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EZRA: An Online Journal of Translation

Fall 2007 Vol. I No. 2

Ezra hopes you savor our new format. “I traduttori,” below, provides a sort of table of contents—giving precedence, as is *Ezra*’s wont, to the translators.

Also new is the featured translator of the issue—this time, Fanny Howe. We call your attention to her recent work: translation (from the Polish) of Henia and Llona Karmel. Please suggest translators we should feature—especially if you have their contact information.

Ezra hopes you are familiar with the American Literary Translators Association. The *Alta* newsletter suggests books which need translating, along with news of recently completed work, both short and book-length.

All Hail Chris Kidder! His translation of Moratín’s play *The Young Ladies’ Consent* is in its first run at the Commedia Beauregard in St Paul. This play was excerpted in our last issue.

And now let us, as Khatibi says, “switch languages.” Réda Bensmaïa points out how he “subjects the French language to a system that enables it to translate the untranslatable, to express the inexpressible. In a word, he wrests it from the metaphysical and precritical state in which it was supposed to be merely a secondary tool for the expression of a single and/or unified mind, culture or subject. Among other things, then, Khatibi wants to make language *loucher* (to go cross-eyed), to make it *louche* (a bit suspect).” (*Experimental Nations*, Princeton University Press, 2003.)

i traduttori:

Fanny Howe, Zahi Khamis and Kim Jensen
Paul Sohar
John Dutterer
Arlene Zide
Aruna Sitesh

Jeff Jones
Don Mager
Christopher Mulrooney
Adam Sorkin and Ioana Ieronim
Jacqueline Michaud

Featured translators:

Fanny Howe, and her teaching, NEA awards, and twenty books (including *On the Ground*, Graywolf, 2004), needs no introduction. *Ezra* is delighted to include her translation. Born in Buffalo, in 1940, Ms. Howe is at the forefront of modern poetry, and also writes stories, novels and essays.

Kim Jensen teaches at the Community College of Baltimore County. Her writing appears widely, and she is a former winner of the Raymond Carver Prize (short fiction). Her spectacular website is at www.kimjensen.org

Zahi Khamis is a Palestinian artist, born outside of Nazareth. Visit with him at www.zahiart.com

There is a seat for me

—translated by Zahi Khamis and Kim Jensen

There is a seat for me in the deserted theater
in Beirut. I may remember or easily forget
the last act—only because
the play was so poorly written.

Chaos—

like a desperate war diary, the story
of the spectators' own urges, actors shredding their scripts
and hunting for the author among us, the witnesses
in our seats.

I say to the artist next to me: Don't draw your weapon,
wait...unless you're the playwright!

— No

He asks me: Are you the playwright?

— No.

We sit fearfully. I tell him: Be a neutral hero
and avoid an obvious fate.

He responds: No hero dies honorably in the second
half. I'll wait and see. Maybe I'll edit one of the acts. Or I might revise
what iron has done to my brothers.

It's you then? I say.

You and I, he responds, are two masked authors, two witnesses
masked.

What do I have to do with this? I'm just a spectator!
He answers: There are no spectators at the door of an abyss and no one
is neutral here. You have to choose
your role at the end.

I say: But I am missing the beginning.
What is the beginning?

Darwish's collection: *Do Not Apologize For What You Have
Done* (January 2004).

Nothing makes me happy

—translated by Fanny Howe, Zahi Khamis and Kim Jensen

“Nothing makes me happy,”
says a passenger on the bus.
Not the radio, not the morning papers,
Nor the castles on the hills.
I just want to cry.

Wait, the driver says.
Wait till we get to the station.
Then cry as much as you like.

A woman says, I'm like him.
Nothing makes me happy.
I took my son to my grave-site.
He liked it, and lay down to sleep.
He didn't even say goodbye.

A professor says, I'm the same.
Nothing makes me happy.
I studied archaeology
without finding anything of myself

in the stones. What am I?

