

TRANSOM ISSUE 10: THE AROMATIC FOREST

[wherein you may live as many years as you wish]



Katie Waugh

There & Back, and There Again

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Pierluigi Cappello (issue 10) was born in 1967 in Gemona del Friuli. He has published seven collections of poetry. Among his awards are the Montale Europa prize (2004), the Bagutta Opera Prima prize (2007), and the prestigious Viareggio-Rèpaci prize (2010) for his collection *Mandate a dire all'imperatore* (Crocetti 2010). For Rizzoli he has published the volume of selected poems *Azzurro elementare*, his first narrative work, *Questa Libertà*, which won him the 2014 Terzani prize, and *Ogni goccia balla il tango* (Every Raindrop Does the Tango), a collection of nursery rhymes for children illustrated by Pia Valentinis. Author photo © Maria Cecilia Camozzi.

For his translations from the Italian, Todd Portnowitz (issue 10) has received awards from the Academy of American Poets (Raiziss/de Palchi Fellowship, 2015) and the Bread Loaf Translator's Conference. His poems, essays, and translations have appeared or are forthcoming in *AGNI*, *Asymptote*, *Guernica*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *PN Review*, *Southwest Review*, and *Poetry*. He lives and works in New York, where he co-hosts the reading series for writer-translators, *Us&Them*.

TRANSOM ISSUE 10: PIERLUIGI CAPELLO

trans. TODD PORTNOWITZ

A conversation with translator Todd Portnowitz

Transom:

Is it possible for the original text to be reborn through the translator?

Portnowitz:

The term reborn I think presumes some kind of propriety, that the poem translated would now be my poem, my child, something I generated. I don't think of it that way. I think of the poem as belonging very much to its original author, in whatever language it ends up in. If a poem is something born by the author, a translator's job, as I see it, would be more akin to the art of portraiture, to portraying that "child," not conceiving it over again—the poems sits for you, finicky as any subject, and you try to get it right, to capture its features, its shape, its lineaments.

I might think of it as my baby, as a painter might a finished canvas, but that's the pride anyone takes in a job well done. Writing "original" poetry, of course, is not much different a process—the author portrays things from life: people, nature, fantasies, memories—but portraying a text with text is not the same as portraying life with text. This is not to say that new poems aren't ever born from old poems, that text is somehow infertile. Poets are famous for quoting, mimicking, reprocessing, digressing from and responding to other poems—Donald Justice is a great example—and their results I believe are something more like a rebirth, a regeneration, precisely because they are not portraying another text but using it as a seed. Donald Justice's "Variations on a Text by Vallejo" is not an attempt to communicate to us Vallejo's original text, but to revive its original impulse.

Translators aren't so free—they have a task, a duty to render the original text accurately, to project the author's voice, not their own. Of course, there's always some creation there, some presumption, some vicarious sense of ownership but, well, I suppose I'm split on the answer...

Transom:

We find the intensity of the direct address in both of these poems to be particularly striking. To whom or to what do you think the “you” is directed, and is the addressee the same in both poems?

Portnowitz:

The question of the “you” in poems has always troubled me—an early poetry professor of mine insisted that the “you” in a poem must point to an actual subject: the reader, a historical figure, someone else mentioned in the poem or title. Like a good student I took this advice for some years, but let’s face it, we all use “you” so often in speech and song to mean a general “someone,” as a way of speaking out at the world, “I mean, whenever you go to Trader Joe’s you end up buying way more shit than you actually went in for because you...”—everyone knows this speaker is not talking about someone in particular but just about people in general. That’s how we talk. What’s so wrong with that vague use, and why should it be barred from poetry?

I wonder if these two poems might be self-directed: in “Nocturn,” Cappello seems to be addressing a younger self, and in “Nullity,” a former self who’s endured a dark period (such as a long stay in the hospital). I’m just guessing here, I have no inside knowledge, but he seems to be using the “you” as a way to speak threateningly to himself, to create distance between his present self and a past self, and ultimately to come to terms with that former self. To prove he’s grown. If, instead, there is a separate addressee involved, I don’t imagine it’s the same one in both works: the poems are from two different collections, with three years between them: “Nocturn” from *Dentro Gerico* (2002) and “Nullity” from *La misura dell’erba* (1999).

Nocturn

At such a short length from myself
axis and darkness of my gravitation
I raid the mind of who I am
in celebration of oncoming sleep:
here is the earth no-longer, night
summer wind coming
wind of the end of me, reddening
and a nocturn comes and sets itself down
like the palm of a father
and where are you going, really
really, where's it you think you're headed
ordinary as you are
with your ten weightless years
sails stirred by the selfsame breeze
with your two hands and your little face
ten fingers to count your years
and all a surface, feathered with freshness
and all the you of yourself
you could stand.

Notturmo

A così breve distanza di me
asse e buio della mia gravitazione
faccio irruzione nella mente di chi sono
celebrando l'ascensione del sonno:
ecco la terra persa, notte
vento d'estate vieni
vento che mi sottrai e imporpori
e viene un notturno che si depone
come il palmo di un padre
ma dove vai ma dove
ma 'ndolà vastu, ce fastu, tu, garibaldìn
tu così qualunque
avevi dieci anni leggeri
vele mosse dalla medesima brezza
avevi due mani un faccino
dieci dita per contare gli anni
e tutto un suolo, piumato di freschezza;
avevi di te
quanto bastava di te

Proprietà letteraria riservata

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Poetry Foundation

[The nullity cloaking your shoulders]

*The pale globes, slow globes
cumulus temples on the wind
are not me*

—Franco Fortini

The nullity cloaking your shoulders
that scrap of sun and light that ran along
your will dismasted and snapped
the fingers of he who passed brief warmth
to your fingers, the height of winter,
the annihilated hospital beds
and black as any blackness
the midnight black within our sleep
and the hundredth shiver of your soul,
the fire of fever that rendered
every minute a Lazarus battle,
a defeat every stoppage of blood,
that nullity: cloaking your shoulders

was not you.

[Il nonnulla che ti coprì le spalle]

*I globi chiari, i lenti globi
templari cumuli dei venti
non sono me.*

—Franco Fortini

Il nonnulla che ti coprì le spalle
quel cencio di sole e luce che corse
la volontà disalberata e franta,
le dita di chi porse alle tue dita
breve calore, il vertice d'inverno
dei letti nichelati d'ospedale
e, nera a paragone di ogni nero,
la mezzanotte nera dentro il sonno
e il tuo centesimo rabbrivido
d'anima, il fuoco di febbre che rese
ogni minute battaglia di lazzaro
una caduta ogni sosta di sangue,
quel nonnulla: che ti coprì le spalle

non eri tu.

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Actor, poet, and multimedia artist Francis Coffinet (issue 10) has published 15 books to date. He works frequently with artists and designers, and collaborates on several literary journals in France and abroad. His poems have been translated into German, Russian, Korean, Bulgarian, Roumanian, Hungarian and Turkish. These are his first poems to be published in the United States.

James Haenlin (issue 10) began his career as a translator while a graduate student at SUNY Buffalo, where he translated Roland Barthe's *Mythologies* for his Master's project. He has since worked almost completely on French language poetry, having translated four contemporary poets with his wife Lydie, totaling nearly twenty works. Working closely with Francis Coffinet, he has completed four translations in the last two years.

TRANSOM ISSUE 10: FRANCIS COFFINET

trans. JAMES HAENLIN

A conversation with translator James Haenlin

Transom:

Is it possible for the original text to be reborn through the translator?

Haenlin:

The first two tasks of the translator are to assure that the translation is accurate as to meaning, and that it is truly poetry in the target language. Ideally, the translation must match the rhythmic, emotional and aesthetic impact of the original. I often give readings with my poets and know I have succeeded when my translation touches the audience in the same way as the original (i.e. tears, laughter and the inimitable awed silence). And let's not forget the book sales.

Transom:

One of the pieces in this selection begins with the line, "The river carries you in its two languages." Thanks to translators like yourself, Coffinet's poems now exist in multiple languages. Do you believe in a linguistic "river" (or, what Benjamin calls "pure language") that accommodates all of these?

Haenlin:

Since, to my knowledge, poetry exists in all languages, there is a river runs through it. I work in only three languages, so I am by no means an expert, but I assume all languages have similar mechanisms to express poetic sentiments and concepts. And there are great translations for all of them(?). In effect, this is a rather theoretical concern, far removed from the practical problems of dealing with the greater ambiguity of French, and the conversion of alexandrins to iambic pentameter.

from Shamanesque Ordeals

I throttle the fire at its base
I rip a scale from slumber
I gather the ritual salt in small regular piles
Yet I come to you
without language without weight –
I carve the burn at its center
I deflect the meridian on your childlike face.

*

The river carries you in its two languages
the undecided flow ravages the shore
falling flowers inside the bodies,

suffering lays its splints right on the void
injection of the summit of the flame
poison digests poison –
the antidote dissolves between your fingers like a corolla of ice.

*

I ground into blackness whole panels of sky

seen from here
barely the span of a hand –
crunching work
dry sparks –
knowledge unrevealed
cracked calculation of the nails.

*

With my hands
I clear a path in the ear

I apply the verb directly to the eardrum

by the blindness of the roses
I climb back to the source

it explodes in the armpit

I slowly return to my grand nighttime labors.

*

A blade of sleep
inserted in the incision

you walk as if carried by the very matter of thought –

all that was pronounced remains
humid death on the tip of the brush
shiver on the lip.

*

I call to the tactile butterflies
the world slides on your skin –
no reef
no hands that retain –
a ballet in which they who fall asleep on the eyes
wake up on the lips.

TRANSOM ISSUE 10: FRANCIS COFFINET

trans. JAMES HAENLIN

*

The flight:
a science within the flight –
a heart within the heart.

Sleep reverses the tide of the eyelashes
rods of acid, a scream in the refineries of the dream.

de épreuve chamaniques

J'étrangle le feu à sa base
J'arrache une écaille au sommeil
Je rassemble le sel du rituel en petits tas réguliers –
Pourtant je viens vers toi
Sans langage et sans poids –
Je tranche la brûlure en son centre
Je dévie le méridien sur ton visage d'enfant.

