

Ezra's Spring stride is dampened by the sudden news of L.M. Panero's death. This singular personality, who lived in a mental health facility in the Canary Islands, was perhaps Spain's greatest living poet. We had just reviewed his *Like An Eye In The Hand Of A Beggar*, in Arturo Mantecón's translation, in our winter issue.

Ezra participated in the colloquium on Véronique Tadjo, in Johannesburg, November, 2013. There researcher Chris Fotheringham, on our translation panel, said something along these lines—somewhat balancing out the political concerns we raised in our last issue:

“Any discussion of translation inevitably raises a discourse on the access that translated texts afford to different cultures. The idea of [a] translation serving as a ‘window onto another culture’ has almost become a glib platitude or cliché. These discourses are especially true outside of translation studies, where translation researchers are often more cynical about the ideological manipulations that translated texts undergo. While the notion of cultural access bears interrogation in a globalized publishing industry characterized by persistent inequalities between global South and global North, it is nonetheless true that any translation from a distant cultural context has the potential to raise awareness and consciousness about other cultures, even if this runs the risk of transforming literature into ethnography.”

(Transcript forthcoming in the acts of the 2013 International Colloquium on Véronique Tadjo)

Because Allie Batts's process was so interesting, because it reflects the famous process itself of *Rayuela*, and because of, well.. Ezra's blushing admiration for Cortázar, we have printed Allie's remarks below the prose piece.

This Spring's featured writer is Gary Racz. We bring you three poems from *While The Wolf Is Around*, his translation of Eduardo Chirinos. He has translated other Chirinos works; we urge you to get to know this Peruvian writer and to look for *While The Wolf Is Around* very soon from Diálogos Books (www.dialogosbooks.com).

Our interview “What Is Translation,” is now a permanent part of Ezra, in the Archives.

There is a review in this issue. Ez is on a bit of a Baudelaire jag lately, and this is a review of Helen Palma's translations (Pivot Press) from *Les Fleurs du Mal* (one flower appears in this issue).

Featured Writer: **Gary Racz**

G. J. Racz is associate professor of Foreign Languages and Literature at LIU Brooklyn, review editor for *Translation Review*, and past president of the American Literary Translators Association (ALTA). In addition to his critical writings on literary translation, Racz has published many translations from Spanish, mostly of poetic works and verse drama. He has contributed poetry translations to *José Lezama Lima: Selections* (University of California Press, 2005) and *The Oxford*

Book of Latin American Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology (Oxford University Press, 2009) among other collections. Racz edited *Three Comedies by Jaime Salom* (University Press of Colorado, 2004), in which his translation of the mock-Renaissance farce *Rigmaroles* appears. His translations of the Golden Age dramatists Pedro Calderón de la Barca's *Life Is a Dream* and Lope de Vega's *Fuenteovejuna* were commissioned for the *Norton Anthology of Drama* (2009). These two works were also published as stand-alone volumes, the former in the Penguin Classics series (2006) and the latter by Yale University Press (2010). Two volumes of Racz's translations of Eduardo Chirinos appeared in 2011, *Reasons for Writing Poetry* (Salt Publishing) and *Written in Missoula* (University of Montana Press), while *The Smoke of Distant Fires* appeared in 2012 (Open Letter Books) and was shortlisted for the PEN Award for Poetry Translation.

That Obscure Object of Desire

We know this phrase comes from Pierre Louÿs
or, rather, a character of his that held blondes
in low esteem. "Obscure" is a better word than
"pale." "Obscure" practically calls for desire
and goes well with "object." Though now that I
think about it, two desires in one are in play here
or maybe even a dual desire for the old-fashioned
madonna and (similarly old-fashioned) whore.
Still, what's in fashion is not the question here
but desire being defined, like language, by
its absence. What I mean is, if the object

is the meaning, what does it mean to desire?

I could put this another way and conclude that

by desiring, people end up the subject of their

desire. And its slave. Like the old bourgeois

became the perverse dancer's and the poor dancer

the perverse bourgeois's. Like the bomb that

explodes to end the movie, lighting up the screen

to the music of Wagner. Finally, I'd just like

to say I find Ángela Molina very pretty

but Carole Bouquet even more so.

