Perhaps a time will come when a translation will be considered as something in itself.

— Jorge Luis Borges
CALQUE (kælkt) [F., 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 analagous 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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Bringing it all back home

by Brandon Holmquest, editor

I.

The following is a joke my Alabama-born grandfather played on me, in the Indiana where he came to live and I was born, at least once a week for twenty years.

"Brandon, d'you know I can talk Injun?"
"Really?"
"Yep. Wanna hear me talk a piece of it?"
"Yeah."

He would raise his hand, palm facing me, his face incredibly solemn and solemnly intone, "How," and then bust up laughing at the look on my face. I chose to play along with this joke long after I knew what the punchline would be, and he kept on playing it. It became a little ritual between us, a sort of complicated wink.

It was a fairly complicated joke, as well, playing off of my native Yankee idea of Southernness as somehow more primitive, referencing the portrait of his Cherokee grandmother that hung on the wall inside, and tweaking the nose of a thousand movie cowboys and Indians all at once. It is essentially a joke about language and culture, the distances between them and the misunderstandings that arise, or are erected, in that space. Obviously, my grandfather would not have explained it that way, but I am certain that he completely understood the mechanics and implications of that joke. That was why he kept telling it.

2.

When I was young, I considered there to be two true treats in the world. One was room temperature butter, which I would sneak with a finger whenever anyone's back was turned. The other was a tomato. A tomato was a thing which was red. The proper way to eat it was raw, preferably immediately after pulling it off the plant, with a liberal amount of salt. Tomato in one hand, salt shaker in the other, you proceed as with an apple.

So what could my grandmother have been thinking, picking them when they were still green? And what madness was this that led her to slice them up, dip them in flour and cornmeal and then fry them in bacon fat? Then to watch my grandfather cover these abominations in salt and pepper and eat them with a fork. Insanity. Sheer insanity.

No child, hush. There is a place far away. It is called the South. I was born there and we have certain foods we like and certain ways of cooking things. Here, try a fried green tomato. (Delicious.) Try some buttermilk. (Horrifying.) Have a little cabbage fried with bacon. (Wonderful.) Would you like a glass of sweet tea? (Yes.)

3.

I would ask my grandfather to read to me. He would say, no you read to me. I like it better when you read to me. So I would read to him. King Arthur stories. Hardy Boys mysteries. Book after book, all day long.

I was eighteen before he told me he couldn't read or write. He knew the alphabet. He could sign his name. That was all. He'd spent his childhood in a Depression sharecrop cotton field, earning pennies to add to other pennies. He was ashamed of it. I remember him looking out the window, into the yard, trying to find the words. He was worried I might think less of him, might think he was stupid.

4.

The Selected Analects of Byrum Bates

On religion: Mostly a bunch of fancy-dressed people faking to like a man who didn't own a pair of shoes. Wouldn't one of 'em piss on the man if he was on fire right in front of 'em looking as poor as he really was.

On the police: Bunch of Barney Fife sons of bitches not worth a damn.

On bosses: Bunch of peckernecks. I had one one time that rode my ass so much I finally told him, Listen to me you son of a bitch, you better hope you don't die before me cause if you do I swear I'll piss on your damn grave.

---

1. The man did die first. The threat was carried through. I was there.
I spent my late teens on a series of Quixotic road trips through the South. Eating fried green tomatoes in towns like Tillatoba, Mississippi. Walking lost around Birmingham. Sleeping on benches in New Orleans. Whenever I got to a new town, I'd hunt up a pay phone and call him. Never once did I call him from somewhere he'd never been. He'd tell me about the last time he'd been there, what the people were like, what to watch out for and where I might go from there.

Everywhere I went, in diners and bars, in barbershops and public parks, I'd answer the perennial Southern question by saying that I was not from around there, but my grandfather was. I just thought I'd come take a look around. The basic suspicion of a strange Yankee would evaporate and that famous hospitality would descend.

He's been gone eight years now. The lessons were many. The influence is pervasive. Every time I want to knock the teeth out of a smart ass baccalaureate, for example, as well as every time I shut up and listen to what someone has to say. Every time I catch myself thinking I know something I don't, and every time I catch some uptown jackass talking out of the side of his neck and give him a piece of my mind. My basic interest in other people and places. And every time I tell or share a story; which is nothing but a habit I picked up from him.

On the sublime joy of flogging a dead horse triannually in print and continuously on the internet

by Steve Dolph, editor

Besides me, Mary, and our two friends, only three other people in the bar were watching the news. It soon became clear that the corpulent proprietor, his waitress, and the plastic 19-40 year old dye-job with them were McCain supporters, and we decided to relocate. They had been brooding near the television (turned low) while the appalachian and midwestern states began reporting victories where the pundits had Barack losing bad because people are secretly racist. Eventually the owner & co. got so disgusted with the results that they turned off the news in favor of Entertainment Tonight. I remember thinking, Well that pretty much sums it all up.

We left quickly and ended up at the Nodding Head, another bar, where a more substantial crowd had gathered. I passed a booth where Jack Krick, curator of the Electronic Poetry Center and all-around swell fella, sat with friends. I stopped to chat.

Turned out several of the people at Jack's table were foreigners. That's right. Foreigners. Meaning English wasn't their first language and their general attitude suggested that they thought they were better off because of it. But since they were a bunch of foreign oil liberal elite gotcha socialists they had decided to learn English anyway and could speak it better than all but ten percent of Americans can speak another language. Their reaction to the election hubbub? A resigned shrug. We'll see, said one, though he is quite handsome. Jack asked me how I was feeling.

So nervous I have cramps, I said.

On that note Jack brought up Calque and explained to the table our bizarre practice of publishing translations of poetry facing the originals. Translations of poetry? one of them asked. Isn't that impossible? His wicked chesire grin cemented the irony of the question. Everyone looked at me. An answer was expected. Well, technically, yes, I said. It is impossible.

And then I told the story of a group of physicists and neurochemists who had gotten together to research batting. As in baseball batting. Their conclusion was that it is technically impossible to hit a baseball. The time it takes between the moment a baseball
appears in the batter’s line of sight and the moment it crosses the plate is significantly less than the time it takes for his eyes, brain and hands to react. And yet baseballs are hit. And not just once in a while. By professionals, baseballs moving at very high speeds are hit, with high levels of accuracy, about a third of the time.

Even though the analogy didn’t go over so hot in the telling to Jack’s friends (it was loud or something, who knows), I’ll stick with it anyway. When asked, great hitters will talk about how—in moments of intense focus—they can see the path of the seams on the ball as it rotates. But when they’re in a slump, and that moment of clarity does not come as regularly, perfecting the mechanics of hitting often does very little to rescue the miserable bum they should’ve traded in April from his pathetic performance. Said another way: hitting technically is impossible, but it is possible. Left to straightforward mechanical and neurochemical factors, the act of returning a 90 mile-per-hour pitch from 60 feet and 6 inches will not happen. What the batter adds, a kind of alchemy, tips the scale. The same can be said of translating technically. A failed translation, one that is sluggish, hollow, off-tune or wooden, may very well be technically correct, but it’s still a failure. A translator can be a linguistic savant, or an expert in local dialect and her translations might still stink up a room.

This strange magic (an unfashionable word) is what someone like Stephen Kessler means when he writes that you need to be a poet to translate poetry. It’s not a metaphor. Correctness will never completely determine the quality of a translation, and I would argue that correctness actually does very little to help a weak translation. What the translator adds—that soul or jazz or whatever you want to call it—is what makes quality translation. I’ve flogged this pony corpse before to little effect so I’m gonna have another go: when you read literature in translation you are reading the words of the translator. A translator wrote what you are reading. Maybe it’s so good that you start to weep. Maybe you become angry or pensive. Maybe you ditch work the next day and the one after that. Any of these things happened because of something a translator sat down and wrote. Unless you know German you’ve never read Paul Celan. You’ve read the translators of Paul Celan. You’ve never read Osamu Dazai or Sappho or Alejandra Pizarnik either. People who read should value the thoughts and insights of translators as they do those of any other artist. When reading a review of a book by some guy with a really funny-sounding name like Gert Jonke or Imre Kertész that keeps mentioning streets in Lithuania but the expert reviewer goes on and on about how good the writing is and doesn’t mention the person who actually wrote the words he’s referring to, think: travesty.

Over the past two years I’ve been really lucky. I’ve had the chance to correspond with several dozen translators, publishers and booksellers about things as mundane as character inset spacing and as lofty as post-colonial linguistic drift. Many of these translators we’ve had the privilege to publish in this magazine and I offer my thanks. A few: Jen Hayashida, Stephen Kessler, Sawako Nakayasu, Bela Shayevich, and Lawrence Venuti have been an inestimable source of guidance; their endless support will chafe my Catholic guilt until the day I keel, so thanks for that. And Brandon Holmquest, co-editor, well he taught me the sublime joy of watching batting practice from behind the first base dugout—qué más pero gracias, Horacio. This group makes up the most talented and generous bunch I’ll probably ever have the chance to work with again.

If you haven’t guessed it already, you are holding the last issue of Calque. What else can I say except that there’s this magazine, Girabel, that carries the subtitle “revista de próxima autodestrucción.” Roughly translated: magazine of forthcoming self-destruction. So it goes.
Lorand Gaspar and the Poetry of the Brain

a narrative interview

by Daniela Hurezanu

When Lorand Gaspar began to study French at the age of seven he already knew Hungarian, Romanian and German, but French quickly became his favorite language. Born in 1925 in Romania, Transylvania, to a Hungarian family, he had a private tutor of French—a remarkable pianist and a highly cultivated man—who had studied at the French Conservatory, made him read Alphonse Daudet and, with his stories about that country, aroused his desire to go to France. At the age of twelve, Gaspar told his father he wanted to be a physicist and a writer; later he added that he wanted to go to college in France. He couldn't know at the time under what circumstances his wish would come to be realized.

During World War II, the northern part of Transylvania, where Gaspar lived, was given to general Horthy, governor of Hungary, as a reward for having accepted the alliance with Hitler and Mussolini. In 1944 Gaspar was accepted at the École Polytechnique in Budapest, and in December the same year, under pressure from the Germans, the entire country was mobilized. When, several months later, the Germans discovered that Horthy's son was trying to secretly sign a peace agreement in London with Churchill's government, they immediately occupied Hungary. Helped by the Germans, the right wing took power, and two to three weeks later Gaspar and other young men who had been drafted were crammed into cattle cars and sent to labor camps in Germany. Constantly fired on by the British, with quite a few wounded among them and even more dead, his "shipment" arrived after almost two months at a labor camp in a little town south of Stuttgart.

As an interpreter, Gaspar had access to the Commander's office, and was thus able to prepare and successfully lead an escape. It was spring 1945. During their escape toward the west, Gaspar and his comrades had a surprise encounter with the French army. Gaspar was allowed to speak to the Commander (called Rousseau), who, surprised at his ability to converse in French, gave him a permit in order to reach the High Command in Strasbourg, four hundred kilometers away. But, alas, when fifteen days later he reached the High Command, no one cared about his "strange story," and he ended up in a prisoner-of-war camp in Alsace, where he stayed for a whole year.

After his liberation, Gaspar, who had nearly starved to death in the camp, was still very determined to stay in France and applied for political asylum. He began his studies in medicine, obtained his citizenship in his fourth year of medical studies, and in 1955 he was named director and surgeon at the French Hospital in Jerusalem, where he lived until 1970. He then moved to Tunis, where he continued his medical practice for another twenty-five years. His life and interest in the Middle East are reflected not only in his poetry but also in several books of essays: Arabie heureuse, Carnets de Jérusalem and an impressive history of Palestine.

As a translator from several languages—English, Hungarian, German, Arabic, Greek—Gaspar translates from a third (or fourth, etc.) language into his second language. But his second language has become for him a "native language." "Since the sixties, when I began to write in French in a 'creative way,' I became completely incapable of writing in Hungarian," Gaspar told me in an e-mail. Although he can no longer write a poem in Hungarian, he has translated a certain number of Hungarian poets, as well as poems and prose from other languages, books of poetry by D. H. Lawrence, Peter Riley, R. M. Rilke, George Seferis and a study on Spinoza. Asked what he thought, as a writer of Hungarian origin and one of the most important contemporary French poets, of the belief shared by Paul Celan and Czeslaw Milosz—according to many, the twentieth-century's greatest poets—that a poet can only be true in his mother tongue, Gaspar answered: "I think it is an idea conditioned and produced by our cerebral structures of automatic functioning" (see below for more about "automatic functioning").
Lorand Gaspar is at the same time a physician and a poet—"at the same time" because, as a poet, he never forgets what he knows as a physician, and, as a physician, he never entirely puts aside his vision of the world as a poet. In some of his essays he complains that a physician has become today a kind of technical specialist. As a physician, the first imperative Gaspar says he wants to obey is to acquire scientific and technical knowledge without ever forgetting what he calls "the human presence," which is a mixture of 'heart and reason,' that is, of feeling (which is not to be mistaken for emotion) and intelligence, the latter equipped with today's knowledge and yet, open to questioning.

At eighty-two years old, Gaspar still works at the Institute for Environmental Medicine in Paris, where he is part of a team of researchers in psychology, psychopathology and psychotherapy that uses a new approach based on our present knowledge of the human brain. This new approach, known as Neurocognitive and Behavioral Therapy, was created and developed by his friend and colleague Dr. Jacques Fradin (who is in charge of the Institute), starting in 1980, and it is rooted in the work of Henri Laborit, who is considered one of the founders of neuroscience. Dr. Jacques Fradin's experience as well as that of his team of researches and therapists is constantly informed by clinical practice and by the continuous changes in this field.

The fundamental characteristic of this approach as a therapy is that, unlike psychoanalysts, these therapists are not interested in the various "mental traumas" that may happen in the life of a patient who displays so-called psychopathological problems (anxiety, depression, melancholy, phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder, etc.) since the approach is based on a premise confirmed by clinical practice, namely that our psychopathological problems are less the result of "mental traumas" that occurred mainly in childhood, as of an inappropriate use of our various cerebral structures. This "improper" use of our cerebral structures can be verified through "functional magnetic resonance imagining." The therapy sessions, which last at least an hour, consist in explaining the approach to the patient, after having listened to him. The therapy itself will reside in gradually making him understand the possible causes of his problems—which are to be gradually verified during the following sessions. Finally, this cognitive part will be followed by behavioral exercises whose goal is to overcome a certain number of "pre-conditioned" behaviors—primitive structures that can be pathogens, for example "dominance, which can be found at the family level (authoritarian parents, spoiled children) as well as in Saddam Hussein."

From a neuroscientific point of view, religions are creations of our oldest cerebral structure capable of building a human society (like those of the Middle Ages). The Muslim world, Gaspar says, still lives for the most part in our oldest structures capable of founding primitive societies. Closer to us, he adds, our European world has been disrupted by two socio-political structures based on ideologies inspired by these old structures, Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. But Westerners depending on more "evolved" religions, like Christianity, are still using the same structures, even though with less serious consequences.

Equally engaged in a scientific and a poetic understanding of the origin of the world, Gaspar is a Darwinist who makes occasional references to someone or something he calls "God" in his poems. He says that we should distinguish between poetry and social conditioning, though all beliefs, religious or ideological, have produced poems. Since the appearance of homo sapiens, we have a cerebral structure anatomically called "prefrontal brain," a structure that receives all the information elaborated in all the other cortical structures, but which, according to Gaspar, very few human beings have been able to use until the second half of the twentieth-century. If, through some accident or surgery, this human brain were to be deprived of its prefrontal structure, it would be deprived of curiosity, creativity, of the ability to adapt, of perceiving how relative our knowledge is, of the infinite complexity of things and of the surrounding world, as well as of the capacity of fully becoming an adult. This is the only structure, Gaspar explains, that can escape the various conditionings characterizing the functioning of the most used cerebral structures in the Western world; these structures correspond to what Posner has called our "Automatic Mode."

As a neuroscientist, Gaspar believes that creativity is a function of prefrontal activity, and this activity is unconscious. In neuroscientific analysis there are four main phases of the creative process, whether artistic, literary or scientific: chronic discontent with pre-existing models (long phase); chaotic, socially marginalized exploration, rebellion (long phase); illumination, the feeling of having
found before clearly knowing what (short phase); and lastly, a phase
of articulation and application, which can last for years.

In the essay “Living and Writing,” Gaspar compares the process
leading to a certain form when writing a poem, to the process of
finding a diagnosis: “Being able to find the words and forms we deem
appropriate to express what goes on in the mind and body is a step­by-step process, a little like the way a difficult diagnosis is made.” It
is as if the form or the final order of the poem is the poet’s diagnosis
when investigating the real. In the same essay, Gaspar adds: “I have
the feeling that each of these activities—writing and dealing with
language, curing and sewing back (I notice that in both there is a
phase of dissection and one of construction)—flows from the same
desire to live and see more clearly.”

The desire to see more clearly is present in many of Gaspar’s
poems, though for him clear thinking can very well be close to
darkness, insofar as it is born out of the necessity of bringing to
light and making clear certain obscure—and therefore threatening—
feelings. Clear thinking isn’t separate from the feeling of being part
of nature either. It is interesting that Gaspar’s rapport with nature
is intertwined with his scientific understanding of the world, an
understanding that doesn’t trigger the desire to dominate nature, but
to be part of it. In his view, the human being is inseparable from
Nature. In the essay “The Improbable Order,” reflecting on man’s
and earth’s common origins, Gaspar states that both are made of the
same elements, and that the same nature can be found everywhere
in the universe. He gives the example of our plasma, which, like the
ocean, contains salt. Life and evolution can only appear under certain,
well established conditions. In order for life to appear on a planet,
the planet must be at a certain distance from the heating source (in
our case, the sun). Life, a living cell, cannot begin without the pre­
existence of certain conditions, and thought cannot exist without a
body-brain.

Though it is obvious that one cannot think without being alive
and having a brain, that’s not enough, Gaspar says. One can very
well live one’s life by remaining a human being determined by the
“perinatal imprint,” that is, by the neuronal networks established
during the first two to three months after a baby’s birth. During this
time, at least ninety per cent of our neuronal networks disappear;
only those the baby has used will survive. This imprint determines
what we call our “primary personalities” until the end of our lives.
But our access to intelligence, creativity, adaptability, perception of
complexity, rationality, relativity and individuality, goes far beyond the
“automatic” motivations of personalities and their ideals proposed by
our imprint.

Patmos et autres poèmes (Gallimard, 2001, 2004) from which the
poem below is taken, is the poetic expression of a writer in whom
several cultures and civilizations have been absorbed and synthesized:
first, Central European, French and Arabic; second, all the literary
traditions he has integrated through his readings. The spaces
described are those where Gaspar has lived and traveled: Greece with
its luminous buildings, the Transylvanian snowy winters of Gaspar’s
childhood, a mountain chain in the Central Sahara, or the Arab world
and the Middle East, whose central images are the desert and the
sea. What is obvious from the spatial representations of these poems
as well as from the content of many of them is Gaspar’s quest for
origins: origin of the Western World (Greece), origin of humanity and
origin of the poem, the latter being the main “subject” of many of the
volume’s poems.

In Arabie Heureuse, Gaspar confesses to having found at Sidi­
Bou-Said a mysterious harmony between the human artifact and the
earth, the sky and the sea; and a silence in which are inscribed the
harmonies and disharmonies of the waters, the trees and the winds.
This harmony between nature and culture, between silence and the
sounds of nature, this inscription of natural elements within the very
fabric of artistic representation—be it music, painting or writing—
represent the spiritual quest present throughout Patmos. But the
“spiritual” is never separate in these poems from the corporeal, and
we can feel behind them the sensibility of a man trained in science
and medicine, a sensibility representing a synthesis between poetic
vision and scientific knowledge. As Le Monde des Livres noted in its
review of Patmos: “Few contemporary poets have managed to [...] unify to such a degree their personal experience and their perception
of the universe.”
The House by the Sea (I)

by Lorand Gaspar
Translated from the French by Daniela Hurezanu and Stephen Kessler

I

1.

pale gold, fogs of words in the cold
days and icons slowly blackening
the fingers at the edge of an untamed knowledge—

2.

cliff and keyboard of high white walls.
Windows where night doesn't surrender
sometimes catch fire—notes burning
in music beyond their time,
images fall noiselessly at night
in the waters' very dark rust—

3.

in the room's drawers
perfumed with sage and thyme
stir the sounds of the other summer
a few pebbles and polished wood
and the centuries' filth on
Alexander's noble profile
which shone one day
in the rocks' chaos underfoot—

4.

here you've seen come undone
the freshness of a way of life—
and such a hurry now
to slake a bit of quick
beauty still in the lime,
the flaked blue of a boat—

5.

and it's indeed about this little thing
I saw trembling on a wing
lighting up the unknown in a body—

6.

there were these exchanges so simple
between a silence in us and several sounds
pages turned in a book
brief squall of the mind—
outside calm restored
the sea mended its nets

7.

mornings when the world marvels
moved by an infant's hand
between a luminous ray and the mouth
and each reflection is another
cry of surprise at existing—

and the melodies, the voices
like brushes and wings
going where the open takes them—
8.

the walls' silence modesty of the word rose
whispers of scents deep inside the years
and the sea barefoot in deserted rooms—

my eyes are still caught in the night
but I already hear the day kneaded
by the Orpheus warbler in its throat—

9.

fluid and pierced by turns
little by little the mind joins
the ripening silence

and opens to the beats of the body
brief blooming among other
countless ones of a unique fugue

yearnings, failings and rebounds
vigorous brightness of fear
dissonances—unsolvable—

10.

numbers and words like a bundle
of twisted wood and illegible
broken bottles abandoned by the sea.
Once again the light so close
shows me from the outset my outline
—makes my thought illegible—
but isn't the whole light
present in each flash that touches me?

11.

I extinguish images that crash
into invisible mirrors, watching

only the deepening swirl—

yes, yes, so much spirit in the fingers,
the mute abyss of touching
picked up from things and bodies—
golden chips of a Christmas fire
when the sleigh goes by
in the snow with its weight
of a disquieting softness—

I.

I burn gently
grass of summer days
a shout of silence
in the idea of infinite—

the morning rust lays the bones bare
the sky is naked a man listens
to his heart's sounds carried by the sea—

2.

the pebbles tremble
the pebbles laugh
close ranks in the surf
are churned, close ranks again

tinkle in my pocket
decoded by my fingers
idea that I can
listen to and touch—
3.
in the day my eyes
broken water—
days of space
ceaselessly broken again—

clusters of thoughts
in the night of the body
open to the words
rising in the heart

pulsing of sameness
continuous pearling

4.
some days the stones
swarm in the twilight
their cement of gravity

the dissolved words
the eye and the hand caught
in the illicit impulse

5.
a bodylight
watches the darkness

sky in water
mountains drift
carried by mist

a child's laughter
at the night's coolness
everlasting crumbles away

6.
crumbs of seeing
fallen from what table
that no music—

when the night unveils
its whiteness to the orchard
petals buzz
at the brain's beehives

can thought ever
weigh the snow's
silence in us?

and the night write
with white words?

7.
my page is clear and the words obscure
feet of insects rowing in the cold
of the body still burrowed in its fear

I don't know how deep I had to plunge
in the same woven movement, woven again,
so the unknown of the face could surface

8.
an old family photo
slim supplement of travel
in humble search of oblivion
While I was waiting in line for the bathroom, the guy in front of me pointed out that, although the doors of the two bathrooms bore no signs or markings identifying them as pertaining to any specific gender, our fellow party-goers had separated themselves along these lines. It was true. He and I were there with two or three guys idling behind us. Across the room a slightly longer line of ladies shifted foot to foot as they waited. I said that was funny, which it was. He started talking about a series of experiments that had been done at Stanford to study this very phenomenon. I tell him that I once heard that during the filming of Planet of the Apes, in the cafeteria, all the actors dressed as gorillas sat together, apart from the orangutans and chimpanzees, who likewise sat with “their own kind,” without anyone realizing that it was happening until several weeks had passed. He laughed and the door opened, some guy came out and the guy I’d been talking to went in, came out a minute later and it was my turn. I came out and made my way to the open bar, got about halfway there and realized that the guy in front of me in line for the bathroom had been Junot Díaz. Across the room I could see Jeffery Eugenides, surrounded by a humming throng of middle-aged women. And then Dan Sociu came up and asked me if I wanted to go smoke on the roof.

Yes.

W
follows was not exactly easy. Dan is basically drifting around. I'd get an email from him saying he was in Prague, then a week later another from Berlin, then one from Bucharest three weeks after that. He had just published a novel and it was keeping him rather busy, besides the fact that his Internet access hasn't been the most reliable thing in the world. So for some of the poems that follow there is no Romanian text. The interview is not what Dan or I would have liked to produce under ideal circumstances, either. I know he wanted to edit his responses a little more and did not have the opportunity. I had several questions that we never got around to. Oh, well. As an editor I had to make the call on whether to go with what we had or not publish any of it and frankly it was a pretty easy decision to make. If anyone is pissed off about it, I guess I'll have to make it up to them.

Brandon Holmquest: What are you trying to prove?

Dan Sociu: I think I started writing to try to prove to my mother, who is a Romanian literature teacher, that I am not a completely washed up kid. Never really worked, my mother doesn't like literature. But after 25 years of teaching the same authors, I would hate Romanian literature, too. And it's not even a very entertaining literature, lots of those writers were and still are writing for the teachers, for academic appreciation. Guys from my generation are usually writing for their friends and the internet public their own age (but of course they are also publishing books), so now the circulation of the texts and the texts themselves seem more alive.

BH: What's so excessive about eXcessive Songs?

DS: eXcessive Songs is a book that I wrote long time ago, it seems to me now, even if it was published in 2005. But lots of things happened to me between now and then, really rad things. My life changed in many ways and also my brain. So I'm looking at those poems now with very distant, but somehow nostalgic eyes. I was very depressed, I'd fucked up my family life because of a bovaric fantasy (and the alcohol), I was really hating myself, but I was smart enough to write all that. Writing poetry keeps the narcissism up, especially when you have no money and no self-respect. Those poems also helped me socially, but I don't know if that was necessarily a good thing. For an alcoholic, social life is meeting people and drinking with them. I also had money, because that book got me a job, and a supergirlfriend, the kind that can party all the time and solve all the daily problems and love you and she is also a poet. But after that, the excesses got deeper, because I had more money. I became greedy and that lead to the explosion of my pancreas. After that, my whole old life died. I've quit a lots of things, including my job and my supergirlfriend. Now I've discovered Berlin, which is perfect for excess.

BH: What do you think of the following very common American idea about poetry: "poems are made out of words, not ideas"?

DS: This year, on my birthday, I got as a present from my girlfriend a pair of Camper shoes. There was something written in Spanish on the back of one of the shoes, but I couldn't tell what, and neither could my girlfriend. One evening I stepped on a couch and left behind a dusty mark of the text. I showed the text on the couch to a Spanish guy, he said: yes, it's in Spanish, but it's mirrored, so lift the shoe closer to my eyes, so I did. He looked at my shoe, tried to read it, but after a few seconds he said: man, I don't get it, maybe it's some kind of dialect. After a few months, one evening I was on acid with a friend of mine and at some point I took one of the Camper shoes from the floor and looked at it again. It says, in English: To be a revolutionary is to have common sense. I showed the shoe to my friend and he read the same sentence. I was then and I am also now in a moment of time when really weird things happen to me and, unfortunately, I am not crazy. I have witnesses. So I was so excited of course about that, but at the same time I was thinking clearly: this is not possible. All these bizarre coincidences that are happening to me lately, I can accept them, but not this. A structure cannot change into another structure just like that. I was tripping, but still hanging on to common sense. After a few days I read the shoe again. It says: Ser revolucionario es tener sentido común. A friend said to me immediately: maybe on one shoe is the Spanish text and on the other one it's in English. And of course, that was the explanation.
BH: In America, very few poets put their poems on the Internet. How do European poets use the Internet and what effect does that have on poetry in general?

DS: In Romania there is a website where I used to publish something almost every week, usually the first drafts of my poems, and got immediate response and comments. The place is called www.clubliterar.com, and it's a real club, you have to be accepted by the others. The site is visited by a lot of (mostly, but not necessarily) young people who are interested in literature or just want to watch the fights between the members, which happen on daily basis, or both. Sometimes the others' suggestions can help you, sometimes they are just reflecting the other members ideology, which is also interesting. Sometimes the young poets change the way they write because of this website. It's like a magazine, but everything is live and it's changing all the time, even if, at some point, you can predict the reactions of certain members to the texts. And everybody is very courageous in front of the computer, which is good, because you can get honest answers. Sometimes, the same people who are fighting like enemies on clubliterar are meeting in the evening and drink together, some of them even work in the same office (in newspapers, usually, like many young Romanian writers are doing, which is good for the popularity of our generation but I don't know how good it is for the writing itself). This is the best website of the kind, though there are many others, some of them with hundreds of members (there is one that has thousands of members and many more visitors each day, but the critical attitude is very low and the poetry there is 90% trash). It's difficult to say now how this is changing Romanian poetry, maybe we have to wait a few years. There are scholars who have studied these websites, but there isn't anything big about it yet. But the disadvantages of publishing on the net are obvious: on the screen, the texts lose something, sometimes a lot, the attention of the readers is weaker. You can use editing, electronic gadgets, like hyperlinks, images, music (some are doing videopoems or graphic experiments) and this is ok, but I think that the poems become somehow more real only when they are printed.

BH: When you use the word "I" in a poem, it seems like you really mean you. Do you?

DS: The "I" in my poems is less strong now than it was in the past, when I used to think that it was enough to write about myself as honestly as I could and the poetry would just pop up because of the honesty. Now I realize more and more that I am not the same, never the same, lots of things are changing essentially in my mind everyday. But that is not interesting for poetry, so I thought that what's really interesting is what is not really changing in me and that is what is common to everybody. The death business, for example – seeing yourself from that old, Heideggerian point of view of the dying creature. That, and the feeling that there's something out there. That's why I like, from American poetry, the neo-romantics like Matthew Zapruder, Anthony McCann or Paul Killebrew. They try to bring back a certain sense of mystery. And I don't think this is just an aesthetic effect, it's more like a feeling that you can find almost anywhere these days in art, in music and movies especially. The pure, confessive poetry (written usually by self-hating poets), which was influenced by Freudianism, is almost dead, like Freudianism itself.

BH: What about politics, Dan? What about identity?

DS: I used to write more socio-politically oriented poetry, but now I don't trust that kind of rhetoric, because it's everywhere, it's very fashionable in pop culture and in the media in general. I love pop culture, but I think poetry is an alternative speech to that. It's so commercial to have an angry attitude, to fantasize that you are some kind of Che Guevara (another very tired fake hero), and at the same time the real victims' lives remain exactly the same, it doesn't matter what you write. But I am very interested in investigating the schizophrenia of the official discourse in the matter of immigration. In Europe there is a hidden (not very deep, though, and not very soft either) soft-nazism. They talk about integration and open borders, and these are even regulated by law, but they do everything to discourage the free movement of the people from one place to another. They try especially to discourage poor people, by promoting the middle class way of life. In Copenhagen, for example, they play loud classical music in the train stations so that the bums can't sleep on the benches. The new right-wings are destroying all the social protection systems and they are encouraging xenophobia. The TV is teaching you to hate
yourself if you are poor, greediness is a virtue. Public transportation and food is expensive, so are rents, not to mention medical care, education. If your grandmother is from Switzerland, you can vote, even if you never lived there, but if you've lived in Zurich for more than 10 years, but you come from another country, especially an eastern one, you cannot participate in the community debates. The principle here is a very irrational one: blood. In Sweden, they accepted war refugees from Iraq until the war officially stopped. There's still a war there, everybody can tell you this, but they sent people back to Iraq, because of this language thing. In Germany, which is now the most immigrant-friendly European country, Romanians don't have the same work rights as other Europeans. This, they say, will be changed in 2012, but my question is: why not now? We are European citizens, but this law is saying that we are not, really. But for the Moldavians it's much worse. They used to come to Romania to work or to do a small trade that was helping them survive, now they have to pay a lot every year to get visas. So the writer now shouldn't try anymore to convince us that immigrants are also humans, we already know this, it's indisputable. We just have to be very paranoid all the time and make sure that nobody forgets this, to investigate the language and the language mechanisms that create ghettos. I am not talking about being politically correct, that is just a primitive tool to induce fear, I am talking about making things more clear, as Wittgenstein would say.

Love Quarantine

“We shall have everything we want and there'll be no more dying”

— Frank O'Hara
September 20th

satin

we set off early in the morning to look for a bolt of satin
last summer my brother and I went looking for a bucket of joint compound
later over a beer
he asked me if I were sorry we sold the apartment
after twenty years
now at the end of my adolescence
dad practically died there
don’t know, I answered
I didn’t know
I’d gone back by habit
every night for a month
I couldn’t find the joint compound
now we can’t find satin
andriescu has satin
radu?
a poem “satin”
yeah, I see...
a poem at any rate

musicians

pink floyd isn’t the right ambience
zdob and zdub want too much
bregovic’s busy
jokes
adolescence coming to its end
the botoșani rhapsodists troupe is too botoșani-like
so we hire five from the army
“the singing crickets”
ten-million, two-hundred-thou in advance
we the undersigned engage ourselves to mister dan sociu to play...

&
costum

in cabina de probă e strimit
transpir
trece lume pe lingă perdeaua subțire
bă io am să port costum doar în șicru
in adolescență
vorbe de bancă în parc la rockeri
la o poșă la o bidoacă
miha și vințătoarea îți dau coate
chigotesc
a fucking conspiracy

discuții

cine ciți
tocmeală
miha mingie pisica
părinții cicnesc se păpă
sala nu e gata
n-avem nași
n-avem bucătări
doar nașterea e sigură
se vorbesc antreuri
felul unu felul doi
transport
invitații
eu aduc cannabisu'ii
șoptesc mihaelei
puștani

acte

bivu' bun
singele bun
plăminii buni:
şpagă

the costume

the dressing room's narrow
I'm sweating
people pass back and forth outside the thin curtain
only in my grave will I wear a costume
the idle talk of adolescence
in the park where the rockers gather
to pass around a bottle
Miha's nudging the saleswoman
they giggle
a fucking conspiracy

&

discussions

who how many
miha pets the cat
parents clink glasses kiss
the hall isn't ready
no godfathers
no chefs
only the birth is certain
they're talking appetizers
first course second course
transport
invitations
I'll bring the pot,
I whisper to Mihaela
such kids

&

documents

HIV good
blood good
lungs good:

bribe

November 28th

Today I woke up around 11:00. Maddie&David was on TV. Miss Dipesto—who was very funny—had to report for jury duty. She was very excited, the problem was that Viola had a big family reunion and, in order to impress her relatives, she wanted to bring Miss Dipesto as her fiancée. I didn't watch the whole episode, so I don't know what happened in the end. I made myself a coffee and went to buy The Daily. I was of course interested in the supplement. (Bogdan and Eugen write for it. It also has a psychological test Mihaela and I take every Friday; today the subject was “How happy are you?” or something like that). As we'd previously decided, we started making fresh carrot and apple juice (we found some at 4000 a kilogram, not very pretty, to be sure, but just right for juice). Mihaela peeled the carrots and I washed the apples. The water was ice cold and I automatically started to think back on my childhood rheumatism. Yet I went on washing them because, I told myself, the juice would be cool and fresh. Mihaela didn't feel like making juice because, as she put it, “I'll have to spend an hour washing the juicer.” In the end my curiosity won out. Our plan was that I'd make the juice, the motor being too loud for her and the vibrations might harm the fetus. I took the juicer into the room where the computer was. We didn't have an extension in the kitchen and it was too complicated to move it to the dining room or unplug the freezer. The juice came out excellent. In the first batch, the juice had more carrots and also a very appealing reddish foam. My legs kind of hurt—because I kept having to bend—but mostly I enjoyed the procedure. Then I made some toast and ate it with margarine and mint tea. I read someplace that margarine causes arteriosclerosis. We swore that our junior would have only butter. And honey instead of sugar. And fresh juice every morning.
decembrie - ianuarie

mă simt rău
mă caut pe google

e 11:30 miba la maternitate
de trei ore

mi-e greață
n-a apărut nimic nou despre mine!

mă-nduioșează balatul ei comun de spital
vreau să fiu strins în brațe

e o dimineată bună și
nu știu ce-ai putea să-i duc de mîncare

&

am ieșit după coapă și
am văzut doi bărbați
fericiți
linșă o afumătoare și
mi-am amintit de instalățiile
lui bejenaru & arta contemporană care

(spre deosebire de ioana
fetița mea foarte
contemporană care
a trecut în 6 zile
de la perioada verde gălbui
la galben van
gogh/lucrează în pamper)
sucks!

&

December-January

I feel sick &
I'm googling myself

It's 11:30 miha's been at the maternity hospital
for three hours

I feel nauseous &
there's nothing new about me!

I'm touched by her ordinary hospital gown
I want to be held in somebody's arms

it's such a pleasant morning and
i can't think of anything to bring her to eat

&

I went out to buy onions and
I saw two happy
men
by a smoke house and
I recalled bejenaru's
installations & contemporary art which

(unlike ioana
my very contemporary
little girl who
in six days went from
her yellowish-green period to van-
gogh yellow / she does her installations on pampers)
sucks!

&
abia aştept să crească iouţa
să putem vorbi pe-ndelete
dimineaţa o găsesc lingă mine pe pernă&
e foarte ciudată
miha îmi povesteşte cum ninge afară
cred că peste citeva ore
voi da o fugă până la feriostră
plănuit complicată mîncăuri din flori
şi mîncăm ouă
mi-ar fi plăcut să fi aruncat aseară la gunoi
şi un brad
ceea ce nu înseamnă
că am avut nişte sărbători mizerabile
dimpotrivă
&
am stabilit că iooana nu e fiica noastră
ea e prietena noastră
puţin cam infantilă
dar tocmai de-asta
atît de simpatizată
în gâscă
&
cind zimbeşte
e o băbăţă
care flirtează
cu poştăful
în ziua de pensie!
se spune că mirosul ei
îmi scade agresivitatea

I'm looking forward to my little iooana growing up
so we can indulge in long chats
in the morning i find her beside me on the pillow &
it's very strange
miha tells me it's snowing outside
I think in a few hours I'll take a walk
to the window
we're planning to cook complicated dishes of flowers
and we're eating eggs
I wish I had thrown away the Christmas tree
last night
which doesn't mean
we had a miserable holiday
on the contrary
&
we've decided that iooana isn't our daughter
she's our slightly infantile
friend
but exactly because of that
she's so simpatico
to our gang
&
when she smiles
she's an old lady
who flirts
with the mailman
on the day her pension arrives!
they say that her scent
decreases my aggressiveness
dimineața îmi lipesc nasul
de obrazul ioanei
trag adinc în piept
cit să-mi ajungă pentru
întreaga zi

&
patru mii așează bănuțele ude
pe un calorifer mii de bărbat
cu venele umflate degete galbene
unghiile netăiate și mii mici
mai indeeminatice
căciulițe ciorăpei pe elementii albi
elememții negri în lumina
de iarnă

&
dacă ieşim din cameră
lăsăm radioul deschis
și ea crede că sintem cu ea
nu e nici o problemă
și nouă ni s-a făcut la fel
duminică trecută
de exemplu
dădeau slujba
și nenea teoctist
avea o zdrăngănică
exact ca a noastră!

&
și toate minunile asta
vor fi și miine aici!

in the morning I stick my nose
to ioana’s cheek
I take a deep breath
so that it will last me
all day long

&
four hands arrange damp baby clothes
on the radiator a man’s hands
with swollen veins yellow fingers
uncut nails and smaller hands
more skillful
little hats little stockings on the white metal fins
black fins
in the winter light

&
if we go out of her room
we leave the radio on
so she believes we’re with her
there’s no problem
they did it with us as well

last sunday
for example
they were broadcasting the service
and mister patriarch teoctist
swung a tinkling toy
just like ours!

&
and all these wonders
will be here again tomorrow.
four sonnets

When it was over he forgot about me immediately, but his face was partly stuck on mine. More and more unfamiliar. Livelier and colder. When it ends with her she'll forget about me immediately and so what. The spine of the shaking world is tightly clinched by an IV's branula. And syringes, lots of syringes to keep it still. In a small, dirty room in the back. If it doesn't cure you completely, it doesn't cure you at all. His face and her face grafted onto mine over and over, I'm sick. I'm pedaling my bike between trees and brutalize myself to keep the joy hormone afloat. Hither the heart of the forest, I can hear the rain swelling at the rhythm of self-digestion.

Five weeks on the floor and sometimes the light changes. The famous ultrarapid Berliner clouds pass by electrifying my beard. When you're a child and your brain is a pair of dark rings you think that people in the movies are sentenced to die and yearn for a bit of realism. But now you're here in the sleep lab and can think of something else. Last night this sticky snow fell, the kind that doesn't come off. In a short film of me driving an ATV I inserted images of Mars. I erased all the movies I made on the plane. I even erased the plane so except for a few clouds it's only me holding a steaming cup of tea.
That night it snowed and by dawn
the ground came up to the window.
The old sisters' wheelchair glided past us
in the dark hallway. We got dressed and went out
to take tests. We ate fast food next to a window
and watched the snow melt around their feet.
On the way back we heard a phone ring
in an empty booth. I got in and answered.
They wanted the national bank. We went on
and crossed the street straight through the middle of one
of the longest imageless dreams of all time,
and because a big part of what we did was during life
it shone a little. The way she handed money to the taxi driver
shone a little.