*

Le fleuve te porte en ses deux langages

le flux indécis ravage la berge
chutes de fleurs à l'intérieur des corps

la souffrance pose ses attelles jusque sur le vide
injection du sommet de la flamme
le poison digère le poison –
l'antidote fond entre tes doigts comme une corolle de glace.

*

J'ai broyé au noir des pans entiers de ciel

vus d'ici
à peine la surface d'une main –
travail des crissements
étincelles sèches –
le savoir non révélé
le calcul craqué de l'ongle.

*

De mes mains
je dégage une piste dans l'oreille

j'applique directement le verbe sur le tympan

par la cécité des roses
je remonte à la source

ça explose sous l'aisselle

je reprends lentement mes grands travaux de nuit.

*

Une lame de sommeil
glissée par l'incision

tu vas comme porté par la matière même de la pensée –

tout ce qui fut prononcé demeure
la mort humide à la pointe du pinceau
le frisson sur la lèvre.

*

J'appelle les papillons tactiles
le monde glisse sur ta peau –
pas de récif
pas de mains qui retiennent –
un ballet où ceux qui s'endorment sur les yeux
se réveillent sur les lèvres.

*

Le vol :
une science à l'intérieur du vol –
un coeur dans le coeur.

Le sommeil inverse la marée des cils
bâtonnets d'acide et hurlement dans les raffineries du rêve.

(Editions Alidades, 2006)

The Rivers of the Sixth Sense

Each of us holds a strand
of the rope of the dead
each of us one strand.

*

“Something suddenly just whitened in him
as if it had snowed at the juncture of his conscience,
he no longer spoke now
except in the name of his secret wound.”

*

Light bruises resulting from sleep,
there where flesh touches bone,
the same as those worn there where the eye touches the world,
then carried away by the capillaries ---
the rivers of the sixth sense.

*

The oracle is upon our lives
like a rattlesnake.

*

Traces of time in the bauxite
strands of light in your questions

the enigma proves
the gift of insignificance.

*

Cloistered
in the open space bordering the jail
there where a simple motion of the eyelash
can sever equilibrium

like a storm
caught in the ballast of the earth.

*

Here nothing breaks
here thanks to the waters
residing in simple sleep.

*

A glow rises from the fallow fields
envelopes his familiars
covers them with the alphabet of the passage.

*

For a long time I breathed
at the level of your face
then one day I went on to your knees.

*

Like a dream
clamped in a vice
between two leaves of sandstone

I gained substance
in the bed of the colors taking shape.

I crossed the thin saliva curtain of initiation
I went to lose myself upon the mirrors of water
of all the waters —

in the vertigoes and the groves
there where the tongue is as lively
as a single atom of light.

*

Veins opened
spun with the razor of comprehension.

Les fleuves du sixième sens

Nous tenons chacun un fil
de la corde des morts
chacun un fil.

*

«Quelque chose venait soudain de blanchir en lui
comme s'il avait neigé à la pointe de sa conscience,
il ne parlait plus maintenant
qu'au nom de sa blessure secrète.»

*

Contusion légères venues du sommeil,
là où la chair touche l'os,
les mêmes que celles portées là où l'oeil touche le monde,
puis emportées par les capillaires sanguins –
les fleuves du sixième sens.

*

L'oracle est sur nos vies
comme un crotale.

*

Marques du temps dans la bauxite
des fils de lumière dans tes questions

l'énigme prouve
le don de l'insignifiance.

*

Reclus
dans l'espace libre qui côtoie la geôle
là où un simple mouvement de cil
peut rompre l'équilibre

comme un orage
pris dans le lest de la terre.

*

Ici rien ne se brise
ici à la faveur des eaux
en résidence de simple sommeil.

*

Une lueur monte des grands champs au repos
enveloppe ses familiers
les couvre de l'alphabet du passage.

*

Longtemps j'ai respiré
à hauteur de ton visage
puis un jour je suis allé à tes genoux.

*

Comme un rêve
pris en étau
entre deux feuilles de grès

j'ai pris corps
dans le lit des couleurs qui se forment.

J'ai franchi le fin rideau de salive de l'initiation,
je suis allé me perdre sur les miroirs de l'eau
de toutes les eaux –
dans les vertiges et les vergers
là où la langue est aussi vive
qu'un seul atome de lumière.

Veines ouvertes
filées au rasoir de la compréhension.

(Dumerchez, 2006)

Luis de Góngra (issue 10) (1561-1627) was a Spanish Baroque poet and one of the most influential Spanish poets of his era.

Stephen Frech (issue 10, issue 11) has published a mixed genre chapbook *A Palace of Strangers Is No City* (2011) and three volumes of poetry, most recently the chapbook *The Dark Villages of Childhood* (2009). He is also the translator of Menno Wigman's *Zwart als kaviaar/Black as Caviar* (2012).

TRANSOM ISSUE 10: LOUIS DE GÓNGRA

trans. STEPHEN FRECH

A conversation with translator Stephen Frech

Transom:

Is it possible for the original text to be reborn through the translator?

Frech:

If a text is not reborn in translation, then it's not a very ambitious translation. In fact, I think the regular reawakening of work in translation is one of the many gifts of work from another language.

Mandelstam and Ahkmatova come to readers of English in multiple versions, inviting debate about the differences in tone, syntax, figurative constructs—essentially the innumerable decisions poets make (both conscious and unconscious) that contribute to a poem's effect on a reader. Some of that debate addresses nearness, fidelity to the original, but also on the choices translators make, creative decision-making, and even (as an extension of Mandelstam's idea) a "secret hearing" of the poem. In this sense, I'm less interested in a "definitive" version, and more interested in the aggregate of many small choices a writer makes.

And isn't that some of the pleasure of reading poetry in its original language? For all the wildness of Whitman's 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, he's making all variety of decisions. Set that original alongside the deathbed edition nearly forty years later and we see the creative choices a poet makes. What are those choices and to what effect?

Transom:

The meaning Gongora's poem is notoriously difficult to parse, given the complexity and mystery of its references. As a translator of this work, what relationship does your translation have to this history of difficulty?

Frech:

I tend to have a high appetite for gorgeousness of sound, and there are any number of poets for whom the primacy of sound creates complexity. Hart Crane comes immediately to mind: He debates this complexity famously in letters with Harriet Monroe that she published in *Poetry* along with his poem “At Melville’s Tomb.” But as challenging as Crane’s work can be, the richness of sound is immediately available in much of his poetry even when the meaning or sense eludes us.

Gongora has a similar appeal for me: gorgeous, Elizabethan in its learnedness and constructions, and Baroque in its aesthetic. I also love the mix of high and low in Gongora. Some who dismiss him for his complexity and learnedness miss much of the fun of his work: the bawdy, the playful, the wit, the moodiness.

Las Soledades/The Solitudes is a much longer narrative sequence, but the magic of the poem for me is in its lyric moments and descriptions. So I did not set out to translate it in its entirety. Instead, I focused on the concentrated moments, faceted, brilliant, with extended metaphors that move beyond their original likenesses, to see how he moves so efficiently from one facet to another.

I read over the Spanish original and my drafts with native speakers of Spanish. They all marveled anew at the difficulty of the language and the meaning. We debated lines, some of them with as many different syntactical readings as there were readers. Sometimes seemingly simple questions—like which noun is performing the action of the verb—did not have simple answers. But that is some of the fun of translating: taking the machine apart to see all its marvelous little parts, to see them all working in accord and in time to create the life of the machine.

The First Solitude (lines 22-41)

By the Ocean first sipped,
and then vomited out
not far from a reef crowned
by dried reeds, by warm feathers
—all seaweed and ocean foam—
he found rest where he found the nest
of Jupiter's bird.

He kisses the sand and from the broken ship
that small part
that delivered him on the beach he gives to the rock:
even the cliffs bow down
flattered by signs of gratitude.

The young man, naked, all that his clothes
already drank of the Ocean
he returns to the sand;
and he spreads them in the sun,
barely licking
its tender tongue of tepid fire,
slowly attacks them, and in its gentle way
sucks the smallest wave from the smallest thread.

Soledad Primera (lineas 22-41)

Del Océano pues antes sorbido,
y luego vomitado
no lejos de un escollo coronado
de secos juncos, de calientes plumas,
—alga todo y espumas—
halló hospitalidad donde halló nido
de Júpiter el ave.

Besa la arena, y de la rota nave
aquella parte poca
que le expuso en la playa dió a la roca:
que aun se dejan las peñas
lisonjear de agradecidas señas.

Desnudo el joven, cuanto ya el vestido
Océano ha bebido,
restituir le hace a las arenas;
y al sol lo extiende luego,
que, lamiéndolo apenas
su dulce lengua de templado fuego,
lento lo embiste, y con suave estilo
la menor onda chupa al menor hilo.

The First Solitude (lines 453-465)

After so many frustrated astronomic omens,
so much doctrine of the sea
even below the zone nearest
to the sun, overwhelming calms and shipwrecks,
at last you kissed the kingdoms of Aurora
whose purple breasts pure as pearls,
 whose secret mines
guard for you today their most precious setting;
you enter the aromatic forest
that for the bird of Arabia—whose flight
 is a winged arch of sky
 not curved, but long, reaching—
builds a funeral pyre and constructs a nest.

Soledad Primera (lineas 453-465)

Tantos luego astronómicos presagios
frustrados, tanta náutica doctrina,
debajo aun de la zona más vecina
al Sol, calmas vencidas y naufragios,
los reinos de la Aurora al fin besaste,
cuyos purpúreos senos perlas netas,
 cuyas minas secretas
hoy te guardan su más precioso engaste;
la aromática selva penetraste,
que al pájaro de Arabia—cuyo vuelo
 arco alado es del cielo,
 no corvo, mas tendido—
pira le erige, y le construye nido.