Carrièra del Taur

It was on this street, Saint-Sernin, that he left

his hide. A slow-to-rise basilica commemorates

his martyrdom, the mood of a rather indifferent

autumn. The drama occurred, our guide

explains, in the middle of the third century:

a bull about to be sacrificed in a plaza

(the present-day Place Esquirol) dragged

poor Saturninus to death in its fury—in

Occitan they call him *Sernin*. The basilica

and martyr are the pride of Toulouse, a

city of stone with blue shutters and rooftops

moist with rain. No one recalls his martyrdom

anymore, not the civil servants, sleep-deprived

students or children holding the hands

of their still young and beautiful mothers.

Taur Street, with its pagan bricks laid atop

stone and reddish sky pointing toward

the West, beyond the Pyrenees, beyond

Santiago, patron saint of pilgrims and tourists.

José made it all the way out here, wafted

by the wind, by the blind bull of history,

which in Occitan they call *taur*.

Circles Come Full Circle

Over time we can only hope that circles
come full circle. A sleepless night might hold
the key—a simple oversight and everything
begins to gel: blue comes to terms with red,
childish rancor with requited love and past
disdain with the wildest of passions. Circles
smile, turning like the blades of a fan, expecting
no answer, as all the while passion claims
its poison, red does exactly as it pleases
and childish rancor rears its ugly head just
when we were happy to be reaching old age.
Ah, circles come full circle! They stamp our
foreheads, sink into our flesh and glow like
haloes on the saints in old paintings. I often

see circles that have come full circle. Their
pointless geometry troubles me, their stubborn,
vacillating roundness, too. Opening our eyes
or trying to square them is of no use. They act
on their own to our great indifference. We all hope
that circles come full circle. They smother us
every night only to rescue us the following day.

EDUARDO CHIRINOS

Traduttori/traduttrici:

Gary Racz	Abigail Hammer	Nesreen Akhtarkhavari
P.B.Nelson	Dara Barnat	
Allie Marini Batts	Helen Palma	

Soap Opera / Telenovela

~~ translated by P.B. Nelson

The space Homer left vacant,
the center that Scheherazade occupied
(or even before the invention of language, the place
where the tribes people congregated

to listen to the fire)
is now occupied by the Great Idiot Box.

The brothers forget their squabbles
and fraternize on the same sofa; lady and servant
declare class differences abolished
and now they are more than equals: accomplices.

The teenage girl abandons
the balcony that serves as her showcase
to display her availability
and even the father gives up his game
of dominoes and delays
his other shameful nocturnal goings-on.

Because here, on the screen, a nurse
confronts the frivolous wife of the doctor
and gives her a lecture
in which she speaks of professional morals
and the interference from one's private life.

Because a widow sews until she's losing her sight
in order to pay for the coming-out ball of her fifteen-year-old daughter
who is ashamed of her and her sacrifice
and passes her off as a maid.

Because a girlfriend waits for the one who left;
because a schemer hatches lies;
because a testimony is falsified;
because an unmarried woman takes a wrong step
and can't manage to hide the consequences.

But also because the debutante
runs everyone off with her bad breath.
Because the washerwoman intones a hallelujah
in praise of the powerful detergent.
Because love is guaranteed
by a deodorant
and a special brand of cigarettes
and one must make a toast to it with some drink
that makes us happy and distinct.

And one must buy, buy, buy, buy.
Because buy is synonymous with orgasm,
because buy is equal to beatitude,
because the one who buys becomes like a god.

There is no heresy in this.
Because in the conception and the creation of man,
want was used as an element.
A needy being was made out of it,
a creature that lacks
what is big and what is small.

And the theological secret, the whisper
whispered in the poet's ear,
the discussion in the philosopher's classroom
is now the publicist's domain.

As we said before there is nothing bad in this.
The natural order is being followed
and turning to its proper channel.

When the program ends
the gathering dissolves.
All go to their rooms
mumbling—barely—a “good night.”

And sleep. And have beautiful prefabricated dreams.

ROSARIO CASTELLANOS

Valium 10 / Valium 10

~~translated by P.B. Nelson

Sometimes (and don't try
to take away its importance
by saying it doesn't happen frequently)
the stick you measure by breaks,
your compass gets off
and you no longer understand anything.

