

*Ezra* is fatally drawn to disquisitions like this one, from Gilles Deleuze's *Proust and Signs*:

Beyond designated objects, beyond intelligible and formulated truths, but also beyond subjective chains of association and resurrections by resemblance or contiguity, are the essences which are alogical or supralogical. They transcend the states of subjectivity no less than the properties of the object. It is the essence which constitutes the sign insofar as it is irreducible to the object emitting it; it is the essence which constitutes the meaning insofar as it is irreducible to the subject apprehending it. It is the essence which is the last word of the apprenticeship or the final revelation.  
*(Richard Howard's translation)*

Deleuze was simply speaking about Proustian essence. Must Ezra see a translation issue in everything? Perhaps so, but in defense of mania, Ezra insists that these "essences" are like the heart of metaphor, the betweenness of poetic image and metaphoric space, and the ineffable in all great writing. Thus, they are like the zone that a translation must work in, while mediating the leanings of both source and target languages. These essences waft up, Ezra hopes, from the pages of every issue of the magazine, and have the refined tang of Benjamin's "pure language." A recent enunciation of this zone, this language-attempt, is Merwin's (in a lengthy interview in *The Writer's Chronicle*): "And language of course is deeply mysterious. Nobody can ever know this, but the origin of language and the origin of poetry I think must be the same. Because they come from the urge to say something that there is no way of saying. There will never be a way. But [and here, oh translator, Merwin is cueing up your skill] there are things that approach the way of saying it." (*February, 2015*)

These are the partial answers (deftly batted back and forth by Gary Racz in an article in a recent *Translation Review*, "At Sixes and Sevens With Lezama Lima") which we must tirelessly put forth to editors and cocktail skeptics who ask "CAN poetry be translated?"

The non-skeptics at ALTA had the usual wonderful time this past November, in Milwaukee. At one panel a "shame the editor" hash-tag was mentioned—whose purpose would be to make sure editors print the names of translators. At another, Lucas Klein inadvertently endorsed Ezra's house style (we print only the translation, which stands alone) when he said we should consider "what these translations are *for*, not just where they're coming *from*." The booksellers' display was unusually rich this year.

We've gone and violated house style by printing original Scots language (2 poems translated by Kent Leatham) because all our readers can get the gist of it.

Claudia Serea reminds us of National Translation Month, an initiative of Serea and Loren Kleinman. Here's your website: <http://nationaltranslationmonth.com>

We're thrilled to have theater in this issue—Gustavo Aybar's excerpt from a Glafira Rocha play. Scroll on down!

Our feature, Pablo Medina, is remarkable among other things for Grove Press's new translation (with Mark Statman) of Lorca's *Poet in New York*.

There are two reviews in this issue.

## FEATURED WRITER:

**Pablo Medina** is the author of fourteen books of poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and translation. Most recently, he collaborated with photographer Carlos Ordoñez on a collection of poetry and photography titled *Calle Habana* (PhotoStroud, 2013). In 2008 he translated García Lorca's *Poet in New York* with Mark Statman. Winner of various awards, among them grants from the Rockefeller and Oscar B. Cintas foundations, the state arts councils of New Jersey and Pennsylvania, the NEA, the Lila-Wallace Reader's Digest Fund, and others, Medina was a Guggenheim Fellow in poetry in 2012. Currently, he is professor in the Department of Writing, Literature and Publishing and director the Graduate Writing Program at Emerson College in Boston.

Virgilio Piñera was born in Cárdenas, Cuba, in 1912 and died in Havana in 1979, marginalized by the Castro regime. He lived in Argentina for twelve years and collaborated in *Sur*, the magazine that Borges directed. As well as Borges, he befriended Adolfo Bioy Casares and the Polish writer Witold Gombrowicz. Piñera published his first novel, *La carne de René*, in Buenos Aires. Besides poetry, he wrote many plays, among them *Electra Garrigó*, *En esa zona helada*, *Falsa alarma*, and *Dos viejos pánicos*. He also wrote short fiction, collected in *Cuentos fríos*, and, posthumously, in *Cuentos completos*. Currently, he is considered one of the great Cuban writers of the 1950s, alongside José Lezama Lima and others, who collaborated in the magazine *Orígene*.

## Elegy and Such

I invite the word  
walking its barren bark among the dogs.  
Everything is sad.  
If it crowns forehead and breasts with shiny leaves  
a cold smile will blossom on the moon.  
Everything is sad.  
Later the sad dogs will eat the leaves  
and bark out words with glistening sounds.  
Everything is sad.  
A dog invites the hyacinths by the river.