A long time ago there weren't so many planes
and the sky was clearer; the luminous dots
were less colorful but they held still.
But back then who stayed up
to stare at the stars. I was too small
and the confusing way the days
switched places filled my whole head.
I've never really had any need for meaning.
But I do need more things that aren't
explosions or three months of snow every year
to be convinced that the world can get out
of the world, even a little. Anything more than that
is only light, which is coming and going without
carrying away, bringing back, or leaving a mark.
Osip Mandelstam

from The Voronezh Notebooks

// Translated from the Russian by
John High and Matvei Yankelevich //

With the publication of his first book, Stone, in 1913, Osip Mandelstam became recognized as one of the outstanding poets of his time. Along with Nikolai Gumilev and Anna Akhmatova, he was a founder of Acmeism, a movement in opposition to both Symbolism and Futurism and with similar aesthetics as that of the American Imagists. After the Civil War and the emergence of the new Soviet state, those of his colleagues who remained in Russia joined up with official Soviet culture (with varying degrees of hesitation), or were persecuted for remaining true to the bohemian lifestyle, aesthetics and ethics of the modernist period—the Silver Age. Unwilling or unable to change his writing for the sake of the Socialist cause and therefore marginalized to a great extent as a cultural figure, Mandelstam survived in the Soviet system as long as he did because of the influence and help of such important political and literary figures as Nikolai Bukharin and Boris Pasternak. While many were out to destroy Mandelstam, many others of the literary establishment did everything from buy him clothes to petition the Bolshevik bosses on his behalf.

Though Mandelstam's paradoxical commitment to the revolution into the early 1930's is undeniable, his resistance to the brutality of the new order was fermenting. His well-known "wolf" poem of 1931 suggests the image of Stalin and his own preference to live out his life in the "Siberian steppes." In 1934 he wrote a poem depicting the dictator's body in the language of "worms" and "cockroaches." "One gets it in the balls," Mandelstam wrote of Stalin's victims, "the other in the forehead, one split between the eyes." Though he thought he had read this poem only to a small group of close friends, one had turned informant and Mandelstam was arrested, and eventually sent into exile in the city of Voronezh in central Russia.

After his arrest and torture in the Lyubankia, having given the names of everyone in his circle of poets, Mandelstam was guilt-ridden and attempted suicide on two occasions. If it were not for a phone conversation between Stalin and Pasternak, Mandelstam would have surely been sent immediately to the camps and certain death.

Mandelstam referred to the poems written after his arrest as "the new poetry" (commonly known as "the later poetry" in the West)—a complex fusion of classicism, high modernism and Soviet popular culture. The body of verse written in his Voronezh exile consists of three "notebooks." The first was written from April to August 1935, the second from December 6, 1936 to the end of February 1937, and the third from the beginning of March to May 4, 1937. The poetry of the Voronezh Notebooks is layered with subtle references to nineteenth-century literature, the crisis of the emerging Soviet regime, and the metaphorically disguised codes of the poet's "resurrection" in verse. Mandelstam wrote primarily while walking and memorizing the poems, for his poetry was by then strictly forbidden. He wrote the Notebooks under the constant awareness and threat of his inevitable death, which finally came in a transit camp near Vladivostok on December 27, 1938.

In the period of 1935-1937, however, Mandelstam did all he could to save himself and his wife. He wrote letters to the Soviet Writers Union and to Stalin himself, and poems (including his infamous "Ode" to Stalin)—frantic efforts to redeem himself. He wanted his poetry published and accepted by the regime that eventually destroyed him. He never relinquished hope of returning to publication in these darkening conditions, but unlike his friend and contemporary Boris Pasternak, Mandelstam did not succeed in his attempt to navigate his poetry into "acceptable" Soviet culture.

This year, a monument in his memory was erected in Moscow—marking the 70th anniversary of his death.

The five poems selected for this publication are all taken from the first notebook (they are #8, #14, #15, #17, and #19 in the sequence).

—John High and Matvei Yankelevich
От сырой простыни говорящая —
Знать, нашелся на рыб звукопас —
Надвигалась картина звучащая
На меня, и на всех, и на вас...

Начихав на кривые убыточки,
С папироской смертельной в зубах,
Офицеры последней выточки —
На равнины зияющий пах...

Было слышно жужжание низкое
Самолетов, горевших дотла,
Лошадиная бритва английская
Адмиральные щеки скребла.

Измеряй меня, край, перекраивай —
Чуден жар прикреплённой земли! —
Заклебнулась винтовка Чапаева:
Помоги, развяжи, раздели!...

Speaking, off a damp sheet
—They've found a soundherd for the fish—
The sound picture advances
On me, at everyone, and you too...

They had spat on their crooked little losses,
Deathly cigarettes in their teeth,
Officers cast from the latest & final dye—
On the plain's gaping groin...

You could hear the low buzzing—
Planes that have burned to the ground,
The hoarse scrape of an English razor
Against the admiral's cheeks.

Measure me, native ground, refit me—
Miraculous heat of the parceled earth!
Chapaev's rifle gasping for air:
Help, untangle me—pull us apart!...

(April—June, 1935)

Note: In April 1935, in Voronezh, Mandelstam watched the film “Chapayev,” released the previous year. This movie and its hero are the impetus for this poem. Vasily Ivanovich Chapayev (1887–1919) was a decorated WWI soldier who joined the Bolshevik party in 1917 and achieved legendary status as a division commander in the Red Army during the Civil War. He purportedly drowned in the Ural River, attempting to flee a White Army ambush. The fictional film—directed by Georgi and Sergei Vasilyev, and based on a book by Dmitri Furmanov—became a classic of Soviet cinema. Mandelstam scholar Yuri Freidin suggests that the sheet (the screen on which the movie is shown) is damp because it has been wetted to make it hang smoothly. Soundherd—a neologism made from the word for sound and a suffix that means herder, as in shepherd. The officers are White Army officers, the last of the Tsar's loyal forces. The Admiral is a reference to Admiral Kolchak (1874-1920), leader of the White Army's Siberian front against the Bolsheviks.
Not as the white moth dusted with flour
To the earth will I return this borrowed ash—
I want this thinking body
Transformed into a street, a country:
This spinal charred body,
Conscious of its length.

The call of the dark green pine needles,
Wreaths the color of a well's depth
Pull life and precious time along,
Leaning on mounts of death:
Red flag pine needles in a ring,
Wreaths like bold alphabets!

Comrades of the latest draft
Going about their work in the coarse skies,
Silently the infantry carries by
Exclamations of rifles on their shoulders.

And thousands of anti-aircraft guns—
Eyes either brown or blue—
Walking in disorder—people upon people:
Who will continue in their stead?

(Spring—Summer 1935; May 30, 1936)

Note: The scene described in the poem is a ceremonial burial for airplane pilots. Mandelstam may have seen newsreel footage of the crash of an agit-prop plane— the Maksim Gorky—on May 18, 1935.
St. Isaac's dome frozen on dead eyelashes
And the barons' streets are blue—
Death of the organ-grinder, the bear rug's nap,
A strangers' logs in the fireplace.

The huntsman-fire flushes out
A flock of crisscrossing lines,
The earth hurdling—a furnished sphere—
And the mirror acting the smartass.

From landing to landing—discord & fog,
Breathing, breathing & singing,
Schubert's talisman caught in a fur coat—
Movement, movement, movement...

(June 3, 1935)

Note: The apartment described is probably the setting for Mandelstam's rendezvous with Olga Vaksel, with whom he had a brief love affair, several years before the writing of this poem. The view from the window is of St. Isaac's cathedral—one of the most prominent buildings in Petersburg, situated near the center of town. The organ-grinder in the first stanza may be a reference to Schubert's Winterreise cycle. (The composer's name appears in the last stanza, and references to music are visible throughout the poem.)
The full-weighted ingots of Roman nights,
A bosom that beckons a young Goethe—
I'll answer for this, but I'm not in the red:
There's a bottomless life outside the law.

(June, 1935)
Исполню дымчатый обряд:
В опале предо мной лежат
Морского лета земляники —
Двуискренние сердолики
И муравьиный брат — агат.

Но мне милей простой солдат
Морской пучины — серый, дикий,
Которому никто не рад.

I'll carry out the smoke-colored rite:
In disgrace before me lie
Wild strawberries from a summer sea—
The two-faced candor of cornelian quartz,
And agate—brother of the ant.

Though I'm fonder of the simple soldier
Of the sea's abyss, wild & gray,
Who pleases no one.

(June, 1935)

Note: The word for 'disgrace' in Russian, опала, resonates with the name of the stone, opal. Nadezhda Yakovlevna Mandelstam had been to the Black Sea shore (at Koktebel, where—in happier times—they both visited the poet Maximilian Voloshin) and brought back some colorful stones from the beach to Voronezh for her husband.
Bohumil Hrabal

“Baptism, 1947”

// Translated from the Czech by Ema Katrovas //

In his poem “Beerspective,” the Czech poet Pevel Srut sits in a Prague pub, sometime “towards the end of the seventies/or eighties,” and “babble[s] much” with “few words.” When he leaves the pub, he sees a bus full of hunters arrive behind the Law School after their latest hunt. Confronted by this juxtaposition (at the time a fitting representation of Czechoslovak law) he returns to the pub “where a turned up glass is a telescope through which one may see/the close from afar.” Bohumil Hrabal (1914-1997), a Czech novelist and short-story writer, took on the task of seeing the close from afar with more “beerspective” than most writers. Best known for his three later novels, Closely Watched Trains, Too Loud a Solitude and I served the King of England, he is considered one of the most important writers of the Czech language. In his earlier work, Hrabal was a hyper-realist, though his love of reproducing spoken Czech appears throughout his work. All of the short stories in his collection Perlicka na Dne (Pearl in the Dregs, 1963), including “Baptism, 1947,” revolve around everyday conversations leading to no particular resolution. Each story in this collection is a study, a sketch, of live speech.

Though Hrabal’s work seems more motivated by the music of language than by social commentary, “Baptism, 1947” must be regarded within its historical and political context. In 1956, the Communist party secured a majority in the parliament. Czechoslovakia didn’t become a communist country, however, until the People’s Militia secured the boarders and a new, Communist government was formed in early 1948. “Baptism, 1947” is set in a time when Czechoslovakia’s fate may have been sealed, but the injustices and banality associated with the forty-one years to come were only about to begin in February of the next year. It is autumn when the story takes place both seasonally and, in terms of the end of a short-lived post-World War II era, historically.

During the Stalinist trials of the 1950s, six thousand religious people received prison sentences, and in the decade after the communist take-over, the number of clergy in Czechoslovakia diminished by half. The characters of “Baptism, 1947,” a salesmen and a clergyman, would likely lead significantly different, though equally tragic, lives in the winter to come. The idea of imminent demise is present throughout the priest’s and funeral salesman’s conversation as well as in the priest’s attempts to illegally poach animals by hitting them with his car. Baptism takes on an entirely different meaning in 1947 Czechoslovakia and in Hrabal’s story; not only is it a religious ritual, but a secular celebration of birth in the midst of death.

– Ema Katrovas
Baptism, 1947

He sat in the ditch next to the main road. The sun had set but the stars hadn't come out yet, so he sat in the ditch and watched cars and motorcycles zoom past. One car put on its lights and its opposite did the same. That is how evening began on the highway. All the vehicles swept the road in front of them with coquettishly downcast lights. Then one car switched on its headlights, and the beams splattered the asphalt between the rows of surrounding trees. That is how night began on the highway.

Nearby, a bus wheezed to a stop then left again with two ruby-lights on its behind. The man knew this was his bus and that it would take him to the small town where he had arranged to stay for the night, but he sat in the ditch instead, looking at the other side of the field where beams of light were mingling, blinkers blinking, head lights politely dimming and taillights drawing away from each other.

A deep forest lay behind him. The wall of a forester’s lodge glowed white on its edge. A green lamp floated out of the lodge, swinging back and forth to the rhythm of its invisible bearer. It disappeared behind the bushes, appeared again, disappeared again.

Who's carrying that petroleum lamp along the building at the forest’s edge? he thought. Then two headlights turned from the main road, blinding him. Brakes screeched.

"Want a ride?" asked a pleasant male voice.

"Sure" he answered and swung himself up from the ditch with one arm and slipped into the seat next to the driver.

"Where are you headed?" asked the chauffeur.

"Wherever you are."

"Then I guess we’re headed in the same direction." the driver laughed. He rolled down the window, put his palm to the air and felt with bliss the cool evening air streaming through his fingers. “It smells like mother’s herb cabinet,” he said with a relish.

"Is that an oak forest?"

"Beech..."

"Too bad. My beloved and lucky card was an acorn nine. A dead bird..." said the hitchhiker.

"You hear?" the driver listened. "That’s a Zundapp! It's marching along, you hear? Like a Bavarian!" and he listened to the approaching motorcycle, and when it passed, it flashed its shiny drum. “It is a Zundapp” he said with satisfaction. “So, who are you?” he asked.

“I sell funerals.”

“Ah!”

“Yes. Do you love your mother? Do you love your father? Pre-pay a beautiful funeral for them with Arimath,” he recited, then added in a different voice, “that’s the company I work for.”

“Really?” said the driver in disbelief, tightening his grip on the wheel.

Further down the road, a rabbit was frolicking, then froze as it gazed deep into the head lights. Its eyes bulged. The driver stepped on the gas, but the wild rabbit shook off the spell and jumped, head first, into the ditch. Its white tail tucked itself into the darkness.

“Darn!" said the driver.

The hitchhiker added: “He could have had a beautiful funeral. In a baking dish, richly decorated with browned onion, garlic, lard, bay leaf and a few beads of pepper and allspice.”

“And a pinch of nutmeg” the driver added “I still don’t believe you. You know what? I’ll give you a ride, and in turn you can give me a funeral!”

“Deal,” said the seller of funerals “But first, who are the dead?” he asked.

“The dead are those who came before us.” laughed the chauffeur.

“Great answer! So who wouldn’t want a beautiful funeral?”

“I don't long for one much!”

“All right, but like everyone, you surely want your journey to eternity to be so glamorous that people talk about it ten years later. They’d say: ‘Today’s funeral’s aren’t funerals at all. But ten years ago so and so had a funeral - what was his name?- and that was some funeral!’

I think you would look best in the "Egyptian Sarcophagus," type 7. It’s better to pay a little extra. Dying is better if you do.”

A pheasant swung up from the ditch, a beautiful beast with foppish feathers and emerald eyes. It saw the head lights, raised one leg in surprise, and gazed with fascination into the irresistible light.

The driver turned the wheels abruptly; but the pheasant took flight, the vibrant colors of its feathers gathering across the head lights, and with a powerful blow of its wings, it flew close by the window; its legs, horizontal and glowing, drifted up into the darkness.
“Darn!” hissed the driver.

“He redeemed himself,” the hitchhiker said with relief. “He flew from his tin coffin and so distanced his natural end along with the honors you had in mind for the rabbit... but a pheasant is best off with a sprig of thyme!” the hitchhiker raised a finger.

The driver didn’t reply.

Then, from behind, two powerful head lights pushed past, flashing to show how they longed to pass. “Go ahead, go ahead...” said the chauffeur, waving his hand into the light, and driving to the very edge of the road “that’s a Ford—the milkman.”

And at that moment a truck with a cistern zoomed past the window and grew distant again.

“He’s going ninety;” said the driver with satisfaction and added, laughing, “On the main road, over by the turn, a cottager was leaving the field with his cows... a Ford just like that flew by and skidded on the curve and the cistern came off, flew over the cottager, and broke against a tree... the cottager with his cows almost drowned in milk!”

After the image of a milk flood had passed, the chauffeur asked: “So what’s my funeral like?”

“A ceremonial hall richly draped with black; in front of your coffin a magnificent silver cross; thirty-six quarter-kilo candles; would you like your horses to have mourning plumes? That would be fifty crowns per horse. Then...”

“All right, all right I believe you. But by how you talk...what were you before you began this sad profession? Tell me...”

“A sexton.”

“Wow!” the chauffeur hit the wheel with his palms, “That’s too much! And what were you before you were a sexton?”

“A professional gambler. I used to have a stake at the Gotes. I played on God’s will until one day I wandered into a church and thought: I wonder what they do here? And when I saw the chaplain serve mass, I thought: That’s the profession for me! And so I became a verger...now I’d like to do it again...”

A doe trotted out of the forest, leapt over the ditch, and was making its way across the road. It turned and looked into the head lights. The driver stepped on the gas and settled himself in. He hissed: “Hold on so you don’t smash my window with you forehead.”

And the doe got bigger and bigger, until it could have sniffed the lights. The driver turned the steering wheel sharply, scooped the doe up and hurled it away with his dashboard; the doe flew through the air, its back arched, down into the ditch. Brakes screeched.

With his whole body turned to the back window, the driver reversed. He stopped. Blue smoke ascended in the head lights from the over-heated engine.

Everything was quiet.

The driver got a hunting knife out of the glove compartment, stepped out of the car and handed the hitchhiker a flashlight. “Hold this!” he commanded. He looked around; the road was abandoned on both sides. Only a few ginger leaves fell in zigzags to the ground.

The doe was in the ditch, lying on its side, scrambling with its legs into the fallen leaves and clawing into the dark earth. When it saw the man and was blinded once more by light, it wanted to run away from its broken body. It rolled over a few times on the ground and bleated mournfully. Then it stayed quiet, eyes wide, blood streaming from its nose.

The chauffeur looked both ways; no one was on the road. Having assessed the situation, he took a mighty leap onto the beast and pinned it to the ground. But the doe was strong. It lifted the heavy man and tried to shake him off. He wrestled it into the fallen leaves again and the doe licked his hair a few times as if pleading for mercy. He pulled a hand free; the dagger flashed then sunk between the doe’s ribs, into the heart... Only then did the doe went quiet and loose, until it went limp entirely and stretched out, a diamond tear falling out of its eye...

The driver knelt, lifted himself heavily, then picked a twig from a nearby pine tree, snapped it in half, put one half into the doe’s mouth, the other into the wound on its chest.

“Ok, now let’s move fast!” he said and ran to the car and took a blanket from the back seat. He unfolded it on the ground, scooped up the doe and gently placed it on the blanket like a sleeping child. He tied the blanket into a knot and carried it to the back seat.

When he sat down behind the wheel he thought better of it and returned to the ditch to polish the earth with his shoe and draw together an armful of leaves to cover up the signs of a struggle...

He started the engine and when the car was on the road again he said: “You wouldn’t believe it: if she gets you with her hoof she can rip you open through your clothes like the sharpest knife.”

“Poor thing,” said the man who sold funerals.
A brass moon glowed above the clearing.

The driver talked to hide his excitement: "You wouldn't believe the things people plead for, nowadays! Back where I'm from, in the city, some boys broke into the church at night, lit the candles on the main altar, and served mass all by themselves! One sang: 'God, let it be that we may dance the Boogi-Woogi. Please, God, let it be that we may dance the Boogi-Woogi.' And the others replied in chorus: 'Please Lord, let us dance the Boogi-Woogi.' I swear it's true: 'Please Lord, let us dance the Boogi-Woogi.' So they led this midnight mass and broke the locks to the storage cabinets and put on the ceremonial robes. Then they wanted to play Jazz on the organs, but instead of pushing the electric organ button they pushed the electric bells button, and the church bells started ringing...and people ran out of their houses and saw that the lights were on in the church...they looked through the key hole and saw the boys running around in robes...they broke open the door but the boys ran out through a side entrance...At noon the verger was still picking up robes from willows behind the city...over by the brook." the driver was laughing and driving with one hand as he felt the doe on the back seat with the other "She's out." he said with satisfaction and added "Once a doe ripped my car seats open to the metal springs with a post-mortem twitch! A quarter hour after I did her in! But what with young people? The moment you don't give them what they want, they take it anyway...I mean, let them dance the Buggi-Woggi, for Christ's sake!"

They drove out of the forest and the moon shone on the rippling landscape. The car was approaching a large town.

Here came the first street lamp, under which two young men were leaning against bicycles, smoking and talking; then someone lit a match above a pile of logs, illuminating the rim of a hat. The clinking of chains and mooing of cows issued from the industrial stables.

"I'm on the spot." said the chauffeur "If you want, you can sleep in the tavern inn; they have a small room, there." He stopped in front of a two-story house. All the windows were lit and an old gramophone was playing through the walls.

They got out of the car, and the driver locked it carefully.

"Is there any blood?"

"Show me," said the man who offered funerals, and examined the noble countenance in the glow of a street lamp. "A little over here."
Qutban from Mirigavati

// Translated from the Hindavi by Aditya Behl //

'The Path of True Feeling':
On Translating Qutban's Mirigavati?

Some years ago, I was blocked on a book manuscript that had taken me eight years to complete, a genre study of the literary tradition of the Hindavi Sufi romances from the sultanate period of Indian history, extending from the establishment of the centralized Delhi sultanate in 1206 to the consolidation of Akbar's Mughal empire in the late sixteenth century. I had produced a chronologically arranged reading of each romance, but found myself repeating myself in many places and everywhere subject to the tyranny of plot summary. The book manuscript, due at Oxford University Press, lay fat and forbidding on my desk. It had won me tenure, and was the essential companion to my collaborative blank verse translation of Shaikh Maiijhan's Madhumalati, a mid-sixteenth century romance from the Shaghai Sufi order. Yet I could not send it in to press, because I was not happy with my own account of the poetics of the genre. Until I understood how these romances worked as spiritual texts, I could not adequately represent them in print. I felt that scholarly integrity demanded no less, and I withheld the manuscript from publication.

I turned my hand to something else, a blank verse translation of another text from the genre, Shaikh Qutban Suhravardi's Mirigavati, composed in 1503 at the court-in-exile of the cultivated Jaunpur Sultan, Husain Shâh Sharqi. The author is only known to us from the prologue of his poem, which effaces all personal mention. All the information we have about the particular branch of the Sufi order to which the poet belonged is contained in a dedicatory verse to his own spiritual preceptor, Shaikh Bu<;l<;lhan Suhravardi. Looking in the sources for the identity and precise location of Shaikh Bu<;l<;lhan, whose affectionately shortened name means simply "the big son" or "the eldest one", is a bit like looking for someone named Joe in America or Alexandro in Mexico. At least three are known from the published history of the sultanate of Jaunpur, one of whom meditated in a small cell that you may inspect today near the Central Post Office in the city of Jaunpur, site of an annual fair. There are also numerous Persian manuscripts genteelly decaying in archives and shrine libraries, awaiting the spade and trowel of the researcher. Who knows what is contained in them?

Jaunpur was an important regional sultanate, founded in the 1390's by one of the eunuchs of the house of Firúz Shâh Tughlaq in Delhi, the line descending as an independent kingdom through an adoptive son after Timur the Lame sacked Delhi in 1398. Part of the trouble is that Jaunpur itself was taken apart stone by stone, saving only five mosques, by the armies of the Lodi Sultan of Delhi in the 1480's, ending a long struggle between Sultan Husain Shâh Sharqi's military pretensions and the might of Delhi. So Shaikh Qutban's romance, while from the court of Jaunpur, was actually composed and performed for a Sultan in exile in a village in Bihar after the loss of Jaunpur, a city of poetry and the arts famed as the Shiraz of India. Sultan Husain Shâh Sharqi was himself a noted musician, composer, patron of the arts, in short, the ideal civilized patron with the time and leisure to savour artistic, poetic, and musical offerings.

The Mirigavati was also a teaching text for novices in the Sufi order to which Shaikh Qutban belonged, the Suhravardis. The romance begins with the hero, called simply Râjku!!var or 'Prince', riding out to the hunt with a company of noble retainers. He sees in the forest a glimmering seven-coloured doe, the Mirigavati or magical

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1. This introduction was delivered in November, 2008 as a lecture entitled "On Reading Enigmatically" at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. The author would like to thank J. S. Hawley for his comments on an early draft, and D. F. Plukker for his aid in reconstructing the text from the manuscript evidence. The author is also obliged to the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts for their generous assistance in bringing this translation to completion.
"doe-woman" of the title. He follows, and is soon separated from his companions. The doe lures him to an enchanted lake into which he vanishes. Although the Prince jumps in, she is gone and he is left lamenting. He will not return to court, and stays there meditating on the vision he has seen. His father builds a palace for him on the lake's shore. This motif inaugurates a long and elaborate romance in which the Prince first captures the magic doe, who is really the heroine Mirigavati, by trickery, then has to regain her through many difficult ordeals, including rescuing a Princess, Rupmini, and marrying her, then undergoing further trials and tribulations before dying at the end and being burnt on a pyre with his two wives.

Comparison with the Suhravardi sources did not yield any schema which would explain the text. The Hindi critics and critical editors of the texts seemed to focus largely on finding adequate categories with which to avoid embarrassment over the fact that the first large-scale narrative and devotional literature in Hindi was written by Muslims. They foundered alternately on the Scylla and Charybdis of pious Hindu nationalism with its purist categories and alankāra-śāstra ("the science of ornament") or Sanskrit aesthetics, with its endless sub-categories. The Urdu critics had simply buried their heads in the sand when it came to precursors of Urdu, invented in their view definitively, once and for all, in Mughal Delhi circa 1700. The process involved, aside from a ludicrous over-Persianization that is to be seen at its hyperaesthetic nadir in the writings surrounding the College of Fort William since its inception in 1800, a wilful forgetting of the bread-and-butter part of Urdu's origins, the desi bhāṣā or spoken language that the Delhi poets and lexicographers sought to refine in an Islamicate direction.

It is the question of the demotic, the Hindustani that everyone speaks but no one claims, that haunts the drawers of boundaries between Hindi and Urdu, and will continue to do so until they redraw the political spectrum as a spectrum, not a dualism nestling neatly within the binaries of religion and region. The two ends of the spectrum may encode a radical difference of worldview, but any form of social organization requires a pluralistic understanding of a range of possible options, preferably without the political will to delineate or to police any such options. We cannot continue to apply blindly the classical European model of the nation state, with its historical specificities of united languages, territories, and ethnicities, if not religions, to the polities of Asia, Africa, and the Americas as if there were no significant historical differences between these continents and their histories.

In short, then, aside from the text, I had no sources of illumination, and pretty soon I was waffling about intercontinental cultural politics. A moment that all writers, critics and teachers have known. Just the romance. That's it. Explain it to us, son, you've just spent another eight years translating this unknown medieval text, you didn't publish your book, what does it all add up to? That makes half a young lifetime, sixteen years. A long time in which to ponder the workings of a literary tradition removed by five centuries from my own lifetime. I had no flipping idea. Then the dreams began. To my amazement, my dreams the next few nights led me through sections of the romance I had just finished translating, and pointed again and again to the palace the Prince's father had built for him, included in the section translated here. The palace was a building 'with four parts' (caturarmga), and had seven stories, and atop it was a four-sided caukbānḍi over broad balconies with four gateways or doors with steps (paurnā). Okay. In case you are wondering, I am not a new age loonie. I left graduate school at Chicago a confirmed Marxist in spirit. Tout. So what was happening? I was not accustomed to dream visions as regular sources of enlightenment.

When I awoke, I mapped the building and realized that its structure and ornamentation encoded certain messages. As a caturamga, or four-part building, it was a four-sided palace encoding a quest in four stages. That was the most basic division, and it had seven stories with jharokhās or windows set in. The palace of four had also four gateways or doors, one on each corner. The reason why they had to be on the corners rather on the sides of the building was because the poet also mentions that it seemed as if broad balconies or atārīs were set on all four sides. This means that there could not be gates in the middle of each side, for they would break up the expanse of the wall. Therefore the gates or doors had to mark the progression from one side of the
building, one stage, to the next, meaning that there would be ways to signal these turning points in the text. Alūris are roofs or balconies from which, in the world of Indian poetry, the lovelorn heroine watches out for the return of her lover. Here, they seem to be used as a way to direct the gaze inwards, as for instance to look at each side of the building structuring an inner journey as a distinct stage in the work of spiritual cleansing. The seven stories suggest also that there is a structure of spiritual ascent somewhere in the quest, which most plausibly fits in before the meeting with divinity, i.e., the attainment of union with the divine heroine of the romance. Atope the building is a caukhandhi, a miniature dome supported by four arches, found as a tomb ornament in sultanate architecture. It is also attested in literary texts of the period as a house built around all four sides of a central courtyard. Here we have to take it as a cupola, a little dome set on four arches, since the poet has specified that it rests on top of the building. In the architectural and symbolic grammar of the period a cupola signifies a tomb ornament, meaning that death will come as the end of this particular quest.

Let us take the seven stories first, the structure of spiritual ascent. I had earlier written a paper on an allegorical clue in a single line at the end of the Prince's quest, when he leaps over seven steps to enter Mirigāvati's palace gate. After being tested, he is deemed worthy and Mirigāvati grants him his nuptials. At the precise moment that the Prince ascends the seven steps of the palace gate, the poet clues us into to what is going on by saying that each step had a different bhāva, a different feeling or emotion. Thinking back to the path he has just traversed, I could see that it had seven distinct stages: (1) the delineation of the quest and its object, prema rasa, the sublimated juice of love and the introduction of the hero and heroine, the principal characters, turning point: Mirigavati leaves and the Prince puts on yogic garb to start his quest; (2) the seven stages of his quest, turning point: the Prince sits under a tree and hears two birds talking about a Prince who is near the object, bhāva; (3) landing on a shore preyed on by a man-eating sea-serpent and surviving; (4) rescuing a Princess, Rūpmini (Beauty or Form), from a seven-headed demon, thus introducing the secondary heroine, the wife who represents the world; (5) marrying the Princess under duress, but living chastely within marriage; (6) being guest to a cannibal herdsman, whom he blinds in an episode curiously reminiscent of the Odysseus and the Cyclops; and (7) passing a night in deadly danger in a palace full of the illusions of sensuality. In particular, the episode in the cannibal herdsman's cave keeps mentioning sat bhāva, 'true feeling', which is also cited in the prologue as the path taught by Qūṭbān's preceptor, Shaikh Buddhān Suhrawardī. The word sat conceals a pun, for it means both 'truth' and 'seven', the number of stages of emotional refinement on this path of true feeling.

The seven stages each involve dealing with emotions like fear, lust, gluttony, and temptation. The point in all these seven episodes is that they refine human bhāva or emotion, feeling, until the listener can get the Sufi message. The narrative design here uses each stage of the seven ordeals to show how each emotion can be turned around and controled through fasting, breath control, gīk, what have you. An entire basic regimen of Sufi exercises for gaining mastery of the self and its impulses. What do you know ... and now the building offered me an architectonics for the text, a framework within which to set these seven stages of emotional refinement. The stages began with becoming a jogi and taking initiation with a spiritual guide. Like life, there are different guides at different points in the narrative, leading up to the meeting with the heroine, divinity, after the hero had done the basic work of turning around the baser drives to which the human race is prone.

It was fascinating work putting the pieces together, the four stages of the quest marked by turning points, portals at each corner of the four-sided palace, as follows: (1) the delineation of the quest and its object, prema rasa, the sublimated juice of love and the introduction of the hero and heroine, the principal characters, turning point: Mirigavati leaves and the Prince puts on yogic garb to start his quest; (2) the seven stages of his quest, turning point: the Prince sits under a tree and hears two birds talking about a Prince who is near the object of his quest, Kanchanpur, the City of Gold; (3) the Prince's sojourn in the City of Gold, the metal here used in the sense of alchemical purification and transmutation into gold of the seeker, turning point: the dispatch of the bārub-māsā, the account of her sufferings through the twelve months by the worldly wife, Rupmini; and (4) the Prince's journey back into the world, his reintegration with the rhythms of worldly life, turning point: the arrival of the hunter and his request for the Prince's intervention with the tiger. This last turning point marks the passage into the end of the quest, the caukhandhi, the tomb ornament signifying fana after the four stages are completed,
the balance between material and spiritual aspects of life attained. Thus the romance culminates in the literal death and allegorical annihilation of self of all the major characters.

What I've just described is my unlocking of an enigma, a problem unresolved in the scholarship since 1896, when Sir George Abraham Grierson, linguist extraordinaire, began publishing the most famous text of the genre, Malik Muhammad Jayasi's *Pāṇdūravaḥ*, first composed and performed in 1540, newly recovered from shrine manuscripts. Clever, but what does it mean? What are the implications? Well, first you have to hear what happened, it's not over yet. I had been invited by the editors of *Calque* to do a reflection piece on translating the *Mir igāvati*, along with a translated excerpt, and I had asked for time because I knew it would take me a while to think through the extraordinariness of the last few months. Try as I might, I just could not begin the piece. Instead, I found myself writing the poem printed with this piece, 'Let's Leave.' As you will see, it reproduces the enigmatic form (*rūpa*) of the dream building, in a poetic medium that I am comfortable in, blank verse, before finalizing the translation a few months later. The implications of this act slowly dawned on me during the ensuing months. Somehow, I just had to replicate the process of aesthetic creation that shaped the sultanate poet's understanding of his craft.

Let me explain. India did not know a theory of aesthetic creation that involved, as it does in western traditions post-romanticism, a spontaneous and unmediated onrush of emotion, poetic inspiration yielding the form and content of the poetic effusion, nor the ultimately dystopic breaking of form engendered by modernism and its successors. Instead, an artist in any medium would first engage in a meditation (Sanskrit *dhyāna*) on the object he sought to create. When the artist felt that he had identified completely with his intended aesthetic object, in effect he became one with the form in his heart and mind. Once subject and object had fused, he could then recreate that form (*rūpa*) in his chosen medium. If there was a flaw in the execution, it was held by the audience to be a laziness or weakness of the artist's concentration. But what of the aesthetic effect of the artistic creation? Here the audience would have to allow the object to work on their own consciousness, but how? One other aspect of this summary icon, this enigmatic form, sketched out at the beginning of the long narrative, that had struck me forcibly was its similarity to the genre of classical Indian music called *dhrupad*, the dominant tradition when the Sufi romances were composed and performed. In this form of Indian music, the musician builds up in the opening section a melodic outline of the *rāga* or melody that is then elaborated at length. Why did both media, narrative poetry and music, share a parallelism in form? It suddenly struck me that both were dependent on the sense of hearing, for these poems were received in oral performance during this period, a tradition now lost to us except for a few tantalizingly brief references in the sources.

So the senses were key to understanding poetry and the other arts of the period, but again, how? I went back to look at the building. I had a good explanation for its structure, but what of its ornament? It was painted with murals, a practice common in sultanate palaces in India: scenes from Indian epic and story literature, the hunt and rows of wild game, and of course the doe who had led the Prince out into the forest and for whom he pined. The scenes from epic and story literature, clues put there to provoke a response through vision and a shared cultural understanding, had all to do with one of three themes. The first was heroism: the portrayal of the demon-king Rāvaṇa seizing Rāma's wife Sītā, the *casus belli* from the *Rāmāyana*, and, from the same epic, the hero Aṅgada girding his loins, or, from the *Mahābhārata*, Arjuna's valor and Bhima's killing of Kīcaka and Duḥśāsana. The second theme signalled by these murals is love, here indicated by a portrait of Kṛṣṇa with sixteen thousand cowgirls. And third, the story of King Bhartṛhari and Queen Pingalā, whom he abandoned to become a yogi, points towards renunciation or asceticism as a major theme. At the end of the story, the poet confirms

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that ascetism, love, and valor were the rasas or 'moods' of his poem in a framing verse.

Rasa ... the word takes us straight to the heart of aesthetic understanding in Sanskrit India. Rasa means juice, essence, sap, semen, flavor, or mood, what is blissfully savored or tasted when appreciating the arts. The basic building blocks of different moods or flavours are the emotions. In each episode, Qutban uses the word bhāva, 'emotion' or 'feeling', to show the seeker how to control it. In performance, the storyteller or singer created a psychological induction experiment where the listener had to imagine himself/herself in a thought world where a situation has happened, the hero is in danger, and shown techniques for overcoming that danger and the primary emotion associated with it. In other words, we had a narrative design for messing with human consciousness, using an indigenous poetics of sensory response and its sublimation into aesthetic savor. The point was to show humans to control their drives and baser emotions rather than have the emotions controlling them. I began to realize that reading this genre meant being open to a kind of 'experiential listening' in which one imagines oneself in each of the situations described and allows the magic of the poetic text to work on one. In each episode, the clues could come in the form of ornament, word or other coded symbol. These elements are explicitly marked out in Sanskrit criticism as sources of rasa (śībhāva) and actions or experiential signs (anubhāva) that heighten the audience's experience of the main emotion or mood (sthāyī-bhāva) or the various transitory emotions in a scene (vyabhicārī-bhāva).

It seemed to me I had hit upon the human sensorium as a way of thinking about the arts in a unified way in sultanate India. The difference was that this Indic technology of emotion was here being used for an Islamic, Sufi spiritual purpose, at a very early time, and this fact had important historical implications. The Sufi use screamed out a major cultural-historical fact that the Orientalist and nationalist scholarship had each suppressed for different reasons, that the classical Sanskrit intellectual world had not fallen with the establishment of the Delhi sultanate in 1206, but lived on in attenuated and modified fashion. Among the most surprising agents of this Indian translatio studii were the Muslims of the Delhi sultanate!

The transfer of Sanskritic learning to later centuries was conducted not only through lineages of Brahmans more purist than pure but also through sympathetic Sufi orders who engaged in intellectual and spiritual debates with local groups. In this process of dialogue and exchange, both sides clearly benefited from the exchange, putting the lie to narrow nationalist and religious ways of reading the Indian past.

Coming back to the text itself, its architectonics or overall structure was half revealed, half concealed by the poet, a code that could be put to use with flexibility by the users depending on the kind and nature of the audience: shrine, courtly gathering, salon or bazaar. I would characterize this as a dynamic allegorical code, in contrast to more static definitions of allegory as a point to point correspondence between two levels of meaning. Fundamentally, in Indic and Sufi cosmologies, words have power, and one can praise, invoke, create, transform, and create worlds through them, provided the receiver of the message has ears to hear. If a form remains obscure, then the consciousness of the listener needs more polishing, more cleansing, so that the responsibility for understanding is not simply on the part of the author, but also the audience. This contract between author and audience is therefore a condition or price for entry, submission to the Sufi master and the willingness to apply the lessons of the text to one's own life. The Sufi masters who composed these elaborate texts seemed to be well aware of the human tendency towards essentialism, which they called "idol-worship", and made narratives designed to frustrate attempts at simple mapping or classification. In order to "get" the text, even, perhaps especially, for a reader outside the tradition, one has to give oneself up to the text and allow it to work its subtle magic on one.

In a Borgesian twist, this is a textual tradition that is designed to resist decipherment until one submits to the text and allows it to create reality around one in the act of reception. Further, this is a dynamic allegorical code, one which allows its users to divulge only as much of the meaning as the audience is deemed ready or worthy to hear. There is a flexibility of meaning that works to the advantage of the enigmatic poet, who could only choose to open out spiritual meanings behind closed shrine doors and not in the bazaar or the royal court. The code is entwined with sensory perception and its
The only question about this flexible pluralism of meaning was whether it had any limits, or could there be an infinite play of meanings? The details, structural and ornamental, of the enigmatic form or ri'pa would have to be the limits or horizons of reception, for they set the alternative levels of signification in place, to be brought into play when appropriate to the 'inner work' necessarily carried on by the ideal listener. In a sense, the enigmatic form was being used to imprint the listener at the beginning, just as in music the melodic outline was sketched out by the performer to set the broad outlines within which the composition would be elaborated. On the side of reception, the form was an imprinting of consciousness, pushing the receiver's understanding into a predetermined set of limits. Could this work in practice? I had no evidence to go on but my own experience, but, given that I just had to write a poem replicating the enigmatic form of the romance before finalizing my translation, I have to say, it works.

The poem below is the record of my identification with Quṭban's romance, proof that the pattern of cognitive and sensory imprinting encoded in the Hindavi words has to reshape the listener's consciousness before the work of art can emerge in a new medium. This was known in the Islamic literary sciences as sihr al-hulāl, the 'licit magic' of the arts, their power to transform human subjectivity. In this communication through translation, possible through the licit magic of poetry, what had happened to the Marxism of my graduate school years? I realized I had confused correlation with causation, allowing the instrumental raison d'être of the age, currently in crisis, to cloud my brain. Now, with the clarity of a thunderclap, the theory of aesthetic creation in the sultanate period had demonstrated itself through triggering a similar process in me. I had recreated in my own medium the enigmatic form of the poem I had just translated, before recreating Quṭban's artfully constructed poem for an English-speaking audience. I am so glad I waited to publish the book.

Or, as the Sufis would say, the open heart is the key to every enigma...

Let's Leave

Let's leave
in the lees
the sour wine of yesterday!

Look instead
at today,
fresh, new
as the birth of passion,
peonies in flower.

Look inside,
lotuses blossoming
on magic lakes
in faëry lands forlorn!

Here's the Prince,
dismounting at the lake,
jumping in
after the magic doe
who has led him so deep
into the jungle.
She vanishes into the mere,
a magic lake here,
for the Prince to dive into,
to no avail,
for she's gone,
with her seven colors
and ornaments of gold.

II.

The company catches up
with the Prince
under a banana palm
canopied with shining leaves,
disconsolate by the lake.

He will not leave,
for no one's sake,
not family, nor kingdom,
not friends and retainers,
so they build him a palace
on the lake's shore.

The palace: foursided, sevenstoried,
bright gold and red lead,
broad balconies on each side,
a quest encoded
in pictures of warriors,
yogis, lovers, new rāsas
to savour in a new age.