The day turns into a series
of incoherent acts, of functions
you're performing out of inertia and habit.

And you live it. And you dictate the official letter
to those it concerns. And you teach your class
the same to the students enrolled as to the one auditing.
And at night you write the text that the printing press
will devour tomorrow.
And you keep watch (oh, only superficially)
over the running of the house, the perfect
coordination of multiple programs
—because your oldest boy is all decked out
to go as the beau to a girl's sweet sixteen party,
and the youngest wants to be a soccer player and the one in the middle
has a poster of Che next to his record player.

And you go over the expenses and you consider,
next to the cook, the cost
of living and the great art of combining,
out of which emerges a possible menu for the day.

And you still have the will to take off your makeup
and put on the nutritive cream and to still read
a few lines before the light goes out.

And in the dark, on the threshold of sleep,
you miss what you've lost:
the highest priced diamond, the navigational
map, the book
with the one hundred basic questions (and their corresponding
answers) for at least an elementary
dialogue with the Sphinx.

And you have the awful feeling
that an error slipped through on the crossword
that makes it unsolvable.

And you spell out the noun Chaos. And you can't
sleep if you don't take the lid off
that bottle of pills and if you don't swallow one,
in which is condensed—
and chemically pure—an ordering of the world.

ROSARIO CASTELLANOS

The Black Heralds / Los heraldos negros

~~ translated by P.B. Nelson

There are blows in life, so strong . . . I don't know!
Blows like the hatred of God; as if before them,
the backlash of everything suffered
welled up in your soul . . . I don't know!

They are few; but they are . . . They open dark furrows
in the fiercest brow and in the strongest back.
Perhaps they are the colts of barbarous Attilas;
or the black heralds that Death sends us.

They are the deep falls of the soul's Christs
of some worshipable faith that Destiny blasphemes.
Those bloody blows are the crackling
of some bread that got burnt on our oven's door.

And man . . . Poor thing . . . poor thing! He looks back, like
when on our shoulder a pat on the back calls us;
he looks back with eyes crazed, and everything he's lived
wells up, like a puddle of blame, in his eyes.

There are blows in life, so strong . . . I don't know!

CESAR VALLEJO

The Happy Corpse

~~translated by Helen Palma

Here, where the soil is fat and full of snails,
I'd like to dig a furrow, where I'd mark,
At last, eternity without travails,
As in the depths, a cold, insentient shark.

I hate last wills! The meretricious tomb!
I won't occasion tears. I'll go alive,
Call inauspicious crows to that dank room
To drain these veins; then bid the maggots thrive.

O Worms! companions without ears or eyes,
Come look! a happy corpse beside you lies;
And Epicures! in whom too, rot is bred,

Come view my ruins here; then, tell no lies,
But say if there be something left to dread
For this soulless body dead among the dead!

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

From: *Lint Season* (2011)

~~translated by Dara Barnat

Through Our Clenched Eyes

“Our life here is an illusion,”
says the bedroom window, its eye always open,
refusing to shut,
so we sleep inside it.
Through our clenched eyes
the sunlight is glaring.

Once I was your glowing light;
now I'm dimmed
in our bedroom
(that's not really ours.
Nor is the sleep.)

GILI HAIMOVICH

From: *Lint Season* (2011)

Silence

I live in a world of silence

that's broken when you come home.
And my voice, which I hadn't heard in a lifetime, actually sounds familiar.
Only younger.
Then together we're sorry
you're taking me away from here to a world of English.

Sometimes even your arrival doesn't break the silence.
We speak, but say nothing.
It gets so quiet that I translate my thoughts into English.
Preparing, planning, for you to steal me away to a noisy, Anglo-Saxon world.

GILI HAIMOVICH

From: *Reflected Like Joy* (2002)

And it's summer again.
Actions diminish.
We become a coalition
that comes out against the streets
filled with dust and boredom.
And it's summer again.
The body is embarrassed by its exposure.
Fatigue belongs to the day,
alertness to the night.
And it's summer again.
There is a threat
the high temperatures will be exploited
to invent a new bomb.
But we, for ourselves, only check
what's on the next channel.