Everything is sad.  
With looney words, with doggerel arrows,  
with tiny toothy leaves  
the hyacinths wound the mute damsels.  
Everything is sad.  
The black grass grows with a quiet hum,  
but shiny edges caress the rhythm.  
Everything is sad.  
Behind the words the serpents laugh,  
deaf earth allows no sound.  
Everything is sad.

A heavenly bird barks in the sky  
to scare death away.  
The bird discovers it with the flowers of night  
and seduces it with words of a dog  
and buries it with a cupful of earth.  
Everything is sad.  
I invite the earthbound word  
that cuts through life and mirrors  
and the divided echo of its image.  
Everything is sad.  
A play of words and barks.  
Everything is sad.  
A javelin flies through fast winds  
in virile variations.  
Half a cup of earth silenced the music.  
Everything is sad.  
Then the earth drank itself.  
Everything is sad.  
And when the time for death arrives  
place me before a mirror where I may see myself.  
Everything is sad.

1941

### **I See It**

Better death raise  
the crown of your life  
to weigh it,  
and on the forehead where the moon hides its reflection  
death will overcome its own severity with splendor.

You are naked,  
as if the hourless days slid down your body,  
as if a fleeting animal raced  
between rest and memory.

Day now begins its ascent  
and you end up in the sudden beak of inertia.  
You call me as if the impregnable shrouds  
of destruction dropped on my ear one by one.

And I too label you destroyed,  
I reach your outskirts,  
I set fire to you with the suns of my condolence,  
I place you in a box of laments,  
your fear reaches me and I wreck the air  
with the vibrations of its impediment.  
I see you in the air like a dead star  
shattering into cold moons,  
I see you with your shoes and your perfection.

*1945*

### **Island**

Although I'm about to be reborn,  
I won't proclaim it to the four winds  
or feel like I am one of the chosen:  
it happened by mere chance,  
and I accept it because it's not in me  
to deny myself, and, besides, it would be a discourtesy  
a man of distinction would never commit.  
I've been told that tomorrow  
at six minutes after seven in the afternoon,  
I will turn into an island,  
as much an island as islands tend to be.  
My legs will become earth and sea,  
and gradually, just like a Chopin andante,  
trees will grow out of my arms,  
roses in my eyes, and sand in my chest.  
In my mouth the words will die  
so that the wind can blow at will.  
Afterwards, lying down as islands tend to do,  
I will stare at the horizon,  
I will see the sun and moon rise,  
and far then from the noise,

I will say softly:  
so it was true?

VIRGILIO PIÑERA 1979

*Traduttori/traduttrici:*

Kent Leatham  
Gustavo Aybar  
William Ruleman

W.C. Bamberger  
Glenn Halak

**Untitled** (from *Rockslide*)

*~~translated by Glenn Halak*

In the fiery displays of breakage and rupture  
clarity is suppressed.  
In the chiaroscuro of the rain of talk  
they turn off the faucets  
menace with the power of  
a pencil-sharpened knee and fresh-cut nails.  
First  
LICK YOURSELF INTO SHAPE  
and then almost inaudibly  
as animal songs might be sung  
lean over the parapet  
of a sarcophagus wall  
and there it is the first arrow in the mucus membrane of a nose  
and the relatives of the massacre.

ANNE DUDEN

**Untitled** (from *Rockslide*)

*~~translated by Glenn Halak*

Across the racing turf flattened earth  
of the place  
a wind or a storm

that blows a desert away  
without touching anything.  
Seraphim strike from out of inky black yew trees  
the command to stop personified.  
Landscape vectors  
and chasms of going forward  
where everyone is asleep  
the ground staff  
providing essential services blind  
and with braced limbs.

ANNE DUDEN

***Scots from Book 6 of Eneados, in which the ghost of Anchises explains the nature of the Anima Mundi to Aeneas***

Fra the begynnyng al thyng les and mare,  
The fyry regioun, the earth and the are,  
The plane flowand boundis of the se,  
The lichtnyt monys lamp and lemis hye,  
The hevinnys sternes, and brycht sonnys ball,  
Ane sprete thare is within, sustenis all:  
In every part the hie wysdome devyne  
Diffoundit movys thys warldis hale ingyne,  
And by his power mydlit is over all  
The mekill body clepit universall.  
Fra this infusioun and thir elementis sere,  
Baith kynd of man and beist cummys but were,  
All levand foulis fleing in the are,  
All fischis and the monsteris doith repare  
Under the slekit se of marbil hew.  
Ane hate fyry power, warme and dew,  
Hevinly begynnyng and original  
Bene in thay sedis quhilkis we saulis cal...