On top, a miniature dome
set on four little arches,
a tomb in small
for a deadly combat
with a tiger,
the inner beast,
kill him and you die!

All things,
all things to dust return,
souls to their Maker.

III.

A yogi is a form of Shiva,
ash-smear, ad
trident in hand,
third eye
a thousand petalled lotus,
open for business.

What inner forests yet remain
to roam —
what picture pavilions,
what fire-breathing demons,
what damsels in distress,
what magic talking birds,
what cannibal herdsmen posing as hosts —
what desperate souls
on the ocean of feeling?

He has stages to go before he sleeps,
seven of them,
chakras, perhaps,
meaning mastery
of self,
the ultimate landscape.

Philadelphia,
Spring 2008.
Let me now tell you a delectable tale!
I bring you a platter full of pearls and gems.
We have heard with our ears of a King,
very generous, handsome, and full of virtues.
He had a huge army, countless cavaliers.
God had adorned the right religion with him.
Not one ruler could surpass him.
Whoever fought him lost in a second!
Except for a son to carry on his name,
he possessed everything he wanted.

He had wealth, elephants, and horses, and his treasury was beyond all counting.
He prayed for a son with folded hands, 'A son, and quickly, O Creator!' [13]

The Royal Gift

He opened his treasury, and began to give it all away.
Poverty fled from the one who gained something there!
He gave food to the hungry and water to the thirsty.
He brought clothes and gave them to the naked.
He fulfilled the hope of every heart. Once he knew their secret wish, he did not disappoint them.
The heart's desire for which he petitioned God, he received it all, without any stint.
Thus he prayed, 'O Lord, grant me wealth, store, and treasure, a loving son.'
Whatever the King wished for he got, not one hope remained unfulfilled.
His house wasn't blessed with a son, so for that, he had prayed to the Lord. [14]
The Birth of the Prince

A son was born in the King's palace, very handsome, the Creator be blessed!

He stayed in the world, filling it with light like the shining moon at its full.

The King looked at him, filling his glance.

He was so happy it cannot be described!

His son was a Prince with all thirty-two signs,' and his forehead shone with a gem, the fate-line.

The King called for pandits and wise men, to read the stars, to count the constellations.

The King said, 'Reckon, count, and draw his horoscope, marking the auspicious houses.

Considering his good points and intelligence, choose a stainless name for him, the best!' [15]

The Astrologers

The Brahmins sat down and began to count.

They reckoned the signs of the zodiac, and if the Prince's karma was favourable.

According to his sign, God will make him a king, and no one will be able to best him.'

They considered his sign, Libra, and chose a name.

All the pandits said, 'His name is Rājakumara, Prince.

They reckoned as excellent many of his houses, but some of them were quite adverse.

Counting and calculating, they predicted, 'He'll suffer some sorrow of separation from a woman!'

The astrologers blessed him, received many rewards from the King, and returned.

May the King live for aeons, endowed with these riches, with this family and clan!' [16]
**The Wise Men**

The King commanded the royal Nurses, ‘Nurture him quickly; so that he grows up to be just like his father!’ The Nurses fed him their milk with such care that in a year and a day, he was speaking words! Within five years, he had outgrown his peers. The King had wise men summoned before him. ‘All of you must teach him everything, to read and to recite the holy scripture aloud.’ The pandits came and began to teach him, awakening in his mind its innate virtues.

At just ten years, he was a great scholar, and could read the holy scripture correctly. He played polo, learnt to hit the mark, and became a man about town, clever and smart. [17]

**Prince Rājkunvar**

The Prince was intelligent and his name was famous. People would come to that place to see him. He began to hunt and to kill wild animals. Night and day, hunting was his game. One day, when he went off to the hunt, he assembled a company of nobles and retainers. Everyone was given horses to ride on with gilded armour on their backs. All rode out accompanying the Prince, noble Rajputs, handsome and good. Everyone went along rejoicing, all happy to hunt with Prince Rājkunvar.

Many wild animals came out, and the forest rang with blows and cries. [18]
The hunters spread out after their prey, carrying bows of horn and feathered arrows. Then the Prince was parted from the company. He saw a creature and stood there thinking. In the distance was a seven-coloured doe, such as he had never seen in his life. He said, 'That cannot possibly be a doe by birth – she wears bangles and ankle-bells! That dark one wears ornaments of gold, and she walks like a beautiful woman.'

The Prince looked at the marvel, pausing for a moment, then spurred on his horse. He thought, 'Should I kill it with an arrow? Or dismount and capture it by force?' [19]

He abandoned his horse and wanted to catch her. When he saw her beauty, love seized his heart. He thought, 'Let me get nearer and seize her! I'll die if I cannot get that beautiful doe. When I get near her, I'll catch her with my hands!' But the doe skipped away and evaded him. He rubbed his hands in disappointment, began to rue in his heart the spell she had cast. He mounted up again and followed her close, but the saffron-coloured doe ran away again. He followed her for seven yojanas, till he had parted from the company. The nobles and followers thought he was hunting, but the Prince went on alone. [20]
The Prince and the doe were alone in the forest.
No third person was around there with them.
The Prince was enraptured, in love with the doe,
his intelligence was forgotten, all sense fled at dawn.4
He saw a green tree there, massive,
with a pure Mānas lake flowing beneath.
The doe feared the nearness of the Prince.
She sank into the waters of the Mānasarodaka.
The doe hid herself in the magic mere
and did not appear again, but was absorbed.
Swiftly, he jumped into the lake. Sinking in, he began to search,
looking all around. [21]

The Hunt

He sought her, but did not find any sign.
He forgot everything but his mind’s longing.
‘Until I do not obtain that magic doe,
I shall not die or live, but give my life here!’
His senses left him, his intelligence was forgotten.
The story of love was etched on his mind.
He could not forget the picture in his thoughts,
engraved there as if by a nail in stone.
Minute by minute, love engulfsed his mind,
waxing like the moon of the second of the month.
He longed for her deeply, but could not find her, came out and
stood on the shore.
He cried tears upon tears of sorrow and grief, his body bereft of
sense. [22]
She gave him a taste of love, then left. The Prince sought her, then, leaning his back against the tree, he stood and wept copiously. As when the rainy month, Bhādona, pours down, just so, his eyes filled the world with water. All his tears became flowing streams, great and small, from wherever they came. Just as the rainy month pours and thunders, his eyes rained more every second, never tiring. He prayed, 'God, give me wings, that I may fly wherever I hear she lives!' Burning with longing, he stood up and sat down, unable to think of anything at all. He left his home, his family and other people, for her sake he forgot the world. [23]

The company at the hunt could not see the Prince anywhere near where they were hunting. One asked another, and the other said, 'Someone saw him seven yojanas away. The Prince went chasing after a doe. You go after him, he may be quite lost!' Everyone set out on the search together, hoping to find the Prince somewhere. They came upon a tree, very green, under it, a magic lake full of water. Philosopher's stones made up all its ghats, constructed carefully with red lead and crystal. Lapis lazuli was inlaid on its ramparts. All sins were destroyed on seeing that lake. [24]
The Water

The clear pure water was very beautiful to see.
No fault remained in the one who drank from the lake.
Its water was sweet, scented with vetiver!
Such nectar had never been seen in the world.
White and cool was that lake's beauty,
its mud was camphor. Listen, it was matchless!
Many lotuses blossomed in its water.
Black bees hovered, drunk, caught by love.
White water lilies flowered, dense and beautiful,
in love with the moon's bright light.

Cakas, cakis and geese played love-games, so very pleasing to behold.

How can I praise its peerless trees? Did some fortunate man plant them? [25]

The Trees

Plantains spread their parasols on the lake's shore,
watered with nectar. Who had taken care of them?
Their leaves were green and tender, just sprouted,
new leaves shining like little mirrors.
The palms shaded the Prince like a glittering canopy.
The nobles saw him sitting underneath.
They dismounted and approached him,
salaamed and touched their foreheads to the ground.
They all sat around him and asked him,
'Why has your high colour turned black?
With whom have you fallen in love?
Like a lotus, you blossom every day, and, at night, you wax with the deer-marked moon.'

But he wept senselessly, his mind did not work; his wealth was
gone, like a beggar's. [26]
The Prince Speaks

The Prince did not reply. He’d quaffed love’s poison.
His ears were deaf, his mind was on love.
They asked him, ‘Order us, and we will do
whatever we can to fulfill your mind’s desire.’
Then he replied, ‘A doe came before me,
showing me seven colours at once.
Her horns were encrusted with jewels –
how can I describe their splendid show?
She wore a necklace of rare pearls,
precious, taken from elephants’ foreheads.⁹
She wore bangles and anklets, and tinkling bells.
Her eyes were lovely beyond all words.
Lively and frisky, she walked with such grace that she almost
seemed to fly.
One could only watch, and not speak words. Into this lake she
vanished! [27]

‘She had adorned herself in all sixteen ways,¹⁰
and walked with grace and beauty.
She wore all the twelve ornaments,’
was very well-formed and lovely, in her prime.
As soon as she saw me, she went in here,
then I do not know what happened to her.
This is not a matter I can express in words:
she must have been a nymph from Indra’s heaven!’
They said, ‘Rise now, let’s go home playing!
Your father cannot live without you.’
Rājkunvar replied, ‘If life remained in my body, I could not go
against your words.
She took my life, only my body can be seen, my eyes will stay
focused on her path.’ [28]
The Prince's Words

When the Prince said such words to them, worry gripped all of them in their hearts. They took counsel amongst themselves, 'How can we leave the Prince here and go?' They tried hard to persuade him, but he would not be moved, since love had seized him. He said, 'If you're so concerned about me, jump in and find her, leave your clothes here.' At the Prince's request, they entered the lake to search. They came out, saying, 'There's nothing there!' Then the company tried to convince him to return home, sitting in a group near him. But he would not be persuaded by any means, and sighed only for his lost love. [29]

The Prince's Reply

The Prince said, 'What you say is true, and right, but tell me, how can one go anywhere without one's life?' He cried rivers, his eyes flowing blood. Whoever saw him was moved to compassion. He said, 'Until I find some trace of her, or news, I'll die here, but I won't let my mind waver!' They said, 'What shall we do with him? Let a runner be sent to inform the King!' They took paper and wrote down everything, everything that had happened here. The runner went post-haste and reached the King, and gave him all the news. The King said, 'Tell me where he is, at what place?' 'He is seven yojanas from here, Sire!' [30]
The King's Foreboding

When the King heard these words he was sad, and his happiness fled. He sent for his steed without delay. All the people of the town went along with him, not one stayed home. All the King's vassals and nobles rode out, within one watch of the day they reached that place. The King remained looking at the marvel, his son's moon-face seized by an eclipse. His form was just a suspicion of a shadow, his body burnt up by separation's fire.

'Tell me what you saw, so unprecedented, that's in your consciousness and will not leave?'

But the Prince cried unceasingly, silently; he remembered constantly, and mourned. [31]

The King Asks Some Questions

The King asked his son, 'What's the matter? What did you see, whom does your heart long for?' The Prince replied, 'I cannot tell you what I saw, and that is the very thing that has seized my consciousness. I saw a great doe, so grand that my ears have never heard of such a one before, but what can I say? She took away my life and left my lifeless body here forgotten. I do not like food or water any more. My vision stays watching her path, the path on which she vanished, that fortunate one! Watching the path for her to come has darkened the light of my eyes. I wait like the pearl shell in the ocean, who longs for the constellation Svātī's rain!' [32]
The King said, 'Listen to me now.
This is where you are being stupid.
A doe could not vanish into the water!
Did you see that face-to-face, or in a dream?
Get up and come home with me now,
otherwise I shall kill myself here with you!
Say what you want, and I will accept it.
Whatever you tell me, I will fulfill it all!'
He said, 'Without me there's no lack in your kingdom.
Raja of the age, our heads rest in your shade!
You are very wise, and know all virtues; no one else could match
you as a father!
I am telling you the only stratagem through which life can
remain in my body.' [33]

The Prince's Prayer

'I entreat you, father, grant my wish.
Build me a palace at this lakeside.
Tell them to build it in such a way
that in it flows the water of the Mānasa lake!' 
The King sent for his Negis,’ his trusty servants,
'Build a matchless palace by the lake!
This is the royal command of the Prince.
Do what he wants without delay!' 
The Negis said, 'We'll fulfill your wishes
to the furthest limit of our abilities!' 
The King wrote a charter and his command
was proclaimed publicly through the land.
'Young men and old must remain to attend this muster. No one
is excused.'
He gave this order and went back to town, leaving the worry to
the Negis. [34]
The Command for a Palace

A royal proclamation was issued to the populace, 'Come quickly, no caste should be left out!' The old and the young, as many as there were, came quickly, and no one stayed at home. Builders, carpenters, and ironsmiths came, and stone-cutters and workers in stucco. Goldsmiths came, experts at gilding, and painters of pictures, extremely talented! Sawyers came, and those who turn the lathe. It took no time to build the palace.
The mensurers mapped out the foundation with cords. A palace arose, manifold.
Everyone did their appointed task beautifully, sitting there row upon row. [35]

The Palace

They lifted up seven stories upon stories, and set in carved windows, exquisite. They fashioned four four-stepped stairs, like broad balconies facing the four directions. Over them, they put a four-cornered pavilion, gilding it with gold leaf and red lead. They painted scenes from the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata, Rāvana's seizing Sītā from Rāma's home. They depicted Kṛṣṇa, with sixteen thousand gopīs, and Aṅgada girding his loins in Lankā.
All the stories of love were depicted there, each one matchless in its own way.
Lions, antelope, muskdeer they painted, and wild game, row upon row. [36]
They painted Bhima and his killing of Kicaka, and the way he had broken the arms of Duhśasana. They showed King Bhartrhari and his Pingala, separated from whom he went off with the yogis. Arjuna's feat was there, when he pierced the fish, and his winning Draupadi by killing the Kauravas. They depicted Sahadeva, the wise pandit, and brought in the Rig-veda, Yajus, Atharva, and Sāma. As many dances and spectacles as existed were there, but since I never saw them, how can I recount them? There they drew pictures of the magic doe that had so afflicted their Prince.

He'd look at her again and again, weep, then collect himself, for she was his life's support.

The Prince is Sorrowful

He remembered only what he had seen. He cried piteously, and stayed there alone. A Nurse of his was there, in that very place. In the grip of affection for the Prince, she would try to counsel him patiently. For a moment, he would pay attention to his Nurse. Then his soul went to where he might find her. His body was empty, for his soul had left. He was where he'd seen the doe of the wind. The arrow of the God of Love had pierced him. He could not recover, but repeated constantly the doe's name, not forgetting her for an instant.

Night and day he stayed absorbed, and did not think of any other in his mind. His mind was a maddened Indra among elephants, from which he could not dismount.
The Rains

In Bhāda, his eyes rained like the constellation Maghā. The forest and lake remained full of water. Without her, the night seemed very dark to him. He did not like his bed, and stayed awake all night. The lightning flashed under his eyes' shadow. He was watching; where and how could he get news? His palace was empty, and no one was with him. His only companions were the frogs, who croaked. The cāṭaka in the water cried 'Pi! Pi!' Pierced by separation, he could not bear any more.

Both the Prince's eyes rained heavily, showering down long and hard.

'I shall drown in the water of my tears, may providence could carry me across!' [39]

Winter

The month of frost didn't even touch his body. The fire of separation burnt him to a cinder. The King stood there all night calling to him, eyes fixed on him, tongue never tiring. But his body emitted the flame of desire. How could the hoarfrost match that fire? Winter ran about twenty kosas away from him. If it stayed with him, winter would get burnt! The fire of separation blazed up so high, that the cold fled and the earth was all green again.

Rāvana's Lankā burnt and went out, but this fire could not be quenched at all.

He'd only be at ease when he met her, the one for whom his body suffered. [40]
The month of Jetāḥ was burning, as though it were raining sparks, but he did not use sandal paste on his body, nor take any care. Nor would he drink cool sugar-water. God knows how he lived through it! The hot summer wind blew, but for him it was merely the form of his beloved. He directed his eyes to the place where he'd lost her. Cold and heat can only touch the limbs of the one whose frame is without love. Only if one's soul yet remains in one's body can one feel the heat or the cold weather. She had stolen his soul, to whom could he now explain why his body lay lifeless?

The six seasons and the twelve months passed, all the days of a year went by.

Note on the Text


The text is also available at:

http://www.sub.uni-goettingen.de/ebene_1/fiindolo/gretiIl3_nia/hindi/kutmir_u.htm

Endnotes

1. thirty-two signs: these are the traditional Indian laksyana or signs of royal birth, and include auspicious marks on the Prince's body like the wheel (cakra) and the conch (ankha).

2. beauty: Qutban here uses the key word rūpa, beauty or form, which is a calque of the Ar. jamāl, beauty, one of the attributes of Allah. The word is used here to indicate the beauty of the magic doe, but can also mean form or embodiment, and has both theological and aesthetic dimensions.

3. yojana: a measure of distance equivalent to four krofas (Hind. kosa), eight or nine miles.

4. at dawn: a coded reference to the beginning of the Prince's illumination, the dawning of awareness.

5. Mānasā lake: A key element of the symbolic landscapes of the Hindavi Sufi romances, signifying the lake of the mind in the subtle body of the seeker.

6. Bhaīdōn: Bhaīdōn is the sixth month of the Indian calendar, occurring around the same time as the European month of August, marked by heavy rains, storms and dark clouds.

7. cakas, cakis: a large orange-brown duck and its female, also called the sheldrake or Brahminy duck (Anas casarca, Sanskrit cakravāka). They mate
in couples, and are traditionally supposed to be separated at night. They are thought to mourn until they meet their mates in the morning.

8. Plantains: these signify that this place is a kadali-vana, a plantain or banana forest, indicating a place of ascetic mortification in Indian devotional traditions.

9. Elephants' foreheads: elephants are believed to have precious pearls, gaja-moti, inside the recesses of their foreheads. In the symbolic grammar of the genre, these signify pearls of mystical awareness.

10. All sixteen ways: these are the 16 ways that a woman could adorn herself to look beautiful, the traditional Indian solah singār. The 16 kinds of make-up are: (1) dāntan, 'tooth-brush'; (2) manjan, 'tooth-powder'; (3) ubtan, 'cosmetic paste' made of gram flour or barley meal for softening and cleaning the skin; (4) sindur, 'vermillion' for the forehead and parting of the hair; (5) kesar, 'saffron', also for the forehead; (6) anjan, 'antimony' or 'collyrium', kohl for the eyes; (7) bindi, 'dot, mark, or spangle ornamenting the forehead'; (8) tel, 'hair-oil'; (9) kangan, 'comb'; (10) argajā, 'perfume'; (11) pān, 'betel' for reddening the lips; (12) missi, 'dark paint for the teeth and lips'; (13) nel, 'indigo' for tattooing; (14) menbāli, 'henna' for the hands and feet; (15) phūl, 'flowers' for the hair; (16) ala, 'red dye' or 'lace', an insect-based extract used to paint the feet red.

11. The twelve ornaments: these are the traditional 12 ornaments (bārabha abharana), viz., (1) miṣur or pā-zeb, 'ankle-bells'; (2) karībant or kinκiνi, 'wrist-belt with little bells'; (3) ciūdi, 'bangle'; (4) angūṭhi, 'ring'; (5) kangan, 'bracelet, thick bangle'; (6) bāzāband or bijāyath, 'tied or linked armlet'; (7) kār, 'long necklace'; (8) kauṭārā, kauṭī or kauṭi, 'choker, large or small'; (9) besar or nāṭh, 'nose-ring'; (10) karva-phūl and biriyā, 'ear-studs and pendant earrings'; (11) tiṅa, 'forehead ornament, usually hung in the parting of the hair'; (12) us-phūl, 'head-ornament, usually made of gold and jewels, patterned variously like a flower, circle, or paisley, etc.'

12. I warn ... Śvātī's rain: this refers to the star Arcturus, which forms the fifteenth lunar asterism. When the moon is within the constellation of Śvātī, generally in October, raindrops falling into a shell are said to become pearls.

13. Noga: a caste of attendants often entrusted with political and/or matrimonial negotiations.

14. A four-cornered pavilion ... gold leaf and bright red lead: this is an extremely significant building, for it encodes several levels of textual and narrative reference, and forms a summary or icon of the Prince's quest itself. In common with the other poets of this tradition, Quṭbān has concealed the structural principle of allegory in his iconic description of this building, whose form (rūpa) encodes the form (rūpa) of the quest itself.

15. The Picture-Pavilion: this title, supplied by the scribe of the Ekadala manuscript, is the citra-sāri, a painted pavilion that the poets of the genre use to indicate images (miṣūl) that encode particular aspects of the Sufi path. Although the title is somewhat redundant, since it is really a painted palace that Quṭbān is describing, it is notable that the mythological scenes chosen in this and the previous verse have to do with love, valour, and asceticism, which the poet explicitly reveals as the three rasas or 'moods' of his work in the envoi to his romance.

16. The Doe of the Wind: the Hindavi here reads, pavana kurunyāgni, 'doe of the wind', which could be a reference to her power of flight (although the Prince has not yet been a witness to this power). Alternatively, the poet could be introducing the key word pavana, 'wind,' as a coded reference to the Prince receiving mystical instruction, especially the techniques of breath control and the awakening of the 'airs' of the seeker's subtle body. The latter interpretation is strengthened by 38.5 below, which mentions his constant repetition of the object of desire's name (as is usual for a mantra employed for chanting or meditation).

17. God of Love: Kāmadeva, the Indian god of love, is portrayed as a beautiful youth riding on a parrot and armed with a bow of sugarcane, which is strung with a row of bees, and arrows tipped with flowers.

18. Magā: this constellation is the tenth lunar mansion (nāksātra), consisting of five stars, and is prominent during the month of Bhādon.

19. Cātaka: this is the papibā, the pied cuckoo or brain-fever bird (Cuculus melanoleucus, Sanskrit cataka) is a grey-brown, pigeon-sized bird which is supposed to live only on raindrops falling from the sky when the constellation Śvātī is overhead. It is silent in the winter, but with the approach of the hot season becomes increasingly noisy. Its distinctive call is a loud shriek repeated five to six times rising in crescendo, rendered by Quṭbān as 'Pi! Pi! Pi!' which can mean 'My love! My love!' or, in the proximity of the lake, 'Drink! Drink!' I have employed the modern Hindavi here reads, pavaṇa kurunyāgni, 'wind,' as a coded reference to the Prince receiving mystical instruction, especially the techniques of breath control and the awakening of the 'airs' of the seeker's subtle body. The latter interpretation is strengthened by 38.5 below, which mentions his constant repetition of the object of desire's name (as is usual for a mantra employed for chanting or meditation).

20. Kosas: a kosa is a measure of distance roughly equivalent to two miles.

21. Yeṭ: this is the hottest month of the year, occurring in May-June, at the height of summer. Traditionally it is also the favoured month for weddings.
Runoilijan veri

Runoilijan veri kuivuu tervejärkiseen säkeeseen. Joku senkin pyyhkii yli,
sano että rakastat ja veri virkoaan, syöksyy päähän ja saan erilaisen kohtelun.

Te ette saastaisella verellänne voi pestä pois runoilijan verta! Sydän se vain jaksaan pongohtaa kiveltä
aijoina paraennusta herättäneeltä. Ensimmäiseksi katse kääntyi Kiinaan,
jossa veri pulppusi siirtotyöläisen rinnasta. Miksei veri kierrä kaikilla päähän asti?
Itsessä ei valitettavasti ole runoilijan verta vaikka nyt on ensimmäinen
Mihin se kaikki veri menee, kysyi karpanen itikalta?
Nainen on runoilijan omakuva, suitsutusastia,
status. Veri tippui muista, suuitsutusastia,
mielikuvia. Verta virtaa sisään jostakin välimaailmasta. Runoilijan lakanoihin
piilotettuja aisteja, kuriton jotta veri kiertäisi,
vuotaisi maan rehevaksi. Hanessa taytti
sanonta: "Siunattuna käyös!". Jos runoilijalla virtaa suonissaan pisaraakaan
verta, hänet hakataan ja raiskataan niin että silmät vuotavat verta.

Mikäs se kaiken alla soi: "ilman ruumistala veri on/vain lätäkkö". Runoilija on kussut verka tähtesi,
vaihtanut kuivat vaipat, kumonnut kurkkua monen talven lumet. Vapaan runoilijan ase on
tuo neitsyttöön makea veri joka ryöppyyä viihtovaavasta rinnalle. Ei aut坦ant
pumpeli eikä suurempikaaan suoa. Hän päätti lukea ylioppilaaksi vaikka verta hikoillen.

A poet's blood

A poet’s blood dries out in a reasonable line
Somebody wipes it away as well,
tell me you love and the blood is revived,
rushes into head and I am treated in a different manner.

You cannot wash away the poet's blood with your filthy blood!
The heart is still strong enough to bounce away from the stone
which once caused offence.
First eyes turned to China
where blood bubbled out of a migrant worker's chest.
Why does blood not circulate all the way into everybody's head?

Unfortunately, there's no poet's blood in me
But this time my efforts paid off.
Where does all that blood go, a fly asked from a mosquito
A woman is the poet's self-portrait, incense dish,
status. Blood dropped onto the floor as ink.
Junta tortured visions hidden in the poet’s senses.

Blood flows in from an intermediate world. Senses hidden in
the poet’s sheets, undisciplined to make blood circulate,
to make land luxuriant. A phrase was fulfilled in him:
"May you be blessed!"
If there is even one drop of blood
in the poet’s veins, he is battered and raped
so that his eyes are bleeding.

What’s the tune behind all this: "without a body, blood is just a puddle". The poet has pissed blood for you,
changed diapers, gulped down the snow of many winters. The weapon of the free poet is
that virgin's sweet blood which floods
from a cut into the chest. Cotton wool or other protection was
of no use.
She decided to matriculate even sweating blood.
Helvetti

Konkreettinen supilomainen rakennelma, jossa on kaikkiaan yhdeksän sisäänpaasyä. Helvetti onkin sitä, että kaikki toistuu, eteenpäin ei pääse. Helvetti on jäässä. Minne kaikki lihavat mässäillijät joutuvat kuultuaan?

Helvetti on irti, tuiki tavallinen toimintaplajais, onnettomista sieluista vuotaneita kristalleja, jotka ottavat toisiaan käsiä.

Ehka helvetti onkin kaunis? Helvetti soikoon. Vuosien saatossa olen tullut johtopäätöksiin että tassa maassa ei ole oikeudenmukaisuutta.


Perään. Todellinen antikapitalistien helvetti on päässyt valloilleen. Mitä tapahtuu tämän jälkeen?

Me uhrattiin kuusi pullollista, mitään ei tapahdu ja lähetysaika pitäisi saada täyteen. Muista että perusmasokistille taivas on helvetti. Onko helvetti kylmä vai kuuma paikka?

Jos helvetti on täynnä, joutuu seisomaan ja odottamaan. Mikä teissä on vikana?

Etkö tiedä? Jos helvetti on jäänyt, Suomi on voittanut Euroviisuit.
This will be a translator's introduction not by the translator but about him. I could discuss Paul Celan to Wikipedia levels of detail; I could offer half-informed remarks about his writing. But, unlike the translator of these poems, Amos Weisz, I do not know Celan's poetry in depth.

Amos Weisz was my first husband. When he died last winter, we'd been divorced ten years, but I had remained his friend, in so far as one can be friends with a man so devotedly, intransigently psychotic. In those ten years, Amos had a literary career made sporadic by his madness: wrote but seldom published poetry in both English and German (his mother tongue, though he was born in London); wrote barely performable verse plays; began a poetry press for mentally ill writers, for which he recruited during his own stays in secure wards. He also translated German poets and playwrights into English, including Heiner Müller, Bertholt Brecht, and Paul Celan.

I have read Celan's poetry for pleasure, and I have heard Amos hold forth about it and recite it both in German and English, long nights when we were stupid young and drank all night and smoked so much any room we stayed in felt spoiled, ashamed, unclean. In my mind, Celan is Amos's other self or fetch. Because Amos told me so (not because it is true) I see them as twin minds, and the only reason Amos could not write Celan's poetry was because he found it ready made. And of course this isn't true; in fact, it's a metaphor for something which, in its turn, is not exactly true. But Amos's assumption (Celan's, in my mind) was that metaphors must be taken literally, and to him a thing not being true was immaterial; true/false a cosmetic distinction only a clod would mention in earnest. For me, this was one of those points where psychosis (assuming this was part and parcel of Amos's psychosis) seems more intelligent than sanity. The right interpretation isn't always the most intelligent, and sometimes, that seems reason enough to scorn it; it's a habit, anyhow, which is hard to break.

Another metaphor: Amos believed that translation was possession. After all, he was a man who heard the voices of long-dead poets literally, who was hospitalized for hearing them, and for obeying their commands. Amos considered translation a dangerous and servile subjection to another spirit's mastery. The translator was a vessel, therefore feminine, therefore perverse if a man; but Amos embraced all perversity, servility, self-destruction.

He never had any truck with theories of translation. He considered all theory to be a clownish aping of math, and math itself to be half superstition. He understood topological logic and what-have-you, but only believed in ghosts.

Amos's madness was hereditary; or else it was the working-out of history.

His father, Josef Weisz, was a Jew who fled Budapest to escape the Nazis. He was then thirteen. As an adult, Josef became a noted scholar of Judaica, a professor in that subject at the University of London, in which city he first met Amos's mother, Erna.

Erna was German. She had been just four when the Americans liberated her hometown, a suburb of Frankfurt. Nazi propaganda had convinced her at that age that all Americans were black, and that all blacks were subhuman gorillas. The actual appearance of Americans—whose candy she clearly remembers—was her first introduction to adult lies. At that time, also, her father was a Nazi party member.

Amos's father died insane. When Amos was still a little boy, Josef began to suffer from paranoid delusions. At last, he came to believe his wife was an agent of Mossad, hired to collaborate in his murder. When he became violent, she threw him out. Two years later, he committed suicide with an overdose of sleeping pills.
Amos believed that his mother had married a Jew as an act of expiation. He believed his father had married a Nazi's daughter as an act of self-abasement. This was not true, but this fairy story never lost its lustre for Amos. In his thirties he was still rehearsing the tale of the child who was the issue of perversity, indulging a fantasy of himself as the embodiment of an unspeakable wish, sex crime incarnate.

Also, in Amos's mind, his German mother had exterminated his Jewish father. Of course this was untrue; it was incontrovertible nonetheless. And for Amos, all phenomena were ranged under two categories of meaning: The Father and The Mother. Judaism the Father was a holy madness unto extinction; Germany the Mother was the cowardly, carnal acquiescence to life/murder. The good people, the only real people, were the ghost legions of The Father. The living were animated meat, just so many golems (Germans) stalking the world in enmity to the (Hebrew) soul.

Paul Celan was an obvious choice of hero for Amos. Celan was a man reknowned for playing the ghost already before his death.

Born in Romania in 1920, Celan was the only son of German-speaking Jewish parents. In 1942, the Nazis arrived in Romania; he and his parents were put into labor camps. Only Celan survived.

In the years following the war, he became a poet so identified with the Holocaust that his poetry is sometimes seen purely in terms of its relationship with the German (Nazi) language in which it is written. There is good reason for this. Celan grew up speaking Romanian and Yiddish as well as German; as an adult, he was also fluent in Russian, French, and Ukrainian. For him, writing in German was a choice freely taken. Celan was very conscious of writing in the language of murder, that his mother tongue (Mutter sprache in German is a direct analogue of the English word) was the language in which the extermination of his family was theorized as heroism. He is sometimes seen as using a neologistic, fractured style to deliberately destroy the German language; or else to reinvent it, purify it of history.

Celan himself writes: “Only one thing remained reachable, close and secure amid all losses: language. Yes, language. In spite of everything, it remained secure against loss. But it had to go through its own lack of answers, through terrifying silence, through the thousand darknesses of murderous speech. It went through. It gave me no words for what was happening, but went through it. Went through and could resurface, ‘enriched’ by it all.”

Celan himself was a prolific translator—of Cocteau, Michaux, Mandelstam, Ungaretti, Pessoa, Rimbaud, Valéry, and Char, among others. He also translated a French-German poet called Yvan Goll. Celan's final mental breakdown was precipitated by an accusation by Goll's wife that he had plagiarized some of Yvan Goll's poetry. In my cursory researches into this matter, I can find no account of whether there was a basis for these accusations. But then the distinction between plagiarism and translation is trivial anyway. Both are ways of making ghosts from ghosts. Translation is a polite ghost that tells its real name.


— Sandra Newman
HEARING RESIDUES, seeing residues, in
ward one thousand and one,

day and night
the bear polka

they are reschooling you,

you are becoming
he again.

THE NIGHT RODE HIM, he had come to himself,
the orphan's apron was the flag,

no more stravaging,
it rode him straight –

it is, it is as if there were oranges in the privet,
as if the man thus ridden had nothing on
but his
first
moled, se-
cret-besprinkled
skin.
MUSSEL HEAPS: with
the turd mace I parted it,
following the rivers into the melt-
ing homeland
of ice,
toward it, the firestone
to be scratched
in whose hand in the
dwarf birch breath.

Lemmings burrowed.

There is no later.

No
nested urn, no
breakthrough disc,
no starfoot
fibula.

Unstilled,
unlinked, artless,
the all-transforming climbed slowly
scraping
behind me.

SCOOPED WITH the ash ladle
from the trough of being,
soapy, at the
second
attempt, to-
ward one another,

incomprehensibly etched now,
far
outside us and already — why? —

then (at the third
attempt?) blown
behind the horn, before the
standing
rubble of tears,

from an unpaired
budding-split
flag
of lung.
GIVING-GIVEN
hands
flecked with microliths.

the conversation that spins itself
from tip to tip,
singed by
spraying burning air,

a sign
combs it together
as an answer to a
brooding cliff art.

GONE INTO THE NIGHT, helpful,
a star-
permeable leaf
instead of his mouth:

there remains
something yet to throw away,
saulted.
WE LAY
deep in the Macchia when you
finally crawled up.
Yet we could not
darken over to you:
light
compelled.

TRIP MINES on your left
moons, Saturn.

shard-sealed
the orbital paths out there.

Now must be the moment
for a righteous
birth.
WHO STRUCK through to you?
The lark-shaped
stone from the fallow land.
No tone, only the deathlight bears
it as well.

The height
whirls itself
out, more heftily yet
than for her.

LUSTRE-LADEN, among the
sky beetles,
in the mountain.

The death
that you still owed me, I
carry it through.
Given free also this start.

Frontwheel song with Corona.

The dawn oar engages, your vein torn awake unknotted itself,

what you still are lies oblique, you gain height.

BEACON collector, nights, your hod full, at your finger's end the guiding ray, for him, the one approaching wordbull.

Beacon master.
POURED FROM what's lost, you,
fitting a mask,
to be near to you
along the
lid crease with my own
lid crease,
to strew
the trace and the trace
with grey;
finally, mortally.

WHAT hurled
us together
is shrieking apart,
a world stone, distant as suns,
hums.

ONE time, death was approaching,
you buried yourself in me.
Axe swarms
above us,

conversations
with tulle axes in the lowland –
Island floor, you,
with the hope
clouding above you.

FOREKNOWN bleeds
twice behind the curtain,

c-o-known
glistens.

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AT BRANCUSI'S, THE PAIR OF US

If of these stones one
sounded
what mutes it:
here, nearby,
at the zimmer frame of this old man,
it would open as a wound
into which you had to dive,
alone, lonely,
distant from my cry, the already co-
sculpted one, white.
WHERE I FORGOT MYSELF in you
you became thought,
something
roars through the two of us:
the world's first
of its last
vibrations,
I grow the pelt
over my
weathered
mouth,
you do not
return
to yourself.

MUDSKIFF EMBARKED ON long since.
a burst
button
performs bricolage on each ranuncula,
the hour, the toad,
heaves the world out of joint.
If I consumed the barrow trail
I would be there.
TODTNAUBERG

Arnica, eyebright, the
drink from the well with the
star-die on it,
in the
hut,
written into this book
– whose name did it receive
before mine? –
into this book
the line of
a hope, today,
for a thinker's
coming
word
in the heart,

wood meadows, unevened,
orchid and orchid, individually,
crude stuff, later, while travelling,
clearly,

who travels us, the human
who hears it too,

the half-stepped fascine
paths in the high moor,

dampness,
much.

SINK OUT
of my crooked arm,
take the one
pulse beat with you,
bury yourself inside it,
outside.

NOW THAT THE kneelers burn
I eat the book
with all
insignia.
TO A BROTHER IN ASIA

The self-deceived bombers travel into the sky,

ten bombers yawn,

quickfire blossoms as certain as peace,

a handful of rice dies as your friend.
If the name Ghérasim Luca remains known only to a few then it is tempting to believe that this is no more than his wish. Born of a disappearance — at the time of his first publication the writer chose his new name from an obituary notice — dedicating much of his work to conjuring the void at the heart of language and of existence itself, and consigned to a willful absence in his chosen death, Luca's presence quickens like a magic cipher that appears and fades again before anyone can reread its handwriting.

On February 9, 1994, Luca wrote to his companion to tell her that he was going to throw himself into the Seine. An extraordinary text written in 1945, *La Mort morte* (Dead Death), had already announced the fragile dialectic between life and its negation: an account of five suicide attempts, each accompanied by a farewell note and an automatic text written during the act. Yet somehow death is the last thing one thinks about when reading through the small pile of incandescent books left behind. That so much of his writing invokes silence, disappearance and absence would seem to suggest that Luca was searching for the very means to cheat despair, for ways to reinvent love, language, the world and a poet's place in it.

More than a decade later, Luca's work seems increasingly precious, not only as a missing piece to the history of international surrealism — that of the Romanian surrealist group (1940-47) — and as a hidden precursor for several elements of contemporary thought (notably Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, prefigured over a quarter of a century earlier by Luca's "non-oedipal" theories), but also as a fixed marker for the questions asked today by those wishing to situate themselves in the continuing stream of a critical surrealist thought against those demoralising currents with which the new century too is awash. Luca and Trost's *Dialectics of the Dialectic* (1945) addressed this question in a tone that confronted desperation with defiance:

The inexhaustible diversity of the means of cretinisation at the disposal of the enemies of the dialectical development of thought and of action, and the oceans of blood which bear witness to the current cessation of objective evolution, will never make us avert our eyes, even for a moment, from the red thread of Reality.

*Dialectics of the Dialectic* was the key theoretical text of the Romanian surrealist group, whose core comprised the writers Ghérasim Luca, Gellu Naum, Paul Paun, Virgil Teodorescu and Dolfi Trost, and with links to the painters Victor Brauner, Jacques Hérold and Jules Pérahim. Formed in the wake of the outbreak of hostilities in 1939 but unable to publish or exhibit during the war years, which had already been preceded by a period of increasing censorship in Romania, the group nevertheless led an active covert existence, the direction it took both extending and giving a radical slant to the primarily French surrealism of the 1930s led by poet André Breton. A distress call from a band of poets marooned in Eastern Europe, *Dialectics of the Dialectic* affirmed unshakeable fidelity to Breton, dialectical materialism, and objective chance while also having the temerity to warn the international movement of the dangers of becoming just another artistic style. It proposed instead a reinvention of the surrealist imagination: a critical approach to dreams, the eroticisation of the proletariat, the poetic appropriation of quantum physics, and the perpetual re-evaluation of surrealism through the negation of negation.

Luca was a key figure in these developments, and his own contributions to the group's direction were amongst the most interesting. As a teenager he had been a member of the confrontational *Alge* group (1930-33), and with the Bucharest avant-garde becoming increasingly fascinated with surrealism, Luca left for Paris in the winter of 1938, followed shortly by Naum. Both had to return to Bucharest when the war broke out in 1939, but they were now committed to continuing surrealist activity, even in clandestine form.
Luca's writing of this period, often in French, alternates polemic with delirious narrative. *The Inventor of Love* of 1945 is an exposition of non-oedipal theory, advocating the paroxysm of love and sexuality as the means to overcome oedipal oppression. The shorter text *I Love You* (1942) reads like a detective's fingertip search of a bedroom, a single sentence capped with a question mark in which objects gradually impose themselves as the mirrors and the sorcerers of a lover lost amid the dust. Projects such as the 'cubomania' collages, on the other hand, propose a graphic equivalent to this reinvention of the world by cutting an image into squares and reassembling them, as if once again the simplest theoretical techniques should be taken to their extreme conclusions.

Though *The Passive Vampire* represents only a fraction of Luca's early work it represents not only the culmination of his journey into surrealism through the 1930s, but a substantially more elaborate and extended text than most of the writings by the Bucharest group. Published in 1945 by the fictitious (and significantly named) Éditions de l'Oubli, supposedly in Paris, examples seem to have circulated with reasonable liberty in France during the following decade, but its rarity until its reissue by José Corti in 2001 had made it something of a lost legend within surrealist literature, rarely referred to and almost never seen other than in jealously guarded private libraries.

Yet despite its status as a singular, in places even delirious text, there is much in the tone and ideas of *The Passive Vampire* that would situate it firmly within the traditions and canon of surrealist writing. Stylistic homages and direct references to Sade, Huysmans, or to clinical textbooks, for example, are consistent with the interests of French surrealist authors. But above all, as the book progresses its deranged logic, its lurching from a frantic cataloguing and collaging of the irrational to a dispassionate, even scientific accuracy, and eventually to the transparent borrowings from unacknowledged sources, all point to Lautréamont's *Chants de Maldoror*—perhaps the single most cherished text among the first generation of surrealists—as the black genie of *The Passive Vampire*, whose appeal to the archetypal figure of the vampire probably owes more to the manic gothic of *Maldoror* than to the popular currency of legends from Luca's part of Europe.