GILI HAIMOVICH

Hopscotch (chapter 7)

I touch your mouth, with my finger...I trace the borders of your mouth, and from beneath the touch of the tip of my finger, born under the work of my hand, the outline of your mouth emerges. Your lips are half-open. I am my touch, and it is enough. I have sketched in a draft of your face, tracing and retracing your mouth, trying to capture desire with the workings of my hands. I've drawn it in all wrong. Shut your eyes. I'll erase it and start tracing over my work again, this time I'll get your face just right, and it will be the most beautiful face ever drawn, because it is your face. My fingers are free when they draw in your face—this is my chance, for once, to get it right, not seeking to understand what I am tracing, but to allow my fingertip to coincide with your lips, finding precision in your smile. I use my fingertips to draw a smile over your mouth, to trace the borders of your lips, to open them halfway with desire, and your smile knows everything that lies beneath the touch of my hand, upon this etching of your face that I create by touch and touch alone. Up close, I gaze at you; I look at you so closely that you become more than just what I have drawn. This close to you, unblinking, you have only one eye, you are my Cyclops, and your one eye looks back at me, widening and revealing so much more than just one eye, as I drawn nearer still, to close the gap of space between us until we superimpose upon one another. We are both Cyclops now, up this close to each other, you see yourself in my one eye just as I see myself in yours. Our breath is all mixed up between us—am I breathing in, or are you breathing out?—no matter which breaths are mine or yours, they are all ours now, between our two mouths. For once, we are without passion, our lips are simply lips struggling against each other, barely leaning together. There it is: silence, like an old perfume, hanging heavy in the air between our lips. These mouths used to be a playground for our tongues and teeth, where heavy breaths rolled against each other...coming and going and coming

again....and there it is, again. Silence, as my hands seek out your hair. I find it, I find your hair, yes find it to caress it slow and deep, your hair kisses my hand back, as though it had a mouth, full of flowers or fish, living things, moving things, your hair a living, moving thing under my hands. The dark perfume between us bites down with a sweet pain, drowning us, quickly, so quickly, I am frightened of the dark. Your secrets are the perfume, the old perfume, the silence, hanging heavy in the room between us, sucking out the breath from our lungs to drown us in air and give our mouths a beautiful death. On one thread of spittle from your mouth, your beautiful mouth, which I have traced and re-traced so many times with my fingers, there is the taste of ripe fruit—too ripe, too sweet, too silent. You tremble at my touch, and between us, between us is the air, we are separated by the air, I am the moon, separated from you, the ocean, oh the air, separating us, separating us, separating us, like your half-opened lips.

JULIO CORTAZAR

Process: I took pieces from the first paragraph and “hopscotched” back to them (especially in my last lines of paragraph two)—because I had such a difficult time with the original lines jumping backwards and forwards that I decided to mirror the action with the lines that I felt spoke across what was literally being said, thinking that the reflexive nature of the writing was more the point than faithfully reflecting the lines actually being written. With that in mind, I felt that the repetition back on itself line by line gave the piece a movement and lyricism, sort of the way a pantoum or a sestina poetically achieves a rhythm by repeating lines and revisiting phrasings without resorting to rhyme to make the piece flow forward. I had the idea in mind that maybe this was a painter or an artist whose muse was also a lover; there’s no mistaking the sensuality or the eroticism of the words, which I felt was so imaginatively done, because it never says anything explicit, but yet I did find myself fighting a blush once or twice. I wanted to keep that feeling present, but to make use of the skillful restraint necessary to keep the piece within the bounds of eros, not pornographos....writing about the acts of love, versus writing about sex acts. I inserted ellipses to visually indicate the ideas trailing off, as the speaker’s fingertips.... and included the use of emdashes as well, to visually indicate the idea of the speaker interrupting their own ideas and then resuming the ideas again after their flight of fancy. In my first draft of this translation, I felt the

speaker was definitely masculine, but in my re-draft, since the chapter is taken out of context of the novel as a whole, I rather liked the idea of perhaps this being a female speaker and wrote the lines accordingly.) Read independent of the rest of the novel, there's nothing that explicitly states the sex or gender of the speaker, so by changing the speaker (in my head) to feminine, I felt that the longing and the ache resonated even more than it did in my first drafts. –*Allie Marini Batts*

Poem

~~translated by Abigail Hammer

Tomorrow, before dawn, when the land whitens,
I will depart. I know you are waiting for me.
I will cross the mountains, I will cross the forest.
I can be distant from you no longer.