**The above excerpt**

~~translated by Kent Leatham

From the beginning, each thing in its place—

The fires below, the earth, icy space,  
The vast, windswept plains of the sea,  
The moon's white flame in the lantern of sky,  
The stars like salt, and the sun's hot yolk—  
In each dwells a spirit, a drop from the lake  
Of divine sustenance, grease for the gears  
Of this world's great engine, spread over the years  
And leagues, commingled, infused into each  
Living thing—man, woman, child, and beast,  
And birds that swim like fish through the air,  
And all the sea-serpents and monsters that share  
The uncarved depths below the salt:  
From the cores of their cells, each one is called  
To life by these dewdrops, this unguent, this oil,  
Quickened within by the weight of a soul.

GAVIN DOUGLAS (1474-1522)

### ***Scots***

### **Sonnet**

Fra banc to banc, fra wod to wod, I rin  
Ourhailit with my feble fantasie,  
Lyc til a leif that fallis from a trie  
Or til a reid ourblawin with the wind.  
Twa gods gyds me: the ane of tham is blind,  
Ye, and a bairn brocht up in vanitie;  
The nixt a wyf ingenrit of the se,  
And lichter nor a dauphin with hir fin.

Unhappie is the man for evirmaire  
That teils the sand and sawis in the aire;  
Bot twyse unhappier is he, I lairn,  
That feidis in his hairt a mad desyre,  
And follows on a woman throw the fyre,  
Led be a blind and teichit be a bairn.

### **Sonnet**

*~~translated by Kent Leatham*

From bank to bank, from wood to wood, I run,  
Overcome by my feeble fantasy,  
Like a leaf tumbling from a tree  
Or a reed blown over in the wind.  
Two gods guide me: one is blind,  
A mere child, reared by vanity;  
The other, a beauty born of the sea  
And weightless as a dancing dolphin's fin.

Miserable is the man for evermore  
Who ploughs the sand and sows into the air;  
But twice as wretched is he, I've learned,  
Who feeds in his heart a mad desire,  
And follows a woman through the fire:  
There'll be no gods to save him when he's burned.

MARK ALEXANDER BOYD (1563-1601)

### **The Artist's Ordination**

*~~translated by William Ruleman*

We wander silent, timid, steeped in dread  
And what our hearts hold dear, we shyly hide.  
We utter thoughts we do not feel inside  
And praise with rapture things completely dead.

The soul is buried in a hidden bed.  
Decay shines pallid on the night path's side.  
And art should stir us when we're weary-eyed  
Till dull pain's rush leaves us inspirited.

When I was young my eyes fell on the verse  
Of Wolfram's *Parzival* and so the curse  
Of the long-lost Grail comes crashing down:

"What have you not yet asked, ill-fated clown?"  
In mute and piteous pain comes liberation:  
That's the artist's one true ordination!



HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL (Austria, contemporary of Rilke)

## **The Prophet**

*~~translated by William Ruleman*

He has received me inside a great hall whose gloom  
Fills me with mystery, a feeling of dread.  
Sweet scents swirl sickeningly around my head;  
Strange birds and colorful serpents loom.  
The gate falls shut, the sound of life goes dead,  
The soul's breath's checked by a hollow fear of doom;  
A magic potion holds each sense ensnared in this room,  
And all flees helplessly, with ceaseless tread.

But he is not as he ever was before; for now  
His eyes shine bewitched, and strange are his hair and brow.  
From his words, inconspicuous and soft,  
There issues forth a strong, enticing will.  
He makes the stifling empty air spin round, aloft;  
Without even touching, he can kill.

HUGO VON HOFFMANNSTHAL

## **Blessed Hour**

*~~translated by William Ruleman*

Here where I lie, sans house or tent  
Appears the world's peak, the firmament!

The ways of people lie all around me,  
Up to the mountains, down to the sea.

They bear the goods that please them so;  
Each holds my life, though none would know.

From rushes, grass, they bring, on wings,  
Fruits I'd long lacked, life's dearest things.

These figs I know; now I sense the spot:

Still living, those fruits I'd long forgot!

And for me it was life, the thing snatched from my hand—  
It was kept in the sea, and kept in the land!

HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL

One Section from

*The Hashish Films of Toll Collector Henri Rousseau*

*and Tatyana Joukof shuffles the Cards*

[*Die Haschischfilms der Zoellner Henri Rousseau*

*Und Tatyana Joukof mischt die Karten*]

~~translated by W.C. Bamberger

**Sometimes**

(*For my son*)

1.

Around 9 o'clock. An asylum in which, with no shame, I lose Verlaine. A red letter day.  
And Cendrars, in a drunken state, recounts tales of Russian monks, of women under  
bridges, of farmer Gaborwiegh. I just lie far below and look at the noses of Baudelaire and  
Villon. Some believe that we met out of love.

