

VOLUME 9 number 2

Ezra, this time of year, knocks at your door, heart-aflutter, with a sprig of lily-of-the-valley: “Je porte bonheur!” One hopes that sabbaticals, travel, and summer translating projects are all springing forth as well.

A reminder that The Ezra Fund exists, and nothing stops you from contributing to it. Please contact our editors. As worthy as gifts to the ALTA endowment, gifts to Ezra are specifically aimed at helping solve various costs for translators (such as permissions costs, advertisements of new books). It will not be easy to raise these funds—your help is needed! Donations directly aid translators and do not support the magazine.

Anatole France (getting worked up in defense of Zola’s crude material and language), opined “One can faithfully translate a person’s thoughts and sensations only in his native tongue.” A rush to the barricades, serendipitous for us translators. For M. France could just as well have used the verb “portray.” But, revealingly, he said “translate.” Thus supporting what we have always said (cf. the interview “What Is Translation?” Ezra Archive): the writer in his or her *original version* is a translator. He or she translates experiences, knowledge of human nature, and the thoughts and sensations of his or her characters just to get them on the page in the original version. Yet another rejoinder to be tossed, in our French way, “in the nose” of those who think that the original version is a monolith and that there is no translating literature.

The Don Bogen feature this month is spectacular, because Julio Mesanza has not been translated before. AND because the book will be out soon, from Diálogos Books – *Europa: Selected Poems of Julio Martínez Mesanza*.

You may have noticed Ezra’s hunger for Austrian work over the last two years. This issue welcomes back Chris Mulrooney, with versions of Georg Trakl. And we finally have more prose—from Turkey, and from our favorite Russian monster.

There are two reviews in this issue. One is by Lucina Schell and you *must* step nimbly over to her translation site: www.readingintranslation.com

There is also a brief review of a chapbook. The poet will be new to many—the translator will not: Jill Levine.

FEATURED WRITER:

Don Bogen is the author of four books of poetry, most recently *An Algebra* (Chicago, 2009). Awards for his work include fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Camargo Foundation and a Witter Bynner Poetry Translator Residency at the Santa Fe Arts Institute. His poems and translations have appeared in *The New Republic*, *Ploughshares*, *FIELD*, *Boston Review*, and other journals. A former Fulbright Senior Lecturer in Spain, he is currently McMicken Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Cincinnati.

Born in Madrid in 1955, **Julio Martínez Mesanza** is among the most prominent of a generation of Spanish poets who came of age after the death of Franco. His work includes four editions of a single, expanding collection called *Europa* from 1983 to 1990; two other books of poetry, *Las trincheras* (*The Trenches*) in 1996 and *Entre el muro y el foso* (*Between the Wall and the Ditch*) in 2007; and a volume of selected poems in 2007.

Super Flumina Babylonis

As we sit along the banks of the rivers
of Babylon, under the long shadow
of its towers, we think about the homeland
that waits for us, lamenting all the years
we've had to spend in exile and slavery.
We come back from working in the fields
our masters own; we have been wandering
the dirty skin of the world beneath the flags
of foreign lands, filling up the carts
of overseers, and we have scars

that remind us of our painful struggles,
and the wine brings sadness to our soul,
wine that erases things, the bitter wine
of promiscuity; and our soul's become
the same as what we saw, our soul is one
with the world and it will die in it.

They think we're singing, but all that we can do
is prophesy. They ask us for songs,
but all that we can do under the long
shadow of these proud towers is relate
how kings throw grace away, how our souls
are falling into nothingness like kings
who rule over the mindless and inept.

Retreat

Gray horses walk along the snowy path,
and an old man stops and watches the riders
pass by, and hears the sound of armaments.
An endless line of soldiers passes by,
and he thinks back to another land and time.

The old man's heart grows darker as he counts
shadow after shadow, thinking back
to another war, another group of men.

Lily in the Water

Lily in the water, beyond reach,
light beyond reach and water flowing off.
I will take your eyes into the darkness,
the terrifying beauty of this world,
the guilty beauty of this evening,
and the light beyond reach in your eyes.
Because the evening is dark and final,
a beauty with no afterwards, a well
in which a child is going to drown, a well
with a lily in its depths beyond reach.
Everything is fading, all that's left
are a well in the middle of the evening,
a lily beyond reach, and, in my eyes,
the light I will destroy when I leave.

