

Spring 2010

**VOLUME 4 Number 1**

*Ezra* springs forward with new young talent, in Kirsten Sanft's translation of old Ez fave Huidobro (*Altazor*). These strange lines are the very anvil and essence of poetry, are they not? Welcome back, as well, to former contributors Keming Liu and Christopher Mulrooney—both master translators. Astute readers will recognize other stand-outs in this issue.

The polemic about translation continues apace, and Ezra views this as part of the new energy in the field. A tip of the chapeau to Edith Grossman for her new *Why Translation Matters* (Yale).

Don't forget the new bilingual conference in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, July 15: Diálogos ([www.dialogossanmiguel.com](http://www.dialogossanmiguel.com)). For writers and translators. And for next year (the April 1 deadline has passed): <http://academia-rossica.org/en/literature/young-translators-prize-10> -- the Academia Rossica Prize, for young translators.

Notes from North Africa: Nabile Farès's 1971 classic *A Passenger from The West* is finally available in English from University of New Orleans Press—complete with the never-before-in-English interview with James Baldwin. From the same house, coming soon, is the *Correspondence* between Khatibi and Ghita el Khayat. It is believed to be the first book of published letters between an Arab man and an Arab woman. Abdelkébir Khatibi is, of course, a giant, and this book's translators—Valérie Orlando, Safoi Babana-Hampton, and Mary Vogl—are the distinguished featured writers of this issue of *Ezra*.

Do join ALTA if you have not; their journal, *Translation Review*, is better than ever under the editorship of Rainer Schulte and Dennis Kratz.

And remember, when mud-wrestling with your colleagues, Schulte's words: No scholar explores the linguistic and aesthetic interaction of a

literary text with the same attention to detail and contextual thinking as does the translator.

**Traduttori/traduttrici:**

**Valérie Orlando**

**Jonathan Lyons**

**Safoi Babana-Hampton**

**Karline McLain**

**Mary Vogl**

**Christopher Mulrooney**

**Mark Blaeuer**

**Kirsten Sanft**

**Cui Ling**

**Roger Sedarat**

**Joe Fleck**

**Christian Ward**

**George Held**

**Robert Wooten**

**Keming Liu**

**FEATURED WORK:**

Excerpt from: *Open Correspondence : An Epistolary Dialogue*

Original title in French: *Correspondance Ouverte*, by Rita El Khayat and Abdelkébir Khatibi, (Rabat, Morocco: Marsam, 2005)

*Translated by Safoi Babana-Hampton, Valérie Orlando and Mary Vogl*

(Michigan State University, University of Maryland, Colorado State University, respectively)

## Letter 6

Rabat, February 27, 1996

Ghita, I received your letter from Paris. From across the shore, you say. You know, I completed my studies in sociology there between 1958 and 1964. From then on, Paris became my second hometown. I know certain neighborhoods completely by heart: the 14<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*, the 5<sup>th</sup>, the 6<sup>th</sup>, the 7<sup>th</sup>, and the 8<sup>th</sup>. Part of the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup>, of the 11<sup>th</sup>, in a nutshell, many pathways that I weaved into memories from the moment I happened to cross Paris on foot, in beautiful weather, particularly in the summer. I won't praise Paris: since it speaks for itself, for many centuries now. It's a unique phenomenon of its kind, as Paul Valéry[1] says in his magnificent text on Paris.

One day I promised myself to write a novel set in this city. For example, at the *Café de Flore* that you mentioned; a café that was a regular meeting place for some of my friends who were fashion models. Or, at other places now almost mythical. By walking, by wandering about in this city, we are in a position to discover it better, and to entrust it with secrets. This was Baudelaire's[2] strategy, his art of living in Paris, from day to day, inventing all the while beautiful ideas on modernity. Just like Paris, Baudelaire's work hasn't aged, it matured with this century, always living up to its own standards, to its polyphonic music.

March 4<sup>th</sup>

Ghita, I had to interrupt my letter. I was compelled by my professional work to do so. This is therefore another letter that I am sending you, the same and another.

You're wondering what *Al Mawadda* is. Or rather, you say that it's a word that weaves a carpet, or that it's one example of words that are "untranslatable". Yes. We write to each other in French, and you

know well that this language is composed of a Latin lexicon and a French syntax, properly French, initially speaking. Bilingual in a sense. I consulted *Lisan al arab*[\[3\]](#) to check the meaning of the word *Al Mawadda* and its derivatives. The idea of loving, between men, between human beings, between man and God. An attribute of God: *Wadoud*; *Al Mawadda*: the book; also, the name of a woman sang by a poet. *Wadd*: statue. With these variations, there is enough to work with, wouldn't you say?!