2.

My shirt is sweaty from someone I never had. Now I have many women who kiss flowers. And there was only one who truly loved me. Six o'clock in the morning.

3.

Once I saw on the beach at the ocean many Indian-yellow women dance naked and painted a 4 o'clock in the afternoon on Chinese gold silk. I reread old beautiful books.

4.

Transylvania. 12 o'clock at night. I often cannot sleep because a picture by Michael Wohlgemuth hangs over my bed. The small figure of Christ, with a very large skull, plays the flute and a small girl with little chubby cheeks looks raptly at the peasant type wrapped in king's clothing. In my parents' castle ballroom there was a large, heavy cupboard ornately carved with Parsifal, with the legend of Melusine, and there were knights with comical Flemish satyr-faces, killing the sharp-nosed devil of the time.

And if I sometimes coaxed my pale mother while weeping into her lap, she would then open the cupboard and the key had so seldom been ground, that she trembled and looked thoughtfully at father, who played silly games before the big fireplace with a heavy sword.

And then my mother would read very, very sad songs to me from droll, beautifully bound books.

But this seldom happened.

5.

Once upon a time at twilight. 7 clock. Autumn. Father said in disgust to the Jewess: Our children have not ennobled you; you are no longer allowed to open the cabinet of my ancestors.

I cried with the beautiful, 30-year-old Jewess.

And my many siblings whispered among themselves, Just let father die, then that pack of Jews will fly away by itself.

6.

My studio looks like a coffin lid. I lie on the sofa among oriental colors. I dream in the sun and in the intermittent rain. It is 11 o'clock in the morning in Paris.

7.

It's said that when I'm drunk, a cross wafts across my brow. My eyes always smile sadly and I daub phantom dwarves into my pictures, a turpentine injection. 1 clock in the afternoon.

8.

During a hashish high I once, at 4 o'clock in the morning, painted a dead piano, and with a dirty smile sent all the children that I found beautiful, and all the children that had toys, and all the children that I used sinfully in my dreams, to the devil for a feast.

9.

My friend Cendrars, the only living poet, created the *Trans-Siberian* laughing cynically in horror, and I was there then and, noticing nothing, buried myself. I was preoccupied with the stupid memory of when we both quarreled with rag pickers at Sous. 11 o'clock in the morning.

10.

I wanted to break the curse of my ancestors. I have painted myself afloat in the sun over the heads of the rag pickers. In the chapel of Sanct Julien de Pauvre 3 o'clock in the afternoon is struck.

11.

And in the gloomy silence that often tarried with me, between 11 and 12, driven by desires, I decorated the mattress with paintings. Cendrars had just finished the *Trans-Siberian*. Someone, maybe me, listened at the door. It was late. All my friends had spurned me. Cendrars lost the face of Mirabeau then. I sold off the Marquis de Sade to a Jewish secondhand bookshop in the Rue Mouffard. And from Cendrars nostalgia seeps out as if from a small wooden vat, while he, with a Polish Jewess, tells his child, a future professor, stories about me and about Monticelli.

12.

And once, when we celebrated a grape harvest with farmers and Rousseau wanted to paint us all, because we had not seen each other, we finally all lost one another. There were wooden vats, literary historians with long beards, women with big bellies, orderly streets.

And the asylum that I painted was gaped at in the Louvre by tall, thin Englishwomen.

EMIL SZITTYA

From the play **Symphony of Characters In Flight**

*~~translated by Gustavo Aybar*

SECOND MOVEMENT  
*ANDANTE*

*Roberta, laying on her bed, listens to Mozart's Symphony Number 35, she gets up and starts to write, on the stage a screen opens up in which the spectator can read what she writes.*

ROBERTA (*Writes*): "While she writes on her computer part of the play she can not finish, she feels that everyone reads what she types, an immense fear invades her body and she thinks: 'one more minute of loneliness and I will lose myself forever'. The only thing saving her is listening to that symphony in which she perfectly distinguishes each of the instruments. A chill runs through her body, she knows he will arrive at that moment, the author that created her had mentioned him to her as part of a secret, so she hurried before he arrived but now she wasn't able to do anything, shortly she'll hear the keys inside the lock and she'll have to write a dialogue."

*(The sound of a key is heard, César enters, carrying the bicycle that had previously appeared.)*

ROBERTA: What is that?

CÉSAR: Can't guess? A bicycle, yeah, a bicycle.

ROBERTA: I know that, I was asking for what.

CÉSAR: It's for you, to go out and distract yourself.