******Traduttori/traduttrici:**

Tom Conlon/Franco Ferrante

Akhil Katyal

Michael Gray

R.E. Parrish

Matthew Lundin

Francis Blessington

Christopher Mulrooney

The infinite

~~translated by Tom Conlon Franco Ferranti

Always dear to me this lonely hill
and this hedgerow hiding from my gaze
so much of furthest horizons.
But as I sit and stare, boundless
spaces I fancy beyond it, and superhuman
silences and deepest peace, so that
my heart beats almost up to terror's
brink. And as I hear the wind
go rustling through the leaves, I contrast
its voice to that infinite
silence. And I'm minded of eternity
and the past seasons and the present
living one and the sound of it. So that

my mind is drowning deep in this immensity:
and sweet it is to sink into this sea.

GIACOMO LEOPARDI (1798-1837)

Wooden House Inscription

~~translated by Michael Gray

This building is not tall, yet windows let in light.
The island is not far from land, like healing mists along Kunlun.
Alas, this wooden house delays my journey.
The four walls are painted green,
the surrounding grass is clean.
I hear the loud clamor of the village
and the watchman on his night vigil.
We may exercise outside, Brother Square Hole.
The children disturb my ears,
but no signs of people reading aloud
as the airmen survey from the west.
The writer says, "What happiness do we have?"

ANONYMOUS (CHINA)

Kure Mama

~~translated by Matthew Lundin

Kure Mama

Around here, if a mother is expecting, we say she is “with two souls.” We also like to say that she is “burdened.”

“The missus has been burdened...”

“Hiçe has taken on two souls, did they tell you? Have you heard?”

“Hatun is also with child, bravo...”

Around here, if you’re with child, whether you call it being pregnant, “burdened” or “with two souls”, it may mean that you’re in for a lot of pain, quite a bit of work, and above all remedies and tonics. But you won’t ever hear of the need for a doctor. If a wife, well, any woman for that matter, finds a spot to lie down with their man then voila!.. Sure enough nine months and some odd days later the burdened’s burden will be set free in the World. If you aren’t troubled by the thought of your wife going a year or two without having a balloon for a belly, you better not go around in public calling her your wife! Especially if you’re not ready for this to happen eight to ten times. You might as well consider yourself infertile.

Around here, if you wanted to know if a mother was expecting; how many days, or how many months she had been burdened, you always went and asked Kure Mama. We couldn’t do without her. Who else could have delivered all those little rascals? Who else would have pulled those little bastards from the bellies of their mothers? Who would have cut them free with a pair of dull rusty scissors, and just as casually announced:

“Hiçe, it’s a girl again.”

“Hatun, damn your eyes, it’s a girl for the fourth time...”

“My dear lady, bless you, this time it’s a son with the head of a watermelon...”

Do you about “Birnoti”? I mean do you know what that word means? Well, Birnoti and Kure Mama are one in the same. When we - and by we I mean those born in Diyarbakir during a certain time (you could call it Kure Mama’s generation) - when we first met her, that’s when we also came to learn about Birnoti.

Kure Mama would carefully take out the tiny metal box hidden in the ornate Kurdish belt she had wrapped around her elbow, point with her right hand and tap gravely on the top of the box, then carefully screw open its lid. As if carrying out some ancient ritual, she used to take a pinch of brown dust from inside the box, look around at all of the eyes watching her, then with happiness and pride she would turn up her nose, and breathe it in with first her right, then her left nostril. She would then inhale the granules caught in between her yellowed nose hair with a deep breath, inhaling them deep down into her lungs. Kure Mama could not function without her snuff. Snuff, what we knew as Birnoti, was inseparable from the thought of Kure Mama. We couldn’t imagine Kure Mama without it. It was as absurd as thinking of a Christian without their baptism. Perhaps that’s what made Diyarbakir’s Father Arsen, in the presence of the Holy Gospel and the holy cross and in the presence of God himself, once remark:

“Yes, as soon as Kure Mama was born she was baptized with snuff - Birnoti - and thus was her Christianity confirmed.”

Back when we were young, in the happy years of childhood when we went around without any pants, all of the kids Kure Mama had helped deliver flocked to her side,

grasping and kissing her hand; never failing to show respect. The words of our parents stuck in our ears like earrings.

“Whenever you see Kure Mama, go kiss her hand and press it to your forehead.”