At the moment, I am studying contemporary Arabic art. I am deeply immersed in this work. For a long time now, I've been trying to clarify certain paradigms of thinking between the image and the sign, considering that Islamic civilization is a civilization of the sign that has the Book as its temple. To unveil the gaze, to rediscover the image, in order to enrich my writings, brings me pleasure and stimulates my thoughts.

March 11<sup>th</sup>

We say that we need time, but it's time that always puts us into perspective. I return to the question of the visible in contemporary Arabic art. I tried a new approach; I analyze this art starting from its civilizational paradigms, including artistic ones: the purity of lines and absolute geometrical perfection, the powers of decorative elements, the autonomy of colors... so many characteristics that contemporary European art discovered in its own way. Although we no longer consider the non-figurative in the same way. For example, *action-painting*[\[4\]](#) is a play between gesture and color, or simply a gestural improvisation, a little like *free-jazz*[\[5\]](#). It's very different from classical Arabic calligraphy (which is a very coded art, emphasizing precision and respect for the rules). Apart from some artists, including Brion Gysin[\[6\]](#) who lived in Tangier during the time of the *Beat Generation*[\[7\]](#) movement, European and American painters refer mainly to Japanese calligraphy.

To look at contemporary Arabic art starting from its civilizational paradigms, then to draw attention to its points of contact, its transformations alongside European art, such is my method.

Plastic arts constitute an international space. They are part of our heritage, which is itself in a state of becoming.

On the occasion of “International Women’s Day”<sup>[8]</sup>, I realized that the visibility of women in painting is immense; it’s an asset, as is the case with poetry often written or read by men, to women, or to a woman in particular. This is what saved the symbolic relationship of *aimance*.

This act of giving to women, consciously or unconsciously, should one dilapidate it? Embellish it and renounce it as being external to a woman’s being? This art belongs to no one – as a property. It is for no one. It is an act of giving for no one. It is therefore up to women creators to propose new forms of encounter, of the act of giving and of heritage, through the combined use of signs and images. I will talk to you some day about many women poets who are part of my poetic repertoire. They wrote for us, the living, and for those to come.

Still March 11th

Of course, Ghita, it would be appropriate to continue this correspondence. It is a promise. A promise of an aporia. It is too late to lose the one and the other.

In these days, spring is too hesitant to come. The air seems to dance, and the rain appears to participate in the unveiling of its own blessings. It gives immeasurably. There is a reflection here of every aquatic or oceanic metaphor that weaves the body with its poetic shelter. The art of living each day, is impossible. But it is so from time to time, through the breath, the rhythm, the splendor or the memories draped in their enormous cloak.

My greetings to you.

Abdelkébir

(footnotes for all pieces are at the end of the issue)

## **“The Lofty and the Low”**

*~translated from the Urdu by Jonathan Lyons and Karline McLain*

I was returning from Hyderabad, where I had just passed my exams, to my home in Pleasant Village. I'd left my fellow travelers behind outside the village. Father had had a horse and two men, Kallu and Ramdas, sent for me. (After all, wasn't I the lord's daughter?) The fatigue of the journey shone on my face, and my skin had reddened, an affliction from the harsh sun. I pulled a green handkerchief over my golden hair, and knotted it under my chin. But the gusting wind made my hair fall and fly, and my feet began to sway in the stirrups. With every passing second I wondered, “When will we reach home?”

As we left the dirt road and started down the path toward the fields, my eyes fixed with disbelief on the landscape.

“Oh, this field... Who could have brought such change to it?” I fell speechless.

From my silence and the look on my face, Kallu could see that I was stunned. Smiling, in a mischievous tone, he said:

“Madame, this is the field of Shambhu Nath Ji's oldest son, the one who studied agriculture in college in Hyderabad. Since returning, he's always urging the villagers, ‘Farm according to the new ways. Take part in the government to make your voices heard. Change your minds, get out of your old habits. ...’” Kallu burst into laughter.

“Shambhu Nath Ji’s son, Sunny,” I said, staring at the field.

“Yes, yes, little Sunny. Now that the Great King has grown into a big sun, he shines on the village.”