At the same time, however, *The Passive Vampire* is also a meditation on the writings of French surrealists themselves, and in particular Breton's, whose books such as *Mad Love*, *Communicating Vessels*, and above all *Nadja* stand as ghost readers for Luca's text. Its grave tone, adoption of a first-person confessional that insists on narrative as fact, however much credulity is strained, its meticulous accounts and dissections of the smallest events, and the pursuit of a love that might also be a form of haunting, all recall Breton's signature style, and it is to the absent poet that much of this book seems dedicated.

Of course the recurring themes of an encounter between psychoanalysis, psychosis, and the object—explored in the game of 'Objectively Offered Objects' that forms a disorienting prologue to *The Passive Vampire* and then infects the entire text with its secret exchanges—would all appear familiar to readers of the French surrealists' journal of the early 1930s *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*. In its pages Salvador Dali had first masterminded the game of 'Symbolically Functioning Objects': fragile constructions of found items put together apparently at random by the game's participants and then subjected to analysis. The objects of *The Passive Vampire* would seem to have been lost or abandoned on Luca's emigration from Romania, but both their documentation and their scrupulous interpretation clearly situate them within the category of the 'surrealist object' that played such a prominent role in the movement from the 1930s onwards.

Just as Paris is a principal character of so many French surrealist texts, Bucharest is curiously present in *The Passive Vampire*. But the Bucharest of late 1941, when the book was first written, has a very different status for its author. Most obviously, it is a city under effective occupation, controlled by the pro-Nazi Iron Guard whose rise to power in autumn 1940 (the period when at least some of the action described in Luca's narrative took place, in particular a major earthquake) signalled a definitive end to the distinctive Romanian avant-garde activity of the already repressive 1930s. Luca's membership of that avant-garde (his writings had even earned him a brief spell in prison) but above all his status as a Jew would have made his position doubly precarious in a city that feels poised on the brink of a disaster. Luca, like all surrealists, detested any idea of national identity, but
clearly he also detested Bucharest and its inhabitants as well. Forced by the conflict to leave France, an expulsion he experienced as a kind of trauma, his heart nonetheless remained there; in February 1940 he had written to Jacques Hérold that "not for a moment can I forget that I am no longer in Paris. It is my one obsession, and it sits well with my persecution mania."

Luca left Bucharest for Paris in 1952. While maintaining close contacts with Surrealist friends he nevertheless chose to follow a more solitary, secretive path. His writing, now more clearly poetry rather than prose, became spare and hermetic, in pursuit of the hidden tracks of the French tongue through verbal games, stammerings and the dismantling of words, as though to dissolve and recast the very elements of meaning. These largely untranslatable poems enlist a 'verbal alchemy' to conjure up the presence/absence of the loved one (Aîmée à jamais), to confront the threat of nuclear catastrophe (La Clé), to ask how to live in the face of the world's despair, or to dialecticise the void of death (Autres secrets du vide et du plein). Compelling performances and recordings were made of some of these works; Gilles Deleuze announced Luca as "the greatest French poet." With an intensity and seriousness that suggest that such poetry will eventually replace what today we call philosophy, Luca's words commanded the silencing of silence:

If it is true, as is claimed
that after death man continues
a phantom existence
I'll let you know

(La Mort morte, 1945).

- Krzysztof Fijalkowski

from *The Passive Vampire*

Objects, these mysterious suits of armour beneath which desire awaits us, nocturnal and laid bare, these snares made of velvet, of bronze, of gossamer that we throw at ourselves with each step we take; hunter and prey in the shadows of forests, at once forest, poacher, and woodcutter, that woodcutter killed at the foot of a tree and covered with his own beard smelling of incense, of well-being, and of the that's-not-possible; free at last, alone at last with ourselves and with everyone else, advancing in the darkness with feline eyes, with jackals' teeth, with hair in lyrical, tousled ringlets, beneath a shirt of veins and arteries through which the blood flows for the first time, we're lit up inside ourselves by the giant spotlights of the very first gesture, saying what must be said, doing what must be done, led among the lianas, butterflies and bats, like the black and white on a chessboard; no one would dream of forbidding the black squares and the bishop — the ants vanish, the king and queen vanish, the alarm clocks vanish in turn, we reintroduce the walking stick, the bicycle with odd wheels, the timepiece, the airship, the siphon, the telephone receiver, the shower head, the lift, the syringe, the automatic mechanisms that deliver chocolate when numbered buttons are pressed; objects, this catalepsy, this steady spasm, this "stream one never steps in twice" and into which we plunge as into a photograph; objects, those philosopher's stones that discover, transform, hallucinate, communicate our screaming, those stone screams that break the waves, through which the rainbow; living images, images of the image will pass, I dream of you because I dream of myself; hypnotically I aim at the diamond contained within you, before falling asleep, before you fall asleep, we pass through each other like two ghosts in a marble room whose walls are hung with life-sized portraits of our ancestors, with the portrait of a mediaeval knight next to the portrait of a chair [1] gazing at the two fossils of ghosts on the walls of this spectral museum, and if it is true that we are shadows, then the people and the objects all around us here are nothing but the bones of shadows, the shadows of shadows, since here they don't die, here the passing, removal, or putrefaction of a
woman is not enough to kill the desire connected to her, like the flame of a candle to the play of shadow and light it maintains around it, when, trembling between the sheets and transfigured by fever, one murmurs her beloved name; no, as long as desire persists there is no death: the living die more easily; these men I meet in the street making the usual gestures, smiling or furrowing their brows on the café terraces or on the metro, hurrying, wearing hats, wearing ears. These men have been dead for a long time, even if they’ve never been born — as for my father, I killed him before he died, while my mother still isn’t dead, even if they tell me she is, and even if a brain in braces and a flour heart make me realise that I don’t know the frontier between desire and reality, I’ll remind them about dream, I’ll remind them of the reality of desire’s tomorrow or, perhaps, I’ll insult them and, while I keep looking at the portraits on the walls, it’s with pleasure that I’ll confuse the chair with a mediaeval knight, the shoe with the wan marquise who is slipping it on; I’ll walk into the next room arm in arm with the object, between shadows and their fossils, between the mirrors that don’t reflect me, between the looks that don’t spy me, that don’t dissect me, unable to surprise anything and with nothing apt to surprise me in a world of surprise, in a world of unexpected apparitions, which I expect even while not expecting them; they reveal themselves before being expected, at the precise moment when the lips get moistened to receive the kiss or else the teeth or else the wind or else the white neck that reveals itself to the moon, offering itself to the cold breaths (like two stilettos) of the vampire. Here we are in the final chamber, O object! Let’s take the stairs that lead us down into the castle’s caverns, let’s lose our way among all these long corridors and distant calls like a great river seen from its mouth upstream, let’s walk gingerly so as not to stir the stones’ dust, the molecules’ soot, and let’s leave the huge spider webs untouched, adopting their terrible owners’ fascinating acrobatics, and I’ll offer the object a spider just as I offer the bed a woman who offers herself to me; I offer the object to other objects in the same way that images encounter one another in poems and dreams, since the object offered objectively to an object (O.O.O.O.) is a magical process of communication between the ego and the id, whereby for a given moment the object is divested of its nature as a mediating symbol in erotic practices (like poems, dreams, daydreams, games
of ‘exquisite corpse’, or collages), putting us in the delirious state of fetish worshippers in which the symbol supersedes the thing it symbolises — for me the lover who puts a flower in his beloved’s hair or pours champagne into her dancing shoes are typical examples of a lover offering objects to other objects. This magical process of communication gives us the possibility to move about more freely in a world of apparitions, which more closely corresponds to who we are and denies the reality-obstacle through the simple process of clasping a shadow. In this world of apparitions, shadows become flesh, they can be loved and photographed like the phenomenon of the split personality of clairvoyance.

In this universe of phantoms I feel as if encircled by fire, as if in one of those set pieces where the Devil is invoked. All I need is to look at my palm spread before me in the semi-darkness to see, as though on a screen or on the disconcerting surface of an aquarium, a luminous and shadowy aura, from which a woman’s hair emerges like a handful of ashes cast onto the retina. I know that beyond my palm the profile of this woman is cut into a diamond and that I only need move one finger to see her mortal pallor. But in front of me, on a chair, a cape beneath which someone is breathing tells me that I am not alone. And in my lap rises up another apparition, like a statue made of water, her breasts bared, her shoulders glass. The gestures I manage to make are so simple and basic that I have the impression I am moving through a world that is not solely the realm of conjecture. I cannot understand how, beyond the window, in the street, in their homes, people can still live in discord with themselves. How can it be that the mechanisms for nocturnal recording are rejected the following morning and that when, rent and disfigured by their own contradictions, people are forced back to these mechanisms, nothing has been altered in the order of things?

I can no longer say that I’m dreaming; the hundreds of thousands of years of dreams are enough for me, and if the castaway’s message in a bottle floats on the waters, then somewhere, eventually, a shore awaits it. I have deciphered this sign that has risen from the darkness and to feign amnesia during the daytime would be to hide from my own shadow. The world I move in during the day does not contradict the one that exists at night. This is why I cannot claim to be troubled by the fact that humanity only lives half of the time. I no longer say that I dream, because the quantitative difference between the two phenomena of day and night also implies a qualitative one.

I would propose the discovery of a new language that genuinely expresses the psychic phenomena that resemble, but are not identical to, dream. This dream which, even if still opposed to external reality, has long since ceased to be opposed to the life of the dreamer. In this language, the one I have been unable to find, the ancient antinomies, beginning with that of good and evil, will be resolved for the meanwhile at an individual level. The Surrealists — who at this individual level represent synthesis — have found a way out of that great drama separating the dreamer from the dream, while on a collective level their coming to consciousness still holds them within this drama. The nocturnal image, which finds its identity in the presence of phantoms of the waking state, leads us to consider those people and objects with no psychic resonance as equivalent to the diurnal residue of the dream. We approach the world of phantoms as we would a reality lying outside this world at odds with itself, a world with no valid correspondence within ourselves. In the world I like to breathe in, a box can take on the same psychic content of a beloved woman; the delirious and fetishistic love between a man and a box thus casts a prophetic, thaumaturgic light onto the outer world. Because of the multiple possibilities for symbolization that an impulse might assume, tomorrow’s world will be given a quality that corresponds to our inner delirium. Phantoms will be approachable and commonplace, and we will no longer need the pretentious rituals of hypnotic séances to produce mediumistic phenomena; in a world where the mediumistic will be commonplace, the projecting of our unconscious will occur as automatically as a slip of the tongue. A man smitten with a shoe will no longer be exposed in journals of psychiatry — those revolting prisons in which our society reveals its own monstrosity by seeking to put its “monsters” on display — and the nimbed phantoms of paralytic spirits will transform their haloes into spittoons and gather around us to complete our dreams, our poems, our simplest gestures.
Figure 9: Astrological Birth Chart

Figure 11: The Ideal Phantom
How many times have I thought of you, you hair-worshipper, standing at the Trocadero metro station at six in the evening with a pair of scissors sticking from your hand like an erection, waiting for schoolgirls with their long plaits? Why do these scissors and the tresses hidden under your shirt make me think of that place of the chance encounter in Maldoror, the dissecting table? Why this woman-object with a heart like an icy shred of ectoplasm, with her diaphanous skin through which the wind blows and pipettes full of milk from passive vampires pass; why put this solid shadow on a dissecting table as though at the feet of the most superb woman?

How otherwise could I reveal the sadomasochistic confusion lying at the depths of my active and passive being, like the idea of a wound, provocative and provoked like the whiteness that springs from a solar spectre? And my great, my supreme desire to spill blood, to dive into a bath of blood, to drink blood, to breathe blood, how could I understand this desire without the sacrifice of blood which I am ready to make? [2] And the ever more ample, ever more shadowy maternal breast that with mathematical exactitude directs each of our gestures, how much closer does it get to us with each drop of blood shed? And that handsome vampire, paler than a letter, eyes closed, the tresses of mist flung around his shoulders, flung around his sword, sucks in frenzy. His leaps forward and back are made in solitude, like a block of ice, foretelling the past, revealing the future, casting onto the world a spectral light, a tenebrous light.

I close my eyes, as active as a vampire, I open them within myself, as passive as a vampire, and between the blood that arrives, the blood that leaves, and the blood already inside me there occurs an exchange of images like an engagement of daggers. Now I could eat a piano, shoot a table, inhale a staircase. All the extremities of my body have orifices out of which come the skeletons of the piano, the table, the staircase, and for the very first time these ordinary — and therefore non-existent — objects can exist. I climb this staircase not to get to the first floor but to get closer to myself. I lean on the banisters not to avoid vertigo but to prolong it. If when I get to the top floor I open a door that leads straight out onto the street, I will fall into space but will not die. If I do happen to die, it is a phenomenon used only as a pretext. I understand the feeling of guilt but I do not understand death; I am unable to understand how this iniquity, this error, has led to the extermination of so many generations and how humankind can treat it as a finality (and I'm not referring to those swine who talk about the afterlife). Death is an irremediable end, a "truth", an ultimate obstacle among the reality of obstacles. Within this reality, in which the elixir of life is a fantasy, an alchemist's dream, death is irremediable, definitive. For us, the alchemists' dream, like any dream, is a part of reality. We deny false external reality, we deny the false reality of death, we deny all repression. The elixir of life is a prophetic dream, and if we think of the reality of desire, then all dreams should be considered prophetic. At worst tomorrow's death will be a macabre substitute for pleasure, a traumatic remnant bequeathed by past generations that keeps up the impulses' play of shadow and light, yet physical, irremediable, definitive death will be nothing but a sinister utopia. In today's society only those with the psychology of a corpse can talk naively about a "natural" death.

Notes

1. In a hypnotism manual I saw the portrait of a woman in a cataleptic trance holding a chair in an unaccustomed position, and to me the portrait was at the same time one of a chair holding a woman in an unaccustomed position.

2. 'When atheism will wish for martyrs, let it designate them, my blood is ready to be shed' (Sade).
The aim of this selection is to introduce readers to a number of the most innovative and influential writers of verse from Argentina and Uruguay working in the last quarter of the twentieth century and beyond. Any introduction to such a collection is obliged to justify the selection of both poets and poems, and the process by which the pieces have been translated; before this is undertaken, a few words on my title I hope will offer suitable context to what is being undertaken here.

By “contemporary” I refer to both the careers and the relevance of the poets included. Of the poets included, four are still alive, writing and publishing. The two deceased poets, Perlongher and Lamborghini, continue to be active presences within Latin American poetry, through posthumous publications, translations into a number of languages (particularly between Portuguese and Spanish, in the case of Perlongher), and through the numerous essays that their work inspires. The contemporaneity of all of the poets included here is marked by the absence of biographies (except in the case of Lamborghini) or a significant body of single author studies, works that are yet to be written and published. I would argue, finally, that any understanding of either the current state of River Plate poetry or, indeed, the history of twentieth-century poetry, is incomplete without reference to these writers.

The second term of my title, “River Plate”, points to the countries of birth of these writers: Argentina in the case of four, Uruguay in the case of Espina and Echavarren. The inclusion of Uruguayan poets alongside Argentines is not intended as a reinstatement of former territorial unities; nor is there any attempt to subsume the particular history of the East Bank within that of its larger, western neighbour. Instead, I wish to point to the artificiality of certain divides that the arbiters of the national canon are forced to maintain: in the twentieth century, exchanges across borders and languages in the Southern Cone have led to some of the most productive cultural encounters: the dialogue between the avant-gardes in Buenos Aires and São Paulo in the 1920s; the links between the radical left and social poetry in the 1970s; and the nexus São Paulo/Buenos Aires/Montevideo along which the conversations of the neo-barroco were often traced.

The choice of a river—rather than a country or a geographical region (such as “the southern cone”)—as a geographical delimiter, marks another factor in the biographies of these poets: the experience of moving between countries, for personal, professional and political reasons. Perlongher experienced exile in Brazil; Echavarren and Espina have both pursued academic careers in the US; Lamborghini spent the last years of his life in near-isolation in Barcelona hotel rooms. The constant movement of the Río de la Plata also hints at another reality in the lives of these poets: centrifugal and centripetal movement away from and towards the major urban centres. Lamborghini and Carrera are both closely associated with the town of Pringles and the Province of Buenos Aires; Perlongher’s relationship with his working class suburban upbringing in Avellaneda, across the Riachuelo that divides Buenos Aires city from the province must also be noted; Echavarren states that he divides his time between Buenos Aires and Montevideo. These are, in sum, poets characterised by movement, who travel both as Lezama Lima suggested, without leaving the house but, also, geographically, between countries and continents.

1. I’d like to thank all those who commented on these translations: Roberto Echavarren, Eduardo Espina, Tamara Kamenszain and Cornelia Graebner.
By “poetry” I point to the use of verse by many of these writers; Lamborghini spoke of “prosa cortada”, or “cut prose” but, while the disposition of the text is of importance, the rhythms and distinctive beat of verse are clearly present. Kamenszain’s verse, for example, is characterised by not only extremely precise syntax, but also the rhythms of tango and Japanese music. Espina’s poetry offers two further distinctive formal characteristics: the counting of syllables that results in the sculpted shape of his poems, and the creation of sonic links through sibilance and alliteration. Lamborghini and Perlongher, meanwhile, towards the end of their lives, both wrote poems of a surprising formal precision; Perlongher’s sonnets draw on the Golden Age (Góngora and Quevedo, in particular) and the Spanish mystics (especially Santa Teresa); Lamborghini enters into a dialogue with both the aesthetic poets of the 1960s—Alejandra Pizarnik, above all—as well as popular gaucho poetry of the late 1800s. Most of these writers produced pieces that could be called prose poems, as well as much longer pieces; in this case—Carrera, in particular—it is the precise attention to the rhythms and repetitions of language where the work of the poem takes place.

I present these works as parallel texts and there is, for this reason, some literality in translations. I do not intend these translations to stand wholly alone as poems in their own right, nor to depart greatly from the originals, as is the case in the work of poet-translators such as Don Patterson. This work is very much intended as an introduction for the general reader of poetry, as a tool for the specialist, and as a study aid for students. Wherever possible, the most literal—dictionary word for dictionary word—option has been chosen. In poems where formal elements respond either to traditional metrical forms or offer innovative formal devices (Espina’s shape, Kamenszain’s syntax) I have attempted more creative translations that may not opt for the most immediate choice of word in the target language. The selection also acknowledges another aim: it is hoped that even readers with no or very little Spanish will be able to enjoy this selection through reading my translation alongside the original.

The relationship between reader and choiser of such a selection as this is one that implies a great deal of trust; with this in mind I should offer an explanation of the criteria for inclusion. It is both a personal selection, and an attempt to provoke discussion and study. No work such as this is objective; Echavarren has spoken of the role of the editor as being close to that of the DJ selecting tracks or the curator choosing art works.

My deeper engagement with Argentine poetry began with a PhD thesis on Perlongher, and a related four-handed project, sadly never fulfilled, to produce a critical bilingual edition of his poems and prose. My work on Perlongher introduced me to those poets included in Echavarren’s collection Medusario, perhaps the key reference point for students of Latin American poetry at the close of the last century. Thus writers included here are also found in that seminal collection; they are also writers on whom I have published or taught. This is, in part, related to the issue of translatability, to which I shall return below. In all cases, I have aimed to select writers of whom I have been able to come to a personal understanding of individual works, and their place within the author’s production as a whole. As a group, the poets were all born after 1940—see also my comments on contemporaneity, above—and exhibit a similar trajectory, often including work within the academy, in particular university overseas, a personal intellectual engagement with continental philosophy (Echavarren’s use of Kant; Perlongher’s theoretical application and adaptation of Deleuze & Guattari; Lamborghini’s visceral engagement with Lacanian psychoanalysis, as well as classical Cynicism), and personal friendships with other poets included herein. Many of these writers also found themselves dissatisfied with the political options available as their writing careers began—the mid 1970s and immediately afterward—particularly those presented by the organised or armed left, with its focus on the seizure of central power and, very often, its increasing militarisation, as in the case of Argentina’s montoneros.

Formally and stylistically there is a great deal of variety in the choice of authors and in the choice of individual’s works, but as representatives of recent poetics in the region, I feel that together these authors illustrate a number of important features: a critical engagement with the Cuban neo-barroco of José Lezama Lima; a further engagement with the classical barroco of the 1600s; a clear shift away from conceptions of language as a communicative tool in itself, towards an awareness of the materiality, corporeality and conditionalness of language; an often
aggressive dialogue with the headline literary and cultural movements of the twentieth-century Southern Cone, including surrealism and the avant-garde, the response of poets to the Spanish Civil War and other political catastrophes, and popular forms such as tango and the grotesco criollo; and the presence of theory—be it Freudian, Lacanian, or post-structural—at times ironised, at times sexualised, in their work. Finally, it is impossible to ignore the presence of sex in all its forms in the works of these writers.

The texts themselves have been chosen for a variety of reasons. Often these are intensely personal: put simply, I enjoy the poem “Momias” by Espina. Secondly, these are poems that I have been able to translate. Any translation, even the most basic, implies translation loss; indeed the mere repetition of a phrase in the same language implies change, as Hume would have it. But I have found some—many—poems beyond my capabilities as a student of language and of poetry. These I leave for more gifted translators to come. Those included here are poems that, often with great effort and, even after this effort, an intense sense of provisionality, I feel satisfied that I have been able to render with sufficient equivalence. This includes the use of compensation in a number of areas; attention to the version of Espina’s poem of course reveals the mechanographical and syntactic tricks required to maintain its distinctive form; loss of sonic play at one point has often been compensated for elsewhere; liberties have been taken with Lamborghini’s word choice to maintain both his crudeness and his experiments with rhyme and repetition. Any poem is both utterly translateable and utterly untranslateable, and I hope that these attempts acknowledge both what can and cannot be carried over, while at the same time being, alongside the Spanish versions, enjoyable as poems. Finally, length has also been a factor: I have not myself cut poems (I have left that for earlier editors) and so, in general, have chosen poems of a length more suitable to inclusion in a selection like this one.

It is important at this stage to offer some context to the period from which these poems emerge, and the political circumstances with which they—in certain cases—intervene. The second half of the twentieth century in Argentina and Uruguay was characterised by an increasing polarisation of the political spectrum; Peronism had been able to vertically organise working class demands and control the middle and upper sectors; in Uruguay, the Battlista model had created a prosperous, stable and well-educated society, often referred to stereotypically as the Switzerland of the south; less appreciative was Mario Benedetti, who referred to Uruguay as the país de cola de paja: the coward country. Military coups and dictatorship came with a regularity that became almost depressingly predictable in Argentina: in 1955 to remove Perón after he had alienated foreign interests and the Catholic Church; in 1966 as the elected government failed to hold off economic crisis; and bloodiest of all in 1976, as the disaster of Peronism redivivus and the violent confrontations between police, military and armed leftist groups contributed to a strategy of tension that led almost inevitably to military takeover and repression of astonishing savagery. Uruguay, in contrast, seemed to move almost by accident into dictatorship after a right wing clampdown; despite the numerically less shocking nature of the crimes of the Uruguayan dictatorship, the coup and repression clearly revealed the tensions and aporia of the social-reformist model.

All of the writers included here have thus experienced dictatorship; several have known exile and violence first hand. Perlongher, for example, dedicated his most famous poem, “Cadáveres” (“Corpses”, memorably translated by William Rowe), to a disappeared friend. But what distinguishes these writers from many poets of the previous generation is that political violence did not move them towards a Marxist-Leninist position; although Lamborghini, for example, declared himself a Marxist, this by no means moved him towards the styles of writing most closely associated with Marxism and its variants, namely socialist realism or, more recently, the testimonio à la Rigoberta Menchú or the former left-Peronist militant Miguel Bonasso. Nor is the specific association with Cuba and the notion of an exportable revolution, so common amongst the Latin American left of the 1960s and 70s, encountered here. In particular, it is the attitude towards minorities that some of these writers encountered amongst the organised left that clashed with their own positions as individuals and writers; Perlongher recounted his constant shifts amongst different anarchist and far-left groups in the 1960s and 70s: none could be persuaded to pronounce “favourably” on the “theme” of homosexuality, seen as a bourgeois deviation. Writers such as
Echavarren instead found hippy movements, androgyny and drugs as means by which difference could be experienced without censure. The *neobaroque* is thus provocative in a number of ways and in a number of fashions: a very different association to Cuba (specifically via Lezama Lima, effectively under house arrest in Havana after the Padilla affair); a sensual, excessive language, in which politics often appears at the level of the body; and a refusal to commit artistic sacrifices in the name of the cause or the struggle.

So brief a historical sketch runs the risk of flattening out the individual life-stories and poetics at play; shared coordinates, experiences and interlocutors there may be, but there is no uniform story to tell of the poets included or their works. Arturo Carrera's work is characterised by the search for innovation in both formal presentation and stated thematics. His early collection, *Escrito con un nictógrafo*, explored Lewis Carroll's invention, the nyctograph, to produce white-on-black poems, strikingly read by Alejandra Pizarnik in 1972. Thematically, Carrera has explored birth and childhood, both in biological and literary terms: his collection *La partena canta* (1982) was seen by Perlongher as the central literary birth for recent Argentine poetry and it is revealing that Carrera's anthology of new Argentine poetry was entitled *Monstruos*. Thematically, his poems explore the means by which desire throws the supposedly stable family unit into question; Carrera is a poet clearly aware of patriarchal structures, but also keen to ridicule and explode such rigidities. Particularly given the background of Italian immigration to the area, Carrera also questions national and linguistic stratification; that is to say that there is a world of difference between the twisted, stumbling orality of Carrera's poems, and any notion of orality as the royal road to communicative clarity. At the same time, what makes Carrera's "father" so recognisably Argentine is that he is also so recognisably Italian: the national is the foreign and vice versa.

Roberto Echavarren's work is closely associated with two key terms: the *neobaroque* and the androgyne. Alongside Perlongher, Echavarren promoted, theorised, and published the *neobaroque* as a rebellion against the strictures of contemporary River Plate poetry, particular so-called "objectivist" works that, in something close to neorealist style, sought to capture and communicate socio-political reality. His investigations into androgyny, in particular the androgyne as one who throws binary thought into chaos, have led him beyond poetry into rock music, drugs and the hippy movement. His work also engages closely with the notion of performance, and he is himself an accomplished performer and filmmaker. His work, thematically and sonically dense and sensuous, highlights the micropolitics of the body.

Eduardo Espina, currently a professor at Texas A&M University, characterises his own style as "barrococó": the tension of metaphor and complexity of syntax, of Gongora, alongside the sensual overload of the rococó. His poems are further characterised by their distinctively monolithic form and complex networks of sonic play. His work thus has an intensely synaesthetic quality, working on eye, mouth, ear and breath at once; I would also argue that he is one of the most intensely erotic poets of the current era.

Tamara Kamenszain, who is also a distinguished critic, demonstrates in her work a particular concern for space and attention. Her series of poems based around Japanese Nō theatre explores different regimes of viewing, of the relationship between actor, role and spectator; her use of non-referential simile (close to Perlongher's non-metaphorical metaphor) obliges the reader to experience the signifying potential of poetry without it necessarily signifying anything; meanwhile her exploration of domestic space—one of her collections is entitled *Vida de living* (living room life)—forces readers to defamiliarise the everyday through the folding and twisting of commonalities: a way of re-viewing the familiar. Thematically Kamenszain reengages the tango as a means of relating to the city; formally, her poems are characterised by precision, smallness and even what one might call phrasal anorexia.

Lamborghini's poetry operates in multiple voices, registers and lexical fields: the political, the personal, the sexual, the philosophical; like the man himself, Osvaldo's poems are provocative, stimulating and extremely dangerous. Politically his work moves from an awareness of the risks and disasters of populism—its Peronist variety—to a radical Cynicism in keeping with the life and sayings of Diogenes of Sinope. Yet despite expressing vitriolic hatred for the Argentine political class,
Lamborghini's work also talks obsessively to its literary tradition, in particular popular forms such as tango and the *gauchesco*. His pieces send out a multitude of tracers into all aspects of Argentine history and culture in what might be called an overflow of allusion.

This allusiveness is also characteristic of the work of Perlongher, a poet whose work's similarities with that of Paul Celan have been noted by Claudio Canaparo. Perlongher's allusiveness comes, initially, from the secretive world of anarchist politics and gay rights groups in the 1960s and 1970s; it also hints at the codes and secrets of the subculture of homosexual parties, cruising and drag in a context of legal censure and paralegal violence and murder. Perlongher became the most vocal and active theorist and representative of the so-called *neobaroque* and his career demonstrated a remarkable capacity to exist constantly at the cutting edge of alternative politics and theory: anarchist in the 1960s, gay rights activist in the 1970s, urban anthropologist and theorist in the 1980s and, finally, anthropologist, theorist and member of the Amazonian drug cult, Santo Daime, in the 1990s. His poetry shows this varied development: early poems that allude obsessively to politics and Argentine history; an attempt to express in language the sensations of urban prostitution as a kind of popular baroque; later, an attempt to capture the force and form of the *yagé* trip.

A note on the presentation: as much as possible I have attempted to keep lines of the Spanish and English versions level with each other, although I am aware that for syntactic reasons this has not always been possible. For the reader's convenience I include either by the title or at the foot of the poem the date of publication or, in the case of some of Lamborghini's poems, not anthologised until 2004, the date of composition as suggested by César Aira in his edition of Lamborghini's *Poemas 1969-1985*.

To conclude this introduction, then, if, as is the intention of this collection, the reader's interest in contemporary River Plate and Latin American poetry is pricked by what she reads herein, I can think of no better place to continue her readings than the collection *Medusario*, edited by Echavarren, Kozer and Sefami.

— Ben Bollig

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**Arturo Carrera** (Argentina, 1948)

from *MI PADRE* (1985)

Padre cubierto de nieve. Hace frío. De uthilería.  
Vía a cazar. Pujar. En la cama casita caza.  
Vía a cazar con sus señuelos los patos feos a laguna preciosa.  
Vía a sostener las dulces querellas de la pólvora y el vino.  
Vía a contener el sádico irisarse del arco iris. Matar.  
Pujar en la naturaleza soberbia. So verba de correr. Hundir un poco la jabalina en jabonoso barro. Sentir herir un poco entre las plumas y las risas el golpe de la impaciencia en perdigones. Volársele los patos sobre la pícara y cejijunta niebla... No poder sino reir, sonreír, pintar con la energía más célibe las recortadas figuras acuáticas del desasosiego.

//

from *MYFATHER*

Snow-covered father. It's cold. With kit.  
He's going hunting. To struggle. In bed board bait.  
He's going hunting with his decoys for the ugly ducks at the pretty lake.  
He's going to withstand the quarrels of powder and wine.  
He's going to contain the sadistic iridescence of the rainbow. To kill.  
To struggle through proud nature. In the name of the chase. To pierce the soapy mud slightly with the javelin. To feel the blow of impatience wound the partridges slightly through feathers and laughter. To have the ducks fly away from him over the soundrel frowning fog... To be unable but to laugh, smile, paint with most celibate energy the aquatic cut-outs of unease.
Padre que cae de nariz en el barro. Padre que mueve a risa. Padre que revive del conocimiento la vocetita confusa del saber. Deseo y voluntad de unas muertes eréctiles como el humillo azul de las silbantes codornices. Páramo donde el error engarza sus tesoros: sus bultos primitivos. Padre fantasma que canta en el exceso. Que sale a constatar del tiempo las mensuras. Vigila pariciones. Las esquelas. Los redondos conejos. Los caballos en las rayadas, torpes y negras lluvias. Los uccellói. Los vuelos, las nidadas, las cuevas y los aromosos pollitos con sus cluecas, sus abuelas, sus gallinas esponjosas atravesadas a cada cloqueo por los manchones del sol sobre los huevos. La carne de "chinchudo", la miel: los pollitos, otra vez, oyendo al padre retráctil como un falso cubillo.

Father who falls face first in the mud. Father who makes people laugh. Father who brings back the confused whisper of knowledge from knowing. Desire and will of erectile deaths like the thin blue smoke of the whistling quail. A wasteland where error mounts its treasures: its primitive bundles. Ghostly father who sings too much. Who goes out to check the weather stats. Watch over the births. The sheering. The fat rabbits. The horses in the striped, clumsy, black rain. Th'uccellói. The flights, the nesting, the cellars, the odorous chicks with their mother-bens, their grandmother-bens, their spongy bens crossed at every cluck by the stains of the sun over their eggs. The "chitlin" meat, the honey: the chicks, once again, hearing the father, retractable like a false knife.
Padre sin origen. La cigüeña lo trajo. El sonido frío del sonajero chino en la puerta del templo del verano. Allí lo dejó la cigüeña en un repollo de seda escarlata sobre los tablones pulidos. Junto al pie gordo y rosado, suavísimo y húmedo, de una desconocida orante. Sí, todas las mentiras más simples. Todos los pillajes de las sabidurías del sueño. Padre sin origen. Padre que en el lecho nupcial, junto a su Madre por la mañana y por la noche. Hundidos levemente en la ciénaga que se evapora. Abrazados, desnudos. Con sus olores, sus colores y sus cosas. Y el verano cercándolos de verano. El vaho donde arrastramos con el camaleón las plumas de colibrí descartadas por la bruma. Y allí alguien delata las escaramuzas de los dioses. Allí una edad del sexo canoniza los ritmos y las diabólicas posiciones humanas: consentimos creer. Niños oscuros en el diapasón del deseo. En el corazón el oro que mastican las noches y los juguetes hidrofóbicos, los tiñosos artificios. No, no entiendo lo que se me decía es verdad. Tampoco lo que volcaron forzando y maldiciendo los tinteros involcables. No entiendo. Y allí abrió en el deseo una boca de la verdad:

allí se introducía la lengua. Por romo que fuera amor
allí simple era el amor imposible y no existía simple
allí me pedían que enterrara un diente de oro paternalf
y que pelara una teta fría, de difunta Carrera...

Father without origin. The stork brought him. The cold sound of the Chinese rattle at the door of the summer temple. The stork left him there in a scarlet silk cabbage on the polished boards. Next to the fat pink foot, so gentle and damp, of an unknown worshipper. Yes, all the simplest of lies. All the pillaging of the knowledge of dream. Father without origin. Father who in the nuptial bed, next to his Mother in the morning and at night. Buried lightly in the evaporating swamp. Embraced, naked. With their odours, their colours, their things. And the summer surrounding them with summer. The vapour where along with the chameleon we drag the hummingbird feathers discarded by the mist. And there where someone gives away the skirmishes of the gods. There an age of sex canonizes the rhythms and diabolic human positions: we consent to believe. Dark children in the tone of desire. In the golden heart that nights and hydrophobic toys—the scabby artifices—chew on. No, no I don't understand what was being said to me is true. Nor what they spilt forcing and cursing the non-spill inkwells. I don't understand. And in desire she opened a mouth of truth:

there the tongue went in, as oval as love was
there simply love was impossible and it didn't exist simple
there they asked me to bury a paternall golden tooth
and pluck a cold tit of the deceased Mrs Carrera...
CONFESIÓN PIRAMIDAL (1988)

pirámides formando en un momento
– Julián del Casal

PYRAMIDAL CONFESSION

pyramids forming in a moment
– Julián del Casal

Roberto Echavarren (Uruguay)

Si la distribución de los azules en este vértigo cóncico, en vísperas de primavera
sobre la colcha, espera todo de la música
aunque colabora hacia el espejismo de finales
plenos de sentidos, es que la vida
trae sus manojos apretados, sus gavillas, el torneado
turbante desde el cual el sol se escapa girando
y no sabemos cuál es la relación entre “arte” y “vida”
salvo cuando el pelo de una gata en celo se eriza.
Si pudieras describir la vida como una colección de vestidos
o crímenes que saltan a la vista:
pienso en la foto de un indonesio atravesado en el cráneo
por una bala, pero esta imagen
que está a mi disposición, es una entre otras
y en el espejismo, en las imágenes que mi cuerpo absorbe, en las que expele,
una ola de piojos que a la luz tibia de la ventana aparecen en la piel del mono,
se desmadeja una cabellera, fijada con coágulos de sangre contra un cráneo,
pero los ojos no se corresponden con esa u otra imagen,
son los ojos de la muerte, o más bien del estar muriendo:
vértigo de la mujer que despierta en el techo de su automóvil
hecho un nudo de hierros retorcidos, ve a su hija yacer a su lado
y al querer tocarla advierte que nada hay donde un brazo había,
que no tiene brazos, que ellos han sido abolidos
como una hoja queda aprisionada entre las páginas de un libro;
donde había un mundo todavía hay un mundo.
“Nosotros casi te hemos querido. Faltó poco
para convencernos. Tal vez el problema no está en ti,
sino en una nueva manera de ver que se ha ido insinuando últimamente.
O bien, y esto tal vez nos permita ser más exactos:

IF THE distribution of blues in this conical vertigo,
a day before Spring, on the bedspread,
effects everything from music, though it collaborates
to the mirage of full finales of sense,
whatever life is - brings its squeezed handfuls, its bundles of grain, the turned
turban from which the sun escapes turning,
and we don't know what the relationship between “art” and “life” is,
except when a cat on heat's hair bristles.
If you could describe life as a collection of dresses,
or crimes which leap out at you:
I'm thinking of the photo of an Indonesian,
his skull shot through by a bullet,
but this image, available to me, is only one amongst others,
and that mirage, the pictures my body absorbs, those it expels
in the tepid light from the window;
a wave of fleas appear on the skin of the monkey,
the hairdo flops, fixed with clots of blood against his skull,
but my eyes don't match those of the image,
they're the eyes of death, or rather of dying:
the vertigo of a woman who awakes on the roof of her car
that's a twisted knot of metal, sees her daughter lying by her side
and when she wants to touch her she notices there's nothing where an arm was,
that she has no arms, that they've been abolished
like a leaf imprisoned between the pages of a book;
where there was a world there is still a world.

“Good gracious, we've almost loved you.
You did almost enough to convince us.
Perhaps the problem is not in you,
but rather in a new way of seeing, that's been hinted at lately.
Or rather, and this perhaps will allow us some more precision:
una manera de mirar que era la nuestra
pero que ya no consideramos útil, o interesante, o posible proseguir.
Tal vez los problemas de nuestra economía
truequen las realidades de no digamos una década,
sino de aquellos pocos meses anteriores a este brutal
comienzo de la primavera. El aire mismo,
es decir los altos repentinestodos en el clima
de esta ciudad, los pináculos de sonido,
lá luz del sol en el agua de unos ojos verdes, a cierta hora de la tarde,
cambia a algo tan incongruente como el cardigan de la hora de cenar.
Y tu vida así, entre los crepúsculos
instantáneos y los inciertos periodos de ceguera,
transita calles que rápidamente han dejado de ser las mismas
y todos los trastos de una incipiente parafernalia
con sus particulares órbitas de interés, sus contrastes
o divergencias dentro del espíritu de una época,
cuando uno buscaba simplemente expandir o profundizar
los límites de la comprensión y las condiciones del diálogo,
se han vuelto ahora los mensajeros trastocados de un cambio
en que los indicios no revierten a un sistema, sino implican de súbito
que los más inocentes sueños de imperio quedaron
sin el menor chal con que cubrirse la espalda,
es decir, sin la menor posibilidad de acuerdo,
de sumaciones que los designios prvidos del principio del día
nos hacen ver ahora como ruinas
antes de que se hayan completado siquiera los cimientos.

y que la aventura es descrita en términos
tan encantadores, los cronistas siguen hablando
de una Florida de salutaciones;
no ya salones y salones, decorados y amueblados
según el gusto prolijo de los aposentos de invierno,
donde el alba, tan temprano ahora, llega para mostrar
el ligero destartalado o deterioro de los materiales más seguros,
el terciopelo, por ejemplo, enroscándose en las borlas torturadas
pero majestuosas de un cortinado, tras el cual
el Príncipe de Urbino está envuelto como una crisálida
frente al alba ya roja de desastres;
o las almendras y el mazapán machacados en esta torta nupcial,
o los caireles apelmazados con las columnas todavía verticales
pero partidas, y las diademas, y el índigo del mar
y el kohl de cejas y pestañas;
las camisas arrojadas a una navegación de cuerpo perdido;
el paisaje decapitado; el indistinto
botín que un emigrado arrastra e incorpora,
del cual caen fragmentos, joyas son robadas,
nuevos frisos aparecen como un mar esmeralda
o como el cono de un helado de menta.
Entre la colcha desgarrada salen los pies indemnes,
los pies de barro del coloso,
prestos a calzarse de nuevo a la empresa
del conquistador de turno, pies alados,
pies cansados; pies que son en efecto
el único despojo de la batalla."

but cracked, and the tiaras, and the indigo of the sea
and the kohl of lashes and eyebrows;
the shirts cast to a lost body's navigation;
the decapitated landscape; the indistinct
booty that an émigré drags and treasures,
from which fragments fall, jewels are robbed,
new friezes appear like an emerald sea
or like a cone of mint ice cream.
From amongst the rent bedspread emerge the unharmed feet,
the feet of clay of the colossus,
ready to take themselves again to task,
the conqueror of the moment's winged feet,
feet which are tired; feet that are, in fact,
the only spoils of the battle."
AMOR DE MADRE (1988)

ROCA, eco, arena seca;
corre del barranco
agua candente: cada grano
de mica al sol, papila, broto, piedra,
lengua reseca, recoge polvo
del talud que baja. Llaga removida
sube a la nube, vapor hoy,
chubasco, quién sabe. Lamo salpicaduras.
A pleno sol un soldado cruza la calle;
tuvo más paciencia que yo:
arrastraba el uniforme (paso a paso).
El sol nació en mi corazón (por un momento).
Relegado por la madre a una vida subalterna,
nació lejos de su corazón reservado a otro.
El caso (no obstante) vuelve disponible
una fresca aventura: árboles sobre piedras
al costado del camino dan sombra;
agua murmura en la bomba.