“If it weren’t for Kure Mama you would have died before you were born...”

“I never want to hear you say you’ve forgotten about Kure Mama, and all the work she put into you.”

Kure Mama was a legend in every sense. And we were part of this legend. Her existence was the reason for ours; she had lived so that we could be born. While raising our hands in prayer on Sunday, sometimes we didn’t know whether we owed more to God in heaven, whose face we had never seen, or to Mama Kure. Our little army of pantsless children went after this woman who spent her time snorting snuff to her heart’s content, running after her, clinging on and calling out in chorus:

“Kure Mama, Kure Mama, just give us a little Birnoti.”

Kure Mama refused, brushing us off by saying “No,” “no way,” “not a chance.” But we continued begging her. “Kure Mama, Kure Mama, just give us a tiny bit, a pinch, what’ll happen?”

“Children, I didn’t pull you out from between your mothers’ legs just to have misfortune fall down on your heads...”

Sometimes we caught her on her good side and all our pleading would pay off. As she outstretched her little shiny box she said:

“Go ahead you little bastards, but just a pinch.”

Those of us in Kure Mama’s entourage drew close to her stingily extended Birnoti box with pleasure and reverence. It was as if we were gathering in around a piece of the dear Prophet Jesus’s holy cross; as if we were touching the Holy Gospel that Father Arsen read from every Sunday. We would pinch off a little bit of snuff in our tiny fingers, and just like we saw Kure Mama do it, breathe it into our noses. And then, just as you would predict, our eyes became bloodshot, filled with tears, and we would proceed to sneeze. Seeing us in this state, Kure Mama would grin between fits of laughter and tell us, “My little bastards...who are you to be snorting snuff, who are you all? You’ll use up all my sweet Birnoti.” Whenever those of us “bastards” saw Kure Mama inhale snuff without sneezing, we thought that she must possess some superhuman power.

We showed her our greatest respect whenever she came in under our straw adobe roofs. We ushered her into our meager homes, held up by just a few pillars, and motioned her over to the most respectable seat on the couch.

“Kure Mama, stretch your legs out here, get comfortable.”

“Kure Mama, take that pillow and rest your back against it, get nice and comfortable.”

In every Armenian home that Kure Mama entered she could always find one or more of the “bastards” that she had helped deliver. This was the true source of our respect. We showed as much respect to her as we did to Father Arsen, perhaps even a little more. One’s power came from the Gospel, the other’s from their own hands... Father Arsen had upon his stage the holy cross, the Bible, blessed bread, wine, Mother Mary, Jesus, and God. Kure Mama’s performance only involved one or two old assistants, a saucepan of unsanctified hot water, three pieces of cloth, and her blunt scissors. Our mothers always remembered her dramatic performances with phrases like:

“Kure Mama came right on time, she saved me.”

“When I was pregnant with Serop, if Kura Mama hadn’t been around, I would have died.”

“My life is owed to Father Arsen’s prayers, but first and foremost to Kure Mama’s fingers.”

Kure Mama loved playing cards. You could always find a pack of playing cards smooshed in between her worn out drooping breasts. As soon as she entered a house, our mothers gathered around and a game would start. Kure Mama beat them every time. While they were playing, no one could go check on food in the oven, stoke the fire, stir the soup, or tend to any other chore. Nobody was allowed to get up until the game was over. Anyone who wanted to leave would be reprimanded:

“Now then, let’s play one more hand.”

“Now then, pass out those cards.”

“Now then, take that King of Diamonds too.”

She always found a way to stretch out games with her “now then’s”. By indulging her, pots overflowed, and food stuck and burned in pans.

When our fathers returned home in the evening, they sat down at the head of the table and were faced with tasteless burnt food served on copper trays. They would point at the pot and ask:

“What is this Hıçe, the food is burnt, was Kure Mama here?”

Most of the time our mothers could stem our fathers’ anger by bringing it up themselves:

“The Ayran soup is a little burnt, what could I do, we had Kure Mama over.”

Kure Mama was often times their saving grace as she could be used as an excuse to placate our fathers. She was our mothers’ hope, consolation, and saving angel.

She was the only one in town with dyed red hair. She colored it with henna. Well, actually she would show up to our houses with her henna in hand.

“Hıçe, honey, get up and help me color this faded hair with henna.”

“Hatun, it’s your turn today to henna my hair.”