Kallu calling Sun ‘Great King’ was an old joke around here, because Shambhu Nath Ji wasn’t wealthy or from the high Brahmin caste like us; he was Harijan.[\[9\]](#) If being a Harijan in today’s society brought any honor elsewhere, that honor was completely ignored in our village. I don’t pretend to be perfect. I know that our little Pleasant Village is anything but. Who knows how many hearts have been broken, how many dreams lost? But we still call it Pleasant. People from all walks of life dwell here, the rich and the poor, the lofty and the low, but it’s not like the lofty and the affluent treat the rest like equals. Far from it!

In our village the peasants grew the grain and the lord owned the land, which meant that he named the terms. The peasants needed the lord’s land to grow the grain, and he in turn took the majority of their grain in rent each season. So while he prospered, the peasants never climbed from either the fields or their poverty. That was the way things had always been: The lord was the mill, crushing the peasants like wheat.

I will never forget the dark day that fell upon Shambhu Nath Ji’s house. Shambhu Nath had pledged his word to my own father — though in such an agreement with father, Shambhu Nath was the helpless grain of wheat beneath the millstone! He was a peasant working father’s land, and naturally he was being crushed. That year the harvest was so poor that the farmers’ lives were in danger. They could not even set aside what they usually needed to survive the year. In such a bleak season, on one such day, that harvest even snatched a little girl from Shambhu

Nath's family. I didn't witness the matter because I had already left for Hyderabad to study. But upon returning home for the holidays I learned that the calamity of famine had come to Shambhu Nath Ji's house.

Even among low caste people there are always some who have a high opinion of themselves, and such pride will never accept a helping hand. The people of the neighborhood certainly must have come and spoken with father, but even though father was the landlord, somehow he always took note when someone's nose was in the air. Father told me only this, that if Shambhu Nath had come before him and prostrated and asked father himself, father would have opened his wallet. But neither father nor Shambhu Nath would deign to have that talk. Of course, all through that battle of noses in the air Shambhu Nath's little daughter Lata was suffering the agony of starvation. On the day that Lata died, Sun lifted up a fistful of soil and declared: "I swear to Mother Earth, as my sister suffered and died for want of wheat, I will not rest until we grow so much that none need ever go hungry again!" Until then Sunny used to hang around with the other village boys and make mischief all day long, shooting slingshots and stealing fruit from others' fields. But on that day he changed completely. He was no longer a boy. He had since finished studying reading and writing with his father. But after that decision he regularly went to Hyderabad seeking opportunities for further education – not easy for a Harijan to find. Though Shambhu Nath Ji's wife had earlier pawned her jewelry to father, Sun confronted the lord, demanding its return, then sold all the valuables and left for the city.

That day passed into a stifling afternoon, passed into more days, passed even into months, then years.



And then one day, grown into a handsome young man, Sun returned from the city. He easily conversed in English, and brought with him brand new ways of tilling and sowing. But, “Once a Harijan always a Harijan,” my father always said.

Sun was intent upon freeing his father from the slavery of serfdom. He decided that he must extend Shambhu Nath Ji’s field a hundredfold. Of course, Shambhu Nath Ji was pleased to hear his son’s ambitious plans, but the real question was, *Where would he get the rupees to do it?* Sun went to Hyderabad and took a loan from a trusted friend, then returned to Pleasant Village and plunged earnestly into his work.

They say *Time waits for no man, and Times change, and we change with them.* Where yesterday dust blew, now fields bloomed and grain piled high. Life was happy and pleasant, and the air was filled with laughter and song. Sun had risen as a hero for the villagers, who were won over by his happy nature, his mild voice, and his modern ways of farming. He charmed everyone’s heart, but father remained stubbornly unchanged; moreover, witnessing seen the rise of Sun’s popularity and how all had come to accept him, father became retrenched in his mindset on high castes and low castes and their places in life. To appease his jealousy he would say: “Well, these low people are simply unlucky. Their fathers too might have become lords over the land.” But Sun himself didn’t like it when anyone called him a lord; in a friendly, easygoing way, he would reply: “I am your servant, I am your serf.”

As we rode down the road we hit a pothole, the horse stumbled, and my feet slipped out of the stirrups. Ramdas cried out, “Oh God” and bounded forward, when from the opposite field a young man came running and grabbed me, helping me up.

“Luna Madame,” he stuttered, “you... the lord...”

At these words, and seeing that he had touched me, both servants quickly went on ahead. In a rude tone, Sun said, “I know you’re the lord’s daughter.” (The poor thing couldn’t even say father’s name!) Color spread across Sun’s face. He couldn’t bring himself to say anything, and I realized that I was trembling. My sandal was twisted in the stirrup, and I had fallen into a pit. But Sun reached down, lifted me from the abyss, and slipped my foot into my sandal. In a gentle tone, he said:

“Human decency made me come to your aid after your fall, but in my haste I completely forgot that you are a lofty person here, and that I am low ...”