The soldier says, me too.
Nothing makes me happy.
I attack a ghost who attacks me.

Get ready! the driver snaps.
We're arriving at our last stop.

They all shout: We want what
comes after that!
Keep driving!

But me? I say, let me off here.
I'm like them. Nothing makes me happy.
But I am tired
of traveling.

Darwish's collection: *Do Not Apologize For What You Have Done* (January 2004).

You shall be forgotten as if you never lived

—*translated by Zahi Khamis and Kim Jensem*

You shall be forgotten as if you never lived
like a sparrow's fall
like a deserted church, you'll be forgotten
a fleeting love
a flower at night, forgotten.

I belong to the road. Someone walked before me,
a figure whose visions created footprints to follow,
who scattered seeds of language, dropped hints,
and lit up the lyrical path.

?

You shall be forgotten as if you've never been
a person or a text...you will be forgotten.

?

I walk in the company of a vision.
Maybe I can add a twist to the eternal story,
for words rule me and I rule them. I am their form
and they are free transfigurations.
But whatever I say has already been said,
and a passing tomorrow awaits me. I am the king of echo,
no throne but the margins. And the road
is the way. Maybe the ancients forgot to describe
something in which I may stir a memory or feeling.

?

You shall be forgotten as if you've never been
a trace or a face in the news...you'll be forgotten.

?

I belong to the road...someone's footsteps
will follow me to my visions. Someone will recite poems
in praise of the gardens of exile
at the doorstep of home, free from worshipping yesterday,
free of my metaphors and language; and I will testify
that I am alive
and free

when I am forgotten!

Darwish's collection: *Do Not Apologize For What You Have Done* (January 2004).

The way the brook

—*translated by Paul Sohar*

What can a creature do except
among the other creatures, love?
love and forget,
love and mislove, love, unlove, and love?
always, even with one's eyes
(Ahogy a folyó) by Sándor Kányádi,

The brook meanders under
the ceaseless embrace of shadows
cast by the brookside willows,
my spirit tags along slithering
with its one-note hiss,
flashing silver-bellied fish
into the sky
whenever the sun
breaks through the chinks.

Sándor Kányádi

STAG AT THE WATERING HOLE

—*translated by Paul Sohar*

What can a creature do except
among the other creatures, love

When a stag goes to drink,
summer and birch stand still;
even the leaves of grass salute
when a stag has a thirst to kill,
even the creek comes to a halt
and the water stops its flow,
and the stag treads with a swagger,
his antlers jeweled branches aglow.

Sándor Kányádi (Hungary)

NOT ONLY...

—translated by Paul Sohar

not only the sweat-inspired
verses of a pushy versifier
but typos and misprints also
manage to arouse my ire

as if the hangover feeling
of the inability to act
and the power of futility
had formed a pernicious pact

it's nothing I say to myself
nothing compared to the schemes
for a garbage dump to be built
on the landing field of my dreams

Sándor Kányádi (Hungary)

SNOWS

—translated by John Dutterer

Countryside without roads
and town without roofs.
The world is silent
and naive.
Gigantic dove
in the stars.
Why doesn't he fall from the blue,
the eternal hawk?

Federico Garcia Lorca (Spain, 1898-1936)

world

—translated by John Dutterer

Eternal angle
the earth and the sky.
Divided by wind.

Immense angle
the righthand road
divided by desire.

The parallels meet
in the kiss.
Oh heart
without echo!

In you begins and ends
the universe.

(. . .)

Federico Garcia Lorca (Spain, 1898-1936)

One day she'll wake up

—translated by Arlene Zide and Gagan Gill

One day she'll wake up and God will have left her bedside.

One day she'll wake up and her eyes will be dry. The scab will have come off. The pain will have ebbed.

One day when she's recovered, she'll look in the mirror, and be surprised. There'll be a bandage, but no evidence of the wound. The injury that will hurt her, is still far off in the future.