ROBERTA: I don't need it, but thanks.

CÉSAR: You've spent a lot of time cooped up.

ROBERTA: (*To the public*) How does it occur to this author to pair me up with such a brute? I need to finish the play, I still can't devise the perfect punishment for Amelia.

CÉSAR: Are you nearing the end?

ROBERTA: That's the most difficult, one can't leave a story unfinished, at least it's what a dramatic situation begs for: beginning, development, climax and an ending, but I can't with that last part.

CÉSAR: It's very easy, everyone ends up happy and that's it, as simple and practical as that.

ROBERTA: What an excellent idea. I'm going to jot it down so I don't forget it. (*She writes and it's seen on the screen.*) He's an idiot.

CÉSAR: I know you didn't write my grand idea.

ROBERTA: Just leave, I need to write.

CÉSAR: Sorry, but this is my house too.

ROBERTA: I need my space, I can't write with so many people watching.

CÉSAR: I won't bother you, I'll start reading.

ROBERTA: I'm the writer, why don't you have a real career? You could be a photographer, architect, I don't know, but you don't represent anything. No one knows what you do.

CÉSAR: Who cares about that? I'm here, complicating your existence, we don't need anything else; without me you'll be lost.

ROBERTA: (*Coming closer to César*) Let's make a deal, you let me write and I'll intervene so that we have sex in another scene.

CÉSAR: Why do you treat me like that?

ROBERTA: It's too difficult to explain; I never know what to tell you, the only thing I feel is that I'm with you for some reason. I don't care about sex because I want to be with you, I don't care if you don't do anything because I need to be with you, the rest doesn't matter to me. There's probably someone who thinks what is a guy like you doing with someone like me, well, I don't care what they think, I'm here, because I want to be here. I like that you want a happy ending, I like that you never agree with me, but during this moment of creation, I can't be with you. I'm selfish, I'm sorry.

CÉSAR: I get it, I'm leaving then, I hope you like the bicycle.

*Roberta sits at the computer and writes.*

"I'm cruel when I don't want to be, I appear at the wrong time, but that's how I am, probably some day I'll be able to change."

*Blackout.*

*Just as in the previous scene, Roberta hears the same symphony, lying on her bed. The music we hear opaques due to the sound of a flute. Blanca enters playing, puts her flute close to Roberta and leaves. Roberta takes the flute and plays for a moment, she leaves the flute hanging around her neck, she gets up and starts to write. On the stage a screen opens up in which the spectator can read what she writes.*

ROBERTA: (*Writes*): The main character has become a prude. Now inseparable from it, she'll write on the computer.

"She sits before the device, writes, knows that everyone watches her and she gets nervous, but her fingers flow as if they knew perfectly well the path the story would take. A woman of pure virtue is willing to lose herself to know by way of another woman what she never before wanted to know or what she had already forgotten by divine justice. She knows that everything will be different soon, she'll hear the steps and she'll commit herself to the abyss, to that abyss which she herself has formed."

*Cesar's footsteps could be heard, arriving, bringing the bicycle.*

ROBERTA: It's for me?

CÉSAR: Of course it's for you; it's for you to get out of this place.

ROBERTA: This contraption will make me lose my virginity. Why do they make the seats in the shape of a phallus? César, I can't leave this place; I'm scared I'll end up suffocated and demolished by all of them (*points to the public*). The tortured souls will possess me and I'll have to succumb.

CÉSAR: Yes, yes, of course, but remember that I'll be with you.

ROBERTA: I've always been alone, I like to walk aimlessly knowing no one awaits, the Lord sent me to save the oppressed and to cure the sins of the unrepentant such as you.

CÉSAR: What's the matter with you now? Stop talking like that and just come.

*Roberta begins to play the flute. César kisses her.*

ROBERTA: Please don't hurt me.

CÉSAR: It'll be slow, as if it were your first time.

ROBERTA: I don't want to, please. (*Acquiesces to the kiss.*)

CÉSAR: (*Kisses her.*)

ROBERTA: (*She surrenders completely to the kiss.*)

*César becomes frustrated and starts to undress Roberta, he seems crazed. Roberta hopes to slip away but can't. César tears her clothing and possesses her; then, he falls asleep. Roberta remains limp on the floor. Plays her flute, gets up and goes toward the computer, she starts to write and what she writes can be seen on the screen.*

ROBERTA: (*Writes*): "Could it be that sex is a constant violation?"

*Blanca enters dragging herself; Roberta places the flute around her neck.*

*Blackout.*

*The what-if place is more colorful, even in its walls some graffiti appears. María reads her book of instructions attentively. Amelia is lying on the floor with her ball at one side.*

AMELIA: Do you have a long time with that burden?