Mirza Ghalib (issue 10), born Mirza Asadullah Beg Khan (27 December 1797 – 15 February 1869) was the preeminent Indian Urdu and Persian language poet during the last years of the Mughal Empire. He used the pen-names of Ghalib (ġhālib means “dominant”) and Asad (Asad means “lion”). During his lifetime the Mughals were eclipsed and displaced by the British and finally deposed following the defeat of the Indian Revolution of 1857, events that he described. Most notably, he wrote several ghazals during his life, which have since been interpreted and sung in many different ways by different people. Ghalib, the last great poet of the Mughal Era, is considered to be one of the most popular and influential poets of the Urdu language.

Yousuf bin Mohammad (issue 10) (b. 15 February 1991) is a resident of Delhi, where he works as a digitization assistant with Juma al Majid Center for Culture and Heritage (JUMA al Majid Group) while pursuing physics by distance. He is equally interested in poetry, philosophy and psychology. Some of his Urdu poems have appeared on Rekhta, a single Hindi poem on Swargvibha, an English ghazal in the 58th issue of The Ghazal Page, two sets of poems on Zouch and a few more on VisualVerse. He has contributed some issue-based poetry to The Companion Monthly as well.

A conversation with translator Yousuf bin Mohammad

Transom:

Is it possible for the original text to be reborn through the translator?

bin Mohammad:

Gadriel Orozco once said “Art happens in that space between the spectator and the work.” I believe this holds true in case of literary arts as well, especially so in the case of poetry. A majority of poetry has this inherent quality of being open to a number of interpretations, and an apt translation (adaptation would be a more apt term) has the capability of bringing about an entirely fresh perspective and an interpretation of a poem which might have been hitherto obscure.

As for rebirth of the original text through the translator, Peter Cole once said, “Pound says somewhere that centuries of use have worn out a lot of the key words of early poetries, and that’s certainly the case with some of the ‘big’ small words here—soul, spirit, angels, et cetera. Maybe even god. The poet or translator has to bring them and everything that comes with them back to life, to reanimate the occasion that gives rise to them.”

For the inter-relation of translations and ever new interpretations, births life and rebirths, I would quote Cole once more:

“That abstract revelation
and slippery duration
to which, it seems, I’m given
and because of which I’m never
finished with anything, as though living
itself were an endless translation”

Transom:

The English translation of this poem is intriguing for its convoluted syntax and strangely archaic diction. What elements of Mirza Ghalib's style were you trying to capture here?

bin Mohammad:

During his times Ghalib was notorious for the complexity of his couplets. As we look now these very complex couplets appear to be inviting to deep and prolonged brooding, but it is said that his contemporaries often insisted Ghalib to say a bit easier poetry. His poetry is quite difficult to understand, most Urdu readers and even many Ghalib fans would readily accept that it is hard to find a single couplet in his 'deewaan' that could be relished without the help of an elaborate Urdu dictionary.

The complex sentence syntax, which is typical of Ghalib, is often compounded with sophisticated symbolism with some very deep allusions in the dimension of time. For example the very first couplet of his Urdu Deewaan holds an allusion to the justice system of ancient Sasinid Empire. The convoluted syntax and archaic diction employed in this translation is actually an attempt to capture a bit of the essence of Ghalib's poetry into English.

An Elegy

When naught was there the Lord hast been,
hath naught been there the Lord hath been,
Hast shattered me the matter of being,
hath I been naught then what hath been?

When so impervious to grief hath I become
then wherefore grieve in guillotined being?
If hast it not beheaded been
then plainly upon breast hath been!

And ages hence hast Gualib d'ceased,
but heart ever yearns to hearken
On aught his skeptic utterance
“Hath this been thus then what hast been?”

An Urdu Ghazal

نہ تھا کچھ تو خدا تھا کچھ نہ ہوتا تو خدا ہوتا
ڈبویا مجھ کو ہونے نے نہ ہوتا میں تو کیا ہوتا

ہوا حب غم سے یوں بے حس تو غم کیا سر کے کٹنے کا
نہ ہوتا گر جدا تن سے تو زانوں پر دھرا ہوتا

ہو ئی مدّت کہ غالب مر گیا پر یاد آتا ہے
وہ ہر اک بات پر کہنا کہ یوں ہوتا تو کیا ہوتا

Abraham Sutzkever (issue 10), born in 1913 in modern-day Belarus, is a legendary figure of the Yiddish literary world, with a poetic oeuvre numbering well over 1,000 pages. A survivor of the Vilna Ghetto, he passed away in Tel Aviv in 2010, at the age of 96.

Maia Evrona (issue 10)'s poems, as well as excerpts from her memoir on chronic illness, have appeared or are forthcoming in *Prairie Schooner*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, and elsewhere. Her translations of Abraham Sutzkever were awarded a 2016 Translation Fellowship from the NEA and have appeared in *Poetry Magazine*, *The Kenyon Review Online* and other venues. She also loves to sing.

TRANSOM ISSUE 10: ABRAHAM SUTZKEVER

trans. MAIA EVRONA

A conversation with translator Maia Evrona

Transom:

Is it possible for the original text to be reborn through the translator?

Evrona:

Yes!

Transom:

As the translator of these poems, what was the most difficult part of your task in bringing Sutzkever's text into English, and what about his work do you most look forward to sharing with an English-language audience?

Evrona:

The most difficult part of translating these poems was simply creating real poetry in English, poetry with grace rather than the awkwardness that can mark a poor translation. As for what I most look forward to sharing with English readers, Sutzkever's work has an imagination and lyricism that are informed both by his sensibilities as a poet and by his life experience. I think these qualities may be refreshing for English readers, and I appreciate that they are packaged in seemingly conventional quatrains: The form focuses the reader's attention on just how vast Sutzkever's imagination was.

The Treasure Tree

The treasure tree. Does such a tree exist, then?
The name is mine, mine. It revealed itself just a single time
and plunged its reflection into my heart as into a wave.
Since then I have been constantly lying in wait for its rustle and scent.

To tell the truth: As I have dreamed for it a name
the treasure tree is already mine. And so long as the kerosene
of honest stars has not been spent over me,
I must make my way to its roots with shovel and crowbar.

Its roots are granite. Holding the treasure in their claws.
And I pound and break their thick fortress apart.
To tell the truth: As I have dreamed for it a name
the treasure tree belongs to me and the treasure is mine.

There is a diamond, which can slice apart that set
of twins--death and life--so death should bleed separately.
Blessed friend, I will mine that diamond for your sake
so you may live as many years as you wish.

דער אוצר-בוים

דער אוצר-בוים. איז דען פאראן אזא בוים? דער נאמען איז מיינער מיינער. בלויז אן איינציק מאל ער האט אנטפלעקט זיך און אפגעטונקט זיין שפיגלונג אין מיין הארץ ווי אין אַ כוואליע זינט יעמאלט לאַקער איך באַשטענדיק אויף זיין רויש-און-ריח.

למען-האמת: האב איך אויסגעטרוימט פאַר אים אַ נאָמען איז מיינער שוין דער אוצר-בוים. און ביז ניט אויסגעגאנגען איז איבער מיר די קעראַסין פון קאַפטשענדיקע שטערן דערשלאָגן זיך מיט לאַם און רידל מוז איך צו די וואַרצלען

גראַניטענע די וואַרצלען זיינע. האַלטן אין די נעגל דעם אוצר און איך שלאָג און פיצל זייער דיקע פעסטונג למען-האמת: האב איך אויסגעטרוימט פאַר אים א נאָמען געהערט צו מיר דער אוצר-בוים און מיינער איז דער אוצר

אַ דימענט איז פאראן וואָס קאָן דעם צווילינג: טויט און לעבן פונאַנדערשניידן, אַז דער טויט זאָל בלוטיקן באַזונדער געבענטשטער פריינד כ'וועל אויסגראָבן פאַר דייַנטוועגן דעם דימענט אַז דו זאָלסט קאָנען לעבן וויפל יאָרן דו וועסט וועלן

The Same Saw that Sawed My Life into Seven Parts

The same saw that sawed my life into seven parts
and clearly, it was my destiny to live to tell,
that same saw is still around where no one else is
and its teeth are the stars above my thoughts.

From both sides of the world, and over the graves of millions
I see that same saw in the domain of two demons
My body is unnecessary, superfluous, its pain no doubt as well:
the saw draws closer to my disappearing soul.

And they both draw the saw to themselves and both are certain:
they want to saw into pieces in me the stillness and the whirlwind,
saw into pieces the unseen, the main thing that remains,
so it may live with substance, my flesh is grass upon my skeleton.

A saw from both sides of the world and creatures gravitate toward it.
“Saw into pieces already that soul of his, hear me, let him rest.”
“It’s fidgeting still,” a voice roars back, “capable of recognizing us.”
The vision of the saw and its two demons crumbles into ash.

די זעלבע זעג

די זעלבע זעג וואָס האָט צעזעגט מיין לייב אויף זיבן טיילן
און דאָך, באַשערט איז מיר צו בלייבן לעבן און דערציילן
די זעלבע זעג איז נאָך פאַראַנען וווּ ניטאָ איז קיינער
און איבער מיין געדאַנק די שטערן זענען אירע ציינער.

פון ביידע זייטן וועלט און איבער קברים פון מיליאָנען
איך זע די זעלבע זעג אין אַ רשות פון צוויי דעמאָנען
אומנייטיק, איבעריק מיין לייב, זיין ווייטיק אויך מסתמא
ס'דערנענטערט זיך די זעג צו מיין אַנטרונענער נשמה

און ביידע ציען די זעג צו זיך, און ביידע — זיכער
צעזעגן ווילן זיי אין מיר די שטילקייט און דעם וויכער
צעזעגן ס'אומגעזענע, דעם עיקר וואָס איז בלייביק
מיין לייב איז גראַז אויף מיין סקעלעט, איז מעג עס לעבן לייביק

פון ביידע זייטן וועלט אַ זעג און ס'ציען זי די ברואים
"צעזעגט שוין די נשמה זיינע, הער איך, לאַז צו רו אים"
"זי צאַפלט נאָך, ברומט אַפּ א קול, מסוגל אונדז דערקאָנען"
ס'צעפאַלט אין אַש די זעונג פון דער זעג און צוויי דעמאָנען

Paul Verlaine (issue 10) (1844-1896) was a French poet most closely associated with the Symbolist and Decadent movements. His affair with Arthur Rimbaud culminated in the poets living together for 18 months until, on July 12, 1873, an inebriated Verlaine shot at Rimbaud and injured his wrist.