Kure Mama could enter any house uninvited if she found the door open. And woe to any closed door! She would add her own shrill voice to the clacking sound of the hanging door mallet, causing quite a stir.

“Ladies, laaaaaadies! Where are you, where have you gone off to? It’s already past noon. You aren’t still burrowed in the lice ridden bosoms of your husbands, are you?”

Doors immediately opened to the sounds of her voice and the door knocker. As soon as she was ushered in, the henna ceremony began. After coloring it, she would bathe her long hair, comb it with a wide wooden comb, braid it up on top of her head, and then finally the card game could begin.

There was a role for our fathers, too, in Kure Mama’s performance. They all competed for Kure Mama’s favor. They did it for the sake of their future investments. Was it not Kure Mama who reaped what they had sown in the wombs of our mothers every year?

“Kure Mama, this Birnoti smells wonderful, have some!”

“Kure Mama, look, I smuggled you this snuff all the way from Aleppo, and the box is an antique, here you go!”

“Please Kure Mama! This deck of playing cards is for you, all the way from Syria...”

She could remember who these gifts came from, when, and which children had been delivered because of them. Laughing like a hyena, she would recall just which gifts had yielded girls and which had yielded boys. Pleased with this, she stuck her snuff box into the belt stretched snugly around her full stomach. Then she put her playing cards in between her shriveled wrinkled breasts...

Kure Mama lived on her own, on one of Diyarbakir’s dark narrow alleys. Her house was a religious endowment from the Surp Giragos Armenian Church. It would be

most accurate to call her home a refuge. There weren't very many details known about her. In a way she was inexplicable. We did know that she had come from somewhere near Dıbne.

Around here, somewhere near Diyarbakir, she had lost a son in a landslide. That was about all that was known...but that didn't matter. The important thing was this: every Armenian house was considered hers. And not only were our homes hers, she was also the owner of our mother's wombs. She always said to them:

"Hatun, I see you with two souls next year, okay? What's what this laziness dear?"

"Meyro, what's going on honey? Aren't you cuddling up to your husband's hairy goat chest at night? You've gotten quite lazy these last two years."

"Senem, look, this fall by the grape festival, I'm seeing you pregnant. Don't be coquettish like a new bride, dear. Show yourself off. Then say to your husband, Dikro, take me in your arms and to bed; then give him a nice embrace and you'll be sure to give birth to a boy..."

*

By now all the children Kure Mama gave birth to have become parents themselves. And now at the bottom of Diyarbakir's walls there is a small mound of earth inside an Armenian graveyard...

There, underneath that mound of earth she is in an endless sleep along with her deck of playing cards and her snuff box...

Those who go to the graveyard know exactly where she's buried. Above this mound of earth there is no sign, no name, no cross, not even a gravestone. Visitors will always point out to each other:

"That is Kure Mama's grave..."

"Our Kure Mama lies here. May God pardon her sins..."

"Come, let's read a prayer over Kure Mama's grave..."

People who go to the grave, read there, say prayers, and burn frankincense...I hear from them that the bluish smoke given off from the burning of frankincense over her grave will sometimes form the shape of a pair of diamonds, or resemble the king of spades...

And it always smells like Birnoti...

Mıgırdiç Margosyan (Turkey)