MOTHER’S LOVE

ROCK, echo, hard sand;
from the ravine runs
white-hot water: each grain
of mica in the sun, bud, shoot, stone,
sere mouth, collects dust
from the sloping screen. Gouged wound
rises to the sky, vapour today,
downpour who knows when. I lick the splashings.
A soldier crosses the street in full sunshine;
he had more patience than I have:
he dragged his uniform (step by step).
The sun was born in my heart (for a moment).
Cast down by the mother to a subaltern role,
born far from its heart saved for another.
The case (however) makes available
a fresh adventure: trees among stones
alongside the path cast shadows;
water murmurs in the hose.
BAJO el agua, la roca,
bajo los recortes del collage, la sequía,
bajo tu párpado pintado por Ingres o Dalí
un cuenco opaco y hueco;
tras el batir de plumas rítmico, sin posarse,
cuando Psique y Cupido se besan, las paredes del cuarto, erosionadas, inmóviles.

El sentido íntimo de las cosas es una membrana sin espesor atrevasada
por una navaja.
No hay secreto de conjunto sino en cada cosa cuando llama la atención:
papel al viento vuela hacia el huerto.
El cielo tiene una cicatriz de plomo diagonal;
vibran las hojas de la vid.
A los cinco años no pude ver a mi abuela
tras el tul de mosquitero cadente sobre su cama.
Escuché el ruido del mar antes de verlo:
caracol blanco en la escalera de caracol.

Las cosas no se quedan pero vienen de nuevo
para ser vistas por primera vez.
Ella las vio; yo las veo por ella hoy;
ayer me anunciaban algo,
no sé si alguien las verá por mí.
Las cosas callan;
la lluvia corre, no queda nadie.
Jugüete de la circunstancia, ya sin tul de mosquitero
penetré la grupa, arrebate la trenza reservada para mí.
De niño estuve muerto.
Encima de los parrales surge una mancha naranja,
tiza naranja bajo agua,
tuna roja en la maceta roja
tajada por presión de las raíces.
Estoy en su cuarto, en su cama;
de madrugada se oyeron pájaros y lluvia

LOVES

UNDER the water, the rock,
under the cuttings of the collage, the drought,
under an eyelid painted by Ingres or Dalí
an opaque and hollow bowl;
after the beating of feathers, rhythmic, without repose,
when Psyche and Cupid kiss, the walls of the room eroded, immobile.

The intimate sense of things is a membrane without thickness pierced
by a knife.
There is no secret to everything, except in each thing when it calls for attention:
a paper on the breeze flies towards the garden.
The sky has a scar of diagonal lead;
the leaves on the vine vibrate together.
Aged five, I could not make out my grandmother
through the tulle of the mosquito net cadent over her bed.
I heard the noise of the sea before seeing it:
white seashell on the spiral staircase.

Things do not remain but they come again
to be seen for the first time.
She saw them; I see them today for her;
yesterday they announced something to me,
I don't know if anyone will see them in my place.
Things fall silent;
the rain runs, there's no one left.
Circumstance's plaything, now without the mosquito net
I pierced the rump, I snatched the braid reserved for me.
As a child I was dead.
Above the vine arbour rises an orange stain,
orange chalk under water,
red prickly pear in the red plant pot
cracked by the pressure of the roots.
I'm in her room, in her bed;
at dawn one could hear the birds and the rain
que chorrea por techos y desagües.
Un gato color herrumbe pasa sobre el muro del fondo:
el es yo, blanco, gozo latente, punto de rebote.
La neblina a bocanadas engolfa la avenida.
Luces verdes de mercurio explotan, fruta húmeda.
Recogí la flor naranja flourescente entre los arroyos improvisados, espuma, pausa,
cuando los actos dejan de importar pero otorgan un acabado a cada acto
porque siempre estuvo aquí aunque yo no estaba.
Aqui no hay nadie.
Recogí la flor, te la regale.
Gracias a ti hay performance.
Una noción vuelve del limbo
donde no llovió por mucho tiempo.
Parte de la gracia es no ver a través de otro,
no hacernos jamás transparentes en el paraíso,
pero fue suficiente tu estadía en el paraíso,
pero que el cielo pasara de oscuro a naranja,
las sábanas, las paredes, el balcón vacíos.

that drips down roofs and gutters.
A rust-coloured cat passes along the end wall:
he is I, white, latent pleasure, rebound point.
The wind engulls in gusts the avenue.
Green lights of mercury explode, moist fruit.
I picked the orange fluorescent flowers in these improvised streams, spume, pause,
when the years cease to matter, but they put a finish on every action,
because it was always here, even though I wasn't.
Here there is no one.
I picked the flower. I gave it to you.
Thanks to you there's performance.
A notion returns from limbo
where for a long time it didn't rain.
Part of the trick is not seeing through the other,
ever becoming transparent in paradise,
because your stay in no-man's-land was enough
for the sky to change from dark to orange,
the sheets, the walls, the balcony, empty.
EN ESTA TUMBA OSCURA (1994)

EL CANTANTE cubierto de esmaltadas escamas
escapa antes que lo pillen los pillastres,
antes que la zancadilla en el podio lo destine a su fagocitosis
sobredosificado en aras de un entusiasmo salival por la noche
todo de nomade y monad,
devoradora de líquido sanguinosa,
hasta que lo rompen como una bolsa de mejillones,
hasta que lo atravan con una pértiga, latiguillo de las tripas, destapan
un water closet con un guante de goma en la noche rasgada por dentro,
lo parten con un pincho para picar hielo, rotas las sinapsis
de su costra en relieve. No sólo conejo de luna.

Una triple hendidura sobre la bóveda craneana
con una clavija de coral achatado,
por lancinante cabeza hecho fibras
de higo amoratado en un torbellino seco.
La inflada vejiga, rotta ahora, una gruta
de líquido desmaquillante se atomiza.

Súbita deglución melatiizada por un pico de tortuga,
esta tumba oscura se tragó la valva, valga
el cloqueo de la lengua, el pito
brisando los vapores
por donde encarna el boqueo la resistencia al viento.

“Me haces real, me haces libre.” Para sostener este trabajo
de tropero sobrio pero seguro
después de la escuela, tu cosa,
okay, un cuero, tu pelo alrededor
de mi pescuezo, en la noche más de mi vida.
Este método no engañará a nadie. La dialisis
se conmuta en presión por
el río celeste donde nada un caimán. Poca comida,
pero digo: “Este método es el malgasto de una aurora.”

IN THIS DARK TOMB

THE SINGER covered with glazed flakes
escapes before the cads catch up with him
before his trip on the podium destines him to their phagocytosis
overdosed in the name of salival enthusiasm for the night
between nomad and monad,
devourer of bloody lymph,
until they burst him like a bag of mussels,
until they perforate him with a pole, the guts' whiplash,
until they uncork a water closet with a rubber glove
in the night torn open inside,
until they split him with an icepick, broken the synapses
of his scab in relief. Not only moon rabbit.

A triple cleft on the cranial vault
with a crushed coral corer
through a piercing head made fibres
of fig purpled in a dry whirlwind.
The inflamed bladder, burst now, a grotto
of makeup remover is atomised.

Sudden deglution melatised by a turtle's beak,
this dark tomb swallowed the valve,
a clucking of the tongue, the whistle
breezing the vapours
where it makes the mouthing flesh and resists the wind.

“You make me real, you set me free.” To keep up this work
of a sober but secure stockman
after school, your thing,
okay, a skin, your hair around
my neck, in the night most of my life.
This method will fool no one. The dialysis
is commuted to pressure along
the sky blue river where a caiman swims. Not much food,
but I say, “This way's a waste of a dawn.”
UNIVERSAL ILÓGICO (1994)

Subí en el autogiro para hachar por encima. Corta la leche, la miel. Ahora gotea más despacio. Las balizas parpadean enfrente del hotel, un modelo de situación. Ellos quedan separados uno del otro. No se ve más que una sombra. Entra al portezuelo un auto con escape libre. A través del culo miraba para arriba, un festón sobre la capa de tormenta que me priva, un dique ardiendo lejos de solidificarse, un embudo, el pescuezo de un dragón quema la memoria, sacude la contigüidad, aquí y allá se rompe. Este bebé no reconoce lazos pero el circuito continúa, una gé en vórtice, el plasma de una pobladura glandular. Pisa el acelerador cuando lo aprietan de atrás. Un poco tarde para atender el teléfono, enjabelgado, enflaquecido por los desvaríos de un interior jabonoso. Un chalet, Le Tourbillon, cae hoy incompleto, socavado tamiz y borboteo, hervor olla consagrado en el oscuro del jergón. La tunda pareja del amanecer vacío, el músculo, un tic de la cara contra el hueso, un huso, unas cuerdas del Paraguay, un poncho, hexágonos de verde cuyo giro lo ingurgitó lucen mejor que este tul raspado

ILLOGICAL UNIVERSAL

I climbed in the autogiro to hew from above. Cut the milk, the honey. Now it drips more slowly. The sidelights blink in front of the hotel, a model of situation. They remain separated one from the other. Only a shadow can be seen. Through the pass enters a car with an unmuffled exhaust. I looked up, through the bottom, a garland over the sheet of the storm that sends me wild, a burning dyke far from solidifying, a funnel, the neck of a dragon burns the memory, shakes the contiguity, here and there it breaks. This baby recognises no ties but the circuit continues a g in a vortex the plasma of a glandular populator, I step on the accelerator when pressed from behind. A little late already to answer the telephone, whitewashed, washed out by the ravings of a soapy interior. A chalet, Le Tourbillon, falls today unfinished, undermined sieve and bubbling, boiling pot consecrated in the dark of the palliasse. The flush thrashing of the empty dawn, the muscle, a tic of the face against the bone, a spindle, some cords from Paraguay, a poncho, hexagons of green whose turn ingurgitated it shine better that this rough tulle
iridiscente, negro sobre blanco sobre negro.
Un zumbido. Levanta la aguja
que va a coser ese vestido
que viste para su demo.
La ronda compensa los chuchos. Fue el bien plisar
no la casa-cajón. Era una misión-cama,
los ocelos, el rimel, el sobado
leopardo reversible en cualquier momento.
Abri las hojas mojadas del banano,
universal ilógico para cualquiera, para nadie,
con una trompa que acometía.
El rasguño trazó en los ojos una lluvia diagonal,
Esa banda labrada desafectó cualquier punto.
Giraba firme. “Están aquí” decía después de remover
el ápice del exvoto enfrente de la estación meteorológica.
Entraba al comedor para pasar a la cripta.
Bochornoso chasqueaba los dedos
sobre el zafiro sin fondo.

iridescent, black on white on black.
A buzzing. He lifts the needle
that will sew that dress
he wears for his demo.
The roundabout makes up for the shakes. It was the good folding
not the box-house. It was a mission-bed,
the peacock-eyes, the rimmel, the well-worn
leopard reversible at any moment.
I opened the wet leaves of the banana,
illogical universal for anyone, for no one,
with a snout on the attack.
The scratching traced in the eyes a diagonal rain,
that wrought ring disaffected from any point.
I spun firmly. “They’re here,” I said after removing
the apex of the ex voto in front of the weather station.
I went into the dining room to pass to the crypt.
Muggy, I cracked my fingers
on the bottomless sapphire.
Eduardo Espina (Uruguay, 1954)

La patria, un objeto reciente
(Aquí la vida hace como que existe) (2006)

La mortalidad de su materia es lo que da para empezar: a punto de quedarse deseada encuentra la perla y el apodo. Vida como dádiva duradera, como ha sido la del aprendiz y detrás, hay otro. De sí por decirlo sería huir a su ritmo más allá del llano atravesando la verja del paje que pregunta por el anfitrión. A tiempo de poner lo que nunca nació, la mañana derrama ramalajes de brillo, el rubor que a la voz anuncia naciones, nada más que la zancadilla de siempre. Llega la lluvia, la costumbre del cobre y el rocio que por cierto cae en desuso. Todo cambia, nada viene a lo invisible, la luna en el heno hace a la desazón, el invierno al venado que alcanza a ceder. Por su voz ha oído del sino disminuido, en lados idealizado como adorno, o no. Podría resumirse así: el margen de los abejorros origina con el gerundio y la canción llevada al grazno del susurro. El cuerpo dispuesto por la posibilidad. Arbol, revoleo, y va la brizna por libre al abrir la brecha hasta que esté abierta. La casa encuentra un coto encarnizado, nácar de cardo para perder el recuerdo. De toda su estatura hace decir al cielo. Duermel a piel a pesar de lo que pasa. Los ojos dan por verdad a las palabras, las cosas buscan un lugar en la mirada.

The fatherland, a recent object
(Here, life acts like it exists)

The mortality of its matter is what it gives to get started: on the point of staying desired it finds the pearl and the petname. Life like a lasting gift, as has been that of the learner and, behind, there's another. Of itself, just to say it would be to flee to its rhythm far beyond the plain crossing the gate of the page who asks after the master. Time to lay what was never born, The dayspring spills splices of brilliance, the blush that to the voice announces nations, nothing more than the usual legtrip. The rain arrives, the custom of copper and the dew which we know wanes into disuse. Everything changes, nothing comes to the invisible, and the moon on the hay hastens unease, the winter to the fawn who manages to cede. For his voice he's heard of the diminished destiny; in sides idealised like adornment, or not. It could be summed up thus: the bumblebee margin originates with the gerundive and the song carried to the whisper's squawk. The body disposed by possibility. Tree, twirling, and the blade set free to open the breech until it's open. The house comes across a crimson reserve, nacre of thistle to let slip the memory. From all his stature he makes the heavens speak. The skin sleeps in spite of what's passed. The eyes accept the truth of the words, things seek a place in the gaze.
La tortuga de Zenón
(En la quietud la velocidad duerme) (2006)

Lo íntimo atrae a la intemperie. 
Rastro a ras de la escolopendra y algo de logos en la caparazón. 
A su paso piensan las paralelas, viene el viento con un vendaval, viene para que la vida no lo vea. 
Feliz remordimiento de la razón.

Una rapidez tal cuál la luna sale mientras la sed decía no esperes, sé de otros, no de ti ni tan ahora.

Anda, última alma del galápagos, que ya grazna el peso anacarado, un país de piel aparte ya de otros.

Fue la felicidad del día indebido, de cuál si entonces fueron todos.

¿Jueves? aunque digan, fue lunes.

Era más bien por aquel entonces.

El uso osado de la similitud hizo a ciegas, lo que salva cedió a su raza la tosudez de sentirse culta, sacra en tregua por lo predilecta dándole oportunidad al traspies, a la pata pobre con poco Plató.

Caso de poca longitud y ajetreo a merced del ser acertado cerca (cerca que parecía estar tan ahí).

Iba como quien va hasta la idea. Iba bastante hasta sentir encima de la sien músicas de velocidad.

Presocráticos a usanza la vieron rodar entre sospechas enhebrada a las breas que vaciaban su plan. ¿De alcurnia, igual al leopardo?

Zeno's tortoise
(In quietude, velocity sleeps)

Closed doors attract the outdoors. Trace traced on the centipede and a little of logos on the shelle. As it passes the parallels ponder goes the gust with a howling gale, goes so that life will not notice. The happy remorse of reason.

A quickness as when the moon emerges whilst the thirst said don't wait, said be of others, not of yourself, nor so much now. Go on, last soul of the galapago, as already the nacre'd weight croaks, a land of skin apart now from others. It was the joy of the undue day, from which if then they were all. Thursday? Although they may say so, it was Monday.

It was rather some time around then. The audacious use of similarity made blindly; what it saves ceded to its race the stoughourness of feeling cultured, sacred in truce for the favourite giving an opportunity to the footslip, to the poor paw with paltry Plato. A case of little longitude and hassle at the mercy of the close correct creature (close that it seems to be so near). He was going like one who goes until the idea. He was going well enough until
Huida del aire, casi tan solitaria:
lenta de oscuridades por el brío,
siguió hasta salirse del nombre.
Al detenerse, se sintió Aquiles.

feeling, on the temple, musics
of velocity. Pre-socratics as is
the custom saw him roll midst
entangled suspicions to the tars
that were emptying his plan.
Of ancestry, equal to the
leopard? Flight from the air,
almost so solitary: slow from
darknesses for the verve, he
continued until leaving the name.
Stopping, he felt himself Achilles.
Momias
(Morir entre comillas) (2006)

En la invencible inmensidad
del tiempo y de todo les toca
el ocaso de cada cromosoma,
la cuna que trajo cuánto tuvo.
Una invisibilidad las apabulla,
tanta antiquedad les
dará edad
o ideas al responder dormidas,
y despiertas, ¿a quién esperan?
Saben de más venganzas,
de cielo que supo ser demasiado.
(Quietas, calladas como ellas,
hallan en la sombra su nación,
nacen, duermen cerca, van para
saber cuándo está bien decirlo)
Como tanto ven pero en verano,
su tiempo tiene una hora menos.
Ante el menor descuido cuidan
da duración del mundo reciente,
de lo ínfimo a lo mínimo miran
por el alma zen los almanques
al quedar oídas de esta manera.
Es el silencio lo que confiesan.
Dentro de la inmensa morada
lo mismo la lamia que la hurí,
la nacida recién que aquella al
llegar del más allá hace un rato.
Ah la unión de los nacimientos,
blankura de holgados brocados,
seda somnolienta para librarlas.
Cabe la suavidad que las venda,
condición de todas, de ninguna.
Fijeza ni velocidad se les vio,
cuando a solas por las criptas.

Mummies
(Dying in inverted commas)

In the invincible immensity
of time and totality, theirs is
the decline of each chromosome,
the crib that brought all it had.
An invisibility overwhelms them,
so much antiquity must give them
age or ideas, responding asleep,
and awake, who do they await?
They know of other vengeances,
of the heaven that was all too much.
(Calm, quiet as they are, they find
in their shade their nation, are
born, dream nearby, go to find
out when it's right to say it.)
As they see so much but in
summer their time has an hour
less. Faced with the slightest slip
they care for the duration of the
recent world, from the dreadful
to the minimal they look out
for the zen soul in the almanacs
when heard in this fashion. It is
silence that they confess. Inside
the immense dwelling the lamia
is the same as the houri, the
newly born as the one just
arrived from the beyond.
Ah! the union of the births,
blankness of comfortable
brocades somnolent silk to
set them free. The softness
that binds them fits, condition
of them all, of none. Neither
la piel o algo peor añorando.
La nada que nunca llegaba.
(Quedaron envueltas
para que la muerte
no las hiriera)

fixity nor speed saw itself on
them, when alone in the crypts
yearning for the skin or some
thing worse. The nothing
that would never arrive.
(They remained wrapped
so that death would
not harm them.)
Tamara Kamenszain (Argentina, 1947)

**COMO EL ACTOR DE TEATRO NŌ (1977)**

Como el actor del teatro nō
cuya entrada en escena
es ella misma una escena
llena de misterios contenidos
despejándose en cámara lenta
así las cosas esta ciudad el mundo todos
dean de ser telón de fondo
cuando se miran en el espejo de las palabras
y se sorprenden
en una lenta mueca

**LIKE THE ACTOR IN NŌ THEATRE**

Like the actor in nō theatre
whose entrance into the scene
is itself a scene
full of contained mysteries
clearing up in slow motion
thus things this city the world everything
cease to be a backdrop
when they see themselves in the mirror of words
and surprise themselves
in a slow grimace
POR EL BAR LA ESQUINA SE DESDOBLA (1991)

POR el bar la esquina se desdobra
y entra en mi casa en contubernio
con la calle, la atención que flota
desde el charco al pie del cafecito
hasta un vidrio a ras de aquella ñata.
Mojada de servilletas rayo
tu mesa que nunca pregunta si
salgo de mí o me cuelo en el deslinde
de ese afuerear adentro con ventana.

BY THE BAR THE CORNER UNFOLDS ITSELF

BY the bar the corner unfolds itself
and enters into my house in cahoots
with the street, attention floating from the
puddle at the foot of the espresso
to a windowpane flush with that nose.
Dampened by serviettes I draw stripes on
your table which never questions whether
I leave myself or I sneak past the edge
of that inside outsiding with windows.
VIDA DE LIVING (1991)

I

CANSADA
con los ojos cerrados al centro
apunto a un blanco móvil
a esos beatles en el surco
en viejos tiempos
al agujero que acopia acopla
acordes para el corazón moreno del disco.
En esa cara estabas vos
girando por lo bajo
los ojos lunáticos en banda
desorbitaban la púa
y en tu reverso
mi oreja fruncida
escuchando.

Caracol adentro
un sonido metálico de olas
como días agitados
crecía con nosotros
los chicos
los del vapor de la carrera
subidos al buque de la música
hacia qué país en qué frontera
esperó el límite de edad
nuestra llegada.

LIFE IN THE LIVING ROOM

I

TIRED
with my eyes closed at the centre
I aim at a moving target
at those beatles in the groove
in olden days
at the hole that collects couples
chords for the brown heart of the disc.
You were on that side
revolving quietly
your lunatic eyes banded together
exorbiting the needle
and on your flipside
my puckered ear
listening.

Seashell inside
a metallic sound of waves
like restless days
grew with us
the kids

the steamboat ferry kids 2
on board the music ship
toward which country on which border
the limit of age awaited
our arrival.

2. Reference to the former Rio de la Plata ferry, now moored in La Boca.
Añochece de un día agitado:
hasta aquí llegamos.
La sala ahora disemina
su acústica en casa
como una madre maestra del horror
que en el larga duración imprimiera
aquello que termina.
Nos acolcha espeso
que es nuestro
propiedad privada de la escucha
para dos esposos clavados
mullendo los sillones
ESE PAR
que hundido en los resortes del tiempo
soportó el peso de los amigos
muertos viviendo aquí
en el living de esta charla.
Ya no están pero evocarlos
(¿te acordás lo que decía?)
llena un libro de citas
colma de risa este momento;
contagioso es escribir para ellos
en un trance
de alegría espiritista.

Night of another hard day:
we've come this far.
The lounge now radiates
its acoustics at home
like a mother, teacher of horror
who on the long player imprints
that which ends.
Our things stuff us thickly
private property of listening
for two speechless spouses
fluffing up the armchairs
THAT PAIR
buried in the springs of time, who
supported the weight of our dead
friends living here
in the living room of this chat.
They've gone now but recalling them
(you remember what he used to say?)
fills up a book of quotations
right now, talk about laugh;
writing for them is contagious
in a trance
of spiritist happiness.
Osvaldo Lamborghini (Argentina, 1940–1985)

(JUANA BLANCO) (1980)

Odio a mi lengua
el español cerrado
cerrado como cu de muñeco

odio mi lengua
tanto como odio a mi sexo
y aprender otra nunca quise
y sí
me antecipo
:p puedo entenderlo

— aunque acaso ¿acaso?
sí, acaso
no lo entienda

espacio

odio mi lengua
odio mi sexo
puedo entenderlo
y acaso no lo entienda

es divertido ser mujer
es lindo y bien caliente
es divertido como jugar
toda la vida a los indios
aunque a la larga o corta
venga
siempre
el triunfo y la venganza del ejército

(JANE WHITE)

I hate my language
closed up Spanish
as closed as a doll's ass

I hate my language
as much as I hate my sex
and I've never wanted to learn another
and yes
I'm getting ahead of myself
: I can understand

— although perhaps, perhaps?
syes, perhaps
I may not understand

space

I hate my language
I hate my sex
I can understand it
and perhaps not understand it

it's fun to be a woman
it's cute and really hot
it's fun like spending
your life playing indians
even if in the long and short
there's
always
the triumph and revenge of the army
ipero tener
femenino el sexo!
los órganos ífemeninos!
del sexo
adiós
ahí se acaban las plumas
los ululeos y las flechas
adiós juego
Treblinka nos abre sus puertas

but having
a female sex!
female! sex
organs
goodbye
that's the end of the feathers
the squawking and the arrows
goodbye play
Treblínka throws open its doors
NOCTURNO (para Néstor Perlongher)

Fibras de oro, ¡eso era!
el buey torcido y la aurora:
nace la aurora iresplandeciente!
Pero lo que hoy no es el amparo
ide tu mirar!
Y si no es no es
(...si no es el amparo de tu mirar...)
El Sabio Negro agoniza, hermano.
¡Miles de pirulos!
Señores argentinos, y no
iciroyens du monde!
El falo: fálico, y la frase
ifrástica!
Aforismos en Buenos Aires, y dónde si no
imi alma!
La callecita de perfil y la Noche ya madura para el símbolo:
Gardel lloraba y se comparaba con Lázaro
Porque el arte — él decía — es la resurrección de los muertos.

Nace la aurora (fuma, fuma)
y yo estoy en pie para sentarme
— ...nace la aurora... resplandeciente... —
El estilo, un vuelo de perdiz.
un desliz.

Un tropezón...

Con la propuesta — de piedra — de no ser alusivo
me convertí cada vez más en alusivo y alusivo y alusivo.

NOCTURNE (for Néstor Perlongher)

Fibres of gold, that was it!
the twisted ox and the dawn
the dawn breaks, shining!
But which today is not the shelter,
of your gaze!
And if it isn’t it isn’t
(...if it isn’t the shelter of your gaze...)
The Black Sage is dying, brother.
Thousands of pricks!
Gentlemen of Argentina, and not
Citoyens du monde
The phallus: phallic, and the phrase,
phrastic!
Aphorisms in Buenos Aires, and where if not,
my heart!
The alleyway in profile and the Night now ripe for the symbol:
Gardel was weeping, comparing himself to Lazarus
because art, he said, "is the resurrection of the dead."
The dawn breaks (smokes, smokes)
and I’m standing up to sit down
— ...the dawn breaks...shining...—
Style, the flight of a partridge
a trip.

A slip...

With the proposal — written in stone — of not being allusive
I became more and more allusive and allusive and allusive.

3. Reference to El Sabio Negro, a character in Leónidas Lamborghini’s version of the “payada” (singing battle) between the Gaucho Martín Fierro (El Sabio Blanco) and El Moreno.
Y alusivo: no versa nada.
inace la aurora! ¡Si yo supiera cantar! Resplandeciente.

La sombra de una lágrima
ila sola sola sombra de una lágrima!
¿Cómo se acentúa?

Y cada vez menos decir menos.
Y cada vez (por favor!)
más una lengua blanca como la leche.
Cayol: — ¡Un cotorrito blanco como la nieve!
Bicharraquear — Kafkaesquamente.

Porque las cosas groseras les pasan a los seres delicados.

O.V Lamborghini
8 de diciembre, 1980

And allusive: not versing a thing.
the dawn breaks!
If I knew how to sing!
Shining.

The shadow of a tear,
the lone lone shadow of a tear!
Where does the accent go?

And more and more less say less.
And more and more (please!)
a tongue white like milk.
Cayol — a little room as white as snow!
Creepycrawl — Kafkaesquely.

Because vulgar things happen to delicate souls.

4. Versar – Lunfardo, to tell lies, tell tales.
5. As in Perlongher’s surname: stressed by some on the final syllable, following the rules of Castilian accentuation, or on the penultimate, as in Italian pronunciation.
6. Roberto Lino Cayol, tango lyricist. The quote is the opening stage direction from El debut de la piba (1916), a one-act farce, or sainete.
Never is the always the same; always: it's the same, always.

Never is the same.

Always is never: it's the same:

— It's the same as always
never the same.

— Now hand in your exercise books
And sign them with your names, the same
The priest gave you when you were named
Black cloth covered official book
And the target of nasty games
And of strange tropisms to hide
But given that a single die
From the hairs to the lame janitor
Brings and again it is the same
Me cago en el exilio claro
no soy tarada
ni nada
tiene de raro
no voy a aguantarme atlántica
hasta atenazando nalgas
como esta vaca rubia virginia estampa
desargar la popa en inodoros pampas

(1983/5)

Fuck exile, it's a piece of shit
I'm no dumb bitch
and there's nothing
strange about it
I'm not going to wait like Atlas
even squeezing tight shut my ass
like this tobacco-blond heifer
unload the stern in pampan cesspits
Néstor Perlongher (Argentina, 1949)

**LA MURGA, LOS POLACOS** (1980)

Es una murga, marcha en la noche de Varsovia, hace milagros con las máscaras, confunde a un público polaco
Los estudiantes de Cracovia miran desconcertados:
nunca han visto nada igual en sus libros
No es carnaval, no es sábado
no hay niebla, es una murga
como la nieve de una calle de una ciudad de una Polonia
que no es
que no es

lo que no es decir que no haya sido, o aún que ya no sea, o incluso no esté siendo en este instante
Varsovia con sus murgas, sus disfraces sus arlequines y osos carolina
con su célebre paz — hablamos de la misma la que reina recostada en el Vístula el procésoño río donde cae la murga con sus pitos, sus colores, sus chachachás carnosos produciendo en las aguas erizadas un ruido a salpícón que nadie atiende puesto que no hay tal murga, y aunque hubiérala no estaría en Varsovia, y eso todos los polacos lo saben

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**THE MURGA', THE POLES**

It's a murga, it marches in the Warsaw night, makes miracles with masks, confounds a Polish public
The Krakow students look on disconcerted: they've never seen anything like this in their books
It's not Carnival, it's not Saturday it's not a murga, it doesn't march, no one sees there's no fog, it's a murga they're not streamers, it's tickertape, the cold ether like the snow on a street in a city in a Poland

which is not to say it may not have been, or still may not be, or even it may not be being right now Warsaw with its murgas, its disguises its harlequins and Carolina bears
with its famous peace — we're talking of the very same the Queen lying on the Vistula the torturous river where the murga falls with its whistles, its colours, its carnal cha-cha-chas producing in the bristling waters a splashing noise that no one notices given that there's no such murga and even if there were it wouldn't be in Warsaw and that's something all the Poles know

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7. *Murga*, a noisy musical street procession in Argentina and Uruguay and the style of singing and chanting that goes with it.
8. *Oso Carolina*, a traditional Buenos Aires carnival costume, consisting of a man dressed up in brown rice sacks to look roughly like a bear.
India Muerta (1987)

noticiándose del malhadado suceso del 27
volví a sufrir otro revés que nos obligó a pasar el Yaguaron
un poco apurados
yo perdí parte de la montura pero salvé bien desde aquel día
estamos bajo la protección de las autoridades imperiales
que nos protegen y nos respetan en todo aquello que puede ser
para mantener la esperanza de salvar la república
mirar con indiferencia las desgracias del país
un enemigo fuerte y poderoso que tenemos al frente
no me horroriza ni me infunde terror
árbitro de la fortuna de este honrado
pueblo compuesto de patriotas cuyo patriotismo los ha hecho callar
un atrevimiento sin límites
En la frontera de Santa Teresa nada hay nuevo: los enemigos
continúan ocupándola
mi idolatrada Bernardina
en brazos de un poder americano.

India Muerta

giving news of the ill-starred occurrence of the 27th
I once again suffered a reverse that has forced us to cross the Yaguaron
somewhat hurriedly
I lost part of my tack but have saved well since that day
we are under the protection of the imperial authorities
who are protecting and respecting us in any way they can
in order to maintain hope of saving the republic
to look with indifference on the misfortunes of the country
a strong and powerful enemy that faces us
neither horrifies me nor inspires in me terror
arbiter of fortune of this honourable
people composed of patriots whose patriotism has made fall silent
a daring that knows no bounds
On the border with Santa Teresa there is no news: the enemy continues to
occupy it
my most idolized Bernadina
in the arms of an American power

9. India Muerta, Uruguayan town, site of the battle in which General Urquiza’s
Argentine forces defeated those the fledgling Uruguay, under General Rivera
in 1845.
10. Yaguaron, river on the Uruguay/Brazil border.
11. Imperial Authorities, i.e. Brazil.
Como en ese zaguán de azulejos leonados
donde ella se ata el pelo con un paño a lunares — y sobresale un pinche
como un punto: en el Bretel donde el mendigo gira
las huellas de los hombros embarrados en la gasa desnuda:
eran plateados esos velos, plúmbeos: ella que recogía, al pie de la
escalera, los volados
tropezaba en la huella que embarrada por el mendigo
huba en espiral: esas farmacias
donde ella se soltaba blandamente una liga y el pinchador pulía la
nalga, con un algodoncito: ese capullo
huele a cerveza, como un bar: ella se arremangaba toscamente y veía
la huella, en el estafio — como un peso de plata
: en medio de un poema sentimental, con bultos en los trenes
y una cesta (de paja) con una vieja trusa
renga como el linyera que posaba sus dientes en la manija
y Ethels que baldeaban, casi a ciegas, su cuerpo: vago echado
en las lajas,
coraje y lavandina:
trapos con que una Ethel arma un hatillo, y prende sus orejas, como
años o fotos de un hipódromo: en círculos, alrededor
del lago artificial
donde se ahoga un lagarto, en torbellinos
oye con la cabeza pesarosa el tintín de la plata en ese vaso
donde ese pordiosero lía las gomas de alambre de sus babas

As in that hallway of tawny tiles
where she ties up her hair with a polka-dot cloth — and a hairpin sticks out
like a point: in the strap where the beggar tramps
the marks of muddy shoulders on the naked gauze:
those veils were silvery, leaden: she who gathered up, at the foot of the
stairs, her flounces
stumbled in the mark muddied by the thirst of a beggar
fleeing in a spiral: those pharmacies
where she softly undid her stocking and a clip shined her
buttock, with a little bit of cotton: that bud
smells of beer, like a bar: she gruffly tucked up her skirt and saw
the mark, on the tin — like a silver coin
: in the middle of a sentimental poem, with packets on trains
and a (straw) basket with an old pair of drawers
crippled like the hobo who left his teeth on the handle
and Ethels who strip-wash, almost blindly: tramp lying
on the flags,
courage and bleach:
rags with which an Ethel makes an outfit, and pins up her ears, like
hoops or photos of a hippodrome: circular, around
the artificial lake
where a lizard drowns, in whirlwinds
listens with mournful thoughts to the jangle of coins in that glass
where that beggar ties the wire rubbers to his drool
DEVENIR MARTA (1989)

A lacios oropeles enyedrada
la toga que flaneando las ligas, las ampula
para que flote en el deambuleo la ceniza, impregnando
de lanas la atmósfera cerrada y fría del boudoir.

A través de los años, esa livida
mujereidad enroscándose, bizca,
en laberintos de maquillaje, el velador de los aduares
incendiaba al volcarse la arena, vacilar

en un trazo que sutil cubriese
las hendiduras del revoque
y, más abajo, ligas, lilas, revuelo
de la mampostería por la presión ceñida y fina que al ajustar

los valles microscópicos del tul
sofocase las riendas del calambre, irguiendo
levemente el pezcuello que tornando
mujer se echa al diván

BECOMING MARTA

To the wither'd tinsels ivy'd
the toga that flaneuring the straps, ampulates them
so the ash may float in the wandering, impregnating
with wool the closed and cold atmosphere of the boudoir.

In the course of the years, that livid
womanliness encoiling itself, squinting,
in labyrinths of makeup, the nightlight in the encampment
caught light as the sand spills, to hesitate

in a trace that subtly would cover
the cracks in the plaster
and, further down, straps, stalks, fluttering
of masonry by the snug and fine pressure that on tightening

the microscopic valleys of tulle
would suffocate the reins of cramp, raising
lightly the fishneck that turned
woman lays on the divan.
RECIO EL EMBARQUE, airado aedo
rizas ondula noctilucas
iridescencias enhebrando
en el etéreo sulfilar:

un trazo
(deleble persistencia)
en el enroque de los magmas
en el cuadriculado del mantel

—mental, la sala
de entrecasa (arte kitsch)
compostelaba medianías
en el corset del voile, leve y violado.

Pero los voladitos
de los encajes del mantel urdían
más que un texto una forma, una figura...

Boreal o suave, sus caireles
no dejaban de iluminar los resbalosos
voleos del minué, por las baldosas: uña
desprendida y procaz, arañando sus pases
el inane, translúcido volar

Por espejismos del piel viva
en el tirón de las mucosas
los rasgueos de la uña
elevaban las cántigas
al cielorraso hueco, sublunar.

* 

Recio el cantor, bruñidas las guedejas,
deo de mambo infinge al modular

STRONG THE EMBARKATION, the wild aedo
coils or undulates fireflies
threading iridescences
in the ethereal pinking:

a trace
(delible persistence)
in the castling of the magma
in the squares of the mantle

—mental, in the back
room (kitsch art)
compostelating medians
in the voile corset, light, violet

But the rufflettes
of the lace of the mantle weaved
rather than a text a form, a figure

Boreal or gentle, its tassels
still illuminated the slippery
volleys of the minuet, on the tiles: detached
and brazen nail, inanition scratching
its passes, translucent flight

Through mirages of living skin
in the tugging of the mucoses
the strumming of the nail
raising the canticles
to the false ceiling, under the moon.

* 

Strong the singer, burnished the locks,
aftertaste of mambo inflects as it modulates
intensidades en el cieno,
plástica
porosidad en la materia espesa.

En el dejo un espasmo
contorsionaba los ligámenes
y transmitía a los encajes
la untuosidad del nylon

rayándolos
en una delicada precipitación

(1991)

intensities in the mire,
plastic
porosity of the thick matter.

In the aftertaste a spasm
contorting the ligaments
and transmitting to the lace
the unctuousness of nylon
striping it
in a delicate precipitation.
TEMA DEL CISNE HUNDIDO (i)

Undoso el que avanzara por los rizos
del espejo laqueado, su pezcuellodócil al mando del cendal declina
rayado el rutilar de su plumaje.

Quien por interrogar las inestables
corrientes donde anega su pellejo
arruga de nerviosas denticiones
la quilla que traslúcida corría

por parques de reflejos azulados,
impávido el azor, la crista alta,
arriesga el hundimiento en ese anclaje.

Porque, por más que mírese a los hados,
no se retarda la fatal carrera
si tempestuoso pie pisa la pluma.

(1997 [1992])

THEME OF THE DROWNED SWAN (i)

Pleated he who would advance through the curls
of the lacquered mirror, his fishneck,
docile at the call of the gauze, declines
striped the rutilation of its plumage.

He who to interrogate the unstable
currents where he immerses his skin
wrinkles with nervous denticions
the keel that translucent moved

through parks where azure shines
intrepid the goshawk, the crest haughty,
risks drowning in this anchorage.

Because, for all that he looks to the signs
the fatal race will not be slowed
if tempestuous foot crushes the plume.
Manuel Rivas
from From Unknown to Unknown
// Translated from the Galician by Jonathan Dunne //

Manuel Rivas writes fiction, plays and poetry in the Galician language of northwestern Spain. Spain has four official languages: Basque, Catalan, Galician and Spanish or Castilian. Everyone has heard of Basque, Catalan and Spanish, basically because the Basque Country and Catalonia had industry and Spanish is easy to remember, but Galicians were poor people, working the land and the sea, and frequently had to emigrate, so that Spaniards in Central and South America are often known as Gallegos and Barcelona is often referred to as Galicia's fifth province.

The story of the languages in Spain is simple. Two memorable dates in Spanish history: 711 and 1492. On the first, the Moors invaded the Iberian Peninsula (which today holds Spain and Portugal), reaching as far as Geneva, but quickly falling back due to the climate and what must have been overstretched resources. Christian kingdoms formed in the north of the Peninsula – Galicia, Asturias, Castile-Leon, Aragon, Catalonia – reconquering south, squeezing out Asturias and Aragon, and taking their language with them, until the Moors (who'd long been paying tribute in gold) were finally sent packing in 1492. So today Galician is spoken in Portugal (which, however, is a State and gets its own name: Portuguese), Catalan in Valencia and the Balearic Islands and Castilian Spanish in Spain. No one really likes to ask about the provenance of the Basque language.

Galicia is linked with Portugal geographically and culturally. To some, it may conjure up the golden age of Galician-Portuguese medieval poetry, lyric and ribaldry, the cantigas de amigo and amor, Alfonso X’s religious hymns to the Virgin Mary, the incisive and heavily satirical cantigas de escarnio and maldicir. This was the language used by kings in Toledo to write poetry while the more mundane tasks of law and administration were relegated to Spanish. To others, Galicia may suggest the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, the French Road, from a point marked wherever you start to Galicia’s capital, the western tip of Christendom (with Rome in the middle and Jerusalem in the east). To others, it may evoke memories of weather reports and Cape Finisterre, the rocky and notoriously treacherous Costa da Morte or Death Coast, where many a ship, in Borrow’s words, must go to shivers instantly. George Borrow passed through here on his mission to distribute Bibles in the vernacular, at which the locals’ nostrils would quiver as they sniffed the flames of the Inquisition; a century later, Laurie Lee from here walked out one midsummer morning. The Spanish dictator from 1939 to 1975, Francisco Franco, was Galician; Fidel Castro’s parents were originally from Galicia. Others may think of famous wines such as Albariño and Ribeiro or soccer teams such as Celta Vigo and Deportivo Coruña.