Kurt Heinzelman (issue 10) is a poet, translator, scholar, teacher, and editor. He has written extensively on British Romanticism, poetry and poetics, and cultural economics. His latest books of poetry are *Intimacies & Other Devices* (2013) and *The Names They Found There* (2011); in 2011 his *Demarcations*, a translation of Jean Follain's 1953 volume of poetry *Territoires*, was also published. He is Editor-at-Large for the *Bat City Review* as well as Editor-in-Chief of *Texas Studies in Literature and Language (TSL)*, and former Executive Curator at the Harry Ransom Center. A Fulbright Fellow at Edinburgh University (Scotland) and a fellow at the Rockefeller Center in Bellagio, Italy, he has also taught at L'Institut du monde Anglophone, Sorbonne Nouvelle (Université de Paris III). He is on the Board of Directors of the Cunda Workshop for Translators of Turkish in Istanbul and an Honorary Professor at Swansea University (Wales).

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trans. KURT HEINZELMAN

A conversation with translator Kurt Heinzelman

Transom:

Is it possible for the original text to be reborn through the translator?

Heinzelman:

These are playfully phrased questions that raise, as of course you know, difficult and important issues. I hope I can respond to them with a corresponding sense of play, even as I try to define what is complicated about their implications and how they personally affect me.

To the first question, then. So much depends on what is meant by “reborn.” In one sense the obvious answer is “Yes, translation is always rebirthing the original.” It is why certain works get translated over and over again. How many English-ings of Dante’s *Inferno* have we had in just the past few decades? Or of *The Iliad*—the most recent by the incomparable Classics scholar Peter Green after I thought Stanley Lombardo had made a wonderfully colloquial and musical version. The *American Poetry Review* alone has offered so many versions of Neruda, especially “*Macchu Picchu*,” I’ve lost count.

“Reborn,” though, also suggests that a work has somehow died. When construed in this way, the question invites this kind of response from contemporary poets: “It should surely, by now, be axiomatic that poetry cannot be translated in a way that will preserve anything of the flavor of the original.” Well, it surely is not axiomatic, and the best theoretical refutation of this slightly daft statement is *Poetry and Translation: The Art of the Impossible* by Peter Robinson, which should be required reading for anyone who practices or writes about translation. What’s important, though, is what follows from the premise quoted above—namely, that the only remedy for the failure of translation is to write “versions” of the original—not translations, not even imitations, but something “between” them, whatever that may be.

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(The person I have cited above is Don Paterson as he tries to justify his own versions of Antonio Machado, *The Eyes*. Paterson goes on to say that his “versions” have occasionally appropriated without credit some lines from a non-poetic translation by the scholar Alan Trueblood “because they seemed pretty much unimprovable.” Doesn’t this tend to contradict his own operating premise? I suppose Paterson would counter that Trueblood only gets a few lines right, not the whole poem. But still.)

Paterson is correct, though, if he is implying that translations breed more translations and if that is what “reborn” can mean. Translations “breed” in this way, however, not because they are false but precisely because they do catch some of the flavor of the original: subsequent translators strive to catch some more.

Transom:

In submitting “To Rimbaud” to us, you remarked that you “have never found a translation [of this poem] that is idiomatic in English but still ‘gets’ Verlaine’s musical and complicated tone.” Can you play French music on an English instrument?

Heinzelman:

To the second question and again to quote Paterson: “a poem can no more be translated than a piece of music.” What does this mean, exactly? Any piece of music that is scored is translated every time it is performed. Performance is translation. We could say the same about the text of any poem when it is voiced aloud. Perhaps Paterson means that a piece scored for harpsichord cannot be adequately voiced on a piano. He is right about this . . . in a sort of pedantic way. I suppose he would call a transcription of cello music to guitar a “version” rather than a “translation.” What would one call, then, the cellist or guitarist, neither of whom are the originator of the music they play?

The composer Charles Wilfred Orr observed that the kind of verse easiest to set to music must be 1) beautiful, 2) scanned, 3) rhymed, and d) make sense. This certainly applies to Verlaine (and Heine and Housman), whose verse has been often given musical settings. This particular poem, "To Rimbaud," has been set by Claude Debussy and many others (see Green, a CD collection of Verlaine poems set to music, sung by Philippe Jaroussky); it is also an interesting challenge to a poetic translator because it is a rare example where French is more succinct than English. That is, it takes more English words to translate even the sense of the French and that is even ignoring the word-play that confronts one immediately in, say, "pleure" and "pleut."

There is actually a truly wonderful, almost miraculous translation of this poem by Louis Simpson (see his *Modern Poets of France*, 1997) in which he is not only entirely accurate as to semantics but he gets the end-rhymes, often merely repetitions of the same word but used in a slightly different sense (called in French *rimes riches*), in the same places in the stanza where they occur in Verlaine. It is masterful. Incredibly difficult to attain. My only quarrel with Simpson is that the staccato sentences in English, accurately tracking the staccato sentences in the French, sound slightly stilted and a tad archaic, whereas the French idiom is more choked up (as with emotion) than stilted, colloquial rather than old-fashioned.

Here is the penultimate stanza according to Simpson: "I am sad for no reason / And sickened at heart. / Why? What have I done? / This grief has no reason." Simpson brilliantly gets the repeated word "reason" in the same place where it occupies in French, although his last line is not really idiomatic, is it? Can one imagine an English speaker actually saying that line. And the second line, "sickened at heart," while idiomatic enough, misses the excruciating word-play of "ce coeur qui s'écoeure."

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It is true we can't do everything in translation but, contra Paterson, we can do some things. Donald Revell (see his *Songs Without Words*, 2013) tries to render the abruptness of the French, here in that same penultimate stanza: "Useless tears, / Heartsick still. / Fantastic betrayals / Today like rain." This may be a good example of making an English horn sound like a French horn. Although I have no idea where the word "fantastic" came from or how it works in the same verbal register as "heartsick," I understand and admire what Revell is trying to do by choosing a concise diction that energizes the lamentation. Simpson's simple line "Why? What have I done?" is plain yet emotional. And that is more like the tonal flavor of Verlaine who is not fragmented or jerky the way Revell's English is.

I am pretty sure that all of our translated versions of this Verlaine poem would fail to satisfy the four criteria composer Orr calls for, if a poem is to be set to music. And maybe, in deference to Paterson, one should admit, "How many translations have ever been set to music?" I can't think of any, off-hand.

To Rimbaud

It is raining lightly on the town

—Arthur Rimbaud

My heart cries out
The way rain rains down.
Where did it all come from,
This heart-needling rain-sound?

The bruited of raindrops is gentle
On rooftop and ground
When there's a heart pining
Is rain its sole song?

To a heart that's lost heart
There's no betrayal,
Just tears without rhyme,
Loss without reason.

For worst is not to know
Why, free of hate
And love alike, this grief
Still overflows.

from *Songs Without Words*

Il pleut doucement sur la ville.

—Arthur Rimbaud

Il pleure dan mon coeur
Comme il pleut sur la ville,
Quelle est cette lagueur
Qui pénètre mon coeur?

O bruit doux de la pluie
Par terre et sur les toits!
Pour un coeur qui s'ennuie
O le chant de la pluie!

Il pleure san raison
Dans ce coeur qui s'écoeure.
Quoi! nulle trahison?
Ce deuil est sans raison.

C'est bien la pire peine
De ne savoir pourquoi,
Sans amour et sans haine
Mon coeur a tant de peine.

Tomaž Šalamun (issue 3, issue 10) (1941–2014) was born in Zagreb to Slovenian parents and grew up in the port city of Koper, near Trieste. In his lifetime, he published 48 original books of poetry and his work has been translated into nearly 30 languages. His most recent book in English is *Justice* (Black Ocean Press, 2016).

Katarina Vladimirov Young and Jeffrey Young (issue 10) are the translators of Tomaž Šalamun's book *Andes*, forthcoming from Black Ocean in 2016.

A conversation with co-translator Jeffrey Young

Transom:

Is it possible for the original text to be reborn through the translator?

Young:

Reborn is a good word. Šalamun believed in this possibility, absolutely. I think the excitement around and continued interest in his work, which over the years has been translated by literally countless people, and continues to be translated, also proves this point. What is exciting, strange and new inside the best of Šalamun's work is able to be reborn in and inhabit other languages, over and over again. The energy is irrepressible.

If you think about it too much, translation can easily appear as something fundamentally impossible, which is a sad and lonely thought. Tomaž Šalamun was an optimist of the highest order. It is not what is lost in translation, but what is gained, that most interested him.

Šalamun believed that it is possible for a translation to compensate, even if in a limited way, for the very much that is lost when one tries to transfer a work of art made of words from one language into another. That the target language does this by discovering or creating something that is fresh, unexpected, or new, even (and usually) when this appears in another place inside the poem or even in another poem inside the book. Any places in our translation where this happened excited Šalamun, and, as I experienced it, he had no qualms with any differences between language versions that this "energy transference" created. It's as if the energy of the original line, the original poem, is looking for the organic way in the other language to express whatever it is that it expresses through the poet in the original text. When it does that, it becomes like another original, or a kind of facsimile of the original.

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But what, in Šalamun's case, actually is the original? He once told me, during an interview for the film, that in many ways his Slovenian texts are themselves translations of the language that he experienced during the act of writing. The original is somehow poetry before language, or beyond language, or however you wish to visualize this thing that enters, embodies, and is reborn within a poet in the form of a poem—a form that seldom, if ever, can do justice to the original inspiration or encounter that brought it into being. So in this sense, a translation into another language is twice removed from the original source of inspiration. It is an echo of an echo...

Happily, as I mentioned before, Šalamun was an optimist. He believed that writing poetry was possible, regardless of what “gets lost” or changes (or gets misunderstood) in the act of writing it down. By extension, he believed in the ability to transfer the energy of poetry from one language to another, from one person to another, through the medium of poetry-in-translation.