Five Epigrams from *The Palatine Greek Anthology*

~~~translated by Francis Blessington

**Far**

Paulus (6<sup>th</sup> cent. AD)

Even if you set your foot  
beyond Abyssinia,  
pure Love flies me there  
on powerful wings.  
Even if you arrive  
where Dawn rises  
with your color,  
my foot shall follow,  
measureless stade  
upon measureless stade. (5.301, 1-4)

### **Fright**

Meleager (c. 100 BC)

She has been rushed off!  
Who's so savage as to raise a spear?  
Who would battle with Love himself?  
Light quick the torches.  
A step—Heliodora's!  
Go back into my breast, heart. (12. 147)

### **The Cup**

Agathias (6<sup>th</sup> cent. AD)

I am no wine lover.

When you wish to get me drunk,

first taste and hand me the cup.

If it brushes your lips, it's not easy to be sober,

nor flee the sweet wine-bearer.

The cup carries your kiss,

announces the joy it took.

### **Good-Bye**

Paulus (6th cent. AD)

“Farewell,” I was going to say

but hold back, rein it in

and again stay close. I shrink

from your going like a trip to Hell,

a bitter night with the Dead.

You are daylight to me, but that is silent.

You bring talk sweeter than the Sirens,

where all my soul's hopes are suspended. (5.241)

## Looking

Paulus (6<sup>th</sup> cent. AD)

Eyes, eyes, bold drinkers of pure beauty,  
how long will you take in Love's nectar neat?  
Let's run far as we can to where I shall offer  
wineless libations to soothing Aphrodite.  
If somewhere there I am possessed by this madness,  
drip icy tears, suffering always your pain justly.  
Because of you, we came to such fiery work. (5.226)

## Excerpt from "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man"

*~~translated by R.E. Parrish*

And then I was buried in the earth. They all left and I was alone, perfectly alone. I didn't move. When I had been alive and had pondered what it would be like to be buried in a grave, I had always imagined it to be very damp and cold. And now I did feel it – the coldness, especially in the tips of my toes, but I felt nothing else.

I lay unmoving, and strangely, didn't expect anything. I accepted without protest that the dead have nothing to await. But it was damp. I don't know how much time passed – an hour, a few days, or week. But suddenly a drop of water fell from the ceiling of my grave onto my closed left eyelid. After a minute, a second drop fell, and after another minute, a third. A deep resentment began to burn in my heart, and I felt a jolt of physical pain. "It's my wound," I realized, "where I was shot..." And water kept dripping onto my face, minute after minute, right onto my closed

eye. And I suddenly cried out, not with my voice, but with my entire being, to the master of all that was happening to me:

“Whoever you might be, if you do exist, if there is something more rational and fair than what is happening to me right now, please make it so! If you are punishing me for my senseless suicide with the disgrace and absurdity of my current existence, then know this – there will never be any kind of grief worse than the contempt which I will silently bear for myself, even through a million years of martyrdom!”

I made my plea and fell quiet. For nearly a minute there was a deep silence, broken only by one drop falling, but I knew at that moment with inviolable certainty that everything was about to change. And then! My grave was opened – I don’t know how – but it was the work of some dark and unknown being, and suddenly I found that we were in outer space.

I could see again. It was the deep of night, and never before had there been such darkness! We flew through space, already far from earth. I didn’t ask where I was being taken, my pride made me wait. I assured myself that I was not afraid, and thrilled myself with this assurance. I don’t know how long we were flying... I can’t even imagine. It was like a dream, where you can jump arbitrarily through space and time with no regard to rules or reason, and you can linger unnaturally on the parts that your heart yearns for.

I remember suddenly noticing a star.

“Is that Sirius?” I asked, forgetting that I’d resolved not to ask questions.

“No, this is the very star that you saw between those clouds back on earth,” answered the being that was carrying me.

I could tell that it had something resembling a human face. Strangely, I wasn’t fond of this being, and in fact, I felt a profound aversion to it.

I had expected complete nothingness after death, which is why I had shot myself, and yet now, here I was, in the hands of a creature that wasn’t human, of course, but that was still living and sentient.

*“And so, there is life beyond the grave!”* I thought with the strange syrupy giddiness of dreams. But deep in my heart, I remained unswayed. *“And if I must exist again,”* I thought, *“And if I must live again under the control of some greater power, this time I will not be conquered and humiliated.”*

“You know that I fear you, and you despise me for it,” I blurted out to my companion, unable to hold back the outburst that doubled as a confession, and immediately felt embarrassment prick at my heart.

He didn’t answer me, but I felt that he didn’t actually despise me, and wasn’t laughing at me, and didn’t even pity me, and that my journey had a goal which was unknown and mysterious and pertained only to me. Fear grew in my heart. Mutely and painfully, my silent companion transmitted something to me and it flowed through my entire being.