MARÍA: What?

AMELIA: How much time do you have as a guide?

MARÍA: Three times the age that I appear.

AMELIA: Isn't it horrible carrying that weight?

MARÍA: No, the opposite, you realize that discipline improves individuals.

AMELIA: Improves?

MARÍA: Even though it sounds vague, little one, but order gives light to the universe.

AMELIA: All order can be broken.

MARÍA: You'll know soon enough what will happen by breaking that exact order.

AMELIA: Did Roberta finally tell you what the punishment is? I suppose you still don't know it. But, I'm not scared.



MARÍA: You will be soon, because you'll be the spectator of the universe's history, nothing of breaking rules, nothing of living through others, you'll be and you won't be, you'll face temptation but you won't be able to go after it. I'll tell you more bluntly, you'll be an ordinary spectator, like those that came to see you.

AMELIA: (*Scared*) I didn't believe Roberta had so much imagination, that's the worse that could happen to me. What will I do sitting there? And if the play seems boring to me? I'll have to wait for fear of leaving the audience and have everyone thinking I'm rude. I'll be falling asleep and a snore would make me wake up. The woman beside me would kiss her boyfriend. My cell phone would probably ring and I'll have to leave and miss the most important part of the story, to then say that they play was a waste. Don't allow it, María, I don't want to be a spectator. I like this character.

MARÍA: Your body will soon cease to belong to you.

AMELIA: It's a joke, right?

MARÍA: Do I look like a practical joker?

*Blanca arrives, brings her flute dangling from her neck. She sits beside Maria.*

BLANCA: I fell in love again with the rapist. There's no doubt you have to suffer to deserve, as our God says. Plus, true suffering is what takes us to save the sins of others. I went down to see my siblings and then felt sadness to see them devoted to worldly pleasures. I'm not like them or at least that's what I thought.

MARÍA: Everything fine, Blanca?

AMELIA: It wasn't easy, right?

BLANCA: Nothing is easy.

MARÍA: So then it didn't work for you this time either; only you guys can keep committing the same mistakes. I'm sorry, but the time has arrived to apply the law.

BLANCA: Everything's gone, everything's lost, but I'll rise again, Lord, to follow your path.

AMELIA: Don't talk like that, it scares me.

*María starts to flip through her book, she gets up and goes away reading.*

AMELIA: Where are you going?

MARÍA: I don't know yet, but I'll leave you so that you can start getting ready. Enjoy your final moments. (*Exits.*)

BLANCA: I wanted to remember something and I was sure that this time I would be triumphant. I had already done it a long time ago when they gave me a character resembling yours. I attempted to rectify it all, but I couldn't then either, I fell on the enemy's claws.

AMELIA: I can't believe that you broke a rule.

BLANCA: Even if you don't believe it, I wasn't born a nun. I was young, I had my share of childhood folly, but Roberta would become annoyed and would erase me and when I least expected it, I had already been converted into what I am, the light of the Lord. Nevertheless, I'm an obedient sheep and I surrender before them. The punishment was cruel—being there, feeling, wishing, but without being able to participate.

AMELIA: How did you go back to being you?

BLANCA: She needed an antagonist and I was reborn.

AMELIA: I didn't want you to be involved in this.

BLANCA: You have nothing to do with it, they were the designs of the Almighty.

AMELIA: You'll think it's impossible, but I'm somewhat discreet, actually sometimes I'd wish that I'd been given your role, but now I think it's impossible. Though, everything in this play is fair game, why don't we do what Roberta does with us?

BLANCA: What?

AMELIA: Switch roles.

BLANCA: You don't think I should become the Magdalene that your are, but of course, without redeeming myself.

AMELIA: Nothing will be lost, anyways, we're leaving this fiction and we'll go to another one.

BLANCA: My God, shield me from this temptation.

*Blanca removes the flute from her neck and gives it to Amelia. Amelia gives her her ball. Blanca turns into the young girl and Amelia adopts the rigidity of the experienced woman, takes the flute and begins to play it; she strolls around the entire stage.*

BLANCA: (*Bouncing the ball*) What a weird sensation. It's like living asphyxiated, I'm lacking air. (*Starts to suffocate.*)

AMELIA: (*Lowers the flute*) Freedom is the messenger pigeon that doesn't relay her message. But so much freedom is scary. What can I do with so much space, God our Lord? I deserve hell for allowing myself to be led by the frailty of the flesh. I'm a fallen angel.

BLANCA: (*Breathing calmly*) It seems it's not so difficult to get used to living by breathing through others.

AMELIA: We are all love, but we all have a particle of hate. Don't get so worked up, darling.