He turned to leave as quickly as he had come.

I watched him walking away at first, watched for a long time. When Kallu and Ramdas returned, I mounted the horse. We arrived at the far end of Sun’s field, where he stood still with his back to us, his head bowed toward what corn remained in the field. From my perch, aloft in the saddle, I said:

“Just now you said that I am of the lofty, while you are of the low. Will we ever be able to cross that gulf?”

That startled Sun. He turned toward me and said:

“Luna ...” But nothing more seemed to come. I jumped down from the horse. Sun struggled with his words. He said: “Perhaps —

perhaps never.” Then, fighting back his own tears, he said: “We call our village Pleasant. The truth is that it isn’t pleasant to anyone. Pleasant Village brings only the unpleasant to us peasants, only tears to the low. We will never be able to cross this gulf between us.”

But then I was filled with hope and confidence for change. I smiled brightly at him and said: “But Sun, have you ever reflected upon this: I am called Luna, and the moon always gets her glow from the sun.”

Sun’s face glowed with a flush of color, and his eyes gazed back at me sparkling with joy through the dying embers of his tears. Then it was my turn to blush! I bent down to the earth, lifted a spade from the ground near Sun’s feet, and chose a place next to him. With my blade I cleaved open the chest of the earth, breathing in its rich, loamy aroma.

WAJEEDA TABASSUM (India,  
1977)

## **Night**

*~ ~ translated by Mark Blaeuer*

Night on the mountain looks through widow’s eyes:  
an isolated doe that guards her fawn;  
as if they’d put the cloak of prophets on,  
the rough fields, in their dreaming, vocalize.

Three poplars, wild ghosts in their tarantelles,  
disrupt the scene... A rooster raves, midnight

clock. The moon—in solitary rite—  
enlarges things, fills all with silent spells.

Not even shadow-blemished, the blue lake  
of dreaming is the mountain's purest ache...  
The water rippling only with his breath,

a crazy shepherd wants to kiss the moon.  
In the sleepwalking orchard, a cradle-tune...  
The convent dogs are howling at Beleth.

JULIO HERRERA Y REISSIG (Uruguay, 1875-1910)

**Martial XI.71**

*~~translated by George Held*

Leda told her limp old husband she's horny  
and complains that she has got to have sex;  
with tears and sighs she moans that life's not worth it  
and that she has resolved it's better to die.  
He begs her to live, not leave her fruitful years,  
and he'll let be done what he no longer does.  
Next male doctors arrive, female doctors leave;  
her feet are raised. What a grave remedy!

MARTIAL 40-104 C.E.

**Martial I.13**

*~~translated by Robert Wooten*

## Paetus Does Not Grieve

Guiltless Arria Paetus when she was surrendering  
the sword,  
she herself who had drawn the sword from the vitals  
with her own hand,  
“If you have any faith by me,” she says, “because  
I made the wound, he does not suffer”—  
but because you will make the wound, Paetus,  
this grieves me.

## Ode

*~~translated by Robert Wooten*

You live rightly, Licinius, neither the height  
always pressing hard upon nor the deep,  
while, safe, you begin to shudder at storms—  
too much to be pursuing harsh extremes.

Whoever loves the golden mean is free,  
secure from worn out filth of the house,  
the moderate man to be envied—free  
from care in the palace.

Wiser is agitated, the huge pine  
and the high towers fall down with a heavier sound;  
and the thunder bolts strike the highest mountains.

He hopes through the bad times, he feared with the favorable,  
having prepared well the heart for other fortune.  
Storms without precedent the god of weather returns;  
the same one drives them away.

And, if now bad, it will not be so:  
at once, the god arouses the muse  
with the lyre, and Apollo does not always  
stretch the bow.

In violent times, the spirited, and especially  
the strong man, make their appearance clear;  
if you are the same, you wisely draw in the sails  
in too much favorable wind.

HORACE

**Translated from modern Chinese version of *Yan Zi Chun Qiu*  
(Yanzi's Spring and Autumn Annals), by Yan Ying (or Yan Zi) in  
Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BC).**

*~~translated by Cui Ling*

### **Also a Slacker**

With the deafening beating of battle drums, a fight between two sides began. Before long, the soldiers of one side deserted their uniforms and tried to escape, some stopped for 100 steps, some for 50. Ironically, those who ran for 50 steps laughed at those who did for 100 steps, “Oh. They are so afraid of death that they ran even faster than rabbits.” The fact is all of them were slackers, no exception.