I think it an honest assessment to say that he viewed translating his poems as a kind of regenerating process that exponentially expanded the possibility of communication, not only between himself and the reader, but between people, generally. I know, from interviews we did together, that he believed passionately that poetry could open spaces for people to understand themselves and the world around them. Tomaž Šalamun's poetry is universal (and therefore universally translatable) because it speaks from, and for, our true nature as human beings.

The beauty of art, like love's beauty, is that it is simultaneously personal and universal. Visual art and music need no translation, but art made of words seems to present a problem in the universal transmission of expression, which can appear frustrating, as anyone who ever wanted to say “I love you” in a language that they don't know has experienced. But as any true lover can surely find other means to get the message across, so too does poetry. One way is with translation, but it can also do without translation, when read aloud, usually by the poet in the poet's native tongue.

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The sound, music, cadence of the language, the power, or whisper, or intonation of the poet's voice creates a full sensory experience that has the ability, at the best moments, to transcend the "meaning of the words" (that you, sitting in the audience, do not understand) and the "meaning of the poem," which is being transmitted to you via the music of the human voice, the human breath. This has the power to send shivers down your spine and bring tears to your eyes, because in that moment you are experiencing the "truth of the poem" as the poet, somehow, experienced it. You are in communion: with the mind of the poet, the spirit of the poem, and yourself.

There are justifiable legends around the many readings Šalamun gave where he literally could transform a crowded room of people into a kind of collective, heightened-consciousness state of total stillness, as if no one were breathing, or all breathing underwater like fish in unison the language as it exhaled in a soft, all-encompassing whisper-bubble from Šalamun's poet-mouth—I experienced this once in my life and I do not know how to describe it. Someone explained it to me that it was "as if the words were being etched into my brain." It is like your mind and the mind of the poem are being fused, or rather, the poem is rewiring your mind so that it can synch with your brain and stimulate it.

There is a reason that most poets read better in their native tongue, and Šalamun was no exception. It is a testament to the ability of his poems to be reborn in translation, as well as Šalamun's talent to inhabit other languages, that he was able to read many of his poems in English with the same power and effect as in the original. He forged translations into blazing originals in this way.

I think it is significant, or at least interesting, to note that in Slovenian the word for "poem" and for "song" is the same word, pesem. Words printed on the page in a book are obviously mute, and so translation is the only way to give the language voice again in the mind of the reader. This is why the sound of a word or line can be as important to its translation as its meaning.

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If you ask about poetry in translation, I think it is also worthy to think for a moment about its readers. As I understand it, most readers of poetry in the US these days are poets. To this Tomaž would say (and I am sure did say): Marvelous! One thing Tomaž taught was that poets need each other. In my experience, poets are just like everyone else, except that they tend to have a stronger-than-average need to communicate, in language, things that language ultimately cannot express, because of love and also to transcend loneliness. Translating poetry in this sense is like procreation: not only the poem, but also friendship and love get reborn, grow, flourish.

Transom:

We dedicated Transom 3 to Tomaž Šalamun and his translators, in part to celebrate the chorus of English-language voices that have contributed to Šalamun's presence on the American poetry scene. Your translations are of relatively recent poems by Šalamun, you co-directed a short film about him, and you're at work on a feature-length documentary. How does your role as a "translator" differ when you are moving materials across media rather than across languages? What drew you to Šalamun's work and made it a part of your own artistic life?

Young:

Personally, I don't see much similarity between translating poems and making a film—at least not at the practical level of actually doing the work.

When we started to translate *Andes*, where the selections in Transom 10 are taken from, Šalamun gave Katarina and I some invaluable advice: "Be as literal as possible, and don't look for any meanings." And this, to the best of our abilities, is what we did. Our own creativity had little to do with it.

Of course our job was to transform the literal language into "poetry"—but we soon discovered that in almost all cases, this involved staying as literal as possible to what Šalamun wrote the way he wrote it, and letting the English language do the work of expressing the energy of his lines in Slovenian as faithfully as possible.

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There were moments of untranslatability when we had to take certain liberties, which Šalamun encouraged and approved, but for the most part, whenever we strayed by accident or intent from the literal path, we would inevitably end up on a road to nowhere and had to retrace our steps back to the source, which is the line, the individual word or words, the verb tense, the mood, syntax, the sound and rhythm—all these components of the language. This is the material we were working with.

Making a film, obviously, is a creative act that involves imagination and invention. When I started the documentary, together with the Slovenian filmmaker Nejc Saje, Tomaž gave another, and quite different, piece of advice: “Be a beast!” He wanted absolutely nothing to do with our ideas and decisions, except to excuse himself from those he did not feel like participating in personally. Šalamun was all about passing the fire of inspiration and creative freedom to others. What we were doing was of less importance than the fact of doing it.

The short film we made, *Every True Poet*, is very much inspired by his poems and his words about poetry. We did create imagery and some situations to evoke something of the feeling of reading Šalamun, and we were also playing with ideas how to express the past and memory in film language in a different way. Another thing we “borrowed” from him is the idea that risk is essential to art. If you are afraid to fail you won’t succeed in creating something new.

Of course, in film, all of this “translating” from one medium to another—seeking images that evoke feelings and associations as they relate to the words of a poet—can take you to dangerous or lifeless territory. Evoking “the spirit of a poem” visually in film can collapse into interpretation or illustration, and interpreting poetry in film is certainly the same kind of sin as interpreting a poem as a translator. There, I just found a connection!

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In a way, making a film about another human being is a kind of translation. It is “translating” life into art, or taking something that is fluid and ephemeral and fundamentally mysterious and attempting to transform it into something fixed and (you hope) timeless and somehow understandable, which is another way of saying engaging, because life is too short to watch boring movies. A film about an artist has its own specific pitfalls. A film about a writer even more, because there is usually nothing as boring as watching someone write.

Tomaž told me once: “You know what a film of a poet reading a poem looks like? A poet, reading a poem.”

The goal of the feature documentary is to tell more about Šalamun’s life, where he came from, who he was, what he did, and what happened after.

This also means that he becomes the “hero of the story.” Now, whether I like it or not, it’s no longer only about the poems or even about Tomaž as a human being, but it’s about the hero of the story. Film tends to function this way because film language tells stories in the same way as dreams. Also, like dreams, whatever reality a film has is contained solely within itself. There is, of course, much that is dreamlike about Šalamun’s work. So maybe this is another thing they have in common?

Transom:

What drew you to Šalamun’s work and made it a part of your own artistic life?

Young:

I have lived, on and off, with Tomaz Šalamun’s poetry for more than half of my life. It was love at first sight. And since it is love, it is hard for me to qualify or quantify it. It is. What can I say?

I first met Tomaž personally in the context of interviewing him for a magazine in 1995. He told me something that wasn’t printed at the time, but that explains something about how I feel about him. He said: “I’ve got the fire, when I’m lucky, it happens to me, and if I am lucky, others will get this fire through me.”

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Not only did Tomaž pass this fire of inspiration, he also taught, by example, how not to be afraid of the fire. He took many risks in his life and in his art, and he paid some heavy prices for it. It is easy to forget in all these words about Šalamun that he was, whatever else he was, also simply a human being. He had flaws and weaknesses like everyone else, which he was the first to acknowledge. But he wasn't held down by them. Instead he transformed them, like everything else that came into his orbit, into material for creative activity, which he knew, deep down, was always for the good, even in its darkest moments. Tomaž's passion for poetry, I believe, was always the passion for creativity, to create "something from nothing" as he once said. "The creative process is a healing process," is another line I remember.

I had the good fortune to be his friend, and there was a time in my life where, as a friend, he helped me. I know that he did this for many, many people. So mostly I admire Tomaž as a friend and as a funny, warm and open human being. Like many others, I miss him a lot. I cannot help but admire him as the truly one-of-a-kind person and artist that he was. He showed that it is not only possible to live life as an artist, regardless of external circumstances, but that in fact it is our basic human nature to be creative, in whatever way.

Poetry was his way. Through his poetry, but also very significantly through his presence and interactions and friendships with others, he opened up worlds for people around him and brought so many people and worlds together. Maybe that was his true genius? As a poet he operated from the margins, but if society would worship poetry the way it does pop stars, he would have had the same impact on the world as Michael Jackson, an artist that I know he admired.

It is telling that he never really spoke about his poetry, except in a scattering of interviews over the years and sometimes during readings. Already I have probably used more words to try and speak about his poetry than he ever did. He told me when we started interviewing him for the film: "The answers to whatever questions you ask me are in the poems."

TRANSOM ISSUE 10: TOMAŽ ŠALAMUN

trans. KATARINA VLADIMIROV YOUNG and JEFFREY YOUNG

Grotto

That the little flames won't
lick me. Four of them with turbans,

four with beards. Here I stand
on the rubber floor,

in front of me you, Gorki,
played billiards on

Capri. For Ron in
Venice I bought

a jacket. The two of us
cooled off. Thick are wasps,

clauses. Two headscarves. For God
and stamen.

The norm. Wind cuts. Nabucco.
Flame of the gobbling mouth.

Grotto

Da me ne bodo plamenčki
lizali. Štirje s turbani,

štirje z brado. Tu stojim
na gumijastih tleh,

pred mano si ti, Gorki,
igral biljard na

Capriju. Ronu sem v
Benetkah kupil

jacket. Skulirala sva
se. Goste so ose,

klavzule. Dve ruti. Bogu
in prašniku.

Norma. Veter brije. Nabucco.
Plamen žrečevih ust.

Horse Doesn't Betray

Although I moved in pointers,
ehm, I gargled fluff. Although I rode

the mare, I fell. You said that you are
unbearably bored. Go

naked on the horse. Lay yourself down on
the log. Put on linens.

Make corks wild. Eat up blueberries.
Tear soft branches. Do you

feel them? You grab, smell, show. Do you
shoot them? Don't kill Marilyn

Monroe. Fix a drink. March among
trout. Forget the horse and return

to him. The moon will still be in the
sky. Only in another corner.