Gagan gill

Letter

—translated by Arlene Zide and Gagan Gill

The letter knocks at the door and you can't even undo the latch of your solitude. You've been locked in so long the latch has rusted out.

You've been locked in so long you don't even know whether you're caged from the inside or from out.

The letter knocks at the door and from inside, you say — please open the door outside. The letter probably doesn't hear your voice. And even if it does, can't figure out where the latch is.

Every despairing letter warns you, says, 'I won't come again.' Every non-answer dumps you back where you already are.

No letter ever asks you, "how did you get caged in like this in the first place?" Every letter is sealed in an envelope of hope — and the envelope is torn.

Gagan gill

Mountain man

*—translated by Aruna Sitiesh and Arlene Zide
in consultation with Nirmala Putul and PK Tiwari*

Mountain-like body
Mountain-like chest
Mountain-like complexion

Sitting brooding on the mountain
the face of the mountain man shows
the geography of the mountains.
Within him hushed sits
the history of the mountain

When there's fire on the mountain
then, from his flute springs
the pain of the mountains.

When a mountain somewhere is torn apart
His mountain-like chest shudders
He speaks to the mountain in mountain-language

Shares his joys and sorrow
Sitting on the mountain, sings mountain-songs
Writes on the mountain in mountain-script
— “*m*” is for *mountain*,
Honing the blade of his axe on the mountain
He’s sharpening up the dulled numbness of what’s lodged inside him

NIRMALA PUTUL

Mountain woman

*—translated by Aruna Sitiesh and Arlene Zide
in consultation with Nirmala Putul*

A bundle of dried wood on her head, she
comes down the hill
Mountain-woman
Will go straight to the bazaar
and selling all her wood,
will quench the fire of the entire family’s hunger.

Hanging on her back,
a child wrapped in a sheet
Mountain woman, planting paddy
planting her mountain of grief
for a blossoming crop of happiness

Breaking apart the stones of the mountain, she’s breaking
mountainous rituals and taboos.

Weaving mats on the mountains

passing her mountainously long day

she makes brooms,
weapons to fight filth

Piercing the knot of her hair with a flower

she is piercing someone's heart

She runs after the cows and goats, her feet
inscribe in the earth
hundreds of her innocent maiden songs

NIRMALA PUTUL

Save me, god, from insanity

—translated by Jeff P. Jones

Save me, God, from insanity.
Better the beggar's staff and bag,
better hunger. Better toil.
It's not reason
I prize; I'm glad
to let that go:

If my wits' reins
loosened, I would fly
into the darkest forest,
song raving,
dream rambling, delirious
without purpose or pattern.

I'd lose myself in breaking waves,
gaze possessed at an empty sky,
burst with happiness;
I'd be as free and strong
as a gale upturning the glade.
I could fell whole forests.

But here's the crux: insanity's
a curse to other people, as feared
as a plague, and away they lock you,
an idiot in shackles,
a beast through bars gaping
at its daily tormentors.

In the dark there's no bright
nightingale voice striking,
no muted forest stirring,
only the cries of companion captives,
the screeching and cursing of keepers,
the ringing of chains.

Alexander Pushkin

Snowstorm

—translated by Don Mager

In the trading district where a person's feet
Can hardly step, a fortune-teller's footsteps go
Stepping through the raging storm, a street
Where men, dead-like, sleep in the snow,—

But wait, in the trading district where a person's feet can hardly step, a fortune-teller's
Footsteps step to the window, wearing a fur
In tatters and a crazy strap and halter.

It is pitch dark, but you sense that this district
Must be within the city, in Zamosty,
Zamoskvoreshye or some other (at midnight
A delirious guest recoils backwards from me).

You, Blizzard, in the trading district where
A person's feet can hardly step, permit
Certain thugs—but trembling like leaves they're
Harmless, voiceless and as white as a sheet.

You hurl and batter the gates on every side,
And then look back. On the bridges whirlwinds rant . . .
— This is not that city, it is not midnight,
And you are lost and she is only a servant!