### **To Steal One Chicken Every Month**

There was a man who stole a chicken from his neighbor every day. When he was told that what he did was not quite gentleman-like, the man made a compromise, “Well, let me change my habit gradually. Now I will steal one chicken every month instead of every day, and I will stop completely next year.”

### **Bragging**

A man from the State of *Qi* would always brag to his wife and concubine that he had enough meat and wine outside. His wife and concubine doubted this and asked him, “Who did you have dinner with?” He told them that he had his meals with those VIPs who were wealthy and powerful.

### **The Last Supper**

*~~translated by Keming Liu*

All is ready for the last supper.  
“Be seated, please.” The guest list includes  
a tiger, a goat, a cat, an elephant and  
a Venus flytrap.

“What does each care for tonight?”

inquires the chef, a butterfly. “Nothing really special is on the menu. Just something you’ve never tasted before.”

The cat pipes up, “Too many bones in human flesh!”

Ma Fei (1971- )

## **The Dreamer**

*~all translated by Joe Fleck*

As the saying goes, to live is to dream  
but some go saying the dream is to die  
When my day of awakening finally comes by  
will I awaken to death, my other dream?

The damned fate, the wearisome fever  
Of never knowing which course I should take:  
Should I stay asleep like a log forever  
or like a dead man stay awake?

The falling sands of time  
that day and hour, minute moment scatter  
one by one carve furrows in my brow

You slow stream of the sublime  
eternal peace of dreamless water,  
united, let me come and join you now

OSCAR HAHN (Chile, contemporary)



## **The Exorcist**

I'm not yet at peace with each demon  
Some of them relish the war that they rouse  
They oversee angels in underhand vows  
of under and overworld union

My body's possessed by a cretin  
who by and by crawls from the lake of Avernus  
to sell me a cell in eternity's furnace  
disguised as a garden of Eden

Before it completes its final invasion  
tonight I need an exorcism  
to expel from my sight this malignant creation

It won't drag me down the abyss  
Though the demon and I are one and the same  
I'm also the very same exorcist

OSCAR HAHN

## **The Maniac Love**

The maniac love that blows where it wants  
takes delight for good or for ill  
in playing with fire

And the wetter the logs in the bonfire get  
from the sweat that flows from our bodies  
the hotter we burn

Heedlessly to a naïve human heart  
it offers its fire above  
to take down below

And the sweet entangled virgin lovers  
licking their genital ashes  
go insane

And when flesh and earth are all in flames  
it raises its altar and kneels  
over the coals

So the maniac love will never waver  
in performing its rite though it marry  
God to the Devil

OSCAR HAHN

### **The Body Asks the Soul**

Will you remember me when I die?  
Will you recall the features of the face  
you wore in my flesh when I  
was the house of your nights and your days?

Freed from time and from space  
when is the moment you'll miss me?  
and where will you first reminisce  
of love with its venoms and honey?

Dissolved from the captivity of flesh  
and lost in the infinite gray,  
dream of me, Soul, I will be ash

Captive to a dissolute wish,  
you'll long for my cracked heart of clay  
and to be once again lowly flesh

OSCAR HAHN

### **From the Train Window**

*~~translated by Roger Sedarat*

The train crawled on the ground  
like a small silkworm.

In the distance,  
the desert, wet and green  
like a mulberry leaf  
and hills like children  
ran in a chain  
towards the horizon.

Each had planted a torch of stars  
on the sharp sticks of far trees  
that cut through the darkness.

The moon's white ball  
in the mountain's two hands  
seemed confused.

The train, panting and chugging,  
gradually reached  
the end of the desert.

NADER NADERPOUR (from the Farsi)

## **Geography**

*~~translated by Roger Sedarat*

In the sky's ceramic tallow-burning light,  
on a colourful bedspread with hundreds of patches,  
Tehran, the prostitute,  
lies drunk and naked.  
She has closed her eyes out of fear  
the red-skinned sun might sew her at dawn  
to the bed with his arrow,  
but she has opened her two fat legs  
and the Alborz mountain range  
is screwing her in the dead of the night.

NADER NADERPOUR

## **An Elegy for Desert and City**

*~~translated by Roger Sedarat*

### **Part 1**

The earth no longer remembers  
the mercy of rain in small brooks,  
and the wind has turned a red light  
on wild sour oranges  
in jungle pathways.

From a distance, disturbed hills

shout out the ruthlessness of time,  
and gold lizards in narrow holes,  
like the earth's tongue,  
speak with the wind about adversities.