Konj ne izda

Dasi sem se gibal v štulici,
Em grgral puh. Dasi kobilo

jezdil, padel. Rekel si, da ti je
neznosen dolgčas. Pojdi nag

na konja. Ulezi se na hlod.
Obleci perilo. Divjaj zamaške.

Pojej borovnice. Trgaj mehke
veje. A jih čutiš? Grabiš, vonjaš,

kažeš? A jih streljaš? Ne ubij
Marylin Monroe. Zmiksaj

drink. Korakaj med postrvmi.
Pozabi na konja in se vrni

k njemu. Luna bo še vedno na
nebu. Samo v drugem kotu.

According to the Raftsmen's Floor Plan to Operate on Brain Nucleus

Suitors with discs, who are you?

Are you Henkel employees?

Do you all have tiny new coats? You stuffed
yourselves inside an ant hill with

little heads bent.

You bleed yourselves. Do you

get a snack for each day
of leaking? A warm meal,

before the train? To roll barrels of blood
into nightmare, to roll barrels of blood into

dawn. Barrels, wound with bricks and
plasticine travel like this:

native hill – Luče – the Savinja –
Sava – Danube – Black Sea.

TRANSOM ISSUE 10: TOMAŽ ŠALAMUN

trans. KATARINA VLADIMIROV YOUNG and JEFFREY YOUNG

Po tlorisu flosarjev operirati možgansko jedro

Vasovalci s koluti, kdo ste?

Ste uslužbenci Henkla?

Imate vsi nove plaščke? Nabili
ste se v mravljišče s

sklonjenimi glavicami.

Puščate si kri. Boste

dobili malico za vsak dan
puščanja? Topel obrok,

preden na vlak? Valiti sode krvi
v moro, valiti sode krvi v

zoro. Sodi, oviti z opekami in
plastelinom potujejo tako:

domači hrib – Luče – Savinja –
Sava – Donava – Črno morje.

Who Doesn't Hide behind the Altar

You shuffle! You move legs
and shuffle! Your legs

shiver like teenagers and
basketball players. If a boa

coils up, can you also jump over it?
Lard feasts on the cylinder.

Greasy inner circle of half hat.
Do you follow yourself? Nature whistles and beats

the herds. We draw a wall. We glue
snakes to trees. I'm deaf.

In youth I held incorrect
opinions. I'm dying and

setting my bed on fire. It's creamy.
I'm eternal, death says.

Ki se ne skriva za oltarjem

Šfefljaš! Noge premikaš
in šfefljaš! Z nogami

drgetaš kot pubertentiki in
košarkaši. Če se udav

zviije, ga tudi lahko preskočiš?
Na cilindru se gosti špeh.

Zamaščen notranji krog pol klobuka.
Si slediš? Narava žvižga in tepe

črede. Zrišemo zid. Lepimo
kače na drevje. Gluh sem.

V mladosti sem imel napačna
mnenja. Umiram in si

zažigam posteljo. Kremna je.
Večna sem, govori smrt.

Katerina Gogou (issue 10) (1940 – 1993) was a Greek poet, author and actress. Before her suicide by pill overdose at the age of 53, Gogou appeared in over thirty Greek films. She studied theatre and played the funny, pretty girl in numerous films. Early in her childhood she experienced the Nazi occupation of Greece that began in 1941. Her re-engagement with cinema in the 1970s included only political films. Meanwhile, she started writing political poetry. *Three Clicks Left* was translated into English in 1983 by Jack Hirschman and published by Night Horn Books in San Francisco. *Τρία κλικ αριστερά* was first published by Kastaniotis in 1978. Her poetry is known for its rebellious and anarcho-communist content. Gogou is considered one of the three anarchist-saints of Exarchia Square of Athens, along with Nikolas Asimos and Pavlos Sidiropoulos.

Ilias Kolokouris (issue 10) is a candidate for a Ph.D. in Classics and Modern Greek at the University of Athens. He holds a ptychion in Ancient Greek and Latin Literature, and a Master's Degree in teaching Modern Greek as a foreign language. His thesis was on the tragic elements found in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*. Ilias has taught for the University of Missouri Creative Writing Seminars on Serifos, and for Paideia's Living Greek in Greece program. He is currently interested in the reception of ancient Greek literature within modern Greek poetry. He has translated Katerina Gogou's *Idionymon* into English and *The Women of Homer* by Oscar Wilde into Greek.

A conversation with translator Ilias Kolokouris

Transom:

Is it possible for the original text to be reborn through the translator?

Kolokouris:

Every translation is a reflection of what the translator receives from the original text. Of course, the translation always depends on the era and the circumstances under which it has been written. Hence, every translation is bound to die and be reborn through constant rewriting. But it always gives an idea and an essence of the original text.

Transom:

The “idiomynon” was a Greek law that prohibited “insurrectional” speech. The poem’s title references the public sphere, but the speaker’s concern for Myrto drives home the personal stakes for the speaker. From your perspective as a translator, how important is it to you that an English-language reader understand the politics of Gogou’s poems?

Kolokouris:

In my opinion, political concepts within Katerina Gogou’s poetry can be understood and enjoyed even by readers who are not well informed of Greece’s political history. The “Idionymon” Act of Law, which sentenced to the penalty of six months imprisonment anyone who attempted to apply ideas that manifested subversion or to overthrow the social system through violent means, or to cause partial detachment of the Greek State, or implementing through actions proselytism, was brought down in a superficial way, in 1974, after the fall of the Greek Military Junta. However, up until 1980, the secret service of the Greek State kept and renewed its secret records and files that contained the political acts and profiles of every Greek citizen. These files were actually burned and destroyed after 1981.

Nevertheless, Gogou's use of the word "Idionymon" in the title is totally her personal idiosyncrasy and choice. It actually retains its polysemous meanings in the framework of the anticommunist campaign until the Junta, but Gogou gives it meaning from an anarchist's point of view. After the removal of the original "Act of Idionymon crime," the New Democracy party's government passed a new law in 1976, which shielded and protected the security forces, the Military Peacemaking Groups, and the Riot Police from individual protesters and strikers.

Katerina Gogou refers to this new law in the same way that the anarchist circles of the time did, as "Idionymon," the hidden offspring of the old statutory law, while at the same time she was preserving her own, private meaning for the word. Gogou's poetry is full of ecclesiastical, urban and surreal images. We would not call this iconography a delirium (even though she does mention delirium tremens), for she achieves a cinematic record of reality, which is beyond time and political connotations. An iconography that retains its disgusting appeal. Protesters and anarchists will always fight with riot police, as Gogou describes. Be they at the Puerta Del Sol in Madrid, and the anti-austerity movement, or during the Occupy Wall Street movement, or the riots at Brooklyn Bridge. The political and economic impasse will be the same, and the hyper-real images caused by abuse of drugs in combination with alcohol, in any language, will remain enigmatic as in the poetry of Gogou.

Idionymon 3

My head in smithereens
from the vise of your flea markets

at rush hour and against the
current

I will light a huge fire
and in there I'll throw all Marxist
books

so that Myrto never finds out
the causes of my death

You can tell her

that I could not bear Spring or that I went through a red light.

Yes. That is more believable.

Red. That you tell her.

Ιδιώνυμο 3

Με το κεφάλι θρύψαλα
απ' την μέγγενη των παζαριών σας

την ώρα της αιχμής και κόντρα στο ρεύμα
θ' ανάψω μια μεγάλη φωτιά

και κεί θα ρίξω όλα τα Μαρξιστικά βιβλία
έτσι που να μη μάθει ποτέ η Μυρτώ

τα αίτια του θανάτου μου.
Μπορείτε να της πείτε
πως δεν άντεξα την άνοιξη ή πως πέρασα με κόκκινο.
Ναι. Αυτό είναι πιο πιστευτό.
Με κόκκινο. Αυτό να πείτε.

(Kastaniotis Publications)

Ignacio Uranga (issue 10) (Bahía Blanca, Argentina, 1982) studied literature at la Universidad Nacional del Sur in Argentina. His books include *a-letheia/ramalaje* (Ediciones En Danza, Argentina, 2012); *ramalaje* (Ediciones OREM, Peru, 2012); *Materna* (prefaced by Juan Gelman, Trilce Ediciones, Mexico City, 2013; Viajera Editorial, Argentina, 2015); *entonces Daniela* (Lumme, Brasil, 2015); *lo, parcialmente, hasta entonces dicho* (Ediciones Aguadulce & Trabalis Ediciones, Puerto Rico, 2015); and *al grave aparecer de lo que ser ahí* (Casa de las Américas de Cuba, La Habana, Cuba, 2014). His work has been selected for prizes by writers including Juan Gelman, Pedro Lastra, Antonio Gamoneda, and Mario Vargas Llosa. He edits and contributes to *el Periódico Nacional de Poesía de la UNAM* (Mexico), *Urbe Salvaje* (Chile), and *Revista Ñ* (Argentina).

Michelle Gil-Montero (issue 10) is a poet and translator of contemporary Latin American literature. She has one book of poetry, *Attached Houses* (Brooklyn Arts Press, 2013), and several book translations, most recently *This Blue Novel* by Mexican poet Valerie Mejer (Action Books, 2015) and *Dark Museum* by Argentine writer María Negroni (Action Books, 2015). She has been awarded fellowships from the NEA and Howard Foundation. She lives in Pittsburgh and teaches at Saint Vincent College.

Michelle Gil-Montero:

On Translating the “Touching” Poetry of Ignacio Uranga

There is something in the language of poetry that I would call “touching.” Not merely in the sense that it is, or can be, sentimentally affecting. Rather, I mean that, in poetry, words have a heightened physical desire—to “touch” what they signify. The problem is that, as science and philosophy tell us, touch is impossible; if you look close enough, there is always a gap. Some poems, more than others, are willing to go there, to that gap at the limits of language. Some poems, in particular, marked by the frustration and desire to say the unsayable, find their definition there. “Touching”: in the sense that when we try to touch something, we feel our own edges.