But servant, you lisped to me and with good reason
In the trading district where a person with two feet,
I was one of those who . . . in the street was overrun:
— This is not that city, it is not midnight.

2

Like crowds at the baptismal doorway on a Twelfth Night
Eve. Fomented by orders from the blizzard.
Blocking the windows and sealing the frames up tight,
Where a fresh-hewn childhood Christmas spruce had stood.

Along the leafless boulevard rages its conspiracy,

Cursing all mankind with its headline blasts of news.
In that prefabricated place, the city! To the city!
And the blizzard's swirls are like a torch's dingy fumes.

Unfettered fresh fallen snow piles up on arms
And shoulders with the weight of furry necessity.
Snowflakes scurry about like sparks from lanterns.
You recognize a bough! You spot a passer-by!

Tears are pools of water circled in ice that appear
In the snowstorm's music: — Kolina, we recognized your address! —
The ax with the shouting mouth: — we recognize, recognize
The sign of comfort! — but the door—crosswise crossed with a cross.

What an encampment stood there where creation's scum
Lifted their footsteps in the snowstorm—in its intensity.
And great-grandchildren are sent to their ancestors' home.
It is Twelfth Night Eve. To the city, to the city!

Boris Pasternak

To Anna Akhmatova

—translated by Don Mager

I seem adroit at picking words
As primordial as your words are.
If wrong,—it's all the same to me,

I'll go on making errors anyway.
I hear patter on wet roofs, and eclogues
That fade from boardwalks and cobblestones.
A certain city, distinct from the first line,
Thrives and sounds in every syllable.
Encircled by spring, but can't get out
Of town. Clients press with orders.
By lamplight, eyes with tears still sew
As dawn, whose back can't straighten, burns.
Inhaling the placid Lagoda in the distance,
She hurries to the water with her strength
Exhausted, and finds no picnic party.
Canals reek of stagnant shipping packing.
The hot wind surfs along the surface
Like a nutshell and flutters the eyelids
Of stars and boughs and lamps and landmarks,
While the seamstress stares of in the distance from a bridge.
Eyes can see quite sharply in different ways,
Images can in different ways be quite sharp.
But an expanse of terrible strength
Stretches each night of the white nights' gaze.

So I see the way you look, and the way you look.
It does not hint at the pillar of salt
That five years ago froze you in rhyme
With the dismay of your looking back.
But from the shoots of your first books
On which the grain of prose grew ripe,
The way you look, like an electric spark,
Compels events to pulse.

Boris Pasternak

To Mayakovsky

—translated by Don Mager

You are engrossed in ledgers,
In plans and tragic policies,
You who once sang to the brink
The Flying Dutchman with your verse.

A storm swelled at your canvas tent
And roared, intensifying,
Until you, winged still, descended
At last to walk beside me again.

And now you sloganeer about oil?
Lost in your confusion
I imagine some therapist
Might restore you your wrath.

I ask, is not your true path,
The one that passes beneath
Arches of poorhouses,
Also your rightful path?

Boris Pasternak

Untitled

—translated by Don Mager

To Love,—to leave,—with the thunder not ceasing,
Trampled by boredom not even knowing the boot's tread,
Tripping over a hedgehog, and then, for good, repaying
The cowberry's evil with a gossamer's web.

To drink from the bough while the face
Recoils from Prussian blue lashes:
“What is this echo?!”—on to the end
Moving the wrong way, imprinted with kisses.

Like marching—one plods along loaded with turnips.
At sunset to know that the stars start to shine
To scare off the sun and the oat-laden carts,
And to bring Margarete to convulsions.

To renounce speech, subscribing
To storms of tears in the eyes of Valkyrie,
And in the full glow of the sky to grow dumb,
Drowning in the ether like a mast in a forest.