Ravens, waiting for winter on dry treetops,  
chew the bit of snow on the Alborz peak  
with their eyes.  
Perplexed spiders, deprived of weaving,  
wander among locoweed shrubs.

Playful young sparrows nest  
from lacerations on ancient trees.  
Blood and pride season the bread  
in travellers' insignificant backpacks.

## 2

In the city  
doors and archways stand as tall  
as the short men.  
From behind a window,  
no woman raises her head.  
Frenetic need has removed the callus  
on the forehead of the ascetic  
formed by the prayer stone.  
The tap of fear on window panes  
disturbs children's dreams  
and occasionally the rain  
washes away sluggish blood designs  
into drain pipes.

Men have enclosed their dead hearts  
in small alcohol vials  
and girls store their pleasantness  
in powder boxes.

Friendship has no meaning  
People have forgotten each other's languages.  
A host of migrating words  
without permission to pass  
travel from borders toward printing houses  
and sob,

this mouthful, too big for the throat,  
has filled the hunger pit,  
wetting dry bread with tears.  
Childhood strength has run,  
morning to evening,  
in alleyways of mischief  
and on rooftops,  
waiting to ambush pigeons  
and blind eyes of street lamps with stones.

The sun and the moon,  
red and yellow balloons,  
fly in the vacant sky  
and days and nights,  
these counterfeit coins,  
will rub off in dirty hands.

The laughter of flowers  
no longer inspires windows,  
Singing no longer produced by vocal cords.  
Cigarettes, between fingers,  
have long replaced pens  
and addiction smoke  
has darkened both hearts and houses.  
A man, away from his wife's eye,  
longing to win the game,  
loses his ace of hearts  
and a woman who paints  
incessantly repeats her picture

in the mirror's frame.  
Placing paper flowers and artificial fruits  
in pots and containers  
she loves "Still Life."

3

In city and desert  
the devil claims absolute dominion;  
in the sun  
no sound but crickets  
cursing the wind with their stuttering.  
The absence of clear voice  
except from passers-by  
in alleyways occasionally starting an old song  
with these incomplete lines:

"You absent hope!  
Isn't it time to come?  
Though the stone of revolt in your hand  
is almost too heavy to hold,  
Perhaps it will still hit  
the distant target?"

NADER NADERPOUR

## **Little Sonnet**

*~~translated by Christian Ward*

Your face seems  
to blush at dawn:  
Do not open your eyes,  
because it is dark!

Close - if the light  
offends you-  
red lips,  
because it is sunrise!

Waste in shadow,  
light: you are still mine!  
Dark Eyes:

very good night!  
Mature lips:  
very good morning

AMADO NERVO (Mexico, 1870-1919)

## **With An Impossible**

*~~translated by Christian Ward*

I will tear myself, wife, from the impossible  
Love of melancholic prayer,  
And although the solitary soul will remain,  
Faith will flee from my laughable passion.



I will go very far from your pleasing sight  
And you will die without my tender affection,  
Like the icy nights of winter  
Which extinguishes a tearful serenade.

Then, when you have become weak  
With the burden of all my sorrows,  
Keep the withered orange blossoms  
Between the folds of the bridal gown.

RAMON LOPEZ VELARDE (Mexico, 1888-1921)

### **I saw a tree**

*~~translated by Christian Ward*

I saw a tree taller than all the others,  
full of unattainable cones;  
I saw a great church with open doors  
and all who came out were pale and strong  
and ready to die;  
I saw a woman who smiled  
as she threw a dice for happiness  
and became forlorn when she saw that it lost.

A circle was drawn around these things  
that no-one should cross.

EDITH SÖDERGRAN (1892-1923)

## **Darker**

*~~translated by Christopher Mulrooney*

Free then from everything,  
you bear a faded lot:  
Mourning Cloaks around you swing  
and on your lap and mouth—  
if the very leaves you fold  
on every single tree,  
you are not the joiner bold  
of your trance and dream.

In a breach of consciousness  
silent beyond all skill  
stands yet the world-ash  
Yggdrasil,  
stands as well Aaron's rod  
rendered dry in pieces,  
then with miracle of blood  
Israel made blessed—

To you alone it is unveiled  
empty as thin air  
forevermore unfulfilled  
promesse du bonheur,  
for you it can never be,  
every hour, sinking down,  
with the earth's own gravity  
in strange night come to drown.

GOTTFRIED BENN (1886-1956)

**Poem**

*~~translated by Christopher Mulrooney*

And what mean you by these surges,  
picture, word or calculation,  
what have you then, wherefrom these urges  
of a quiet sad emotion?