In this way, Ignacio Uranga (Bahía Blanca, 1982) writes “touching” poetry. His poems linger at the uncomfortable, electric outline of near-reach. Both the matter and method of his poetry express the frustration and desire of touch. These are poems of direct address, in the language of a voice stretching itself to reach the elusive ear of another. The imagery tends to be exceptionally tactile. And technically, they repeat and vary phrases, enact sonic and syntactic collisions, frictionizing speech. As if thinking were shaped by a rasp, and sound made cutaneous sense.

Aristotle says, *On the Soul*, that “living beings that have the faculty of touch also have the faculty of desire,” and in Uranga’s poetry, language possesses both faculties, hand in hand. Desire in these poems is an attempt, by gestures and reaches of speech, to touch (and by touching, connect, and possibly meld with) another, despite the awareness that touch never quite (whether on the atomic, compassionate, or intimate level) touches down. If many of Uranga’s poems are love poems—and I might call them that—they dramatize that asymptotic edge where love threatens to perfect itself by collapsing the lovers into unity, and inevitably fails.

TRANSOM ISSUE 10: IGNACIO URANGA

trans. MICHELLE GIL-MONTERO

Uranga's poetics of touch reminds me of translation. When I translate a poem, I labor at the margin of my language, and the margin of myself as writer. What drives me to that edge, always, is some desire for the poem I am translating, which plays out in the process of translating as an impulse to get close to it, to approximate it as closely as possible. The desire lures me to a dangerous border where another writing threatens to infringe on, maybe even dissolve, my own. But luckily, two poems can never perfectly meet. Instead, something like friction happens, breaking loose the particles of a language, generating new energy, igniting a spark.

What I call "touching," Uranga himself has called "contingency," a word with several meanings relevant to his poetics: possibility, fortuity, accident, unforeseen expense, and not least, physical proximity. In a poem by that title, he alludes to Walter Benjamin's notion of a "tiny spark of contingency" in the photograph—where, in the viewer's gaze, the past grazes the present. Uranga's short poem "Contingency"—which I interpret as an *ars poetica*—takes up this scenario. It describes, and addresses, a photograph of someone (and by extension, I believe, it describes and addresses the poem itself): "whether the aura of Walter Benjamin is/ liable to be contemplated in those your eyes that / maybe are almost in this photo / as it attempts to legitimize technically that laughing mouth." As Benjamin said of photography, so poetry can only "legitimize technically" what is only "maybe almost" there.

In language, as in any technological means of production, there is no "machine precision," no frictionless surface, no perfectly oiled part. Always, inefficiency, resistance, friction, or unnecessary work intervenes. Uranga's poetry finds ways to enact, and employ, that resistance and inefficiency. For example, the poem "Campo de Mayo," a repeated and varied set of phrases so that the poem enacts its own image of a sewer grate, words slipping through the cracks like blood draining into the sewer outside the torture center.

The “grating” form, we hear the slippage, and we glimpse the disappeared, disappearing. In other poems, the softness of intimate address is haunted by a sharp presence lurking under the tender tonal surface—not visible, but palpable—just like the image of tumors, like hard pebbles, under the skin of a lover’s breast.

To a great extent, every poem that I translate teaches me how to translate it. Every poem comes with its own, unrepeatable instructions. These poems remind me that no translation, however precise, can make direct, perfect contact with the original. At best, it can “legitimize technically,” in the wild frustration of asymptotic translation-desire, what is “maybe almost” there. The unit of translation is the friction, its spark.

Campo de Mayo

“The human figure,” she said, “on the wall,” “on
the firing one,” she said, “the human figure on the
firing wall penciled with bullets,” she said
“penciled with bullets,” “the human figure,” she said
“penciled with bullets,” “the silhouette of a man”
“on the firing wall,” she said, “and the grate
below, to the sewer basins,” she said, “a
grate,” “50 x 50 cm,” “to the sewer system”
she said, “penciled with bullets,” “the silhouette of a man”
“and a grate,” “of a man,” she said, “y’know how many”

Campo de Mayo

“la figura humana”, dijo, “en la pared”, “en la del polvorín”, dijo, “la figura humana en la pared del polvorín dibujada a balazos”, dijo “dibujada a balazos”, “la figura humana”, dijo “dibujada a balazos”, “la silueta de un hombre” “en la pared del polvorín”, dijo, “y una rejilla abajo hacia las cuencas cloacales ”, dijo, “una rejilla”, “50 x 50 cm”, “hacia el sistema cloacal” dijo, “dibujada a balazos”, “la silueta de un hombre” “y una rejilla”, “de un hombre”, dijo: “sabés cuántos”

Adenocarcinoma

While to the touch they're notably
particulated inside, like
tiny stones beneath her areola:
they then formed a part of one
unoffending mere informality her
halitosis, the excessive dilation of
pores, her oily face, the damp
smell in her clothes

Adenocarcinoma

Sin embargo al tacto se notaban particuladas en su interior, como mínimas piedras bajo la areola: formaban entonces parte de una inofensiva y mera informalidad la halitosis, la excesiva dilatación del poro, la grasitud facial, el olor a humedad en la ropa

XVII

In Milwaukee they saw the constellation of Aquarius
in the constellation of Aquarius, in the thick of stars
they spotted a cold weak one, coldest and weakest of all:
it is now called WISEJ085510.83-071442.5, and it's dying
because it's carbon and oxygen: the WISEJ085510.83-071442.5
will cool totally then, will crystallize like a diamond
and disappear: but it's not alone: it joined a companion star
a pulsar now called PSR J2222-0137, and they orbit every 2.45 days:
this solar remnant was born early maybe in history: truly
it's already feeble and cold as hell, between 48 and 13 below zero, but in
good company:
out there, Daniela, these things still exist, believe it or not

XVII

en Milwaukee vieron la Constelación de Acuario
en la Constelación de Acuario, entre muchas estrellas
encontraron fría y débil una, más fría y débil que todas:
se llama ahora WISEJ085510.83-071442.5 y está agonizando
porque es de carbono y oxígeno: la WISEJ085510.83-071442.5
se enfriará del todo entonces, cristalizará como un diamante
y desaparecerá: pero no está sola: se unió a una estrella compañera
un púlsar que se llama PSR J2222-0137 ahora, y orbitan cada 2,45 días:
nació muy temprano en la historia acaso este remanente solar: es cierto
está débil ya y muy fría, entre 48 y 13 bajo cero, pero acompañada:
allá afuera, Daniela, estas cosas todavía existen, aunque no lo creas

Sébastien Smirou (issue 10) is the author of three poetry volumes from P.O.L.: *Un temps pour s'étreindre* (2011), *Beau voir* (2008), and *Mon Laurent* (2003). His prose meditation *Un temps pour se séparer : notes sur Robert Capa* was recently released by Éditions Hélium. A psychoanalyst, Smirou has translated two important psychoanalytical texts from the Italian: Antonino Ferro's *Rêveries* (2012) and Domenico Chianese and Andreina Fontana's *Immaginando* (2014), both from Éditions Ithaque. He will be in residence next year at the Villa Médicis in Rome.

Andrew Zawacki (issue 10) translated Sébastien Smirou's first book as *My Lorenzo* (*Burning Deck*, 2012). His more recent translation of Smirou, *See About: Bestiary*, for which he received translation fellowships from the NEA and the Centre National du Livre, is forthcoming from La Presse. He will spend 2016-17 in Nantes, France, on a Howard Foundation Poetry Fellowship.

TRANSOM ISSUE 10: SÉBASTIEN SMIROU

trans. ANDREW ZAWACKI

A conversation with translator Andrew Zawacki

Transom:

Is it possible for the original text to be reborn through the translator?

Zawacki:

Living as I have, as an interloper in the South for the past decade, I can't help but hear "reborn" as a religious term, one that makes me particularly uneasy, borderline queasy. For one thing, rebirth implies that something has died, so stands in need of renewal, and that's simply never true of a poem, not least when it's undergoing translation.

To the contrary, a poem remains very much alive during that process, even kicking—in fact, that's one of the many troubles inherent in trying to translate a poem: It just won't sit still, let alone cooperate. (In this way, Sébastien's work occasionally reminds me of my daughters, ages two and six, i.e., total pains in the ass.) For another, I'm committed to translation not as purification, which a rebirth is meant to make happen, but rather as contamination. My English versions of Sébastien are necessarily infected by his French, which my versions can't and don't seek to "cure," even as I pollute his work by carrying it into English (actually, the French would say I'm translating his work into "l'américain").

Nor should we pretend that he writes "French," which in turn I'm rendering in "English," as if either language were monolithic or stable: There are many idiolects and dialects and elastic innovations of French, of course, including Smirou's highly peculiar lingo, just as there are multiple English tongues, among them mine—to say nothing of the fact that Sébastien and I are ceaselessly changing the registers in which we speak our "own" respective languages.

And I should probably refrain from assigning us to “respective” languages altogether: Influenced by a bunch of American poets, starting say with Jack Spicer, Sébastien writes in a French already contaminated by English (as well as one infiltrated by Italian psychoanalytic theory); in parallel, whether translating poetry or writing it, my English has a convert’s zealous French floating around in its blood. Sébastien’s poems are no small part of that vascular system.

In any event, to consider a text being “reborn through” a translator sets the latter up as a god, some above-the-fray entity that washes the original words, in order to cast out imperfection, drape them in raiments of white. I feel very far from doing anything that undirty, or wanting to.

Transom:

You described these poems collectively as a “chapter,” and we’ve formatted them as discrete poems in a series, but what relationship do you see at play between the serial poem and the long poem here? We’re thinking specifically about how each of these poems ends with a variation on the same line, like a refrain. How did the dynamics between these poems affect your translation process?

Zawacki:

Without having wanted to legislate, in advance, how exactly I’d translate this book, I was forced to acknowledge its structure, respect its pliantly constrained layout. Beau voir is fractal: eight chapters, each containing eight poems, with every poem comprising an octave of lines. (One poem is even organized according to alexandrines. The title features eight letters, in English no less than in French.)

As you say, all the poems within a given chapter end with a line that's repeated, if not exactly then with only slight variation. Moreover, as in the medieval bestiary, animals here appear in order of decreasing physical size, from the lion to the glow worm. I felt I ought to keep that sense of increasing diminution (compelling oxymoron) in mind, as it cut across the pristine symmetry of the whole, even if its attendant feeling of—what? Descent? Tapering? Shrinking? Devolving?—were more affect or atmosphere than formal constraint.