BLANCA: Each time gets easier; it's sweet enjoying what is not yours.

AMELIA: It's playing as if we're characters; you live a borrowed life, full of someone else's complications. Like at this moment where all of the spectators see everything so twisted that now they probably don't understand the story, but what follows will become more complicated. They'll relate what is happening to them with what is happening here and they'll feel what I feel now. (*Pauses.*) I feel there's nothing left.

BLANCA: We're left. (*She comes close to Amelia.*)

AMELIA: Soon we'll fade away.

BLANCA: I'm scared.

AMELIA: I'll be with you. Hug me.

*Blanca hugs Amelia. Amelia looks into her eyes and both melt in a deep kiss. After a short while they separate.*

AMELIA: This is the perfect moment for a blackout.

*Blackout.*

AMELIA: I told you.

## GLAFIRA ROCHA

### REVIEWS:

ARABS AND THE ART OF STORYTELLING: A Strange Familiarity. Abdelfattah Kilito, translated from the French by Eric Sellin and Mbarek Sryfi. Foreword by Roger Allen. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014. 152 pp.

This is a particularly valuable entry in the Syracuse series, Middle East Literature in Translation. Like the others, it bears the stamp of the U. Penn scholar Roger Allen, and his foreword is especially helpful. The foreword locates this book of essays in the context of Kilito's other critical works, asserts that his contemporary perspective and accessible style will interest non-specialists, and points up Kilito's emphasis on the (poorly understood) influence of Arab literature on European genres. Ezra is bound to remark that Allen is also a significant translator of works in Arabic.

So this is the value of *Arabs and The Art of Storytelling*, in a nutshell. The general reader, aware of such classics as *A Thousand and One Nights* and *Kalila and Dimna*, will learn more about them, including the traditions from which they derive, and will gain entry into many other works. This acquaintance is a scholarly presentation of influences, with many cross-overs to the Western tradition. All readers will be seduced by the charm of Kilito's style.

For the specialist, but, again, even more for the general reader, this book masterfully succeeds in giving us context. There is the (applying a European term) *belles-lettres* tradition of the works discussed, the *adab* (in Arabic) tradition. There is the linguistic context of Turkish, Persian and Arabic. This deserves a much richer dilation here than Ezra is prepared to give it—especially as it involves different registers of Arabic, and the promotion and demotion of languages (discussed, for example, with reference to Ibn Manzur's famous dictionary). There are the contexts of the proprietary versus the appropriated, the censored versus the uncensored, the respected versus the disparaged—by Europe. Also included is the discussion of how and by whom certain works were ordained or commissioned into being.

Strong points along with this context-setting include the discussions of the all-important parable, assistance with Arabic etymology, and a useful disentanglement of Arab from Berber in North African literature. Many footnotes are scholarly digressions of great interest, including one on the importance of tears in the Arab literary tradition.

Indeed, this last footnote ends with the suggestion that we consider Vincent-Buffault's work (1985-1991) on tears in eighteenth and nineteenth century France. To this reader,

the value of this book, and Kilito's true gift as a synthesizer, jump out in passages such as that footnote, and the following:

...[C]ertain works reach beyond the boundaries of their primary soil and create unions with others, foreign and remote in space and time. Such is the case with al-Ma'arri's *Risalat al-ghufran* (The epistle of forgiveness), which has been compared to *The Divine Comedy* and al-Hamadhani's *al-Maqamat* (Assemblies), which [in turn] have been linked to the picaresque novel. (58)

The under-reported area of these connections to European and other intellectual histories is addressed too many times to cite fully here, but includes references to Arthurian legend and medieval Europe, Jules Verne, Moses' pronouncement, Mallarmé and Bidpai (the Indian thinker who, as Kilito appears to assume we know, is probably the origin of most of the Aesop material).

It's important to note that this is a lively, accurate translation, filled with firm, just passages like this one:

This brings us to the question of heresiography. The presentation of heterodox ideas is not perceived as an innocent gesture; it may lead to a result different from that anticipated by the heresiographer, by attracting attention to opinions that might have been forgotten had they not been refuted. Let us consider the heretical books that were condemned and destroyed and of which there still remain some fragments or traces in the very books that have severely criticized them. Citation arouses suspicion of complicity. How can one be sure that the heresiographer is not a two-faced hypocrite who, fearful of affirming certain opinions as his own, rather attributes them to some notorious heretics, all the while taking care to heap upon them the usual condemnations? (9)

We are indebted to translators who take on work like Kilito's. Sryfi and Sellin have an extensive body of work, and both are acquainted with French and Arabic.