It streams to you from out the void,  
from single things, from potpourri,  
thence take you ashes, with fire alloyed,  
you strew and quell and ponder these.

You know, you cannot all things grasp,  
set it round, the greeny fence  
of this and that, you stay relaxed,  
yet spellbound in unconfidence.

So day and night you're on the make,  
Sundays too you're chiseling  
and banging silver into shape,  
then you leave it—it is: Being.

GOTTFRIED BENN

**Preface to *Altazor***

*~~translated by Kirsten Sanft*

I was born at thirty-three years old, the day of the death of Christ; I was born on the equinox, under the hydrangeas and airplanes of heat.

I had the profound gaze of a young pigeon, of a tunnel and of a sentimental automobile. I threw acrobatic sighs.

My father was blind and his hands were more admirable than the night.

I love the night, hat of all the days.

The night, the night of the day, from one day to the following day.

My mother spoke like the dawn and like the kites that are going to fall. She had hair the color of the flag and eyes full of far off ships.

One afternoon I grabbed my parachute and said: "Between a star and two swallows." I have here the death that draws near as the earth to a falling balloon.

My mother embroidered desert tears on the first rainbows.

And now my parachute falls from dream to dream through the spaces of death.

The first day I found an unknown bird that said to me: "If I were a dromedary I would not thirst. What time is it?" He drank the drops of dew from my hair, tossed me three and a half glances and took wing saying: "Good-bye" with his superb handkerchief.

Nearing two that day, I found a lovely airplane, full of scales and shells. I looked for a corner of the sky where to shelter from the rain.

Far away, all of the boats anchored, in the ink of the dawn. Suddenly, they began to loosen themselves, one by one, dragging like pavilion shards of an unanswerable dawn.

Together with the leaving of the last ones, the dawn disappeared behind immoderately inflated waves.

Then I heard the Creator speak, without name, a simple hole in space, beautiful, like a bellybutton.

"I made a great noise and this noise formed the ocean and the waves of the ocean.

"This noise will forever be tied to the waves of the sea and the waves of the sea will be forever tied to it, like stamps on postcards.

“Then I wove a long string of luminous rays to sew the days, one after the other; the days have a legitimate and restored east, but indisputable.

“Then I traced the geography of the earth and the lines of my hand.

“Then I drank a little cognac (because of the hydrography)

“Then I created the mouth and the lips of the mouth, to trap ambiguous smiles and the teeth of the mouth, to guard the rudeness that comes to the mouth.

“I created the tongue of the mouth so that men changed her role, making it learn to speak.... to her, her, the beautiful swimmer, diverted forever from her aquatic and purely caressing role.

My parachute began to fall dizzily. Such is the force of attraction of death and the open tomb.

Believe it, the grave is more powerful than the eyes of the beloved. The open grave with all its magnets. And this I tell you, you to whom smiling makes you think of the beginning of the world.

My parachute tangles in a lifeless star following its orbit conscientiously, as if ignoring the uselessness of its efforts.

And making the most of this well-earned rest, I began to fill the boxes of my chart with deep thoughts.

“The true poems are fires. Poetry is propagated everywhere, their consummations illuminating with shudders of pleasure or agony.

“One ought to write in a language other than their mother tongue.

“The four cardinal directions are three: the south and the north.

“A poem is a thing that will be.

“A poem is a thing that never is, but should be.

“A poem is a thing that never has been, that never could be.

“Flee from the sublime exterior, if you don't want to die crushed by the wind.

“If I did not commit a little craziness during the year, I would go crazy.”

I take my parachute, and from the edge of my star in motion I throw to the atmosphere my last sigh.

I roll unendingly above the rocks of dreams, I roll between the clouds of death.

I find the Virgin seated on a rose, and she says to me:

“Look at my hands, they are transparent like light bulbs. Do you see the filaments where the blood of my light runs intact?”

“Look at my halo. It has some nicks, proving my ancientness.

“I am the Virgin, the Virgin without the stain of humanity, the only one who is not halfway, and I am the captain of the other eleven thousand that were truly too restored.

“I speak a tongue that fills hearts according to the law of the communicating clouds.

“I always say goodbye, and I stay.

“Love me, my son, I adore your poetry and I will teach you aerial feats.

“I need so much tenderness, kiss my hair, I have washed it this morning in the clouds of dawn and now I want to fall asleep on a cushion of intermittent mist.

“My glances are a wire on the horizon where the swallows can rest.

“Love me.”

