorous attraction, Delay is an eminent translator of Spanish authors, ranging from the playwrights Lucas Fernández and Pedro Calderón de la Barca to Ramón Gómez de la Serna, Federico García Lorca, and especially her own mentor, José Bergamín. Her stylistic range, which includes not only theatrical dialogues but also what she calls "imitations," is vast. Among the prolific output of the Oulipian and Anglophile Roubaud are (partly medieval) mystery novels (the "Hortense" series), as well as seminal book-length essays on and edited collections of Troubadour poems and European sonnets from several languages. *Graal Théâtre* brilliantly puts the translators' many talents to work.

**CONTRIBUTORS**

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**Jeff Edmunds** is a painter who writes and translates in his spare time. His work has appeared, among other places, in *McSweeney's*, *Formules* (Paris, France), and, translated into Russian, *Inostrannaia literatura*. In 1998 his *Original of Laura* hoax stunned the rarified world of Nabokov studies by duping leading scholars (and Nabokov's own son) into believing that prose Edmunds had composed were in fact excerpts from Nabokov's final, unpublished manuscript, unfinished at the time of the author's death in 1977 and which Nabokov had requested be destroyed. In 2003 his tale "La feintise" was published with Jean Lahougue's "La ressemblance" by *Les Impressions Nouvelles*. Jeff Edmunds lives and works in Central Pennsylvania.

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Buddha has been adapted to the stage in both Catalan and Spanish. English versions of Farré's poems have recently appeared in The Nation, Words without Borders, and Zoland d'Or of Farré's Poems from Beat to Hiphop and Janiecki's Born in Los Angeles, 1947, Gary Gach is editor of anthologies, including The Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Buddhism (Alpha Books). His poems and translations have been published in numerous magazines, and anthologies, including American Poetry Review, Big Bridge, The Book of Luminous Things (Czeslaw Milosz, editor), City Lights Review, Cod of Signals (Michael Palmer, editor), Hambone, Invisible Cities, Poems for the Millennium, Renditions, Salamanquins, Technicians of the Sacred, Two Lines, WebWay, World Poetry (Chilton Fadiman, editor), and Zyzzryou.

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Samuel Grolmes was a Fulbright Professor of English at Tottori University and Osaka Gakuai University in Japan, and was a professor of Japanese at College of San Mateo in California. He contributed a number of book reviews on modern Japanese literature and history to The Japan Times. He passed away on November 25, 2004 in Palo Alto after a long brave battle with cancer.

Jen Hofer's recent publications include a translation of books two and three of Dolores Dorantes by Dolores Dorantes (Counterpath and Kenning Editions, 2008), lip wolf, a translation of Laura Solórzano's lobo de labio (Action Books, 2007), Sin puertas visibles: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry by Mexican Women (University of Pittsburgh Press and Ediciones Sin Nombre, 2003), slide rule (subpress, 2002), and the chapbooks going going (Dusie Kollectiv, 2007), laws (Dusie Kollectiv, 2006) and lawless (Seeing Eye Books, 2003). Her forthcoming books are The Route, an epistolary and poetic collaboration with Patrick Durgin (Atelos), Laws (Dusie Books), and a book-length series of anti-war-manifesto poems titled one (Palm Press). She has published poems and translations in numerous small-press publications, including 1913, Aufgabe, Black Clock, Bomb, DISASTER, The Brooklyn Rail, enough, Jacket, War and Peace, Poems from Beat to Hiphop, and Others, Primary Reading, Luminous Poems, and Poems for the Millennium, Renditions, Salamanquins, Technicians of the Sacred, Two Lines, WebWay, World Poetry (Chilton Fadiman, editor), and Zyzzryou.

Marc Elihu Hofstadter was born in New York City and earned a Ph.D. in literature from the University of California at Santa Cruz. He has taught at Santa Cruz, the Université d’Orléans, and Tel Aviv University. He is the author of four volumes of poetry: House of Peace, Visions, Strange Tooth and (upcoming in September 2008) Luck. He lives in Walnut Creek, California with his partner, the artist David Zurlin.

Bruno Jasienksi was born in 1901, in Klimontow, Poland. He began as a Futurist poet in Poland (The Song of Hunger; A Word about Jakub Seda), then moved to France, where his limited understanding of the local language inspired him to write I Burn Paris. This novel got him expelled from the country, and drove him to the last country on the larger European continent that would have him: Russia. He wrote a play (The Mannequins' Ball), novellas, and novels (A Collusion of the Indifferent; Man Sheds His Skin) in Russian – the last title has apparently sold millions of copies since its first printing. He was shot by the Soviet authorities in 1938.

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Aldo Palazzeschi (Florence 1885-1974 Rome) had a long and distinguished career as a writer of essays, stories, novels, and poems. He won particular acclaim for his novels The Materassi Sisters (1934), The Cacoli Brothers (1948), and Roma (1953). Palazzeschi’s early avant-garde works, the anti-novel The Man of Smoke (1911) and the volume of poetry The Arsonist (1910) were both originally published by “Poesia,” F.T. Marinetti’s Futurist press.

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Laura Solórzano was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco in 1961. She is the author, most recently, of Un rosal para el señor K (Universidad de Guanajuato, 2006), Boca perdida (bonobos, Metepec: 2005), lobo de labio (Cuadernos de filodecaballos, Guadalajara: 2001) and Semilla de Ficus (Ediciones Rimbaud, Tlaxcala: 1999). Jen Hofer’s en face translation of lobo de labio was published as lip wolf by Action Books in March 2007. Laura is on the editorial board of the literary arts magazine Tragaler, and currently teaches writing at the Centro de Arte Audiovisual in Guadalajara. Translations of her poems into English have been published in the online magazines Action, Yer online, Anfabe, Calique, and HOW2 online, and in the anthology Sin puertas visibles (ed. and trans. Jen Hofer, University of Pittsburgh and Ediciones Sin Nombre, 2003).

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TRANSLATIONS

Yves Bonnefoy / Marc Elihu Hofstadter
Astrid Cabral / Alexis Levitin
Laura Solórzano / Jen Hofer
Ernest Farrés / Lawrence Venuti
Dmitry Golynko / Eugene Ostashevsky
Bruno Jasienski / Soren A. Gauger and Marcin Piekoszuski
Rieko Matsuura / Michael Emmerich
Aldo Palazzeschi / Nicholas Benson
José Saramago / Albert Braz
Kazuko Shiraishi / Samuel Grolmes and Yumiko Tsumura
Ko Un / Brother Anthony of Taizé, Young-moo Kim and Gary Gach

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Florence Delay and Jacques Roubaud // Graal Théâtre