We flew through richly dark and unknown space. I had long ago stopped seeing familiar constellations. I knew that there were stars in some heavenly spaces whose light took thousands or even millions of years to reach the earth. Maybe we had already flown through such spaces. I waited with an anguish that gnawed my heart. And suddenly I felt electrified with a feeling of recognition: I could see our sun! But I knew that this could not really be our sun, the sun that gave life to our earth, because we were an infinite distance from our actual sun, but I knew for some reason that this was a perfectly identical star to our sun – an exact double.

A sweet, beckoning feeling coursed through my bones: a double of the light of that sun that had given me life on earth now resounded in my heart and resurrected my spirit, and I felt life, my old life, like I hadn’t since I’d been in the grave.

“But if this sun is exactly the same as our sun,” I cried, “then where is the earth?”

And my companion indicated a star, sparkling in the dark with an emerald shine. We flew straight towards it.

FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

**All my hopes** (ghazal)

*~~translated by Akhil Katyal*

All my hopes are overthrown  
no cure will work today,  
see as I said, this peevish heart  
has finally had its say.

When young, I was maddened so,  
when old, I shut my eyes,  
as one who has a sleepless night  
when morning comes, he lies.

They wrongly accuse us of freedom  
we who are helpless all,  
it is they who do as they like  
but on us their blame would fall.

Even in my wildest days,  
listen, I had some piety still,  
after Him I searched all my life  
though at each stop I had my fill.

To this black-and-white of the world  
I have only this to say -  
I wish you knew how I lived through the night



and how I dusked the day.

Why ask now of Mir's faith,  
why look for his belief - don't you know,  
now he wears the mark, sits in temples,  
he gave up Islam long ago.

MIR TAQI MIR (1723-1810)

**Rondel**

*~~translated by Christopher Mulrooney*

Gone now is the gold of day,  
Evening colors brown and blue:  
Dead the shepherd's gentle flute,  
Evening colors brown and blue;  
Gone now is the gold of day.

GEORG TRAKL

**Occidental song**

*~~translated by Christopher Mulrooney*

O wingbeat of the nightly soul:

Shepherds were we erst in twilight forests gone

And the red beast followed us, the green flower and the stammering fount

Humbly. O, the cricket's age-old note,

Blood blooming on the offering-stone

And the lonely bird's cry over the pond's green hush.

O, you crusades and red-hot torments

Of the flesh, falling of purple fruits

In the evening garden, where ages since the pious disciples went,

Warriors now, waking up from wounds and starry dreams.

O, the soft cornflower-bunch of night.

O, you ages of hush and golden autumns,

When we peaceable monks the purple cluster pressed;

And round about shone hill and wood.

O, you hunts and castles; evening rest,

When in his chamber man pondered justice,

In mute prayer strove for the living godhead.

O the bitter hour of shipwreck,  
When we behold in darkling waters a face of stone.  
But beaming raise their silvery eyelids lovers:  
*One* body. Incense streams from rosy cushions  
And the sweet song of the arisen.

GEORG TRAKL

## REVIEWS:

WHILE THE WOLF IS AROUND (*Mientras el lobo está*), Eduardo Chirinos. Translated G. J. Racz. Diálogos Books, 2014. 117 pp.

“Without a wolf, there is no game,” Eduardo Chirinos comments in an interview with his translator G. J. Racz, (10). The emblematic title of his tight yet expansive collection of poetry refers to a children’s singing game in which a threatening wolf waits on the outside of the circle to attack. In the poet’s own country, Peru, the song goes, “Let’s play in the forest/while the wolf is around,” but Chirinos acknowledges that in other versions of the game, such as the Spanish and Greek iterations, it is instead sung “while the wolf is *not* around.” Though logical, this insertion ruins the meter of the verse. Throughout the volume, in his deceptively mundane poems, Chirinos plays with the line between logic and poetry, sense and nonsense, present and past, fusing the everyday with the philosophical.

Like the game, many of Chirinos’ poems follow a circular logic as they consider belonging and alienation, those inside and outside the circle. In the title poem, the moving lines of the circle formed by people equate to similarly mutable lines in the outside world: “An avenue runs beside

the white wall/separating the world of the lunatics from/the world of the sane. In front of this wall/another wall (white as well) also stands,/separating the orphans of the world from/those who were raised by a mom and dad” (51). Chirinos imagines his dead father into the game: “I see a boy now standing behind a column. He/doesn’t dare move closer and just clenches his/fists, watching the other children skip in a circle/while the wolf is around” (51). The wolf is death, always lurking at the periphery of our most vital moments. Several layers of separation are at work here: Chirinos’ dead father has returned as a child to signify death; yet, the other children delight in their defiance of danger. It is its very proximity that calls for their song, the same that results in the creation of poetry, as Chirinos states in the interview.