Gradually, amid thorns, people rake up the torn
Events of the years, like lumps of spruce:
On the highway; in a procession to a Tavern;
In the light; they suffered cold; they ate fish.
And collapsing time begins to sing: “Hoary,
I walk, and strengthless, I fall. At last
The city's pressed down with goose-grass,
Awash in the tears of soldiers' wives.
In moonless shadows of a long threshing barn
Or in a fire with groceries and a water bottle,
Most likely, he—gray-bearded, worn,
Will die in his tracks like an animal.”
As I was singing, I died as I sang.
And dying, I reached back to grasp
At her hand, like a boomerang,
For—remembering much—forgiveness.

Boris pasternak

THE ELEPHANT SEAL

—*translated by Jacqueline Michaud*

That one over there, that's the elephant seal, but he doesn't know it. The elephant seal or the Burgundy snail, that means nothing to him, he laughs at those things, he doesn't insist on being somebody.

He sits on his belly because it feels good to sit that way: Everyone has the right to sit as he pleases.

He is very glad that the keeper gives him fish, live fish.

Every day, he eats kilos and kilos of live fish. It's annoying for the fish because after that they are dead, but each has the right to eat as he pleases.

Without affecting reluctance, he eats them very quickly, while man, when he eats a trout, throws it first into boiling water and, after having eaten it, keeps talking about it for days, for days and years:

"Ah! What a trout, my dear, remember!" etc.

The elephant seal, he simply eats. He is hale and hearty, but when he is angry, his trunk-like nose expands and that frightens everyone.

His keeper does not hurt him...One never knows what might happen... If all the animals got angry, it would be a strange story. See what I mean, my little friends, the army of elephants by land and by sea bearing down on Paris. What a mess!...

The elephant seal only knows how to eat fish, but it's something he does very well. In the past, it seems, there were elephant seals who juggled with mirrored wardrobes, but we cannot know if that's true...No one wants to lend his wardrobe anymore!

The wardrobe might fall, the mirror might break, that would be costly; man likes animals a lot, but he cares more for his furniture...

The elephant seal, if you don't bother him, is as happy as a king, much happier in fact, because he can sit on his belly when he feels like it while the king, even on the throne, is always sitting on his behind.

Jacques Prévert

PICASSO'S PROMENADE

—translated by Jacqueline Michaud

On a porcelain plate quite round and real
an apple poses
Facing it
a painter of what's real
tries vainly to paint
the apple as it is
but
the apple is not disposed
the apple
it has its say
and several tricks in its bag
the apple
see it turning
on its solid plate
on its devious self
motionless and calm
and like a Duc de Guise disguised as a lamppost
because despite him one wants to draw his likeness
the apple disguises itself as a beautiful fruit in disguise
and it is then
that the painter of reality
begins to realize
all the apple's guises are against him
and
like the unfortunate beggar
like the poor pauper who finds himself suddenly
at the mercy of who knows what beneficent
and charitable and eminent association of beneficence
and charity and eminence
the unfortunate painter of reality
finds himself suddenly the pathetic prey

of a countless crowd of associated ideas
And the turning apple evokes an apple tree
the earthly Paradise and Eve and then Adam
the watering-can the espalier Parmentier the stairway
Canada the Hesperides Normandy the Pippin and Pink Lady
the Tennis Court serpent and the Apple Juice Oath
and original sin
and the origins of art
and Switzerland with William Tell
and even Isaac Newton
several times prize-winner at the Universal Gravitation
Exposition
and the dizzied painter loses sight of his model
and falls asleep
That's when Picasso
passing through like a passe-partout
each day as if at home
sees the apple and the plate and the painter asleep
What nonsense to paint an apple
says Picasso
and Picasso eats the apple
and the apple says Thanks
and Picasso smashes the plate
and strolls away smiling
and the painter pulled from his dreams
like a tooth
finds himself alone once more before his unfinished canvas
and in the middle of his shattered plate
sit the awful seeds of reality.