It was in Coruña where Manuel Rivas was born in 1957. Trained as a journalist, he is a regular contributor to the Spanish daily El País. But he is best known for his fiction, six novels and six collections of short stories to date, three of them published in English: The Carpenter’s Pencil (2001), In the Wilderness (2006) and Vermeer’s Milkmaid & Other Stories (2008). His themes are the Spanish civil war of 1936-9 and its consequences (a dictatorship is a state of permanent war); adolescence; and a brand of magic realism, in which inanimate objects respond warmly to being addressed by name and animals in a village communicate. Rivas strives to bear out the human stories in inhuman (or sadly human) situations – the light that alone can dispel the darkness of why are we so nasty to each other, the light for which the pupil opens (this last an image from the Bulgarian poet Tsvetanka Elenkova’s poem Humility Is Never Enough) – and it is here where Rivas reveals his Galician roots, a passion for storytelling, an almost obligatory sense of humor, a physiological reluctance to complain. Three stories from Vermeer’s Milkmaid were turned into a film, Butterfly, as was The Carpenter’s Pencil and this is because Rivas has cinematographic vision, he translates history.
The question is does the writer work in isolation, as is often maintained. I don't think so. He works in glorious conjunction with events, memories, stories and jokes he's heard, landscapes, feelings, all of which he translates on to a page. Does he work alone? No. I believe there is always a third point, someone working with us, through us. A common image for translation (which means *carry across*) is that of St Christopher carrying the Christ-child across the river (note that phonetically Christopher can easily be translated into *Christ over*). If you are unaware of the river's source, you are effectively lost, but we insist on drawing a straight line without reference to the third point (which would form a much more stable triangle: compare the Berlin Wall, for example, with the Pyramids), a straight line which responds in English to the ego or *I*. Translation, which is to say every human activity — after all, God brought the creatures to Adam in Genesis to name, not to create (*name*, which contains *mean* and *amen*, but we quickly turned it into *mine* as we turned *what* into *why*) — is not a straight line (even ideas come to us, and to invent means to find), but sadly we think it is, so we draw a line around property, around countries, which we can then go and fight over, we construct pipelines to conduct the water that falls from the sky, the oil that spills out of the ground, which we claim to be ours simply because we got there first (that *I* again), though the first will be last and the last, 1st.

So it was I took these poems to be translated, sitting in the park. I then transported them home and, after lunch, checked the odd word in the dictionary and typed the poems up, in English. Physical movement, I believe, helps translation, as do time and distance. A change of scene can do wonders for inspiration. But we are always drawing that inspiration from somewhere, otherwise we wouldn't be in-spired. Which is why, for me, it is a mistake to talk of the translator as writer, the translator as author, which she is not. There is only one author. I hate to say this, but the rest of us translate, be they words, soil, oil, air when we breathe, food when we eat, clay in bricks, silica in glass. None of these materials exists because of us. You can give a scientist a thousand years but, without the necessary ingredients, he will never come up with a carrot. In this sense, it is the writer who translates.

There are three ways we can move on from the line. We can refer to a third point, the river's source, and make a triangle. We can cross it out, a simple enough procedure, which, while it means we lose our life (the sign of the cross), also means we find it (the plus sign). A translator is constantly trying to do this as she ferries words to and fro across borders, cultural divides. Or we can start counting from zero, something we should teach our children at school, for words need a white page as much as music needs silence. In this way, we turn 1 into 0. LIVE becomes LOVE and not EVIL.

The resultant three symbols — the triangle, A; the I denied, which is a square, +; and circle or zero, 0 — spell A+o, Alpha and Omega (found in AND). When we make this progression from the A of Creation to the I of the modern era to the 0 of recognition, we realize the question was never *what* or even *why*. Had Pontius Pilate known this when he asked Christ, ‘What is truth?’ (almost the most remarkable question ever formulated by a human), he might just have received an answer: I am.

— Jonathan Dunne
O cemiterio dos ingleses

É case unha obriga dicir algo da beleza
mais nin eu nin vós estamos en Brañas Verdes,
entre cabo Vilano e Tosto,
entre Arou e Camariñas.
Hai choivas de area e cinza
e mirei o lume cravarse nos ollos do raposo,
a copula do garañón e a égoa,
o intre do mascato
na sombra da lubina,
o turbante da néboa
nos cumios onde aventa a inquedanza
de Hölderlin viaxeiro.

Se cadra no verán
dous ou tres de nós
pensemos en ir a Brañas Verdes,
onde mirei os fucifios da vaga
bicar xuncos.
Se o facemos,
se dous ou tres de nós imos aló
pensaremos talvez en non voltar.
Na outra face das dunas
hai pequenos oasis
con herba de namorar
i estrela da xunqueira.
Un silencio de horta salgada,
un silencio aleilado
a doce sensación dun tesouro secreto,
dun fogar submarino,
o buraco da frauta,
a escafandra,
o polbo que durme nas furnas do tebeo.
Non se é imprescindíbel, xa sabedes,
e pensamos en quedarnos.

The English Cemetery

It’s almost obligatory to say something of the beauty,
but neither you nor I are in Brañas Verdes,
between Cape Vilano and Tosto,
between Arou and Camariñas.
It rains sand and ash
and I watched the fire stick in the fox’s eyes,
the copulation of stud and mare,
the gannet’s moment
in the sea-bass’ shadow,
the turban of mist
on the peaks where itinerant Hölderlin’s
unease blows.

Perhaps in the summer
two or three of us
may think of going to Brañas Verdes,
where I watched the wave’s muzzle
kissing reeds.
If we do,
if two or three of us go there,
we may even think of not returning.
On the other side of the dunes
are small oases
with sea pink
and starwort.
A salt garden’s silence,
A dumbfounded silence,
the sweet sensation of a secret treasure,
of an underwater hearth,
the flute’s hole,
the diving suit,
the octopus sleeping in the comic’s grottoes.
One is not indispensable, you know,
and we’re thinking of staying.
Ningúen é capaz de facer feliz a outro durante moito tempo. O pan ten menos peso. As cousas van mal. ¿Qué se pode agardar dun astro que se enfriá, dunha estrela murcha hai xa milenios? O paraíso, ben pensado, non ten excesivo interese. Definitivamente, non se emprega en demasía a imaxinación e a capacidade cerebral está infrautilizada. O respeto, o amor...

Eco do mar, si, estrañas formas.

No one can make somebody else happy for very long. Bread is less heavy. Things are going badly. What's to be expected of a cooling star withered millennia ago? Paradise, all things considered, is not so interesting. For sure, the imagination is not over-exerted and the brain's capacity is under-used. Respect, love... That hasn't existed since they were named. In short, this business about Brañas Verdes, it'd be better to leave it. We'll come back in the summer. It doesn't rain in seven colors. Rimbaud is in Abyssinia, trading ivory. Here are photos of Brañas Verdes Valley, between Cape Vilano and Tosto, between Arou and Camariñas. The cassette tape contains echoes of the sea. In the pockets, shells with strange shapes. (Leave the rabbit's tail on the coffin: it's supposed to bring good luck.)

Echoes of the sea, yes, strange shapes.
At that hour, in that pub, all the old men looked like Samuel Beckett.
Madrid

Non lanzarei un puñado da miña terra contra ninguén.
Ademais, non levo terra fresca.
Vou tan baleiro coma un vello sen televisor.
Se queres estar só na cidade, vai a un lugar que fale da cultura de España, entre a loucura atónita das estatuas.
Dirás que todos os homes aman unha terra, sexa unha illa esmeralda, unha horta de brocos a carón do lixo ou unha bufarda na fronteira.
Certo. Pois ben, eu son hoxe todos os homes.
Ese sentimento, ese sentimento tan primario, sube á cabeza coma o fume das follas secas que queima o xardineiro.
Madrid, Madrid en outono cheira a todas as terras, a todos os desterros.
Xente que arrastra un tren serodio no iris, unha bandexa de mazás, unha granada, xeranios entre rellas, a flor branca do cardo.
Se non miras aos ollos, nunca saberás do outono de Madrid, da mirada atónita das estatuas dos reis bárbaros, saudosas dos bosques de bidueiros.
Támén eu o fun, un deses reis feroces solitarios, devoradores de pardais e follas secas.
O meu país era un paxaro de fume.

Madrid

I won't throw a fistful of my earth against anyone.
Besides, I don't have any fresh earth.
I'm as empty as a TV-less old man.
If you want to be alone in the city, go to a place that talks of Spanish culture amid the dazed madness of the statues.
You'll say all men love one land be it an emerald isle, a cabbage patch next to the rubbish or a garret on the border.
Right. Well, today I'm all men.
That feeling, such a primary feeling, goes to my head like smoke from the dry leaves the gardener burns.
Madrid, Madrid in autumn smells of all lands, all exiles.
People trailing a late train in the iris, a tray of apples, a pomegranate, geraniums behind bars, the thistle's white flower.
Unless you look in the eyes, you'll never know of autumn in Madrid, the dazed gaze of the barbarian kings' statues missing the birch forests.
I was one of them, one of those fierce, lonely kings devouring sparrows and dry leaves.
My country was a bird of smoke.
que subía dun borrallo do Prado,
na avenida dos museos.
Canto vos quixen xuntos!
Madrid de outono,
capital mesterosa dun imperio
de colleiteiros de follaxe.
E a ti, miña terra,
chiffon de orballo
no iris das estatuas.

rising from an ember of the Prado
in the Avenue of Museums.
How I loved you both!
Madrid in autumn,
needy capital of an empire
of harvesters of leaves.
And you, my earth,
gauzy mist
in the statues' iris.
Once do un

I'm in bed with the children, watching a film, *Numa the Killer Whale*. I'd spend the whole morning with them in this bed, noting the changes in heat: they go for some satsumas in bare feet, which I then warm between my thighs. It's Sunday. Through the window the white belt of frost girdles the river Small Valley. Later, in the winter sun, the fields seethe with an animal breath. Like golden lingerie, the candles in Somonte blossom. We visit Frixé, a little country Romanesque church surrounded by a cemetery with lots of cement niches (and four left in stone, perhaps in an act of mercy). There can't be so many dead from now to the end of the world. The boy's attention is drawn to the name Palmira engraved on one of the black marble slabs. The path to Nemifia Beach is no longer lined with those dramatically twisted posts that seemed to have emerged from an ancient pilgrimage along the deep sea lanes. They're now straight, solid, concrete posts, uniform in nature, that the eyes end up ignoring. The charm of this world has something to do with the extreme fragility of the shore in contrast to the roughness of the sea and the powerful wings of the great heavenly bird. Next to a boat, the children find a lesser-spotted dogfish half buried in the sand. It's a thin ocean muscle, miraculously still showing signs of life. When it turns, it contorts its arm in agony. I run with it towards the sea. It smells of salty blood, and gapes. I can see fear and hope in its dark eyes. We throw it from the rocks, carpeted with tiny mussels. The currents drag it back towards the beach, but it gradually regains strength and tries to reach the open sea, impelled by our desire. We lose sight of it in a turbulent blue embrace.
On the A552, at the turning for Transurfe, we head for Coucieiro and from there for Castro. We start walking and, on the path leading to the waterfalls and the river's cauldrons, come across an abandoned chapel, a beautiful piece in this ancient kingdom of melancholy. Nobody was able to remove the stone reredos; the roof of the apse is made with slabs of stone, home to a thriving laurel. The rest of the church is open; ivies crown the façade in an arch. The walls are watercolored with lichen. They say that lichen, that association of alga and fungus, can take a hundred years to cover the palm of a hand. The chapel must sometimes serve as a sty because it's littered with manure. Somebody has made a lean-to with Uralite for a tractor that seems not to have moved in years and shares the garage with old country cart-wheels. A local informs us that the chapel is in honor of Saint Eutel. Saint who? Saint Eutel. And then mutters something about what do we care for their neglected saint. We head down paths of gorse to the waterfall. Right at the top there's a tiny mill, small like a hut in a Japanese garden. The waterfall carves out cauldrons, overflowing with foam. The mountain slopes damming the rivers are a succession of superimposed slabs, like two enormous natural dolmens. The water is so cold your hands burn as soon as you wet them. Milady, the grey wagtail, leaps from stone to stone.

Doce do un

Na C-552, no cruce cara a Transurfe, collemos para Coucieiro e de ali para O Castro. Botamos a andar, e no camino que leva cara ás fervenzas e as caldeiras do río, encontramos unha capelíña abandonada, fermosa peza neste antigo reino da melancolía. Ninguén puido levar o retablo porque é de pedra, a cuberta da ábsida está feita con laxes sobre as que prendeu un loureiro que medra vizoso. O resto do templo está a ceo aberto, as hedras coroan en arco a fachada. As paredes están acuareladas polo liqué. Seica o liqué, esa cópula de alga e fungo, pode tardar cen anos en cubrir a palma dunha man. A capela debe facer as veces de corte porque está estrada de bosta. Algúin fixo con uralita un chamizo adosado para un tractor que parece parado desde hai anos, compartindo o garaxe con vellas rodas de carro do país. Un paisano dinos que a capela é na honra de Santo Eutel. Santo que? Santo Eutel. E logo murmura polo baixo, como dicindo que vos importará a vós o noso descoñecido santo. Imos por camiños de toxo cara á fervenza. Xusto no inicio da caída hai un muño moito cativo, pequeno como casíña de xardín xaponés. A fervenza vai formando caldeiras que rebordan de escuma. As abas dos montes que encoran os ríos son unha sucesión de laxes superpostas, como dúas xigantescas mámoas naturais. A auga está tan xeada que as mans ferven ao pouco de mollalas. De seixo en seixo, brinca a lavandeira real, miña señor.
The homeless took a step out on to the sea of clouds and fell from Caspar David Friedrich's painting. As he went down the Underground steps, in the frozen night, he carried Van Gogh's bed in Arles on his back.
Evgeny Baratynsky

Nine Poems

// Translated from the Russian by Ilya Bernstein //

About his friend and contemporary Evgeny Baratynsky, Pushkin himself said: "Baratynsky is unique among us, because he thinks." And at a crucial moment in Eugene Onegin, Pushkin suddenly broke off his narrative and called on Baratynsky to take over: "Where are you? Come! I cede my rights to you with a bow..." The literary critic Belinsky, reviewing Baratynsky's last collection of poems in 1842, wrote, "Of all the poets who appeared together with Pushkin, the first place undoubtedly belongs to Mr. Baratynsky." More recently, the reasons for Baratynsky's enduring position as second-only-to-Pushkin in the pantheon of Russia's Golden Age poets were spelled out by Joseph Brodsky: "Though more narrow in scope than Pushkin, Baratynsky is fully his peer and often seems superior to his great contemporary in the genre of the philosophical poem... On the whole, Baratynsky's is the most lucid verse written in Russian in [the nineteenth] century; that is why, to this day, nearly every poetic school in the twentieth has put him on the banner."

What Ezra Pound had to say about Guido Cavalcanti's relation to Dante could be said about Baratynsky's relation to Pushkin, "for if he is not among the major prophets, he has at least his place in the canon, in the second book of The Arts, with Sappho and Theocritus; with all those who have sung, not all the modes of life, but some of them, unsurpassedly; those who in their chosen or fated field have bowed to no one."

Baratynsky's distinctive muse was the muse of concentration and his art was an art of slowing down and paying attention. The beat of the different drum that he marched to was different not because it was softer or more syncopated than others, but precisely because it was slower. For this, he has often been called a melancholy poet. It would be more accurate to characterize him, in a more neutral fashion, as a poet of thoughtfulness and deceleration.

Baratynsky was born near Tambov in 1800 and died in Naples in 1844. The son of a retired army general, he attended military college in St. Petersburg, where he became acquainted with members of Pushkin's circle, and served with a unit stationed in Finland. In 1826, Baratynsky retired from the army and settled in Moscow. In 1843, he traveled to France and Italy, where he died. From the early 1820s until the end of his life, Baratynsky was a frequent contributor to periodicals. A collection of his poems was published in 1827, and an expanded two-volume edition came out in 1835. A final book of poems, Twilight, appeared in 1842.

– Ilya Bernstein
Мой дар убог, и голос мой не громок,
Но я живу, и на земли моей
Кому-нибудь любезно бытие:
Его найдет далекий мой потомок
В моих стихах; как знать? душа моя
Окажется с душой его в сношенье,
И как нашел я друга в поколенье,
Читателя найду в потомстве я.

1828

My gift is slight, my voice is only modest,
And yet I live, and someone on this earth
Perhaps takes cheer in my existence here.
That same existence some far-off descendant
Will rediscover in my poems. Who knows?
His soul may find itself conjoined with mine
And as I found a friend in my generation,
A reader in posterity I may find.

1828
With head bent in front of the bronze reflecting his image,
Slightly lifting the golden locks of his brow with his palm,
Pensive and proud sat the beautiful youth—and with bitter laughter
Scornful men pointed their fingers at him.
Maidens, admiring in secret the noble and open visage,
Reluctantly drew their gaze away and furrowed their brows.
Blind and deaf to it all, he saw himself not in the bronze, but in the future,
And wondered: how would he look wearing a laurel wreath?

1835
Сначала мысль, воплощена
В поэму сжатую поэта,
Как дева юная, темна
Для невнимательного света;
Потом, осмелившись, она
Уже увергива, речиста.
Со всех сторон своих видна,
Как искушенная жена
В свободной прозе романиста;
Болтунья старая, затем
Она, подъемля крик нахальный,
Плодит в полемике журнальной
Давно уж ведомое всем.

A thought, when it is first expressed
In the condensed verse of the poet,
Seems enigmatic as a maid
Before the undiscerning public.
Then, taking courage, it becomes
More talkative and calculating
And on all sides appears exposed,
Like a mature, experienced wife,
In the freedom of a novelist's prose.
An ancient chatterbox, in the end,
It makes a lot of shameless noise
By propagating in the press
What everyone already knows.

1837

1837
I am, as yet, no ancient Patriarch; my head
Is not anointed with mysterious oil:
The laying on of uninitiated hands
Is useless. But receive my blessing from me
By means of other signs, O maid of beauty!
Beneath this rose bend down your head, O you,
You likeness of the fragrant queen of the flowers,
To tell of days of roses and abundance.

1839

Еще, как патриарх, не древен я; моей
Главы не умастил таинственный елей:
Непосвященных рук бездарно возложенье!
И я даю тебе мое благословенье
Во знамене ином, о дева красоты!
Под этой розою главой склонись, о ты,
Подобие цветов царицы ароматной,
В залог румяных дней и доли благодатной.

1839
Thought after thought! Poor artist of the word!
O priest of thought, never released from thinking.
The whole is here: the human being, the world,
And death and life are here, and the truth stripped naked.
Chisel, organ, brush! Happy is he who feels
Their sensual pull and does not leave their precinct.
The world is a feast where he can drink his ale.
But next to you, as next to a naked sword,
O thought, sharp ray of light!—this earthly life turns pale.

1840
To a Wise Man

In vain, philosopher, do you aspire to find a haven
Between cold death and turbulent life, calling it “peace.”
We, who were called forth from nothing by the alarming word of creation,
Have been given life for unrest: life and unrest are the same.
He who was spared from mankind’s common troubles
Invents a care for himself: the chisel, the palette, the lyre.
Ignorant of the world, but as though sensing its law, the infant
With his very first cries compels his cradle to be rocked.

1840
Въешься, терзая меня, льнеешь то к лицу, то к перстам?
Кто одарил тебя жалом, властным прервать самовольно
Мощно-крылую мысль, жаркой любви поцелуй?
Ты из мечтателя мирного, нег европейских питомца,
Дикого скифа творишь, жадного смерти врага.

1841

Въете, паченье молния, молня, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния, молния(119,455),(362,490)
АХИЛЛ

Влага Стикса закалила
Дикой силы полноту
И кипящего Ахилла
Бою древнему явила
Уязвимым лишь в пяту.

Обречен борьбе верховной,
Ты ли, долею своей
Равен с ним, боем духовный,
Сын купели новых дней?

Омовен ее водою,
Знай, страданьо над собою
Волю полную ты дал,
И одной пятой своею
Невредим ты, если ею
На живую веру стал!

1841

Achilles

When the Styx's tempering current
His prodigious strength did seal
It made furious Achilles
Ready for his ancient battle
Guardless only at the heel.

Destined for the higher struggle,
Is your lot at all like his,
Warrior of the spirit, infant
Of the font of newer days?

Know you that by your ablutions
You have given suffering license
Over you in all respects,
And your heel alone possesses
An immunity to danger
If on living faith you have stepped!

1841
Когда, дитя и страсти и сомненья,
Поэт взглянул глубоко на тебя,
Решилась ты делить его волненья,
В нем таинство печали полюбя.

Ты, смелая и кроткая, со мною
В мой дикий ад сошла рука с рукою:
Рай зрея в нем чудесная любовь.

О, сколько раз к тебе, святой и нежной,
Я приникал главой моеймятежной,
С тобой себе и небу веря вновь.

1844

When the poet, a child of doubts and a child of passions,
Deeply looked at you,
You dared to share in his turmoil
Out of love for the mystery of his despair.

You, modest and courageous, descended with me
Arm-in-arm into the wasteland of my hell.
Wondrous love beheld a heaven there.

How often have I pressed my unruly head against you,
Holy and tender,
Believing with you in myself and in the skies once more.

1844
It is through place that we put out roots, wherever birth, chance or our traveling selves set us down; but where those roots reach toward—whether in America, England, or Timbuktu—is the deep and running vein, eternal and consistent and everywhere purely itself, that feeds and is fed by the human understanding.

—Eudora Welty, The Eye of the Story

Exploration, whether it be of the human psyche or faraway places, is one of the primary joys of reading fiction. But as a reader, under normal circumstances, we never come as close to the text itself as a translator does. Although reading Ričardas Gavelis's Vilnius Poker is in itself a startling, sometimes horrifying, sometimes head-spinning experience, I found it a pure joy to explore the depths of Gavelis’s writing, to observe just how carefully he structured his plot and even the cadence of sentences, how phrases and words reappear in different contexts in different meanings, and how, despite the crushing overall impression of grimness, the work contains such outstanding black humor. And yet humor is only a single layer of the multiplicity of this work, parts of which are still a mystery to me. What, for example, to make of all the preposterous claims the major protagonist, Vytautas Vargalys, makes for his father? Some weird metaphor? A Freudian fantasy? A Lithuanian wet dream? The suspicion that Gavelis is merely yanking our chains comes only at the end of the episode, when Vargalys finds his father drinking while rolled up in a carpet, and out comes an outrageous pun about a snail in his shell (kiliminam name: in a portable/carpet home).

Ultimately it is the author's integrity, grounded in the reality of location and time, and shining forth from every page, that carries the reader through the mysterious, the preposterous, and the unexplainable. When asked to come up with a summary of what the book is about, or a single section that could characterize it, I find myself groping at so many things that I’m completely at a loss. Yes, I suppose one could summarize something of the plot: there is a murder, a love story, four narrators, a number of characters, a more or less concrete time frame, and most certainly a concrete place, but how to include that time also goes around in circles, and on two occasions actually stops? And what to do with details of the plot that get told over and over, so that in the end you hardly know which version to believe, much less how to describe it? The best I can come up with, without writing a doctoral thesis on the subject, is also the simplest: this is a piece of fiction about life. The four narrators are all flawed people, but they are all people nevertheless, including the last narrator—the reincarnation of one of the characters as a dog. They make us squirm at their rawness, cringe at the depth of their self-deceptions, laugh at their stories, and in the end, when we see what cards they have been dealt, break our hearts.

But it is also about life set in a concrete place (Vilnius, Lithuania) and a concrete decade (sometime in the 1970s). This adds another aspect of exploration, for Vilnius is not a city that has been immortalized in world fiction before—although it’s a rare place in fiction that has been given quite such a frightening role to play. Vilnius, with its complex and frequently tragic history, its multiple cultures, and above all the deadening effect of Soviet rule during the Brezhnev era, pervades the work from top to bottom, not omitting a good dose of the Lithuanian penchant for the supernatural. (And a perfectly human penchant it is, for the “magic realism” can arguably be found under any condition of oppression, as witnessed by Toni Morrison's work or Terry Gilliam's films.) Vilnius lives for the reader through a myriad of details, everything from "Bird's Milk" candy (not really a favorite of mine), to Gediminas Castle, the symbol of Lithuanian statehood (described, quite memorably, as “the symbolic phallus of Vilnius: short, stumpy and powerless”), to the mysterious and vanishing Jewish imprint on the life of the city (embodied in one of Vargalys's spiritual guides, Dapira, whom he calls Ahasuerus). We travel through the city with each of the narrators, observing everything from lamb carcasses hanging in the market to construction debris that never
seems to go anywhere. Like its inhabitants, it has its stories to tell, and those stories may be entirely contradictory. We may view Vilnius as a metaphor, analyze it as a symbol, deconstruct it, or simply dismiss it—who, after all, would be interested in a place described as "the Ass of the Universe"—but the vein of human understanding that runs through this work and grounds itself in the city is never off the mark. As Vargalys observes, Vilnius is everywhere.

Gavelis was born in his "beloved, despised" Vilnius and lived there all of his adult life. *Vilnius Poker*, written during the 1980s, was first published in 1989. Its mordant humor, scatology, sexual frankness, and brutal deconstruction of numerous Lithuanian myths, most fully in his description of the creature *homo lithuanicus*, caused a public uproar, paradoxically bringing it best-seller status. Vilnius forms the background of Gavelis's six subsequent novels, in which he continues to explore the struggles and missteps of a nation attempting to find its identity after so many years of foreign rule.

In the midst of translating the following section from Vargalys's narration, I found myself compelled to go rummage through my shelves for a book I had found several years before in a used book store. The book, *Vilniaus Architektūra iki XX amžiaus pradžios* (The architecture of Vilnius through the beginning of the 20th century), was published in 1955—at a time when the Lithuanian resistance to Soviet occupation was crumbling, a topic covered in the novel through Vargalys's excruciating flashbacks. It's a strangely grim photo album; the pictures, in black-and-white, show the state of an occupied city still not recovered after fifteen years of war. The human figures mostly seem distant, dark, and shadowy; a remarkable number of the photographs have absolutely no figures in them at all, as if the city had been emptied, which in fact, it had been—according to Laimonas Briedis's *Vilnius: City of Strangers*, the city, its Jewish population annihilated, had lost 90% of its inhabitants in the preceding decade.

The photograph I was looking for, by P. Karpavičius, identifies the place as a courtyard on Gorky Street (a street name mocked in the novel). The photograph's mysterious, gloomy, and Escheresque feel perfectly suits the role Vilnius has to play in the novel.

The excerpt I have chosen takes place just after the narrator has had an encounter with his long-lost father in the depths of Vilnius's Old Town, an encounter that seems more like a hallucination than reality. Gavelis drags the reader through this nightmarish encounter, and then drops the reader onto a side street, where two drunks provide a hilarious counterpoint.

Among the many, many thanks I owe to all the friends, family, and colleagues who bore my endless questions while translating this work, I must here mention Dalia Cidžikaitė, who, among other valuable suggestions, kindly obliged my request and sang the song "Ant kalno mūrai" over a cell phone for me while standing on a CTA platform in Chicago. The full English translation of *Vilnius Poker* was published by Open Letter Press in January, 2009.

- Elizabeth Novickas
Street scene in the Old Town of Vilnius.
Photo by A. Mockus.

A residential courtyard in Gorky (now Pilies) Street.
Photo by P. Karpavičius.
17th-18th century buildings in Pilies Street.
Photo by A. Mockus.

The roofs of Vilnius's Old Town.
Photo by A. Mockus.
The oldest church in Vilnius, Mikołaj Church, was built in 1440 and rebuilt in the second half of the 18th century. During the Soviet era it was used as a museum of architecture. Photo by S. Simanskis.

Gediminas Tower, built in the 14th century and renovated several times since then. Photo by A. Mockus.
Suddenly darkness fell upon me. I heard a quiet rustle and felt a soft breeze on my cheek. By the time I collected myself, both the rustling and the draft were gone. I was left alone in complete darkness. Crazed, I sprang towards the now silent rustling, and began groping about and banging on the wall with my fist. I was obliged to catch up with him right away, to recover my father. I had to kiss him, to say everything I hadn’t said. I didn’t want to save myself, not myself at all—I wanted to save father. I didn’t have the time to tell him I’m still strong. I could protect and defend him. The two of us could take on the entire world—me and my father. Why, we’re Vargalyses! We must fight together—after all, we’re branches of the same tree. I banged on the wall harder and harder, it seemed I even screamed aloud, “Give me back my father! Bring back my father!” I couldn’t even imagine I would never see him again.

The walls didn’t answer; I realized I still needed to get out of there. The way back was a live labyrinth. I slunk past repeating rooms, corridors, stairs, and covered balconies; I should have exited somewhere long before, but still there was no end. I kept returning to the same intersection of corridors, the same inner courtyards. Like it or not, I remembered the labyrinth of Babylon, whose center could be reached only by always turning to the left. But I didn’t need the center of the labyrinth; I was afraid of it. I needed either an exit, or father. It seemed to me that I felt father somewhere close by; that sensation sometimes grew weaker—I would turn somewhere else, and the sensation would grow stronger again. I wandered around as if I were playing “warmer, colder”: it was warm, then it was colder, warm again, warm, still warmer, and then it kept getting colder. It would seem father was right there, on the other side of the wall, but I wouldn’t find a door in the wall. And if I did come across a door, beyond it I would see new stairs, new corridors, and new covered balconies. I wandered without sensing time or space; I came to only when my feet began to hurt. Who knows how many kilometers I had walked. I stood in a dead-end corridor; doors leaned on both sides. I opened the nearest one on the right, beyond it ranged rooms.
crammed full of broken furniture. A vague presentiment told me there was a constant twilight here both day and night—as if that broken furniture devoured the light during the day and vomited it back out during the night. Standing there, my legs slowly sank into the rotten floorboards. It seemed something alive was holding me by the ankles. That corridor didn't want to let go of me. For the first time it occurred to me that perhaps there was no way out of here. I rushed into a low gallery; ran out into yet another corridor, threw open all the doors in turn. It was the same everywhere: rooms stuffed full of broken furniture. The furniture looked like slaughtered people. An occasional door was locked, but I had neither the desire nor the strength to break them down. All I felt was the primitive fear of an animal trapped by pursuers. I tore up and down staircases and jumped over balcony rails onto the pavement of deep little courtyards. By now I heard the voices of the unseen pursuers surrounding me. I plunged through a creaking door and unexpectedly stumbled into someone's living quarters. There were beds along the walls and an idiotic little carpet with swans hung on the wall. I was particularly reassured by a night pot with a handle, set alongside a child's bed. That was surely an object of this world. The awakened children's dirty little faces stared at me with big eyes. A naked woman with pendulous breasts stood upright in the middle of the room, not even thinking of covering herself. Right next to me, a tiny little girl with scrappy little braids turned over on her side in bed and in her sleep clearly said: "Please ring three times." Finally I saw a window; beyond it shone a completely normal, ordinary, dear, beloved street light. I leapt forward and half-dropped, half-fell down to the pavement. The window was rather high up, well above my head. I saw the woman, her breasts hung out in the street, close the window, unaccompanied by the slightest screaming or astonishment.

I was standing in a side street right next to the Narutis. Still not fully recovered, I was horrified to notice two figures leaning against the wall. They were loitering there in terribly evil, terribly dangerous poses. But at last the cool air revived me, and I realized that I was as safe as safe could be in the damp Vilnius night. The two men, concentrating intensely but staggering anyway, diligently relieved themselves against the wall.

"I'm a Lithuanian, and you're a Lithuanian," one of them slowly expounded. "We're both Lithuanian."

"Yeah!" the second nodded, actually smacking his head against the crumbling bricks of the wall.

"We won't give up Lithuania to any shitty Russkies!"

"Yeah! Give it to 'em in the nose, the rats!"

"Let's kiss, brother," the first one shook off the last drops and tried to hug his companion. His kisses were wet and slimy, like the damp-drenched pavement of the side street.

"You're a Lithuanian?"

"Yeah!"

"And I'm a Lithuanian. We're both Lithuanians."

"Lithuania is the land of heroes!" the second loudly declared.

"Yeah!"

The two of them staggered towards the street, while I continued to think about father. Exhausted by the oppressive air of the corridors, the stale side street felt like a mountain resort. I almost felt good. From down the street an inharmonious duet drifted:

Ride Lithu-uanians, up the castle hill,  
Ride Lithu-uanians, up the castle hill,  
Ri-i-ide on, ri-i-ide on, Lith-thu-uanians  
Car-rry on, carr-ry on, wreaths of glory! . . .
"Seasonal Monocle," "Ocean of Memory," "Shape of Snow." Also similar to waka, the poems are neither conclusive, epiphanic, nor narrative, but tend to originate in perception and emotional response. The poem does not develop, but one gets the sense that the poem, or some core nucleus of the poem, existed before the poem was written.

While haiku tends to focus on a singular image, Sagawa's poems accrete into a visual tableau, or montage. Her imagery is colorful and densely layered, while metaphors unfurl in and out of each other—all the while remaining surprisingly grounded.

In Japan in the 1920s, avant-garde poets were furiously translating and reading literature from Europe. Sagawa participated too, with well-regarded translations of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, among others. At least in part affected by the wealth of literary influence and the vibrant energy of Tokyo in the pre-war years, Sagawa's work exhibits syntax and vocabulary that is influenced by non-Japanese language, as well as a density of images that combines the natural with the urban. These kinds of unique juxtapositions were probably quite commonplace in the frenetically changing energies of the Tokyo landscape in the 1920s and 30s.

Sagawa's language in particular had a penchant for using uncommon words, reflecting the fluid nature of language use in her time. Institutional and other efforts (including the development of mass production of print media) to standardize the Japanese language had been initiated during the 1920s, but poets and writers still felt free to draw from a wide range of vocabulary—which included words that borrowed from other languages, such as Portuguese, Dutch, German, French, and English. Here the term "borrowed" seems appropriate, as many words failed to find a permanent place in the Japanese lexicon. Likewise, before nationwide standardization practices took hold, written Japanese exhibited stronger evidence of its Chinese roots, also evidenced in Sagawa's poetry.

—Sawako Nakayasu
The mad house

A bicycle spins.
Along a breezy path in the field.
Only the inside of the rubber wheel exhausts the earth.
He will soon arrive in Baghdad.
It is quite bustling there.
Soldiers of the Red Army; curly-haired artists, pale-skinned Ryazan women, the spiral staircase of the cabaret.
The piano makes a tinny sound.
People standing atop a foot mold’s worth of earth must be sharpened crystals. One wrong step leads to death. The infinite propagation action of the sun.
At the source of the disease the plants dry up, and the clouds running through the deteriorated city streets.
As the past is nothing for him but an arrangement of trees, it is again, cold like ash.
The goose feathers at the entrance, the inverted shadow.

I am alive. I thought I was alive.
鐘のなる日

終日
ふみにじられる落葉のうめくのをきく
人生の午後がうでである如く
すでに消え去った時刻を告げる
かねの音が
ひときれひときれと
樹木の身をづりとるときのよう
そしてそこにはもはや時は無いのだから

A day when the bell rings

All day
I hear the groans of trampled fallen leaves.
As the afternoon of life is such
It tells the time that has already passed.
The sound of the bell
As when shaving away the flesh of trees
Piece by piece
And then, because there is no more time there.
Waves

The sailors are laughing.
With their teeth bared,
Like on the barrel organs
Thrashing about all over the place.
Unflaggingly
They press the bellows with their entire bodies
While laughter passes from shore to shore.

The laughter we have today
Is held captive of the eternal
And the silence only grows deeper still.
Because the tongue is simple, like a pair of clappers.
Now, people
Simply open their mouths
Like when yawning.
毎年土をかぶらせてね
ものうげに雑音もたてず
いけがきの忍冬にすがりつく
道ばたにうずくまってしまふ
おばれの冬よ
おまへの頭髪はかわいて
その上をあるいた人も
それらの思い出も死んでしまった。

Please cover with dirt every year
With no lingering footsteps,
Clinging to the honeysuckle on the hedge
Crouched beside the road
O, decrepit old winter –
The hair on your head has dried
And the people who walked above
Have died, along with their memories.
Per Højholt

from Praxis, 8: Album, tumult (1989)

// Translated from the Danish by Martin Aitken //

Translating Per Højholt is in many ways a contradiction in terms. To anyone familiar with Denmark, its language and literature, Højholt comes on so singularly Danish as to defy any notion of interlingual representation at all. Moreover, his insistence not just on the pivotal nature of language in our conception and understanding of the world around us, but importantly on the idea of text remaining independent of meaning until invested with such by a reader would clearly seem to render translation unmanageable at best.

Indeed, even the slightest glance at Højholt's work of the 1960s would appear to confirm that view, much of it seeming at first blush to verge on the untranslatable. Examples are the systemic, often visual, poems in Min bånd 66 [My hand 66] (1966), Turbo [Turbo] (1968) and +1 [+1] (1969).

However, while Højholt on occasion can be regarded as a cerebral and challenging writer, the oeuvre—quite singularly in Nordic literature—consistently manages to combine the highly intellectual and utterly down-to-earth poetic and linguistic expression. The reader is constantly struck by the ease with which humour, irony and everyday language are so masterfully combined with razor-sharp existential observation.

Højholt's name tends not without justification to be uttered almost simultaneously with that of his revered contemporary, Inger Christensen, herself much cited as a Nobel contender. However, while Christensen has successfully translated into English—the monumental modernist works Det [It] and Alfabet [Alphabet] having notably appeared in award-winning renderings by Susanne Nied—Højholt remains little known outside of Scandinavia, despite being considered by many to figure among the major poets of the modern era, even in an international context.

Per Højholt debuted in 1949 with the semi-religious Hesten og solen [The Horse and the Sun], a collection that placed him in the slipstream of the so-called Heretica modernists such as Thorkild Bjørnvig and Ole Sarvig. While later acknowledging the significance of the Heretica connection on his early career, Højholt was already moving in a more radical modernist direction, breaking with late-Symbolist tradition and what Danish scholars refer to as the 'confrontational' modernism of writers such as Klaus Råbjerg. Thus, by the time of his third collection Poetens hoved [The Poet's Head], which appeared in 1963, Højholt's work was already far removed from what he would later refer to as "the Christian stench" of Heretica. The writer had in his own words "discovered Mallarmé" and a more incisive and increasingly experimental European form of modernism, which to his mind left the Danish tradition palling by comparison.

One particularly noteworthy aspect of this shift is the consistent rejection of the notion of the poet as an oracular or prophesising figure. Throughout his work, and in countless interviews, Højholt stressed the idea of writing as a craft, a skill resting more than anything else on hard work: art issues not from philosophy, but from art itself. Significant here is the framing of much of the later oeuvre as praxis, the main title borne by no less than twelve volumes of poems and prose, including the source of the present selection. Indeed, Højholt even professed (in 1966) to be less interested in what he wrote than in the actual fact that he wrote, an emphasis on writing as a processual discursive act that provides a point-of-departure for a major, much lauded dissertation by Carsten Madsen, an associate professor of the University of Aarhus: "The oeuvre is consistently split between language and the materiality of writing. While language mediates between the oeuvre and literary traditions and institutions, the very gesture of literary writing as an acte d'écrire conveys a critique and a parody of those very same traditions and institutions, with uncurbed nature as the alternative horizon." (Carsten Madsen in the
Another aspect, noted by Jens Smærup Sørensen in his epilogue to Højholt's collected poems (Gyldendal, 2005) and immediately observable already from the early 1960s, is Højholt's complete jettison of ornate metaphor in favour of a wholly uncircuitous style embracing clearly recognisable, often prosaic elements of everyday life projecting effortlessly into images of nature.

Throughout his work, Højholt is consistently focused on nature, its substance and character, principles and laws. Central is a recognition of our essential condition of being removed from nature, confined to a distance from the natural world around us—from 'the gaze which pays us no heed' (cf. this selection, no. 22). From this vantage point we are able only to observe, to mediate between our remoteness and the surrounding world by means of language: "Here we are with tongues in our mouths" (no. 59).

The playfulness with which Højholt approaches such weighty subject matter is legendary and often anarchistic. Note, for example, the present selection's Requirements on a new alphabet (no. 33), with its insistence (in parts 4 and 5) on the mutual discreetness of language and nature; the juxtaposition of the same two primitives in the potential causality predicated in the final sentence of no. 43; the leap from nature to culture in no. 56.

While the bulk of the oeuvre consists of poetry, including arguably the short prose of the present selection (included in the Collected Poems), Højholt did produce two novels during his lifetime, with a third (unfinished) work published posthumously in 2007. In the formally experimental, though highly readable 6512 (Gyldendal, 1969), the protagonist spends his waking hours ensconced in the local library where he has engaged himself in the project of reading its entire collection in alphabetical order. The novel takes the form of his fictional diary, whose entries are likewise alphabetically rather than chronologically arranged, placing the reader in doubt as to the actual sequence of the events described.

Højholt's second novel, Auricula [Auricula] (Gyldendal, 2001), is the stuff of literary legend. Rumours about its conception and development abounded for decades, many of them undoubtedly instigated by the author himself. Auricula was conceived as Højholt's crowning glory, in which he reveals his entire oeuvre to be a swindle perpetrated entirely with the aim of establishing himself as a serious writer only to ensure the publication of the great novel he declared himself to be convinced would have been rejected had he been a lesser writer: "To which institution would you like to be committed?" was how he envisaged the reaction of any serious publisher to an unknown author with hopes of publishing such a work.