Their brief translators' note is helpful on several points, and, of course, Kilito's own preface is invaluable. His Works Cited will help specialists and general readers alike, and goes some way to make up for the lack of an index.

Ezra will review two other works from this series during 2015.

~~Peter Thompson

ALMA VENUS, Pere Gimferrer. Translated by Adrian West. Antilever Press 2014. 122 pp.

Antilever Press and its 2014 English-language publication of Pere Gimferrer's *Alma Venus* reveals how the artist is intimately connected to his community, his generation, and all that surrounds him: its music, fashion, film, and its icons.

Adrian West's masterful translation of Gimferrer's work from the original Catalan captures the poet's essence: always questioning, ever mindful of the past and its role in the present, as well as poetry's role as a part of the same history it discusses. As stated in the Translator's Note, "Gimferrer's writings are demanding," not so much because of their complexity, but because the strength of his language and the precision of his craft create a plethora of images that are as captivating to the senses as they are refreshing to the ear. They force us to embark on a visual and lyrical journey, which reveals to us fragments of an *ars poetica*.

Although comprised of two sections, First Book: *Alma Venus* and the Second Book: *The Senses at Peace with the Memory*, the unifying themes and the beauty of Gimferrer's texts present themselves on occasions as a critique or analysis of society and/or art itself, while at others, as an intimate gaze from an understanding and accepting lover: viewing either his city, his people, or their creations—enamored by what he sees. The form or elements of an *ars poetica* poem, "are not as important as the depth and insight it provides into the art and nature of poetry" ([world-class-poetry.com](http://world-class-poetry.com)); for Gimferrer, life and art are so inextricably bound to each other that at times it is the poem that best describes the object, moment, or feeling which first inspired it. With lines like, "Moguer will live in no place/ Except in those clouds of invention,/ More words than clouds, more Moguer/In the poem than in reality," Gimferrer's fourth poem in the book alludes to the Spanish poet Juan Ramon Jimenez and his work "Moguer," which expresses how poetry can exist as both representative of both a time and a place, yet recognizes the power of the words to create and make a thing more what it is, by simply describing it. This belief appears throughout many texts and sections in the collection, forcing our attention to focus on what we believe art or poetry or life or living should actually be. "Life is not a poem about landscapes,/ it is the cobra of fire of death," the darkness's certified post", states Gimferrer in the first poem, yet this line lives in direct opposition to what the author demonstrates: a poetry of landscapes, of scenery, of settings and surroundings, of cultivation and exhibition.

Gimferrer, "explores, on the basis of a poetics of the instant, the tenuous frontiers between real reality and artistic reality," states LLetra Catalan Literature Online; that much is visible in these lines:

I came from the poplars of the night,  
Real, above all, in the poem;  
In the magnetic pole of verse,  
Each word is fructification.  
I came from living in the poem  
So that thus, the poem would live in me.

Also:

In fantasy I discovered love,  
But love is a figure of realism;  
In fantasy I discovered the poem;  
But poetry fashions the real;

The line between the different realities permeates Gimferrer's thinking, as does the blending of artistic or real life allusions to Pedro Calderon de la Barca and Rubén Darío, to film directors like Roberto Rossellini and actor Charlie Chaplin, even to architecture and many buildings or structures whose appearance sets us insistently in that environment. West himself asserts that Gimferrer's writings, "depend on a system of multiple meanings and textual echoes that span not only the whole of Spanish language literature, but also references to contemporary history, art, music, film, and design." And it is those references and allusions to the past and its relevance to our present that remain very prevalent in *Alma Venus*. Even his "precision and attentiveness to the description of the play of light and shadow" as mentioned in the Translator's Note is a way of linking the past with the present, of sifting through the layers of the ugly or the grotesque, and seeing life and art for what it should and has the potential to be. So, as the seen and not seen reflect the visual technique of chiaroscuro, Gimferrer's multilingual approach to communication embody the same principle of known and unknown, visible and invisible, light and dark.

The use of other languages from Italian to Spanish and French, even English (in the original), as well as the names of places in these countries, helps the reader then find himself in a foreign setting, hearing a foreign tongue, understanding that each moment that passes is a fading memory, a trace of what we just experienced, which is also a clearer reflection of that blurry image or instant.

To Gimferrer, life includes an endless pursuit of who we were and a strong desire to recreate ourselves. "We have lived by clinging to shadows," he states, and unlike Plato's myth of the cave, these shadows become reality and at times are much less fleeting and more tangible than what gets projected to us by the world around us. West's translation of *Alma Venus*, provides readers with a wonderful introduction to a truly remarkable literary talent, one whose legacy already casts a long shadow.

~~Gustavo Aybar