Jacques Prévert

Tease

—*translated by Christopher Mulrooney*

My bags have no more weight the stickers are gleams running above a pond
That'll be quite enough for this country where well after having been scrapped runs the night
coach

All in black crystal along millstones turning curds
Castle which trembles and I swear has just placed a lightning bolt in front of me
Place frustrated of everything that might render it habitable
I see nothing but narrow tangled passages
Spiral staircases
Only to the top of the watchtower
Split the rose-cut air
Banished superstitiously the primitive square from an armful of bulrushes to spread out
The architect gone mad with what remains of free space
Seems to have dreamed a garage for a thousand round tables
To each of them is presumed supper of caviar of champagne
With me some wax busts more beautiful each than the other but amongst them
unrecognizable

has slipped a live bust
Busts for there is only one tablecloth with a changeable surface for all the tables
Lacunary enough to imprison the waist of all these women false and true
All that is or misses being under the tablecloth shies away in music
Awaited oracle of the incense-boat of a shoe
More gleaming than a fish thrown on the grass
Or than the calf of a leg that makes a bouquet of miner's lamps
Or the knee that lobs a shuttlecock into my heart
Or a mouth that tilts that tilts to pour out its perfume
Or a hand at first to the side at the very moment when it seemed not to avoid a winged
kinship

with my hand
O menisci
Beyond all these present permitted and forbidden
To elephants' backs those pillars that thin to silken threads in the grottoes
Menisci adorable curtain of tangency where life is no more than an egret drinking
And tell me just as easily I'll see you no more

André Breton

Bearer-girl without burden

—translated by Christopher Mulrooney

Like a spirit returning at regular intervals so much their deportment is the same and
belonging only to them and so much they seem borne by the same rhythm, young girls of

color pass often alone and each one is the only one of whom Baudelaire seems to have thought so much the idea he gives of her is irreplaceable:

*With her undulating and nacreous attire,
Even when she walks you'd think she was dancing...*

From what night without age and without weight this mute messenger whose ankles and neck, in defiance of all caryatids, launch rather than sustain the totemic construction which in the invisible merges—in view of what triumph?—with the dream of a monument to the laws of impregnation?

André Breton

news flash

—translated by Adam J. Sorkin and Ioana Ieronim

they set out to catch the big fish
the creature seen by the whole community

in the evening the men returned empty-handed
suddenly old and stooped over
with their political opinions changed

Petre Stoica (From The Master of the Hunt Visits)

message of encouragement

—translated by Adam J. Sorkin and Ioana Ieronim

this morning in every mailbox
they found letters with illegible lines
words that squirmed and coupled

people were astonished
the local wise men shrugged their shoulders
the old cantor accustomed to
writing hidden under blotches of wax
expounded on the plum trees' unexpected bloom

nobody understood

it was a message of encouragement
sent by a limping future by time
its glorious hair at half mast

Petre Stoica (From The Master of the Hunt Visits)

news flash

—translated by Adam J. Sorkin and Ioana Ieronim

they made progress in the season of heat
and to the drumbeat of heavy rain
not even the winter wind frightened them

they made valiant progress day and night

when they arrived where they'd been promised
their ancestors' message awaited them
they found a moth-eaten hat

Petre Stoica (From The Master of the Hunt Visits)

holy feast

—translated by Adam J. Sorkin and Ioana Ieronim

on the main street
majorettes strut throw kisses wave panties
the day's fulsome rhetoric follows proudly
astride a gelded mule

one by one the drowsy windows open wide
bewilderment floods the rooms
nobody knows that today is the feast
of illiterate harvests

Petre Stoica (From The Master of the Hunt Visits)

news flash

—*translated by Adam J. Sorkin and Ioana Ieronim*

on the edge of the ditch
they sat smoking and spinning out obscene anecdotes
sprinkled with the reek of cheap brandy

none of them noticed the collapse of the dam
none saw how the raging flood
swept before their eyes the unharvested crops
flocks of sheep iron railroad tracks

when the muddy water rose almost to their shoulders
they remembered it was time to head home

Petre Stoica (From *The Master of the Hunt Visits*)