And then there is Chirinos, who we encounter in this volume as a mature poet, closer to the end of his life than the beginning, and with the measured control over his instrument to show for it. In another poem where Chirinos considers his long marriage, he observes, “Soon we will/be the same age as our parents. Soon we/will turn into our own children” (55). Chirinos benefits from a close friendship with his translator, who is equally confident and poised in his English renderings. Colloquial language is not always easy to translate, and Racz is not afraid to make moves like “I blew the morning” for “he perdido la mañana,” which is especially important given that Chirinos speaks English fluently (22-23).

In one of many poems where Chirinos declares his wide literary affinities, he writes in conversation with Seamus Heaney’s poem “Montana”: “Seamus remembered/the sun shining on the prairie, on the blade of/the table knife that would point, once it stopped/spinning, towards a bright path, some far-off spot/where a man could ramble on the outskirts of the law” (35). In this deceptively simple poem, which ends in a beautiful evocation of the Montana landscape where Chirinos has made his home for the past twenty years, there are again many layers. Peruvian Chirinos, in Montana, remembers a poem by Irish poet Heaney in which he recalls, when he was five-years-old, knowing a man who had once worked in Montana. Memory wraps us in circles, too. In Heaney’s poem, the knife stops pointed toward him and opens a path between the two—whether separating or linking the boy and man is not clear. In both poems, the knife—like the wolf—threatens, but as a spinning instrument of death, it forms the circle, rather than menacing from beyond the ring. In Chirinos’ revision, the knife points away from the circle, toward the ‘outskirts of the law,’ the very territory where the wolf lurks. The laws of life and death can’t be skirted.

“Over time we can only hope that circles/come full circle” Chirinos writes in a later poem (87). Though this cycle is to be hoped for, to be encircled is not always desirable:

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...

...They smother us

every night only to rescue us the following day. (87)

This poem provides a wonderful moment for translation, for the same concept is conveyed in Spanish as “círculos cerrados” (closed circles). The English equivalent seems more open-ended, and enacts the circular logic to which it refers. Chirinos’ poems enter softly like lambs with all the wonder of the intimate and ordinary, but linger on the edges of the mind like wolves.

~~*Lucina Schell*

TIDES (Marea baja). Poetry by Pedro Xavier Solís Cuadra. Translated by Suzanne Jill Levine. Mindmade Books, 2015. 32 pp

This poetry is powerful and new, and thanks are due to Mindmade Books ([www.mindmadebooks.com](http://www.mindmadebooks.com)) and Jill Levine for bringing this work forward. The chapbook was titled *Marea baja* in Spanish, that is, Low Tide. Levine’s collaboration, interpretation and invention are visible in the title and throughout the book of mainly one-page poems.

The publisher speaks of this as “a work in dialogue,” partly because Solís Cuadra references—invokes, rather—so many other writers: Proust, Virginia Woolf, Kay Redfield Jamison, Poe, Baudelaire, Plath, F. Scott Fitzgerald along with citations of Lowell and Dickinson (fly-leaf). This might seem overdone at first, until the reader understands the humble convocation the book aims for. And there’s something beguiling about this Nicaraguan (in his first book appearance in English) calling out to such an *anglo-sajón* coterie.

There is much that is prosaic here; verses like these abound:

Edgar Poe had his ups and downs: periods

When all intellectual activity was a torture. (23)

And this will be nigh unforgiveable to some readers. In the end, though, it seems part of an unmannered and unpretentious style that makes the book a pleasant read—beautifully setting up the sharp perceptions and original images. (“Don’t go down there. Let your mind sail on with its deep fretwork.” 17)

There is an oil-smooth beauty not just in the images, but in the transitions. This poetry is unusual for its occasional power, but also for the quiet, coasting moments between images. See how this line gathers force: “There are days when her mind rises like a cage sprung open.” (13) Now, the particular strength of this translation is that the experienced translator takes liberties to preserve just this Solís Cuadra gift—this grace and power in transition. Note how these lines are rearranged:

indescifrable de ser uno. Recuerdo  
a Proust, al verte al haz del quinqué,  
pálida en la sumisa rutina en que  
te reconoces y te desconoces.

of being one would flow within. Seeing you  
in the oil lamp’s beam of light, pale in the submissive  
routine in which you know and do not know yourself,  
I remember Proust. (21)

There are several points in this text where Levine makes an audacious move yet preserves—rather than distorting—the *net* effect of the poet’s image and its syntactic matrix.

The Monotype Ehrhardt font is gorgeous, as is the paper stock.

~~*Peter Thompson*