As its title implies, Auricula, described in one major review as at once "monumentally absurd, hysterically funny, stunningly insightful, oddly moving", concerns the conception and subsequent roamings of a large number of ears (sic.). On September 7th, 1915, the Great Silence descends momentarily and almost imperceptibly upon a Europe in the throes of war. Nine months later a number of ears come into the world and disperse themselves to all corners of the Continent. In what has since been described as a major work of modern world literature, the reader accompanies Højholt's ears on their escapades through twentieth century European history. Though nominated for the prestigious Nordic Council Literature Prize in 2003, Auricula was somewhat surprisingly passed over (the award that year going to Swedish poet Eva Ström for her collection of verse Revenstäderna [The Rib Cities]).

The source of the present selection was published in 1989. This eighth Praxis volume contains a total of 59 individually numbered pieces of short prose, the majority no more than a dozen lines or so, others comprising a single line only. Each text appears on its own page. Many of the longer pieces exhibit a complex syntactic structure, the text in such cases often being constituted by a single sentence. The selection made for this publication is impromptu and wholly unmotivated by any guiding principle other than the translator's own personal preference. The sequence follows the original.

Per Højholt's extensive archive of notes, drafts, manuscripts and correspondence is now housed at the Royal Library in Copenhagen.
and can be viewed online at http://www.kb.dk/da/nb/materialer/handskrifter/HA/hoejholt. The archive presents a unique insight into Højholt's working method. Minutely annotated ideas and draft versions were meticulously ordered in chronological sequence with the final printed manuscript placed on top. The online documents thus allow for close study of the writing process from inception to publication by flicking backwards through the individual document. Højholt's file for the source of the present selection contains a total of 184 pages.

I would like to thank Carsten Madsen for his useful comments, and in particular Signe Højholt for her kind cooperation, keen interest and many helpful suggestions. Needless to say, any remaining shortcomings are entirely my own.

– Martin Aitken

af Praksis, 8: Album, tumult (1989)

2. Dan han for tredje gang tog fejl af vejen kom han så tæt på sit udgangspunkt at hvis han også fjerde gang havde kørt forkert var han nået helt tilbage og kunne have begyndt forfra uden videre.

//

from Praxis, 8: Album, tumult (1989)

2. When he lost his way for the third time he came so close to his point of departure that if he had made a fourth wrong turn he would have come all the way back and could have started over again as a simple matter of course.
Hvis pludselig alle ting fik halv størrelse og faldt ned i mellemrummene mellem hinanden.

If suddenly all things became half-size and fell through the gaps in between.

19. The exact word for "I" is missing.

22. Anyone who frequents the dikes of western Jutland will be familiar with the occasional pools that stare up like empty pupils into the vast sky from just inside the dike. The grass reaches all the way down to the gaping darkness. The skies of western Jutland have no truer observers. Even in mid-winter these stagnant waters are so late to form ice that for a long time they simply remain, deep black, absorbing snow. One can dream of disappearing in such a gaze, which pays one no heed.

28. The Caucasian radish was the size of a turnip, though round. It had hardly any top and was the same colour as the moon. One night in the 12th week after Midsummer, it pushed itself out of the ground and lay there.
30. Den som på et kort fulgte hendes rute gennem byen ville se, hvordan hendes instinktive omflakken førte hende fra hospital til hospital. Ikke fordi hun var syg, hun foretrak bare at slå sig ned mellem rekonvalescenter, der sad og kom sig på hvidmalede bænke, mens de lyttede til trafikken udenfor og igt tog træerne og græset og de få flaksende sommerfugle over roserne.

30. Whoever cared to follow her route through the city on a map would see how her instinctive roamings led her from hospital to hospital. Not that she was ill, she simply preferred to settle among convalescents getting well on white-painted benches, listening to the traffic outside, watching the trees and the grass and the few fluttering butterflies above the roses.
32. Det længste af hans ben når naturligvis ned til jorden, hvad det korteste også gør, når han har støvlen på, men hvadenten nu det længste er for langt eller det korteste ikke langt nok, så besværer de i fællesskab hans gang så meget, at han ikke i tide når frem til det offentlige toilet, men må bruge posthusets sokkel ligesom hundene og håbe på, at vi der passerer forstår hans problem på vores ubekymrede flakken fra toilet til toilet.

32. The longest of his legs reaches the ground, of course, as does the shortest when he is wearing the boot, but no matter whether the longest is too long or the shortest not long enough, together they contrive to complicate his gait to such an extent that he cannot make it to the public toilet in time, but, like the dogs, must avail himself of the Post Office wall and hope that we who pass by will understand his predicament as we roam untroubled from toilet to toilet.
33. **Krav til et nyt alfabet.** 1. At det indeholder samtlige de bogstaver, der mangler i det nuværende. 2. At det ikke indlader sig i polemik med noget eksisterende alfabet. 3. At også det ignorerer sprogs vidtløftige råb om hjælp. 4. At det opgiver ethvert forsøg på at tilslutte sig naturen. 5. At det udelukkende nærør sig af forskelle og derfor ikke udskiller ekskrementer.

33. **Requirements on a new alphabet.** 1. That it should include all such letters as are lacking in the present one. 2. That it should refrain from engaging polemically with any existing alphabet. 3. That it too should ignore language's wordy cries of help. 4. That it should abandon any attempt to accede to nature. 5. That it should live exclusively on disparities and therefore not pass excrement.
38. Hvis der kun var 1 solsort tilbage ville dens sang forfalde, uden svar ville den komme i tvivl. Efter en tid ville ingen som hørte den vide at det var en solsort. Hvornår er der ikke flere solsorte tilbage, jv. den kinesiske vandgran, Kristus etc.? Aitken

38. If there were only 1 blackbird left, its song would fall into decay. Without reply it would begin to doubt. After a time no-one who heard it would know that it was a blackbird. When are there no more blackbirds left, cf. the Dawn Redwood, Christ, etc.? Aitken
42. Når Susan Pedersen i Lind overhovedet åbnede vinduet den marts morgen var det fordi hun ville lufte ud. At hun var gravid faldt hende ikke ind, og englen på fuglebrættet nede i haven så hunslet ikke. Den var heller ikke meget større end en solsort.

42. That Susan Pedersen of Lind opened the window at all that March morning was because she wanted to air the room. That she was pregnant did not occur to her, and she never saw the angel on the bird table in the garden. But then it was hardly bigger than a blackbird.
43. Regn ville være en god begyndelse, at det regnede, ja, skråt og langsomt, så det høje græs gik omkuld. Derefter ville det være OK, hvis nogen kom gænede, en våd man, vandende med et langt spor efter sig gennem græsset. Nu ville det lune svært med en metaphor, der kunne løftet det hele op i et billede, ligesom samle det i noget anskueligt og større, men han er for våd, manden, han fryser, hans bukser er dyngvåde forned af al den regn til at begynde med. Metaphor nu, og han bliver syg!

43. Rain would be a good start. Yes, rain, diagonal and slow, so the tall grass slumped. After which it would be ok if someone, a wet man, came wading through the grass leaving a long trail behind him. And now a metaphor would be warmly welcomed to raise everything in a single image, sort of gather things up into something lucid and large. But the man is too wet, he is cold, his pants are soaked at the leg from all that rain to begin with. Metaphor now and he would catch his death!
47. Hele formiddagen er det ikke lykkedes mig at sige noget, som ikke står i H. C. Andersens "Kun en Spillemand". Det fik mig til at tænke på det drengebarn i Rouen, der i 1956, da han endelig fik lært at tale, viste sig at være fru Bovary's søn.

47. All morning I have tried in vain to say something not already stated in Hans Christian Andersen's *Only a Fiddler*. It made me think of that little boy in Rouen who, in 1956, when finally he had learned to speak, turned out to be Mrs Bovary's son.
53. En lod. Til hans forsøt om kun at ville bruge
hvert ord én gang havde jeg den bemærkning, at
de fleste ord allerede var brugt op til flere gange,
og så af ham, at de derfor højest lod sig sige en sidste gang og da kun for hans vedkommende,
endelig at han var indbildsk, at bordet fangede, samt
at han lige så gerne kunne indstille al tale én gang
for alle, hvorefter han spildte sit ”Nej” på mig,
hvorefter jeg med et spørgsmål fraranrede ham
hans ”Ja” og gik min vej, idet jeg overlod det til
ham selv at opdage, at han allerede var fortapt.

53. A fate. As for his vow to use each word only once, I commented that most words had already been used several times at least, even by him, and that therefore they could be uttered one last time at most, and then only for his benefit, and that he was conceited, that there was no going back and that he might just as well discontinue all speech once and for all, upon which he wasted his “No” on me, after which by means of a question I tricked him out of his “Yes” and went on my way, leaving it to him to discover that he was already doomed.

56. The ash has lost all its leaves as though by order or decision, at any rate suddenly, *overnight*. Heaps this morning, which do not look at all withered yet, green and glossy, so it must be the stalks. I myself have all my books.
59. Som om det hjalp! En hest ser selvsfølgelig ud som en hest gør, mulen blød og fintformet, ingen tvivl. Og bøgens kimblade, to, som en lille krave, og i hundrevis! Bøg, ask, birk, forskellige og stumme! Her går man med tunge i munden.

© Per Højbol and Gyldendal, 1989

59. As if that would help! A horse has the appearance of a horse, inevitably, the muzzle soft and delicately shaped, beyond a doubt. And the seed-leaves of the beech tree, two, like a small collar, and in their hundreds! Beech, ash, birch, distinct and mute! Here we are with tongues in our mouths.

Translation © Martin Aitken, 2008
Pavel Lembersky

Three Stories

Translated from the Russian by Sergey Levchin

This publication is perhaps unusual for Calque in that the translations were essentially work for hire. Pavel/Paul Lembersky is about a generation my senior, in another appearance Odessite, an American some 30+ years. For reasons adduced below he writes Russian prose. When it came time to convert about a dozen short pieces into English, Pavel put out a call among New York’s Russian literary milieu. My name, along those of various other contenders, was passed on to him by Matvei Yankelevich who, beyond running his own very fine small press, operates rather shrewdly as a kind of switchboard for people on the (Russian) literary scene, and who has occasionally “put through” to me some very worthy characters, for which I am very grateful.

In this case several would-be translators were asked to perform sample work and, I can only suppose, mine pleased Pavel best. We met in person—this was especially useful for me, I think—agreed on a price and time frame (which, however, was violated shamefully on my end) and signed a rather homemade contract. Over the next 3 months we exchanged over 150 emails—mostly textual clarifications and comments, occasional friendly gestures and party invitations. Pavel is a perfectly competent speaker of both languages, and he proved to be a fairly exacting client. On average, each story went through 4-5 rounds of revision (some minor and some significant). For the most part I had to admit that his complaints were just; occasionally I tried to argue for particular phrasing or word choice, and in such cases I found the author largely amenable.

Pavel selected the stories for this publication, and (in the project’s collaborative vein) we agreed to trade a few questions by way of introduction. I hope that the exchange can throw some light on the peculiarities of this kind of translation work.

— Sergey Levchin

SL: Pavel, you have been an American far longer than your translator. Your English is hardly inferior. Why do you write in Russian? Why didn’t you translate the stories yourself?

PL: After learning all there is to know about behavioral quirks of mallard duck and yellow-bellied lizard in their natural habitat I went on to study film in graduate school. The subject matter (childhood, adolescence) and setting (Odessa, Ukraine) of my first feature-length screenplays resulted in my switching back to my native language. It is hard to say whether such reversal, or regression, was my way of resisting complete acculturation and/or partial loss of identity in the proverbial and none too friendly melting pot, or I just needed to carve out a linguistic/psychological space I could call my own.

Translating myself from Russian into English never occurred to me because I know I would lack respect for the original, which is required to do a faithful rendition. Why rewrite yourself if you can do a new piece from scratch? Anyway you work at one and the same text all your life, which happens to be parcelled into pieces framed by the title and the deadline you hope to meet. Finding a good translator is much more rewarding.

Now, why did you take on this project?

SL: It was a moderately well-paid job, though I doubt I could have accepted it had I not some personal interest in these stories. Despite the obvious differences—age, age at immigration, year of immigration, etc.—there are some important similarities between the author and translator. I might have written such stories (varied in style, in particulars, but tinged with the same nostalgia, melancholy, absurdism). It seems our early reading lists had been very close.

Specifically, for the chance combination of match and variance in our backgrounds and experiences I was well suited to translate these texts. That much I saw early enough, though it took me some weeks to understand the basic principles of your style (somewhere around email #90). It was not until then that I felt perfectly free to stray from the letter (or come and go from it, I suppose).

I was also pleased at the time with the prospect of thorough revision and the back-and-forth comments exchange we had agreed on: it
was a way of proving to myself that I belonged to the fine league of craftsmen. More importantly, perhaps, for the first time my client could judge the work soundly, to the relatively fine detail—and I wanted to see how good I really was.

Now, what was it like to read yourself in your other language? What do you think is the relationship between the two texts?

**PL:** Liberating as hell, revitalizing, new wine in new improved wineskins. The fun part was being able to read my stories for the 50th time and actually enjoy them in a new guise. The texts are definitely complementary: I loved how slight/or not so slight regional and culinary differences (or memory playing different tricks with you or me) resulted in your insisting on the way certain dishes are made—and welcomed variations.

**SL:** Were you also occasionally troubled by the variations? At any point did you feel jealous for your own words?

**PL:** My first reaction reading the translated samples was a shudder of recognition mixed with surprise: Finally! I found a guy who really gets it! But...I might need to use my veto power once in a while here too. The challenge was not to get carried away admiring the playfulness of the English translation and to keep a watchful eye for unwanted meaning(s). I also appreciated the generational difference between us, your different take on American culture vs. my more nuanced knowledge of things Soviet. Since I always felt free to point out the spots that I thought could be rendered differently and ask questions about the translator’s choices I must say that the end result is precisely how I would have done it, only better.

And you? How did you deal with the old letter vs. spirit dichotomy? Is it possible to “have it and eat it too”? Especially the more surreal bits, where meaning is deliberately problematized...

**SL:** Your occasional slips into irrationality/nonsense presented a curious dilemma—to translate them one had to understand them, but that threatened their irrationality. As you recall, I did press you for meaning at various points, which was not always easily granted, and that sharpened some the second horn of the dilemma: if it wasn’t clear in the author’s mind, it would be a mistake to have it clear in the translator’s. In the end I tried to hold a balance, rendering a kind of suspicion of meaning, rather than meaning itself—an intuitive approximation of something I did not fully understand. Perhaps it is an apt description of the translation process in general—to a milder degree in our case, I hope. Still, *pace* my best principles, I came away with the suspicion that imperfect understanding—and a vigilant author—is occasionally the best combination for the kind of freedom one cannot dispense with in translating literature.
The Last Words

Laid over mercilessly, alone on a half-forgotten freight, Joe "Tough Nut" Fink rolled into town—the same old town, where, according to Diana "Feeling It, Sweetheart" Noyse, he had spent his childhood dickin' the birdies in a pear tree. They had a few trees in the back of the house. Diana had two hard ruddy fists, fooling around with an Eskimo pie in the lobby of Generation movie house, but they had stuck a dropper in both his eyes, so that it was impossible to tell who was starring and who was extra.

Joe made his way through the unfamiliar streets. A shower of debris fell from a window ledge. "Where's the x-ing?" queried a crippled girl in a pant suit. He didn't understand, shrugged, said, "I was gonna ask you..." She stared at him, like there was a handle bolted to the side of his head.

Joe entered into a dark courtyard. "Hey kid, I'm looking for two old boys, Pakchaian—Lusik and Vsevolod. Heard of them?" The boy nearly fell off the balcony, "They're my uncles!" "Shitting me?" "Fucked if I am." And the boy let drop a set of keys with a note, "Back soon, come up, make do—the kid is harmless, too."

The boy brought out a bottle of Courvoisier and poured out two shots earnestly. Then two more. Then they played last words.

"More light?"
"Edison?"
"Goethe. 'Get out?'"
"Marx."
"Right. Kant?"
"Don't know."
"'Good.' Abelard?"
"Don't know."
"Right."

Joe was beginning to get fuzzy. There was another round.

"Lusik used to be class president of sorts... Sevka, now, that's a whole other story..." said Joe.

Older versions of Lusik and Vsevolod came home and wanted to know about America. "America," said Joe, "America's all right. How are things here?" Lusik and Vsevolod were "in business": they had bought a house in Bastardov, kicked out the old folks and leased the ground floor to a bank. But the bank folded and the ground floor stood empty. That's half a mil in the outhouse. Suddenly Lusik remembered something and ran into the bedroom. He came back with a mug shaped like a bidet—it used to be Diana's favorite.

"How's old Lady Di?" inquired Vsevolod.

"Depends who you ask," said Joe. Three years ago Diana left him for a famous art-activist. He did a piece, lounging around a gallery, naked, surrounded by old-style alarm clocks, feeding on hot dogs. By way of grand finale he smeared himself with mustard and invited the public to lick him. Many resisted—Diana couldn't. The alarm clocks showed the exact times around the countries of the G8. Zemsic, or whatever his name, even got invited to the Belgrade biennale—he was that relevant.

"Ho!" said Joe, "I was headed for the graveyard."
"A bit early!" exclaimed Lusik and Vsevolod.
"I'm seeing Uncle Kotja."

Kotja was a shameless smoker, who lasted 96 years. His last words were, "Nobody should live this long," decided Joe for some reason. He found the gravestone beside the brick cemetery wall. The plot had been hijacked by bands of nettles; there was no one to look after it. Could ask the boy, thought Joe.

Foreigners equipped with floral arrangements wandered about the graveyard in search of kin, and Joe saw himself as a piece of a complex mechanism designed especially for nostalgic necro-nomads: here lies uncle, there is his daughter, here is first love, and over here is second love. He made a remark to this effect.

"Don't be so complicated, Jorka," retorted Lusik. (Vsevolod had stayed home to make dinner.)

"I'm trying," said Joe, catching sight of Diana Noyse.

Mountaineer Dr. Koch called his daughter "Devil's Barbie." 'Koch's alright, if you hold on tight' was a popular refrain on the slopes of the Elbrus. The old man was half-senile, but he could still do Vysotsky sing-alongs at a peak picnic: "What could be better than mountains—mountains..." Baby Diana had golden ringlets—she screamed: I don't want the blue dress, I want the pink dress! And she got the pink dress every time. And what did he do? Climbed to the top of Coit Tower about a year ago, called her from the payphone up
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there, shivering. Nothing. Why didn't she pick up? He did screw her periodically, didn't he? There was also a string of modest but genuine offerings. There were opera festivals in Verona and Salzburg...

“Diana?”

“Hey, Joe! Meet Zemsic. Zemsic—Joe.”

A shaved head in chic goggles peeked out at him from behind the Koch monument.

“Good to meet you, Joe. Cool place, huh?” the head grinned.

“Zemsic wants to get an art-intervention going here,” explained Diana. “He says there’s real discourse potential.”

“Right here?” asked Joe. “Cool.”

“Why the hell did I waste five years of my life on that art-bag?” thought Joe, riding in the Pakchaian Lexus. “Could have married anybody. Back then it was easy. Everyone was somebody’s cousin or best friend. Weekends at the dacha—spin the bottle—new dance every month.”

“How’s old Garik?” asked Joe. “He had a baby sister too—strip your soles, when you’re not watching.”

“Same as ever, huh? Well, what about his sister? Garik’s in Moscow, he’s “in business,” like everyone else. Baby sister went to absolute shit.” Lusik liked to wave his arms about. “The old girl borrowed a mil—at a very high rate. Her partner—also an American guy—he wasn’t exactly versed in the way of the world here—you know what I mean...”

Here something bumped them and threw them in the air, twisting them about and squeezing them into another dimension until a kind of truncated eternity came over them, held their skulls in a vise and crushed them, and all of a sudden a row of cages swayed in the heat of a summer afternoon, where the spectator and the exhibit are one and the same, and for a small fee you could have a handful of hay, observe (yourself) and scratch (yourself) roughly behind the ear, and stern-faced women are selling dusty melons by the entrance—they cut into them and extract a wondrous little pyramid, which they hold up toward you perched on the tips of their knives—try it, you’ll like it, but there’s no way you’ll ever try it, you’ll just get your lips cut to bloody bits.

It was pouring dreadfully at the funeral. Vsevolod pressed the boy close—the boy was sobbing; he kept saying, “two objects are identical not with respect to essences, but by virtue of their indifference...”

Zemsic was shooting the funeral “in soft focus.” His green sneakers flashed behind the dull gravestones. Diana hurried after him with an umbrella, hastily translating the basic points of the sermon and prayers. Discourse potential was swelling brilliantly in his grasp.
Nothing But Tights

They say he was jealous, but they also say some other things. They say he asked her to leave them on, and that she flat out refused, and so he went and strangled her—strangled her with tights!

Our neighbor’s an American guy, but he’s got a Russian surname, Ed Koslow, or maybe it’s that they just never changed the name on the mailbox, because the super’s an Aussi and he drinks, so I personally haven’t seen him sober once, and I’ve been here two years almost. Koslow was an accountant and he did this heinous deed: strangulation, the woman practically his fiancée, with a pair of tights that she was wearing too. They found her in the kitchen, propped up against the fridge – she was already turning blue, tights around her neck, tongue all white sticking out—pretty picture.

I knew her. The crackpot had a new one every six months, but this one had been around for almost a year. He called her Chickadee, they say he proposed to her. Ever since I took a tumble on the steps and cracked my ankle I’ve had to use this cane going out, but mostly I just stay home – I see many things here, things I don’t like, things I don’t understand.

The following circumstances directly preceded and precipitated the crime. Koslow didn’t approve of Chickadee’s plans for the coming year, they included everything but Koslow, and she refused him, she said: I’ll think it over, but she meant to cut it off (I got it from a client of his). Meaning, she might be up for it, every now and then at an inexpensive restaurant, where she doesn’t have to know anyone, but these tights, for Christ’s sake, not in these tights, and his working away at her feet with his rough, callused hands (yes, he was an amateur gardener, sombrero on a stick, spraying avocados from a hose, we don’t have avocados though, not like they do in Mexico, that’s the truth) all oozing and buzzing like a model beehive.

They met a year and a half ago, then lived a whole year together. It was through a mutual friend (she had killed her baby, that’s a whole separate story)—realtor father was rolling in dough, and mother was a famous actress at one point, rising star of primetime, as it were. But the rising star was long dead by then (cancer), though they did their best buying her doctors, and the dacha went for next to nothing—this was all back there still—the sister (not here) finished college, got hitched to a tennis player mad about music. But the hoarse patter not now, not now, you wild man, ever hear that at Carnegie Hall? I don’t think so. Country music in dead of winter, when the day drops like a firing squad, any old music, not just country, that’s it—medicine for melancholia like tea with honey or better. Chickadee lost her confidence, but she’d lost interest even before that, he couldn’t handle it, physically or emotionally. He went on loving her. He had a special lens attachment for his camera, then he switched to basic video equipment. Here she is on the steps going down to the beach, one leg swung over the other next to a fountain, a bubbly little thing, city fountain—people lived here before the war, then they were relocated, and the fountain was relocated, an exercise in futility; you wouldn’t think it was the same city, that’s how much it changed. It had to be renamed. She was smiling, drawing out her words. Weren’t they long enough as it is? He said leave the tights on. She even asked about it: these come off? but she couldn’t say tights, she just pointed, like it was a bad word or something. He nearly choked to death: don’t you, don’t do it, don’t you dare. So she kept them on, then he kissed her fingers, and they were full of rings. And the dark tights, but not black, just metallic brown with dark soles and a seam up the back, maybe.

She loved philosophizing, talking about Bergson and Paul Ricoeur, he just nodded and said nothing, didn’t want her to see the gaps. He had some—gaps, that is. Big ones. Sure he loved reading, but philosophy, forget about it. Too bad, though, philosophy and literature are one and the same (there’s any number of things we could say to the world, but the world—it’s always one and the same—the world doesn’t talk back), there aren’t any protagonists-antagonists in philosophy, otherwise it’s the same as literature, with ideas in place of characters: ideas unfolding where events should be, zooming in on ideas not landscapes, because nowadays nobody’s gonna care about ooh a landscape, nobody’s gonna be chasing you around for a story. Maybe the idiots will. But we get stories bright and early with coffee, thanks to journals and journalists, and the papers had at least a hundred dead at a Bronx disco fire, seems like disasters all around. Some kid got half his skull blown off with a shell, they had to graft it by way of a special process, took a month just to get the ear to stick in the right place. Or a maid from Burma got her nose chewed off and some lips.
Instead we have ideas: essences, perceptions, apperceptions. He'd asked a whole bunch of them, before this Chickadee came along, he'd asked them to leave the tights on, some did and some didn't, but most did. He took one to the movies, he was just a kid then, and there in the movie house he was stroking her tights, and that's when it started, since then he'd had this kind of special interest. I don't want to get too graphic, but when he asked a lady (this was a sort of fetish for him) to keep her tights on, with his whole hands and his fingers, first his rough, calloused fingers, he didn't want the lady, object of desire, to slip off her stockings, everything comes off, but that. Before this one (and before her killer girlfriend), when he had another one coming over from Venezuela and they drank together, they really got tight on tequila (Mockingbird brand), though he could tell she was faking, making like she was more drunk than she was, so she didn't have to feel so ashamed taking off her pants. He woke up around seven and there she was, pouting in her sleep, right up into his shoulder, he wanted to take her then and there, like having a dead body but still warm, and living and with tights on, but she'd managed to slip them off somehow; he didn't even notice, and so he didn't take her, just felt her a little there, where they have tights and other things, typically. Bras, brastraps, he flipped up her dress (killer girlfriend was hiding out on a dacha outside of Moscow where they had property, he brought her cigarettes from the States in the early days when the reforms put the kibosh on everything, they were rolling wallpaper, shredding tights, and rolling them in wallpaper and that's what they smoked—"smoked" in quotation marks—more like choked on, like those patients at a TB clinic, Proletariat blvd. (they also faked it), when, let's say, this is pure conjecture, the nurse came calling in white tights, she's not staying, you see, making like she's just there for a minute, she'd meant to call next door, but the minute turned into leap year, they saw each other, and he never once had to ask her to leave them on, she saw everything with her own eyes and she left them on. Fishnets, like the ones she used to wear, the handsome zoology instructor, and he loved to watch her through the dog's skeleton! Through the crack of the greyhound's ribs. The crisscross of the tights through that crack (sister tossed the baby all by herself, smashed its ribs, death came, then husband came, she's already a mental case, shaking all over, crossing herself and cussing, that's why she was hiding out at the dacha, they did a nationwide manhunt, looked for her everywhere and they found her, got a warrant out for her arrest, but they couldn't prove anything: where's the baby? gone, maybe stolen. It was her word against her husband's, and he'd been out of work for over a year then, the management at the factory where they also made nylon, incidentally, didn't exactly give him a stellar review. So she'd lost all faith in him. Didn't love him anymore. He wasn't ready for it, he just went on buying her shoes, one size too big, that was his thing. He loved to touch her feet and sniff them through the opening in a kind of foot harness they make. She was giggling; it tickles, like that was his business; tickles, just shut up and deal with it, for christ's sake.

It drove her crazy, his manias, his pathological phobias. Even the lamest of parties, a crumpled evening that you just wanted to throw away and never think about as long as you lived - even that was subject to exhaustive analysis, performed over breakfast the next morning, of who said what, and looked where, and moved what, doesn't matter if it had nothing or anything to do with him. Like Ninka, she's the one that did the robot the other night. They were all begging her: Ninka, do the robot, you know you want to. Ninka made like she didn't want to, for appearances' sake, but then she went and whoa! she did the robot. Man, she did the robot, first she did the robot backwards, then she did the robot forwards. She did it stokin' robot, she did it smokin' robot, slam robot, spam robot, and then she did the robot roll. Dumbass robot? Yessir! Apeshit robot? Yessma'am! Dada robot—yes indeed, and then she did the robot roll. This robot went to Hollywood, and that robot went to Bollywood, robot's looking for his shoe, and the rabbi robot too. Hey, my old lady goes hungry, scarfing hotdogs in a tree! Hey-ho, robot, here we go! Man on woman, do the robot, on my bonny; do the robot, and on your bonny do the robot, hey-ho robot, here we go! Everybody's doin' it—sweaty robot, doin' it, natty robot, doin' it, batty robot doin' it! Stroke of midnight, do the robot, crack o'mornin' do the robot, 8:07 do the robot, hit the barracks, do the robot. But my old lady; she goes hungry, scarfing hotdogs in a tree. Bigger robot, better robot, best of all possible robots. Hey robot, ho robot, brave new stinkin' robot.
**2 Sisters**

Take a minute to look around and you will see right away that life is far from senseless. On the contrary, life is full of meaning. If I may be permitted a minor witticism, it is a senseless man that calls life senseless. The story that was told to me by the late Tim O.—chess master, ladies’ man, Cuban jazz aficionado, all-around solid guy—will serve nicely to illustrate the point.

Two sisters lived in New York: East Side—West Side. This was back in the late eighties. Real beauties: lovely curves, rosy cheeks, natural blondes, quick eyes, sharp tongues—everything. How they moved! they shimmied, and discoed, and jitterbugged, and even did the slam dance at the Tunnel, way past late. They could do a headstand and boy, were they sassy! One of them went crazy for raki (lobsters in English, said her sister), the other couldn’t go a day without kolbasa (salami in English, said her sister). Drove the male contingent positively wild—the contingent tucked its gut, flared its nostrils, twitched uncontrollably, barked at intersections, offered its services at the gym (handle that dumbbell? reach that rack?) et cetera. The girls liked the attention, blushed a little for politeness’ sake, but the act went no further. They’d had a proper upbringing: the basic need for companionship and sexual gratification did not translate for them into random encounters with questionable types, who, as a rule, kept an old goat up each armpit at all times. And though one of the sisters worked for an escort service (that’s just how it played out for her) and the other was a starving bohemian—neither was a stranger to real emotional need, and each in her own way despised the brute sex.

That’s just what they were talking about over dinner one April evening.

"I tell you, I can’t stand them. They reek of sewage—slob, neat-freak, they all have the stench on them. I’m not exaggerating. There he is: freshly shaven, hair slicked back, running off to his place of business, stroking his paycheck (mentally)—starched, pressed, a walking Brooks Brothers catalog—and I’m telling you, I can smell him from over here: he stinks like the outhouse, smoker, non, whatever. I’m not even talking about clients now. You’d better hold on to your saints when these boys start pulling off their breeches. I don’t know about you, but I’ve been thinking about it, and there’s no way I’m falling for this scam. I’ll work as long as I can, and when that’s done I’ll buy a stake in the service. And if I ever want a baby—there’s plenty of ways around that too. Somebody feels like getting in bed with bowel movement every night for the rest of their lives—that’s their business. But it’s a sick business, if you’re asking me. Eat, child. What’s the matter?"

"Oh, nothing" began the bohemian sister cheerlessly; "I’m not so crazy about them either, you know. We had a new model in the studio recently—Tim. Crazy tattoos, piercings all over the place, built out—you know—bicépsi-tricépsi, everything in the right place, a specimen. Anyway, wants to get coffee. I’m thinking: maybe never. He insists—I demur. So he gets the bright idea: starts twitching with this thing or that thing while he’s posing. Basically, he’s screwing me up—I can’t concentrate. The whole studio is only four people: Dan, two old bags and yours truly. They’re all conceptualists, anyway, and one of the old bags is basically blind. They don’t give a damn whether he’s twitching or doing cartwheels up there. I’m the only one that has to suffer—because I have this cursed realist strain. I’m the only one that needs him to stand still, for christ’s sake, because I still have some respect for the human anatomy. I believe the body is a viable object of representation. In the end I thought: fine, coffee is coffee, it’s not carnal knowledge. So we ended up getting coffee in the West Village."

"Where? Sha-Sha?"

"No, there’s another place that just opened up, basically next door. Anyway, we get our cappuccino, macchiato, rum-baba, tra-la-la, where you’re from, California, studied acting, but nothing so far. I tell him: could you get into commercials, or is that also dry? You know what he says? I want you to hurt me—I’ll tell you where exactly, and what boots and stockings you’ll be wearing, my lizard-child, and then we’ll make like two preschoolers, ok? Lizard-child? Preschoolers? I say, I’m sorry—I have no idea what you’re talking about. So he starts explaining to me exactly what his thing is, and when he must have it (immediately), he’s just up here on 8th Street. I’m ready to vomit. Charming young fellow."

"What’s his thing, anyway?" The other one was a professional and she’d run into all kinds of unusual requests. Sometimes she was moved to grant them, though it was always extra.
"I can't—not at the table. Trust me, it's vile enough. I ran out, sprinting down Hudson, no umbrella—it's raining like hell—meaning I had an umbrella but it was broken, and I couldn't get it to open, because it's just pouring. He starts after me—he's pretty athletic, obviously—caught me at Bank St., I'm screaming like mad—basically, he's trying to shove his tongue in my mouth—I whack him with the umbrella. Next thing, he pulls this giant you know what out of his backpack, there's water everywhere, drags me into a doorway, the specials are alright, they brought out the raki, leave it on, like that, and the service is not like Chanterelle, let me tell you, but I'm not proud, just asked if they could bag it, for emotional stability, and that's without any sort of discursive probing! so, we ended up not calling the cops, bare hands, split the bill, I took down his info, a small dent in the rear fender, could have been worse, with the belts on. Next time keep your eyes open, Mr. Blind Faith!

"Lobsters in English," said her sister. What a dumb habit, always lecturing people, and way off most of the time. She had clients that won't be lying down for it.


"Salami! Not raki."

"What's on, anyway?"

"Bowel movement, Seinfeld, etc."

"And yet I believe that man as object of representation shall continue for some time."

"Knowledge, sweetheart, not representation."

"All the same."

"Not all. And you have to start with yourself."

"I wouldn't be starting with you, or your Delphic mama!"

"And what about yours? Huh? What about yours?"

And the sisters were suddenly shaking with laughter. And they went round and round the table like a twister—because the table was small, just for two—until they fell to the floor and just stayed
Mohammed Khodeir

"God of the Swamps"

// Translated from the Arabic by Rafed A. Khashan //

Born in the city of Basrah in 1942, Mohammed Khodeir is a key figure in the history of the short story in the modern Arab world. In the early '40s, Basrah was a bustling city, a cultural crossroads where people from all over the world came to trade their goods and tell their stories. The cultural diversity of Khodeir's work is the product of that setting. It can also be attributed to his erudition and his travels through the towns and cities of Iraq, teaching in out-of-the-way schools, which gave him a close look at the varied lifestyles of people all over the country.

His two story collections, The Black Kingdom and 45°C, marked a shift in the course of the Iraqi short story since the 1960s. For after it was entrenched in realism and traditional narrative, Khodeir came to imbue it with symbols, myths and dream-like chunky narratives stitched together by a main idea. Khodeir's world is so varied and rich in cultural allusions, local myths and symbols that only erudite, qualified readers are able to probe into his fictional world. To translate Khodeir into another language poses a challenge to translators, who should possess an advanced cultural competence and a creativity approaching that of the author. For example, in his story "The Pilgrim", Khodeir makes heavy references to places, names and dig deep into the historical meaning of the names of some places like the Straight of Bab AlMandab (the Gate of Tears) whose understanding is necessary to capture the intensity of the situation in one of the paragraphs describing the terror striking the pilgrims sailing through that place. I myself had had to resort to encyclopédias to get an idea about many of the places and things mentioned in that story when the dictionaries failed to assist. Mohammed Khodeir's reputation ranks high in the Arab world, despite his relatively slow pace of production.

He has won many awards in Iraq and throughout the Middle East, including the prestigious Sultan bin Ali Al Owais Cultural Foundation (SACF) Award 1998–99.

God of the Swamps is set in the marsh areas north of Basrah, and depicts some of the harsh conditions in which the marshland people lived. It is also a psychological exploration into loneliness, disease and the moment of impending death. The story is not devoid of myths, as is shown in the episode involving the grandmother's bowl and the piece of lead. Until recent times it was believed that lead, when melted and spilled into a bowl of cold water, would take the shape of the cause of a sick person's disease, be it a mosquito, an evil eye or whatever. This substitution or, in Roman Jacobson's terms, contiguity relationship, is a distinguishing feature of Iraqi marshland people's thought, a shaper of their world view.

The marshland people are Arab tribes recognized for their courage, generosity and intolerance of injustice. They led Spartan lives in the sprawling areas covered by water and reeds and lived mainly on fishing, hunting and raising buffalos, getting around by paddling canoes through the floating islands of reed houses and narrow channels surrounded by canes. Following the 1991 people's uprising in the south, their areas were completely demolished: houses burnt down, animals killed, men tortured and hunted down by Saddam's regime.

The marshes, home to the ancient Sumerians more than 5000 years ago, birthplace of the oldest civilizations in the world, once one of the richest, most bio-diverse areas of the world, full of thousands of birds and other living creatures, were wiped off the map completely, turned into desert by Saddam's atrocious acts. Today, efforts are being made by the new Iraqi government, UN agencies and NGOs to resuscitate the marshes and protect these natural animal reserves.

– Rafed A. Khashan
The last person to see the god Anopheles was the pilot of a malaria extermination floatplane from the Department of Preventive Health. The pilot had flown only once that day to spray DDT over the areas marked on his map. He was returning from the far-flung eastern marshes when he noticed a dense cloud ascending from a swamp fringed with canes and reeds. He had made his run early, before the orb of the sun broods over the marshes. At sunrise, he was over the deep swamps adjacent to the border and swooped down to emit a long trail of dense insecticide that reflected in the clear water. The white plume trailed behind his plane in a wide arc and twisted over the scattered shacks on the islands below.

From his cabin, the pilot peered down on islands, boats, migrating birds, little naked boys playing alongside cattle and water buffalo, their mothers cooking in the flames of clay ovens, and fishermen paddling their mashhoufs. All stared at the silvery plane flying low in the dawn sky. This morning, like ordinary mornings, if not for the puzzling apparition of that dark column spouting like a fountain into the sky; the pilot would have ignored these unchanging scenes from time immemorial. Instead, he turned back to investigate.

At first, the swamp seemed no different than any other swamp. Until the pilot flew lower and saw the nearby abandoned shacks — decrepit and dilapidated — encircled and hemmed in by thick, tangled brush. A web of lonely overgrown paths led nowhere. The pilot swooped down for another pass and saw a mashhouf sinking in the water, its pointed bow and aft sticking out like two black claws under the mass of the yellow cloud. If the pilot had descended any lower, the plane would have touched the tips of the reeds; and he would have heard the buzzing of thousands of wings rising from the entrails of the yellow god.

Let us remember Idris!

Idris was the son of the mosque muezzin. Let us remember the Friday holidays, the bicycles without mudguards, the pink worms from the mud of the river, the homemade fishing rods, the fish wrapped in banana leaves, and the hot shadow of the date palms. In those days, we fished using a toxin made from fruit. We discovered a narrow, tranquil river; a river green with mosses. We bought a discarded boat made of tin plates from an old fisherman. For a week, we exhausted ourselves cramming its holes with tar. Then Idris fell sick with fever. The next week, he was still absent from school. We were five friends who sat in the big desks in the rear of the sixth class. Idris sat in the corner and struggled with math. But in our school plays, he always took the good-boy role. In his favorite part, he ended the last scene by shouting at the boy in front of him: “Now you have to quit your bad acts. Kneel before your father and ask for forgiveness. Kneel at once!” The boy knelt and Idris looked from the corner of his eye at the audience who applauded enthusiastically. The teachers encouraged him to assume serious roles outside the theatre, so he became our leader. He was the tallest in our class and his mustache started to grow before everyone else. In our spring play, his role was to call to prayer the captured Roman soldiers who had embraced Islam, but fever robbed him of the huskiness in his voice, so another actor replaced him.

Early on the last Friday morning of May we decided to go fishing without Idris. We brought bread, dates, onions, a matchbox, a knife, bait and a small net. The river was thick with floodwater and overflowed its banks into the orchards and inundated the trunks of the date palms and fruit trees. Puddles formed in the depressions between the trees. In the stillness and shade, little birds flew close above our heads. Because of the floodwater, we could not find a dry patch of land on the riverbank to grill a fish. On our way home, we strung the fish together with palm fronds through their gills. We made five sets and put one aside for Idris. His family lived in one of the endowment houses adjoining the mosque. I arrived during the azan, the sunset call to prayer. When Idris’s mother opened the door, she saw the fish and murmured: “For Idris?” I gave her his share and she vanished down a dark corridor. She left the door slightly ajar, I called out to her: “Will Idris come to school tomorrow?” Her worried voice crept from the corridor: “How can he come? He is feeble. His father moved him to a chamber in the mosque.” Even in the darkness, I sensed her fear. Before she closed the door, she said: “Don’t tell anyone where he is. He should fight the disease alone.”

The next morning, I went early to school so I could visit Idris. The mosque is next to the building where the dead are prepared for...
burial. I crossed a bridge over a narrow branch of the river adjoining the wall of the two buildings. The last morning worshipers were departing the mosque as I entered. The mosque was older than it appeared from the outside yet its central courtyard was spacious and clean, a place where serenity scented with camphor wafts. The sanctuary was to the right and Idris was in one of three chambers over the yard. The first chamber was empty: white carpets on the floor. Idris was lying on a narrow pallet in the second chamber under a window nailed shut with a wooden crossbar. He was fanning himself languidly with a palm frond, clad in the gauzy cloth worn by little boys who are recently circumcised. As he sat up, his legs dangled from the bench and revealed his emaciated calves. His foot touched a tray with some crusts of bread and dry pieces of cheese. I put down my school bag.