I knelt in the circular space and the Virgin rose and came to sit on my parachute.

I fell asleep and recited my most beautiful poems.

The flames of my poetry dried the Virgin's hair, she thanked me and moved away, seated on her white rose.

Have me here, alone, like a little orphan of an anonymous shipwreck.

Ah, how beautiful..., how beautiful.

I see the mountains, the rivers, the jungles, the sea, the boats, the flowers and the shells.

I see the night and the day and the axis where they meet.

Ah, ah, I am Altazor<sup>[10]</sup>, the great poet, with a horse neither eating canary grass, nor its throat hot with clarity of the moon, but with my little parachute like a sunshade over the planets.

With each drop of sweat on my forehead I birthed stars, I leave to you the task of baptizing them like bottles of wine.

I see it all, my mind is forged in the tongues of prophets.

The mountain is a sigh of God, ascending in a swollen thermometer to touch the feet of the beloved.

He who all have seen, that knows all secrets without being Walt Whitman, but I have never had a white beard like the lovely nurses and frozen streams.

He who hears in the night the hammers of the counterfeiter, they are only active astronomers.

He who drinks from the hot glass of knowledge after the flood obeying the doves and that knows the route of fatigue, the boiling star that leaves the boats.

He who knows the warehouses of memories and the beautiful forgotten seasons.

He, the shepherd of airplanes, the conductor of missing nights and of the west wind trained toward the only poles.

His complaint is like a blinking net of asteroids without witness.

The day lifts its heart and he lowers his eyelids to make the night of agricultural repose.

He washes his hands under the gaze of God, and combs his hair like the light and the harvest of these thin spikes of satisfied rain.

The cries move away like a herd on the low hills when the stars sleep after a night of continuous work.

The beautiful hunter before the celestial water trough for the heartless birds.

Be as sad as gazelles before the infinite and the meteors, such as the desert without a mirage.

Until the arrival of a mouth swollen with kisses for the vintage of the exile.

Be sad, since she awaits you in a corner of this passing year.

Perhaps she will be at the end of your next song and she will be beautiful like a waterfall and rich like the equator.

Be sad, sadder than the rose, the lovely cage of our gaze and the inexperienced bees.

Life is a journey in a parachute and not what you want to believe.

We are falling, falling from our zenith to our nadir and we leave the air stained with blood that poisons those that come tomorrow to breathe it.

Inside yourself, outside yourself, you will fall from the zenith to the nadir because this is your destiny, your miserable destiny. And from the higher you fall, the higher you will ricochet, the longer you will endure in the memory of the stone.

We have leaped from the belly of our mother or the edge of a star and we continue falling.

Ah my parachute, the only perfumed rose of the atmosphere, the rose of death, fallen among the asteroids of death.

Have you heard? This is the sinister noise of the closed breast.

Open the door of your soul and leave to breathe outside. With a breath you can open the door that a hurricane has closed.

Man, I see there your parachute, as marvelous as vertigo.

Poet, there is your parachute, marvelous as the magnet of the abyss.

Magician, there is your parachute one word from you converts it into a marvelous parasoaring like the bolt of lightning that may want to blind the creator.

What are you waiting for?

But I have there the secret of the Sinister that forgot to smile.

And the parachute awaits tied to the door like the horse of the eternal flight.

VICENTE HUIDOBRO (Chile)

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[1] A well-known French poet, essayist and thinker, who was associated with modernist and avant-garde French poets (1871-1945).

[2] Another well-known French poet and precursor of modernist French poetry (1821-1867). His essay *Painter of Modern Life* (1864) is a classic text in which he celebrates himself as a wandering poet, or flâneur, who seeks the poetic and the beautiful in urban and city life.

[3] A major Arabic language dictionary.

[4] English in the original.

[5] English in the original.

[6] A renown painter, poet and artist who, along with Paul Bowles and other, turned Tangier into a vibrant meeting site for the Beat Generation artists and writers (1916-1986).

[7] English in the original.

[8] On March 8<sup>th</sup> of every year.

[9] Harijan is a term that was coined by Mahatma Gandhi for the outcaste “untouchables” of India. Literally meaning “children of God,” Gandhi used this term in a consciousness-raising effort to bring dignity to the untouchables. Today many untouchables prefer the term “Dalit,” meaning “the oppressed.”

[10] A word created by Huidobro combining two Spanish words: *alta*, high and *azor*, a powerful hawk (*Accipiter gentilis* or the Northern Goshawk) known to attack people or animals approaching its nest. Attila the Hun wore an image of the Goshawk on his helmet.