Alongside that odd movement, as I read left to right across the pages of the book, of progress married to retreat, of inertia toward a vanishing point (the trapeze, the trick of perspective), there's the fact that some animals don't quite seem to fit, at all: the dodo is extinct, for example, the glow worm a mere insect. Each of the eight chapters is an intense, focused, eccentric investigation—part phenomenological, part psychological—of the relationship between a viewer (quite often the reader herself) and a creature that's crept into her line of sight. While there's no narrative per se in operation, the poems within each chapter are doubly directed: each poem races toward its final line, which can only gain in gravitas with each reiteration, while the whole chapter hyperventilates toward its close, as if bobsledding into a vanishing point, along the slipstream of an oblique and imaginative but nevertheless insistent argument.

Whereas no chapter is a prereq for the one that follows, in terms of action or the advancement of any philosophical inquiry, there's no escaping the order inside each chapter. Given the emphasis in *Beau voir* on vision—as well as not seeing, or seeing only piecemeal—Spicer's characterization of the serial poem, as flicking on and off the lights of rooms one enters and exits, seems appropriate.

TRANSOM ISSUE 10: SÉBASTIEN SMIROU

trans. ANDREW ZAWACKI

The Cat

1: Seek

Let's call right off the bat a cat kitty
that's sweet cat you must say it quick
think it slow and darling on our voice
dosed out the echo depends if it falls
on a bad day with no hand on our thigh
for patting kitty in vain do we seek
seek an aloofness under a sofa
a way of looking at things.

Le chat

1: Recherche

Appelons d'emblée un chat minou
c'est bon chat ça il faut le dire vite
le penser lent et chou de notre voix
dosée à nous dépend l'écho s'il tombe
sur un jour sans la main sur la cuisse
à tapoter minou en vain on cherche
cherche un muet sous un meuble
une façon de voir les choses.

from *Beau voir (Bestiaire)* (Paris: P.O.L., 2008)

The Cat

2: Slip

Like in rugby you see with your finger
that languors in your eye we grip the tip
of the ball for the striker awaiting the creature
when he plays dead the penalty tempts us
to recover at least the view
to sustain his stare with the kernel
of an apricot that slips at each try
it's a style of looking at things.

Le chat

2: Glisse

Comme au rugby tu vois avec le doigt
couché dans l'œil on tient la pointe
du ballon au buteur en attendant la bête
quand elle fait la morte la pénalité nous tente
pour en recouvrer au moins la vue
de soutenir son regard par le noyau
d'un abricot qui glisse à chaque essai
c'est une façon de voir les choses.

from *Beau voir (Bestiaire)* (Paris: P.O.L., 2008)

The Cat

3: Dip

Like in rugby you see with your finger
that languors in your eye we grip the tip
of the ball for the striker awaiting the creature
when he plays dead the penalty tempts us
to recover at least the view
to sustain his stare with the kernel
of an apricot that slips at each try
it's a style of looking at things.

Le chat

3: Creuse

Si par la grâce d'un creux de la curiosité
ou de l'envie du chat soudain dépasse
d'une porte l'ombre de Bagheera museau
au vent on ne bouge pas nonchalamment
on chantonne juste le premier mouvement
(celui du dos du chat) ça creuse on dirait
les haubans du pont de Tancarville ça pose
c'est une façon de voir les choses.

from *Beau voir (Bestiaire)* (Paris: P.O.L., 2008)

The Cat

4: Dig

When one's a cat in stop motion
you take your footloose for a mystery
of the creation of luminous shards
to the extinction of fires behind the head
we dig deeper into the idea of the anthill
itches less and less the paw
of the cat like so in the face unabashed
is his fashion of looking at things.

Le chat

4: Creuse encore

Quand on est chat dans pas d'élan
on prend son pied pour un mystère
de la création des éclats lumineux
à l'extinction des feux derrière la tête
on creuse l'idée de la fourmilière
démange de moins en moins la patte
du chat comme ça dans la figure posée
c'est sa façon de voir les choses.

from *Beau voir (Bestiaire)* (Paris: P.O.L., 2008)

The Cat

5: Roll

Piled in my arms his body braided foreshor
puss's poise in front of the milk of marble
rests a riddle it cannot run
a cat if you plunge your finger inside
the spur gear fur of his shoulder it'll high roller
wheel and axle bustle pull back the breakaway
way things are going between us
it's a manner of seeing them better.

Le chat

5: Roule

Pris à bras le corps tourné courci
posé du chat devant le lait de marbre
reste une énigme ça ne marche pas
un chat si on met le doigt dedans
l'engrenage de son épaule ça roule
des mécaniques ça remonte au train
où vont les choses entre nous
c'est une façon de mieux les voir.

from *Beau voir (Bestiaire)* (Paris: P.O.L., 2008)

The Cat

6: Row

On three with the same whim we fall
one nude into the rowboat of the two hips
of the pelvis count's at three strikes against
intense where cat myself a small scale
model inside the thick of his bulk we row
to the flow of the rapid run I swear it smacks
of the waltz of a camel of conking out
it's a way of looking at things.

Le chat

6: Rame

A trois dans le même élan on tombe
un nu dans la chaloupe des deux hanches
du bassin un numéro trois de tension
extrême où chat soi-même modèle
réduit dans le dur du gros on rame
au rythme du courant parole ça tient
de la valse du chameau de l'évanoui
c'est une façon de voir les choses.

from *Beau voir (Bestiaire)* (Paris: P.O.L., 2008)

The Cat

7: Rub

It's the moment we land on the island
of the leg of the woman (mine)
head (hers) first pursed kissy kissy
cross your heart to mine will push up
the sand the skin of her eyes would
rub in the view of the other (woman)
at play but on my shoulders I've got a good
it's a way of looking at things.

Le chat

7: Frotte

C'est le moment où on aborde à l'île
de la jambe de la femme (la mienne)
la tête (la sienne) la première bouche
en cœur croisée la mienne bêche
le sable de la peau des yeux s'y frotte
-rait bien au regard de l'autre (femme)
jouant sur mes épaules pourtant je la garde
c'est une façon de voir les choses.

from *Beau voir (Bestiaire)* (Paris: P.O.L., 2008)

The Cat

8: Sway

A hair as history shows in the hand
rouses my cat to embellish the air
of not really patting his head elsewhere
the caress proceeds the direction of less
where electricity pings eternal the pong
of hands the cat sways the dawn of time
identically teaches to reach by touching
is a way of seeing things.

Le chat

8: Ondule

Un poil l'histoire le montre dans la main
ça pousse mon chat à redoubler l'air
de n'y pas toucher vraiment la tête
ailleurs la caresse pousse dans le sens du moins
où l'électricité conduit à l'infini du jeu
des paumes le chat ondule la nuit des temps
à l'identique enseigne l'avancée à tâtons
c'est une façon de voir les choses.

from *Beau voir (Bestiaire)* (Paris: P.O.L., 2008)

Óscar Sandoval (issue 10) lives in Oaxaca, Mexico. He has a university degree in psychology and has been a participant in various poetry workshops in cultural centers and libraries in Oaxaca. His work has been published in several anthologies such as *Poetas sin experiencia: Editorial Tetra* (Oaxaca, 2010); *Antología del Metalenguaje: Ediciones Ajiaco* (Chile, 2013); *Colectivo Poesía y Trayecto* (Mexico, DF, 2013) and *mezcalito city* (Oaxaca, 2015).

Alice-Catherine Jennings (issue 10) holds an MA in Slavic Languages and Literatures from The University of Texas at Austin and an MFA in Writing from Spalding University in Louisville, Kentucky. Her poetry has appeared in numerous publications including *Hawai'i Review*, *Penumbra*, *Boyne Berries*, *GTK Creative*, *The Poets' Republic*, *First Literary Review East*, and *The Louisville Review*. Her chapbook, *Katherine of Aragon: A Collection of Poems*, is forthcoming from *Finishing Line Press* in 2016. She divides her time between Oaxaca, Mexico and Texas.

A conversation with translator Alice-Catherine Jennings

Transom:

Is it possible for the original text to be reborn through the translator?

Jennings:

Rebirth for me seems to indicate that something was first dead. As I tend to translate works by contemporary authors, I think of the poems I translate as very much alive. However, it is true that there are many poems that have lain dormant and not read for long stretches of time. With these “dormant” poems, a translator can revive them and present them to a new readership.

I prefer to think of translation as a “reincarnation” versus a “rebirth” of the original text. If the translator is successful, the soul of the poem enters into and continues in the new language, or flesh.

Transom:

We’re struck by the elegaic tone of this poem. Translation inevitably involves loss. But must these losses be mourned?

Jennings:

According to the German poet Karl Schlegel, “What is lost in the good or excellent translation is precisely the best.”

I Remember My First Encounter

It's been two days since my brother fell into the pit.

It's been two days since the first sightings of the spiders,

It's been two days since

my brother Max has gone away

and left the spiders weaving in the house.

The biggest and darkest spiders are for my parents,

all that is left for me is a small spider, a maker of castles,

a small spider who

destroys and constructs my ideas;

sows plants, vines and abysses.

Dawn is breaking in our house

I wish it were the Tuesday before I met

my spider.

Dawn is breaking

I would like to see your eyes open

brother,

open to receive the night.

Recuerdo del primer encuentro

Han pasado dos días de la caída de mi hermano a la fosa.

Han pasado dos días del primer avistamiento de arañas,
han pasado dos días que
mi hermano Marx marchó
y dejó arañas tejiendo en casa.

Las arañas más grandes y negras son para mis padres,
para mí sólo dejó una araña pequeña armadora de castillos,
esa pequeña araña que
destruye y construye mis ideas;
que siembra plantas, enredaderas y abismos.

Hoy amanece de noche en casa
quisiera fuera martes antes de conocer
a mi araña,
hoy amanece de noche,
quisiera ver tus ojos abiertos
hermano mío,
abiertos para recibir la noche.