I will walk with my eyes fixed on my thoughts,
Seeing nothing, hearing no noise,
Alone, unknown, back hunched, hands crossed,
Sorrowful, and the day shall be like night.

I will not see the gold of the falling night
Or the distant sails descending to Harfleur
And when I arrive I will place on your tomb
A bouquet of green holly and blooming heather.

VICTOR HUGO

Tomorrow

~~translated by Abigail Hammer

Aged a hundred thousand years, I would still have the strength
To wait for you, that tomorrow that hope predicted.
Time, an old man limping on sprained ankles,
Can groan: New is the morning, new is the night.

But for too long we have lived on our guard,
We watch, we keep light and fire alight,
We speak with low voices and cock our ears
For the least noise, quickly extinguished, and lost as at play.

Now, from the depth of the night, we bear witness still
To the splendor of the day and all its gifts.
If we do not sleep, it is to ambush the dawn
That will prove that at last we live in the present.

ROBERT DESNOS

From Walk

~~translated by Nesreen Akhtarkhavari

An Invitation

He received an invitation. Unable to decline, he prepared himself, and while he was leaving, he said to his mother: "Don't worry, a cup of coffee, and I will return."
Years passed, and his cup of coffee is still not finished.

Search

She was a warm, happy woman.
Once, he left her alone and went to prison; so she died.
Then, he wondered, "How would life outside be without her?"
Years passed. The man came out of prison excited.
When he went to her home, a strange woman met him at the door and said, "Sorry, she died years ago, didn't you know?"
He pondered for a while, and then said, "I know, I know, but please, where can I find her?"

Not Her

He knew her while behind the bars of the prison, and she became his woman. When years later, he came out of prison, she met him at the gate and said to him, "I am your woman."
He did not say anything to her, but he thought to himself, "Definitely this is not her."

A Pulse

A heater, a comfortable bed, and a beautiful woman lying next to him, arranging chestnuts on the top of the heater; they peeled the roasted pieces and traded beautiful words in whisper. In the back of their minds lingered a feeling of the pleasure of warmth; while from the beyond, the howling of the wind came roaring, mixed with the rain pounding the walls and the window panes.

The sound of footsteps of heavy shoes reached him. His half-aware senses registered the arrival of a ghostly intruder. Suddenly, the heater, the comfortable bed, the beautiful woman, the roasted chestnuts, the hushed conversation, and the warmth, all vanished; and in their place appeared a cot, a frosted cell, and prison bars; and beyond them, stood ready, a guard with heavy shoes.

Life

He loved her very much, but she died...
That did not happen suddenly; she walked to it with steady steps,
Orderly...
He walked with her to her grave, and watched, sadly, the last handful of soil cast over her.
He stayed after for a long time, contemplating her eternal absence with a shattered heart;
Then, he left.
Before he gets too far, he saw a shadow of a beautiful woman walking toward the city.
He smiled at her, and followed her.

Persistence

The cold was severe, the wind gusting, and the rain heavy.
I wrapped myself with my winter clothes and heavy coat, and was ready to leave.
They said to me, "Where are you going in this severe weather?"
I said, "I want to look for her."
They were very surprised and said, "In this weather?"
I said, "I want her badly, and the troubles do not matter."

They said, "Won't you stop this? You don't even know who she is."
I said nothing, because I had already left.

Scene

I was young, playing in my mother's lap; I heard a tune coming from a distance, soft, charming, and sad in a way I cannot describe.

I saw stretches of green meadows, and beautiful horses flying into the air, slow and high; silhouettes of butterflies filled the horizon, and a very beautiful girl, extending her arms, conveying a mystifying call.

So, I left my mother's lap forever, and started dreaming of the girl and the mystifying scene. I was burning with desire for her, and did nothing but wander in the streets checking the faces of women; asking people and objects about the girl in the scene.

One day, when I grew up, I came across a very beautiful girl. I said, "It is her." And I offered her my heart, declaring, "I have been looking for you since I left my mother's lap. I crossed barriers of tedious time and misery... Isn't it you?"