"There was something out there," said Idris.

He had a faraway look in his eye. He gazed at the morning’s first rays of sun in the yard, the columns of the sanctuary beyond, and the mosque's low flat dome. He stretched out his hand.

“I passed through the first bout at dawn," he continued. “There will be others before I see another morning. I am worn out."

His face was haggard. He pointed to pustules around his lips. “Look, fever blisters." His thin mustache glistened with sweat. He drew up his leg and supported himself against the wall. We were old friends who once shared a single school-desk, but now I didn’t know what to say. I looked at the earthen floor of the chamber, a line of ants carried crumbs of cheese back to their hideout.

"Tell me, how did you know where I was?"

“We went fishing yesterday," I said. “The river was flooding. The boat almost capsized. Everything got wet. But we caught lots of fish. The only people we saw were a man pushing a mashhouf with a woman sleeping in the bottom under her abaya. We offered to help, but the man ignored us. We supposed the woman was ill and he was taking her to the doctor. Afterwards, I gave your share of fish to your mother. She said you were here, in the mosque..."

I moved closer to the edge of the pallet and helped him to sit up. I continued, “They asked after you in school, they will perform the play before the final exam. They made a helmet for the leader of the Romans from half a pumpkin, but it was too big for his head.”

Idris closed his eyes, then opened them and stared at the ceiling.

“The room is hot," I said. “Why did they close the window?"

He eyed a spot of peeling paint on the ceiling, “Because of mosquitoes. The river water accumulated behind the mosque and formed a swamp."

“Did they take you to the physician?"

“They did something for me.”

“What did they do?"

He stood up from his pallet and pulled at a thin cord around his neck, and a small piece of lead appeared from the slash neckline. He removed the cord and put it into my open hand.

“My grandmother came yesterday afternoon and melted some lead, then tossed it into a pan of water that she held above my head. It crackled and the room was filled with a horrible stench ... then this figure took shape"

The lead amulet felt slick in my hand. I said, “It looks like a mosquito or an airplane." Idris nodded. He said he had spent the night in solitude; malaria had visited him three or four times. After each bout receded, he saw something outside the window that resembled a plane or a gigantic mosquito. When morning came, he found himself lying face down in the yard of the mosque.

Idris said, “Let’s get rid of this. Let’s throw it out the window.” We pried off the wooden crossbar and opened the shutters. Light flowed into the room and we felt a cool breeze. Idris took hold of my hand. I threw the amulet beyond the shadow of the mosque. It fell near a patch of reeds growing on the placid green surface of the swamp beneath some date palms. At once, a swarm of mosquitoes erupted, swirling violently into the air in a huge gyrating cloud. I felt Idris’s feverish palm leave mine and he closed the shutters and replaced the crossbar on the window. We listened to the breath of the monster outside.

I said to Idris, “The breeze will abate after the sun reaches its zenith, but it will blow again after sunset.”

He murmured, “I don’t mind staying here another night." No sign of his fate marked his face.
**Translator's Introductions**

**Editor's Note:** What follows are introductions authored by the translators of forthcoming books to be published without one. There are translators, publishers, reviewers and plain old readers who would say that some books don't need an introduction, implying that all that mess before the book proper is superfluous and therefore unnecessary. Well we technically don't need books, so why bother? We don't need toaster ovens or Jack Spicer or tacos de carnitas or crushes or yerba mate either, but each gives us a unique pleasure—ends in themselves, if you like. And this is not to say that the publishers of the books introduced here subscribe to this need-based model—on the contrary, all of these publishers have released books with delightful, thoughtful and totally needless introductions, some of the best we've read. But in this instance they didn't (or will not), and we were curious and in a sharing mood.

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**Ghosts**

by César Aira

Translated from the Spanish

by Chris Andrews

New Directions, 2009

César Aira's *Ghosts (Los Fantasmas)*, first published in 1990, is a fascinating and disquieting hybrid. It combines sharp-eyed documentation of social reality with the wildest imaginative liberties. The central character, Patri, is an adolescent girl, living with her family on a building site in Buenos Aires, where her stepfather is employed as a builder and nightwatchman. The action unfolds on New Year's Eve: the apartment building is almost finished; owners come to inspect the premises; the builders unload a truckload of bricks and then get down to drinking; Patri's mother prepares a festive meal; the children play hide and seek. Yet there is something odd about this unfinished building: it is haunted by unconventional ghosts, who have a special relationship with Patri and with the anxieties of adolescence.

The novel could be very roughly characterized by reference to two authors mentioned in the text: Zola and Wilde. Like Émile Zola's *L'Assommoir*, *Ghosts* chronicles proletarian life; like Oscar Wilde's tragic fairy tales, it is an allegorical fantasy. But it would be misleading to say that the novel is *at once* naturalist and fanciful, since the kinds of writing it contains—quasi-ethnographic "thick description" of customs and habits, tale-telling, but also speculative digressions and parables—are not blended; they appear and vanish abruptly, unannounced, like the ghosts. This creates an uncanny, flickering effect, and prevents the reader from settling into a set of expectations.

César Aira is a libertarian writer: for him, boundaries exist to be pushed. But not always in a defiant or spectacular fashion. The treatment of stereotypes in *Ghosts* is an example of subtle excess. Patri and her family are immigrants from Chile. The narrator and the characters generalize about national differences, nudging the logic of stereotypes until it tips over into the absurd. Of Elisa, the narrator says: "Like many Chileans, she had the secret and inoffensive habit of addressing long, casuistic explanations to an imaginary interlocutor, or rather a real but physically absent person." Could this specific habit really be shared by many Chileans? When Patri is described as "pretty much a homebody, like all Chileans, except when they are tireless travelers", the exceptions that prove the rule also disqualify the absolute formulation ("all Chileans"). It is the characters themselves who finally reverse the mechanism of overgeneralization: "There are so many kinds of Chileans! said Elisa. That's what I always say, added Roberto."

Hybridity, intertextuality, uncanniness, excess: academic terms like these may give the impression that *Ghosts* is an exercise, a example to illustrate some theory of what experimental fiction should be like. But it's really the other way round: the terms and theorizing here are abstractions after the fact, which is to say the irreplaceable adventure of reading César Aira.
Considered the Steven King of Japan, Koji Suzuki has gained a reputation as one of Japan's scariest writers of the decade. His trilogy of "Ring", "Spiral", and "Loop", has received rave reviews in Japan and all over the world, with his ability not only to capture the essence of terror but also to bring the feeling so close to home that the chill seems to linger under your skin and in the air long after putting down his book. His novels like "Ring" have been turned into movies first in Japan, but Hollywood soon caught on with their own rendition. Those who have been acquainted with his work would agree the man understands what terror is. When *Death And The Flower* came out in Japan, however, there seemed to be mixed reactions as some thought it was not as strong as his previous works.

To me though, this collection of six short stories centered on family, the thin wall between security and danger, and a father's role, was probably the scariest of them all, if not the most nerve racking. In this collection, the main characters in each of the stories are standing on the border of the warm cuddly feeling of family and security, and the cold, harsh, devastation and hopelessness that threatens that security, capable of turning life as you know it upside down at any moment in time. It is a crystallization of the author's expert knowledge on the very subject of fear as he demonstrates how to get right down to the core of it in this collection. For one to arrive at this conclusion, however, one must first understand the author's history, and therefore his perspective.

Much of the stories in *Death And The Flower* reflect Suzuki's personal experience as a stay-at-home father, raising his two daughters taking over all the duties that are traditionally a mother's role. The unique position he had as a father, it seems, allowed him to develop strong maternal instincts and a special bond with his children, which was somewhat rare for a Japanese father. First one must understand that the household arrangement Suzuki had was very much unusual in Japan, as gender has strong association with specific roles in Japanese society, especially more so a decade ago when the collection was originally published. In Japan, men traditionally are much more aloof when it comes to family matters and children, leaving most of the child rearing work up to the women, although that mentality has been continuously shifting over the years. Suzuki once explained in his essay that his biggest fear was to lose his children and his wife. He goes on to say that weak men are nothing but a burden to women, which explains his obsession with working out and building muscle. It is no surprise that the terrific horror that threatens a family security is as vivid as it can be in *Death And The Flower*, as these are not just any imaginary stories that came out from one of the most talented thriller writers of our time, but because they are depictions of the author's personal worst nightmare told in different variations.

While Suzuki's personal experiences were instrumental in the depth and intensity of the stories, the unusual family setup and a very much family oriented father's fear as a platform seemed hard for some of the readers in Japan to relate with. Intriguingly enough, most of these readers seemed to be men who even felt Suzuki's take on family was too preachy in some cases. On the other hand, despite the macho tone of the stories, his female fans seemed to have no trouble putting themselves in the author's position, and so forcing them to contemplate the role of the men in their own households. It was interesting for me personally to see such a difference in reaction between gender. Now that the collection will be read by American readers where men are traditionally more involved with family matters and children, it would be interesting to see if such gender based differences in opinion would be seen here as well.
Remembering Bioy Casares: Journal-in-Progress

Adolfo Bioy Casares’s words often seem transparent, and yet there is opacity in his “less is more” approach to language. The translator must catch the exact nuance or register of his irony and phrasing, typically understated; his was a perfect ear for colloquial speech, and his narrators and characters invite the reader’s laughter unexpectedly; because no matter how hard they try to behave with dignity, their actions and utterances are mechanical, buffoonish, as if they were slightly rusty robotic monkeys on a bicycle. Along the same lines, the mimetic precision of his colloquial language would appear “natural” but the narratives woven by Bioy, whether or not they depart from a realistic setting, lead us to a dream world.

Bioy (whom I had already met a few months earlier in Buenos Aires) responded with a letter to my first translation of his work, a story called “The Myth of Orpheus and Eurydice”—published originally in Knopf’s Borzoi Anthology of Latin American Literature (1977) and based on a Peronist incident in 1953. The letter (which I have translated here) was postmarked “Rincon Viejo, Pardo,” the family ranch “Old Corner” in the town of Pardo where in the late 30s he had written his famous novella The Invention of Morel. I’ll end this brief note with an excerpt from his letter, which, to quote him, made me “grin from ear to ear.”

Rincon Viejo, Pardo, March 8 1972

My Dear Jill:

Thanks for the letter and for the translation. Suspense for the moment regarding the latter, soon to be elucidated. I hadn't answered you until today, because for a time that has seemed immemorial I

have spent my season at Mar de Plata lying face up, dedicated to examining, in all its details—sinister to my eyes—the ceiling. It was nothing, lumbago; but, what a lumbago! This finally ended with a single injection, applied after fifty useless ones upon the advice of the father of my daughter’s literature professor. There’s nothing like literature! The lumbago interrupted the progress of a short novel, Los desaparecidos de Villa Urquiza’, which I had begun with great hopes. But there is always something to be gained, as a Mexican general once said, and if I suffered over not writing (incredible as this seems), I spent who knows how many hours a day thinking about the little novel. As I watched it grow, not without fear.... the novel and I became more intimate. Now I understand that before the lumbago, like an irresponsible chap, I was going to write about something of which I was completely ignorant.

Back, finally, to your translation. I wouldn't like to be unfair with anybody but I think, Jill, that it's the best that's been done with a text of mine. In general, the task of the translator consists in simplifying a text by weakening it, so that an evident mystery remains: Why did someone write (of course for this question there is never any answer) & why did someone else take the trouble to translate? Any author who doesn't want to abandon right there and then his profession should abstain from such depressing readings. With “The Myth of Orpheus and Eurydice” the danger, for me, is pride, I assure you.

I have caught myself in the mirror reading your pages with a beatific grin (from ear to ear), which could only correspond to the phrase: “How well I write!” “The Myth of Orpheus and Eurydice” does not feel like a translation but rather reads like an original written with confidence, intelligence and grace.

As if I believed that those merits were also my own, your translation has stimulated me to confront the continuous difficulties hampering me in the composition and writing of The Disappeared....”

[Asleep in the Sun]

Affectionately,

Bioy

1. Bioy mentions here the working title for the novel which became Dormir al Sol, 1974, which I later translated for Persea Books where it was published as Asleep in the Sun in 1978. It is now in print, along with The Invention of Morel, as a New York Review of Books Modern Classic paperback.
first met Dunya Mikhail through a chain of coincidences. When I was at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, I ended up driving Naomi Shihab Nye to the party after her reading. As we were walking to my car, Naomi mentioned that she knew a professor in Iowa who was looking for Arabic translators. I was only an Arabic translator by chance, as a graduate translation course had put out a call for students who knew Arabic. When I later met the professor, Saadi Simawe, he gave me Dunya's book, *Diary of a Wave Outside the Sea*, as a gift and separate from the work we would be translating. I still associate that book with the coffee shop where we met and I first opened it up. It was the best thing I had ever read in Arabic and wonderfully different from any of the poetry I was used to reading (in any language). It was, to my taste, more like mystical or philosophical writing, with a thread of satirical humor woven through. I felt that the English, though fine, was not as good as the Arabic. Saadi put me in touch with Dunya and it came about that I retranslated what is now the first half of the book. It is fitting that we would have met this way; because that is one of the larger themes in the book: the choices and chances that lead people to places they did not expect to be.

The book is separated into two parts: an older section, originally written and published in Iraq in 1995, and a newer section, written in America, about her flight from Iraq later that year, and her new life in Detroit. What is perhaps most interesting about the book is that, without the first half, the second half would most likely never have taken place. It was this older book, the version I had seen at the coffee shop, which got the attention of the Iraqi censors and forced Dunya to flee for her life, first to Jordan and then to America. You could say that the second half details the aftermath of the first. In that sense, it is not merely poetry, but a kind of memoir of the poet's life while she was writing the poetry.

While the two sections go together, they are also clearly distinct. The politics and satire of the older section must necessarily be guarded and often metaphorical, leading to the mystical tone that struck me so much on first reading. The new section, in comparison, explodes with a kind of controlled, clear rage, detailing the strange and violent situations of Saddam Hussein's Iraq. It is like looking at vivid snapshots in a family album while being told stories of the real people—yet what stories! A man is caught by police out at night in his pajamas, with no identification papers. Journalists carefully write articles which they know are untrue, to avoid being sent to prison or worse. *Diary of a Wave* is the reflection of a real life, as it was being lived, with the rippling moods of life, and the kind of artistic beauty that is meant, not to paint over with false perfection, but to delicately expose.
The Nouveau Roman, New Again: A Review of Three Works by Jean-Philippe Toussaint

Monsieur
Translated by John Lambert
Dalkey Archive, 2008
$12.95 paper

The Bathroom
Translated by Nancy Amphoux and Paul De Angelis
Dalkey Archive, 2008
$12.95 paper

Camera
Translated by Matthew B. Smith
Dalkey Archive, 2008
$12.95 paper

Reviewed by Jeff Waxman

People, really. So says Jean-Philippe Toussaint's Monsieur in the novel that bears his name. Repeatedly. It's a verbal shrug, an expression of mild contempt, of incredulity and wondering humor directed toward all of the small absurdities of life. In truth, each of Toussaint's protagonists presents a certain sense of hopelessness, an existential entrapment that is not at all uncommon in literature. What is uncommon is Toussaint's ability to breathe new life into these philosophical half-lives and make them glow with a dry humor. Toussaint has managed to capture the hopelessness of people. Really.

This year, English-language readers have a new opportunity to enjoy Toussaint's work. Dalkey Archive Press—which needs no introduction to readers of literature in translation—has had the temerity and unexpected good sense to publish three Toussaint novels in 2008: Monsieur in June, then The Bathroom and Camera in November. Read separately, they are charming, quirky, and genuinely funny. Read one after another, they begin to speak to the reader of emptiness and inevitability. The world that one encounters in these novels is cold and oppressive, even in its small freedoms.

Fans of Toussaint may find this assertion alarming. We're told he's funny—which he is—and that many of his protagonists possess a certain humorous and humorless irreverence—which they do. Their lives, however, are generally dry, their observations unhurried, matter-of-fact. These men—they're all men—are reminiscent of certain French films, and for the same reasons, certain novels by Beckett. Life in these books is not lived so much as borne and borne for however long they go on. Not that they're not enjoyable—but these are people, really, and people are trapped. This is what Beckett understood, what he and Toussaint share. This Truth is a success. Whatever other nouveau romanesque sacrifices he makes—character, reason, development—this he gets right: the trap.

Trapped in a cage of his own choosing is the unnamed protagonist of Toussaint's The Bathroom (first published as La Salle de bain in 1986 by Éditions de Minuit) translated here by Nancy Amphoux and Paul De Angelis. The first sentence of the book sums up his situation rather well:
"When I began to spend my afternoons in the bathroom I had no intention of moving into it; no, I would pass some pleasant hours there meditating in the bathtub, sometimes dressed, other times naked."

And this is presented as an ideal: life between walls among porcelain fixtures. Safety and predictability. But still trapped, to borrow a phrase from James Thurber, "like a mouse in a trap in Sing Sing." People come and go—he does, as well—and he is hardly a solitary man. His necessities are provided for by a lady friend (with the dubious name of Edmondsson) and guests are frequent, but they seem to scarcely approach his self-absorbed isolation. In an entertaining passage, he describes his boredom during a visit by Edmondsson's childhood friends:

"Pierre-Etienne wondered whether there would be a third world war. I could not have cared less. After administering a crushing defeat (in Monopoly there can be no pretending), I went to bed."

From here on, The Bathroom is increasingly bizarre; perhaps there can be no pretending in Monopoly, but why not in life? Our hero (I will call him that whether he is or not), leaves the bathroom, leaves the apartment, and, however improbably, goes to Venice. But like all of Toussaint's characters, he is still somehow trapped; the hero of The Bathroom carries his trap with him. He wants what we all want—health. Worth noting is the odd structure of the novel: Parts I and III are both Paris; Part II is titled The Hypotenuse. There is an odd, fugue-like feel to the book: at both the beginning and the ending, our hero reflects that "perhaps it was not very healthy, at age twenty-seven going on twenty-nine, to live more or less shut up in a bathtub." In a particularly devilish move at the end, despite having spent the majority of the novel outside the bathroom, the narrator (our hero) decides to leave the bathroom, as though he was there all along. Like all of Toussaint's characters, he is still caged, but the hero of The Bathroom carries his cage with him and however amusing, this is still the portrait of a man in crisis.

And we're all men in crisis, or at least I am. I've referred to these novels as realist too many times in this review to claim otherwise, though meanwhile my editor suggested they were "borderline surrealist." But surrealism isn't merely Dali's dreamstuff; it's absurdity and these realist books are definitely absurd. Toussaint's writing bears a sensation of unreality that shines through even the driest realism. In creating an unreal world, Toussaint has succeeded in an astonishing way and, even more astonishingly, he has succeeded in translation and in multiple translations with multiple translators. Truth has worked its way into these books somehow and into this review. How? It seems that there's something to Toussaint's anti-personal characters. These men are a dark mirror in whom Toussaint's readers will find their own anxieties and confusions, their own unsure ties and failures to engage.

And no less dark is Monsieur, translated by John Lambert. Professionally successful, the eponymous character is in all other ways unformed, flat, and lifelessly pleasant. He floats through life like a ghost, a well-liked shade of a man. He floats through life like a ghost, a well-liked shade of a man. One day he moves in with his fiancée and her parents and even after the evaporation of their relationship, he fails to leave until his ex's parents find him a new situation nearby. There, the ever-passive Monsieur meets Kaltz, a neighbor. Kaltz forces his way into Monsieur's life, suggesting they undertake a scholarly book together—a treatise on crystallography that he will dictate to Monsieur—Monsieur becomes trapped—trapped again!—by their joint project. In essence, Monsieur is the story of a frictionless existence, the story of a man who tries merely to get by, to get through, and to bear life for as long as it takes. In Monsieur, this isn't heroism, it's tragedy. Alive, he's a beaten man:

"And, that evening in his new apartment, Monsieur remained quite simply in his position for hours, where the absence of pain was a pleasure, and the absence of pleasure a pain, bearable in its presence."

—and in a rare moment of passion? Of vitality in the midst of a ping-pong game? Well, he's still a beaten man:
"...he fought to hold his own... When, near the end of the game, he managed to... win several points in a row, [his opponent] conceded that he could have been quite good at ping-pong in his better days." [emphasis mine]

Despite whatever vague success he appears to have—in his career, in the opinions of others—his life is a failure, but a failure with no disgrace because neither Toussaint nor the reader nor Monsieur himself is invested in this so-called life. There's nothing but a friendly shrug here, a nod to what could have been.

But Monsieur's pale existence is not the whole story here. Toussaint brings humor to this tale with wry omniscient interjections, little assessments that add a pink of jest to the whole proceeding that is his life. The novella closes warmly, Monsieur beneath the stars with an amiable woman. And from Toussaint, a last wink for a last line: Life, mere child's play, for Monsieur.

**Camera** (translated by Matthew Smith) follows yet another unnamed narrator through another life, rather more self-directed than in *Monsieur*, but more philosophical, more self-aware. In a characteristically intense reverie, he notes:

"I dozed in the backseat thinking about the fact that the reality with which I was grappling, far from showing the slightest signs of wearing out, seemed to have little by little hardened all around me and, finding myself henceforth incapable of extracting myself from this stone reality that was enclosing me on all sides, I presently viewed my impetus as a surge of releasing forces forever imprisoned in stone."

Those words! The violence and fear! Grappling gives into wearing out into incapable to imprisoned and stone in *Camera* too, our protagonist is trapped and the whole struggle is there, in those words. The plot, however, is more accommodating and, well, more plotted than the other books. From the beginning, the narrator is planning to go to driving school; that this goal is never realized is quickly the point. Idly, without consideration, he moves from that simple goal into a comfortable relationship with the driving school secretary, a woman named Pascale. From here, things progress in a usual way, but from an unusual vantage point; Toussaint seems to simply leave things out. In one scene, the narrator acts briefly as a surrogate father to Pascale's son during a brief conference with his teacher. Shortly after, he meets her father. All of these interactions are normal, but he seems to insinuate himself into her life without any real attachment and with startling rapidity. Later, Pascale and the narrator travel to London—Toussaint's characters seem to do little actual work—and back. It's in London that the book takes a philosophical turn and the narrator's preoccupation with himself slowly gives into a more general preoccupation, but one still twisted by his peculiar impulses.

One of these impulses, the theft of a camera, gives the book its name and at the same time gives the narrator surprising depth. After he has the pictures developed, he realizes that in the midst of these holiday snapshots, among these memories belonging to strangers, he can find no trace of himself. He realized that, "after the twelfth photo, the film was uniformly underexposed with here and there a few undefined shadows like imperceptible traces of my absence."

That this depth comes at the end of the novel is both a disappointment and a relief. There is, in the last word a sense of completion, a sense that the character has finished the gestation of thought that was the whole of book. But at the same time, I cannot help but wonder: what comes next for a fully realized person? Where do we go from here? Where do I go from here?

Fortunately, Dalkey was thoughtful enough to also include a translation of the interview with Toussaint that appeared as an afterward to the French second edition of *Camera* (L'Appareil-photo, Éditions de Minuit). The interview itself is titled: "Toward an Infinitesimal Novel"—as apt a description of Toussaint's work as we're likely to find. Infinitesimal, Toussaint says, is his response to the label minimalist. "The term 'minimalist,'" he says, "calls to mind the infinitely small, whereas 'infinitesimal' evokes the infinitely large as much as the infinitely small: it contains the two extremes that..."
should always be found in my books." The lesson for the reader is clear: however humorous you may find these books, look for the other extreme.

One does not have to look far. In contemporary literature, there seems to be a preoccupation with uncertainty, an anxiety about life and time that is translated onto literary characters in the form of a cold and hollow fearlessness. This anxiety is beyond Auden's anxious look at industrialization. This is beyond also the general fear of destruction, and fear of fear, and of death. This most troubling neurosis, it's a fear of life. Of time and its passage. It is here in Toussaint's work just as it's in other recent novels. In Peter Stamm's On A Day Like This (published in the United States this year by Other Press, translation by Michael Hofmann) Andreas returns to his boyhood home in a classic act of middle-life and is forced to confront the passage of time in his brother and a former lover. In Dominique Fabre's excellent short novel The Waitress Was New (out from Archipelago and translated by Jordan Stump, who has also translated Toussaint), Pierre counts old timecards, counts the ways in which his life has changed and stayed the same in a lifetime of work. As a waiter, one who waits.

Toussaint's sundry unnamed men, Stamm's Andreas, Fabre's Pierre—each is quintessentially male, aching for some kind of freedom: Monsieur, the youngish executive; Andreas, a middle-aged ladies' man; Pierre, an aging serve r with some gentility about him and the air of an old soldier. Each is trapped in consciousness, trapped by mortality, trapped in inadequacy—trapped always by time and expectations.

In Toussaint's novels, perception is merely a matter of focusing on either the background or the foreground, on the immediate or the whole. These books are not warm, but they are funny. They are dry and wry and each wonderful in a surprising way. But let's not imagine that we're not laughing at ourselves and let's not imagine we're not in the same infinitesimal trap.

Come, people, really.

CONTRIBUTORS

Martin Aitken (born 1961) is a translator of fiction and poetry. He holds a PhD in linguistics and lectures in English language. He lives in rural Denmark and is currently translating a novel for Simon & Schuster in New York.

Chris Andrews has translated three novels by César Aira (Ghosts, How I Became a Nun, and An Episode in the Life of a Landscape Painter, all published by New Directions) as well as books by Roberto Bolano (most recently: Nazi Literature in the Americas). He teaches in the School of Humanities and Languages at the University of Western Sydney.

Evgeny Baratynsky (1800-1844) was, next to Pushkin, the brightest light in the Golden Age of Russian poetry and the most thoughtful of all the Russian poets.

Aditya Behl teaches Hindi and Urdu literature and Sultanate and Mughal cultural history in the Department of South Asia Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. He was born in Jabalpur in central India and received his early education in India. His monograph on the Hindavi Sufi romances, Love's Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1279-1545, is forthcoming, as is a verse translation of Shaikh Qutban's Sufi romance Mirigrovati: The Magic Doe. He has translated fiction and poetry from Hindi, Urdu, and Panjabi into English, notably Shaikh Manjhan's Madhumalati: An Indian Sufi Romance (2000). He is also the editor of The Penguin New Writing in India (1994).

Ilya Bernstein is a poet, translator, and editor of Osip Mandelstam: New Translations (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2006).

Ben Bollig is Lecturer in Spanish at the University of Leeds. His books include Néstor Perlongher: The Poetic Search for an Argentine Marginal Voice (University of Wales Press/University of Chicago Press, 2008) and, edited with Pablo San Martin, 31. A Bilingual Anthology of Sabaravé Resistance Poetry in Spanish. He is an editor of Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies and is one of the coordinators of the Poetics of Resistance research network.

Arturo Carrera was born in Buenos Aires in 1948, although he has spent much of his life living and working in the town of Coronel Pringles. In the late 1960s he founded the literary review El cielo with his friend César Aira, and in 1972 he published his first collection of poems, Escrito con un nictógrafo, accompanied by a reading by the poet Alejandra Pizarnik. He has published more than a dozen books of poetry, three anthologies, including his influential collection of new Argentine poetry, Monstruos (2001), as well as collaborative works and essays.

Paul Celan (1920-1970) was born into a German-speaking family in Romania in 1920. After the Nazi invasion of Romania, he spent two years in a labor camp. This experience, and the death of his parents in the camps during this period, informed some of his most famous poems. Celan is known for his neologisms and the cryptic, laconic nature of his later works.

Rita Dahl (born 1971) is a Finnish writer, freelance editor and vice-president of Finnish PEN. She holds masters' degrees in Political Science and Comparative Literature at the University of Helsinki. Her debut poetry collection, Kun huedet olevat yksin, was published in 2004 (Loki-Kirja), and her second book, Ajoitusten aika (Voisai), came out in the spring of 2007, and third Elämälä
John High is the author of eight books, including a trilogy of poetic novels The Desire Notebooks (which made the Village Voice Literary Supplement’s top 25 books of the year) and his selected writings, Bloodline. He has received four Fulbright Fellowships to Russia, two National Endowment for the Arts fellowships, and writing awards from the Witter Bynner Foundation, Arts International and the Academy of American Poets. Among others, a translator of several books of contemporary Russian poetry, he was the chief editor for Crossing Centuries—The New Russian Poetry (Talisman House). His most recent books are Here (a book-length poem) and Talking God’s Radio Show (a novel). In 2008, with an invitation from PEN International, he traveled to Moscow to read poetry and to present a paper on Mandelstam along with translations in commemoration of the poet.

Per Højholt (1938-2004) was one of Denmark’s most influential poets, a philosophical modern master whose work throughout is shaped by playful, often equilibristic linguistics and a simultaneous and astonishing ability to express highly philosophical issues in a colloquial style employing ironical humour as one of its foremost instruments. A trained librarian, Højholt debuted in book form in 1949 with Hesten og Sole (The Horse and the Sun), echoing the predominant Danish modernist style that was coming to expression notably in the Heretical journal. However, Højholt soon discovered a more radical continental modernism as practised by Stephane Mallarmé and his subsequent collection Poets boved (The Poet’s Head) (1963) marked the beginning of the authorship proper. The oeuvre spans prose as well as poetry, the latter though predominant, some 40 works in total, overriding themes being the paradox of man’s removed status in relation to the natural world, and language, its nature, function and (lack of) meaning. The so-called Praksis series ran to twelve small volumes published from 1977 through 1996 and provided a laboratory framework for much of the poetic oeuvre. Praksis, 8: Album, tumult (1989) contains 59 short prose pieces, the majority extending no more than a half dozen lines or so, all archetypal Højholt.

Daniela Hurezana’s essays and reviews appear regularly in Rain Taxi, The Chattahoochee Review and The Redwood Coast Review. She has two recent translations: from the Romanian, with Adam J. Sorkin, of Mariiana Marin’s The Factory of the Past (Toad Press); and from the French, with Stephen Kessler, of Raymond Queneau’s Eyesear (Black Widow Press).

Bohumil Hrabal (1914-1997) is best known for three of his novels Closely Watched Trains, I Served the King of England and Too Loud a Solitude. He studied at the law school of Charles’ University but finished his degree late, in 1946, because of the Soviet invasion. He worked a number of odd jobs, from train conductor to paper-presser, many of which he wrote about in semi-autobiography. He first published in 1963, but was forbidden to publish officially in the 70s and published instead in samizdat and exile-periodicals. He is known for coinning the word “pabitel,” which was his name for ordinary people who told long and colorful stories. Most of his characters are such “pabitelés.” He died after falling out of a hospital window while feeding pigeons (some speculate it was suicide.)

Tamara Kaminetsz in was born in Buenos Aires in 1947 and studied philosophy at the University of Buenos Aires. She was awarded a Guggenheim award for her poetry. She has lectured and organised workshops in Mexico and in the USA. Her poetry collections include Los No (1977), Vida de living (1991) and Tango Bar (1998), while her essays include La edad de la poesía (1996) Historias de amor y otros ensayos sobre poesía (2000). She was awarded the Konex Prize for her poetry in 2004.
Ena Katrovas was born in Prague, Czech Republic, in 1990. For most of her childhood, she traveled between Prague and New Orleans with her parents and siblings, attending both Czech and American schools. She has spent her summers studying in or working for the Prague Summer Program, a creative writing and cultural-studies program for American students. She has translated the poetry of Pavel Lina and the resulting book, Paper Shoes, is published by Carnegie Mellon University Press. She currently studies Music and English at Western Michigan University.

Stephen Kessler's most recent books include Burning Daylight (poems, Littoral Press, 2007), Written in Water: The Prose Poems of Luis Cernuda (translation, City Lights, 2004; Lambda Literary Award), and Moving Targets: On Poets, Poetry & Translation (essays, El León Literary Arts, 2008). He is the editor of The Redwood Coast Review.

Rafed A. Khaskan is a teacher of English and Translation in the University of Basrah, Iraq. He received his MA degree in Stylistics in 2004 yet he started his translation career in 1998 when he was still a student in the BA studies. In 2007, he left Iraq following the murder of his elder brother and threats to his life. He settle first in Jordan before he finally made it to the United States. While in Jordan, Mr. Khaskan got a job as a translator and simultaneous interpreter and worked for a number of UN agencies, companies and publishing houses. The last work he did was a translation of HC Armstrong's book Lord of Arabia, which he did for Dar AlWarraq Publishing House in London. Another translated short story by Moahmmed Khodeir, The Pilgrim, is expected to be published in Metamorphoses by Smith College in the UK.

Paul Killebrew is a staff attorney for Innocence Project New Orleans. His first collection of poems, Flowers, is forthcoming from the UK.

Mohammed Khodeir is a prominent modern Iraqi story-teller and a retired primary teacher. He has written scores of innovative short stories and novels that depict vividly and creatively the varied aspects of the Iraqi society, history, and power. He has the power to magically turn history into fiction and mix fact with fantasy into a dream-like whole. A number of Mr. Khodeir's short stories were selected and introduced to the wide international readership by the finest translator's of Arabic literature like Denys Nair. Another translated short story by Mohammed Khodeir, The Pilgrim, is expected to be published in Metamorphoses by Smith College in the UK.

Sawako Nakayasu’s most recent book is a translation of Takashi Hiraide’s For the Fighting Spirit of the Walnut (New Directions). Her forthcoming books of poetry include Hurry Home Honey (Burning Deck) and Texture Notes (Lerner Machine).

Emerson College has been committed to the intellectual growth of its students through the liberal arts and professional programs since its founding in 1880. The university has a long tradition of excellence in teaching and research, and it has a diverse and vibrant student body. Emerson offers a wide range of undergraduate and graduate programs, including those in the arts, humanities, business, and sciences. The university is located in Boston, the cultural and intellectual center of New England, and it has strong ties to the city and the region. Emerson is proud of its commitment to social justice and its role as a catalyst for change in the community and in the world.
Sandra Newman is the author of the novels The Only Good Thing Anyone Has Ever Done and Cake. Her memoir, Folk Tales of the Rich, is due to be published by Random House in 2010.

Mihael Nitā, born in 1988, is a student in Bucharest and a friend of writer Dan Sociu, whom she collaborated with to produce drafts of his poems in English.

Elizabeth Novickas graduated from the University of Illinois-Chicago with a M.A. in Lithuanian Language and Literature. She has worked previously as a bookbinder, newspaper designer, cartographer, and computer system administrator. Vitūs Pekė is her first full-length literary translation.

Néstor Perlongher was born in Avellaneda, Province of Buenos Aires, in 1949 and died in São Paulo in 1992. He studied sociology in Buenos Aires and alongside his career as a poet was a pioneering urban anthropologist, carrying out studies of male prostitution in Buenos Aires and then for a Master’s thesis in São Paulo. He spent much of the 1980s in Brazil and also in Paris. His collections include the highly influential Alambres (1987), and his poetry was collected by Echavarren in Poemas completos (1996). He published a series of important essays on the neobarroco, coined the term neobarroco, and later researched and wrote on esoteric religions and mysticism.

Qutban was a fifteenth century Hindavi Sufi poet attached to the court-in-exile of Sultan Husain Shah Sharqi of Jaunpur. He was a disciple of Shaikh Buddhvan Suhrawardi, whom he praises as his spiritual preceptor in the prologue to the romance Miragawati.

Manuel Rivas (Coruña, Spain, 1957) has published six collections of poetry: Carnival Book (1980), Anisita and Other Shadows (1981, with Xavier Seoane), Ballad on the Western Beaches (1985), Mobicania (1987), No Sueno (1986) and Death Coast Blue (1999). His collected poems were published under the title From Unknown to Unknown by Espiral Maior in 2001. He has also written a play, The Hero (2005), six novels and six collections of short stories, three of which have appeared in English: The Carpenter’s Pencil (2001), In the Wilderness (2006) and Vermeer’s Milkmaid & Other Stories (2008). His latest novel, Books Burn Badly, an epic of some 700 pages, is due out in English translation in 2010. His poems have appeared in Absinthe, Modern Poetry in Translation and Poetry Wales. He is a regular contributor to the Spanish daily El País. Manuel Rivas is also an active environmentalist, helping to found Greenpeace in Spain and spearheading the protests in Galicia over the oil spill and subsequent sinking of the Prestige in 2002 and the Spanish government’s handling of the catastrophe. The poems in this selection are taken from a forthcoming anthology of Manuel Rivas’ poetry in English translation, also entitled From Unknown to Unknown and to be published in early 2009 by Small Stations Press (www.smallstations.com).

Born in NY, raised in Yokohama, Maya Robinson lives in NY and is a translator of Japanese manga, novels, and short stories. One of the projects she is currently working on is a manga series called, “Crazy For Dogs” from Viz Media. She keeps herself busy writing about Japanese culture, food, drinks, and culture for a local NYC magazine and working in TV as a researcher and production coordinator.

Leena Saarelainen was born on the 2nd of August, 1972 in Enonkoski, North Karelia. After comprehensive school and upper secondary school she started to study at the University of Joensuu in the Savonlinna School of Translation Studies. She studied English and German and was interested especially in translating literature from English into. After graduation, she translated many kinds of texts including non-fiction, instruction manuals etc. In addition, she worked as a PC adviser. This experience turned out to be very useful when translating texts relating to computer programmes. She is married and has two children. Her daughter was born in 2000 and her son in 2002. She currently lives in Outokumpu, a small town in eastern Finland.

Sagawa Chika (real name Kawasaki Aiko) was born in 1911 in Hokkaido, Japan. Through the encouragement and connections of her brother, Kawasaki Noboru, a poet and editor himself, she became a member of the lively community surrounding Kitaro Kusae, and was highly esteemed by many of her contemporaries. Stomach cancer took her life at the age of 25, at which point her poems were collected and edited by Itō Sei and published as Sagawa Chika Shihibu (Collected Poems of Sagawa Chika), (Shōrinsha, 1936). Later a more complete collected works — including her prose, in memoriam writings from poets, and a complete bibliography — was published as Sagawa Chika Zenshibu (Collected Works of Sagawa Chika) by Shinshaisha in 1983.

Dan Sociu was born in Botoşani, Romania, in 1978. His first book, borcan bine legate, bani pentru încă o săptămăna, came out in 2002 (with tight lids, money for another week) and was recognized by the National Mihai Eminescu Prize for Poetry debut award. In 2004, fratele păduce (brother hea) appeared; this was reprinted in 2007. In 2005, cintece eXcesive (eXcessive songs) won the Romanian Writers’ Union Prize for the best poetry book of the year — the first time a book by a non-member was either nominated or won this major prize. In 2007, he co-authored Poveştii erotice româneşti (Romanian erotica) and in 2008, his first novel, Urbancolia, was published to acclaim. Sociu has translated Charles Bukowski into Romanian. He is one of nine Romanian poets in the 2008 Graywolf anthology, New European Poets. In May 2008, he read as part of PEN World Voices, New York, and for summer 2008, he was awarded a residency at Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart, Germany.

Translator Adam J. Sorkin’s recent books include Ruxandra Cesereanu’s Crusader-Woman translated mainly with Cesereanu (Black Widow Press, 2008); Radu Andriescu’s The Catalan Within (Longleaf Press, 2007), translated with the poet; Magda Carnecci’s Chasmos, translated with Carnecci (White Pine Press, 2006); and Mariana Marin’s Paper Children, with various collaborators (Ugly Duckling Press, 2006). In early 2009, Twisted Spoon is publishing Memory Glyphs, a collection of prose poems by Cristian Popescu, Iustin Panţu, and Radu Andriescu. Sorkin has won a number of awards including The Poetry Society (U.K.) Translation Prize, the International Quarterly Crossing Boundaries Award, and the Kenneth Rexroth Memorial Translation Prize, as well as NEA, Rockefeller Foundation, Academy of American Poets, Arts Council of England, Fulbright, and Witter Bynner Foundation support. He is Distinguished Professor of English at Penn State Brandwine.

Jeff Waxman is a bookseller with the Seminary Cooperative Bookstores in Chicago and the editor of their web magazine, The Front Table. His reviews appear regularly in the Review of Contemporary Fiction and Three Percent and irregularly elsewhere.

Amos Weiss (1953-2008) was a poet, playwright, and translator of German poetry and plays. His selected poems have been published as Wiss the damage, djinn! by Makeshift Press.
Liz Winslow is a fiction writer and translator. Her translation of Dunya Mikhail's *The War Works Hard* won a 2004 PEN Translation Fund Award and was shortlisted for the Griffin Poetry Prize. *Diary of a Wave Outside the Sea* will be published by New Directions in 2009.

Matvei Yankelevich edited and translated *Today I Wrote Nothing: The Selected Writings of Daniil Kharms* (Overlook, 2007). He is a co-translator of *OBERIU: An Anthology of Russian Absurdism* (Northwestern UP, 2006). His translation of Vladimir Mayakovsky's poem “A Cloud in Pants” is included in *Night Wraps the Sky: Writings by and about Mayakovsky* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008). His translations from Russian have appeared in several anthologies and in many periodicals including The New Yorker, Harpers, New American Writing, and Circumference, among others. He edits the Eastern European Poets Series at Ugly Duckling Presse in Brooklyn.
Translations

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Paul Celan // Amos Weisz
Contemporary // Ben Bollig
River Plate Poetry

Rita Dahl // Leena Saaréléinen
Lorand Gaspar // Daniela Hurezlanu and
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Ričardas Gavelis // Elizabeth Novickas
Per Hojholm // Martin Aitken
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Pavel Lembersky // Sergey Levchin
Ghérasim Luca // Krzysztof Fijalkowski

Osip Mandelstam // John High and
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