But she remained silent. I held her hand, and said, "Yes. It is you." Then, I seated her across from me, and watched her dazzled. Oh my God, how I loved her!

I kept saying, "It is you, isn't it?"

But she said nothing, and then suddenly, she slipped out of my hands and started moving away.

I ran after her shouting, "Stop... wait a little... It's you, isn't it?"

She did not turn her face toward me, and did not say a thing, but continued to move further, and further, and further... until she was so far away, it became impossible to recognize her by sight or reach her by sound.

Departure

The women were lamenting and weeping over his mother as if she was never coming back.

He would not believe that.

She used to take him with her to the fields every day. He would sit in the shadow of a small trellis she would build for him. He used to watch her tall figure bend, pick up a stack of wheat, then stand up straight. The difference is, the last time she bent, she did not rise.

A Pebble

The child whose mother had gone away was walking; his foot tripped on a pebble, sending it far from another, smaller than it.

The child was saddened, and returned the larger pebble to its place; in case she might have been a mother and the other was her daughter.

Hunger

Hungry was the child whose mother had left; he was exhausted from loneliness and wandering sadly.

Then, he sat on top of a stack of wheat, and started to rub together few of the dry wheat stalks... eating some of the grains and placing the rest on a small rock next to the stack.

He said, "Maybe small hungry birds that lost their mothers will come and eat."

A Butterfly

The child, whose mother had left, slept. A beautiful butterfly approached him and said, “Come with me to a land, the likes of which you’ve never seen before; a beautiful, marvelous land that has no mother that goes and leaves her child lonely and hungry.”

The child loved the butterfly and was gladdened by what she said, except, when he got up to go, she flew away.

SAUD QUBAILAT (contemporary)

REVIEW

SELECTED POEMS FROM BAUDELAIRE’S *LES FLEURS DU MAL*. Selected and translated by Helen Palma. Pivot Press, 2014. Preface, 88 pages.

Classicist and comparatist Helen Palma has made a gorgeous (and troubling in all the right ways) book of thirty-six of Baudelaire’s *Fleurs du mal*. The modest tone of her preface makes it clear that she did not mean to improve on some of the existing translations, but at least one reviewer (J.B. Sisson) finds she “superbly surpasses” Roy Campbell, Robert Lowell, Arthur Symons and Richard Wilbur. Without adding to these comparisons, Ezra is thrilled by recent attempts at *Les Fleurs du mal*—this conundrum and lodestar of translation. Beside Ms. Palma’s, and some versions by Eric Sellin, there is the book by National Book Award winner Keith Waldrop.

Palma sets out to translate some, but not all, of the original group of poems (we keep in mind that there is another “original” edition, those allowed to remain in the book after Baudelaire’s trial in 1857). Palma also sets herself the exquisite challenge of preserving rhyme and a sense of meter. She chooses her poems on this basis: “[I]n the case of several poems I felt I could by no means better their work [that of the earlier translators], so I left those poems alone. I also deliberately avoided those poems in the book that seemed impossible to translate adequately while maintaining Baudelaire’s rhyme scheme.”

Judging (well, that’s what we do—and everyone is a harsh judge of translators) by the sure rhythm and natural rhyme in this book, Palma has succeeded wonderfully. Individual lines seem to us better than the original: When the low, leaden sky weighs like a lid (Quand le ciel bas et lourd pèse comme un couvercle). Others are so *just* that they have achieved independence from the original: The precious metal of our mind, thus kissed/That able alchemist transmutes to mist. And this one: For this soulless body dead among the dead!

The translator abjures some of the liberties that Ezra has often championed. Still, certain images are moved in their stanzas or recomposed in new ways to achieve a rhyme. This seems to us to show some restraint and great taste. The English versions have exceptional authority as poems in a new language. Of course, we are aware of their origin and their era; we can't unring the voluptuously strange knell this work sounded in 1857. But that should discourage no one. The standard English diction and syntax that Ms. Palma applies is just right to avoid jarring anachronism or a postmodern spotlight on a work that is, in part, a historical moment.

The book is elegantly printed, with a flaming view of Paris (by James Webb, also period-appropriate) on the cover and disturbingly lush flowers (Rachel Ruysch) as a frontispiece. Ezra doffs the Parisian homburg of the time to Helen Palma and Pivot Press!