

Volume 14 number 2

Ezra strides forth, unmasked, in the clean spring air of the internet. Welcome to our three issues a year, book reviews, and hallmark variety of original sources.

Troubled by machine translators? Interesting progress, noted by Katherine King in a recent *Translation Review* (issue 105, 2019). For instance, so-called Neural Machine Translators replaced some older, clunkier version (one shudders), and these new babies show some signs of being able to improve over time—specifically in literary language and register. A tall order, for sure. But a key to this is our potential participation as programmers, or feeders of more and more literary structures into the machine. Massive input does bring qualitative improvement, it appears. As it has with Spellcheck.

At this observation Ezra scratches the beleaguered noggin a bit: literary types, having read enormous amounts of different styles of literature would do this inputting. But if you've taught a creative writing class or MFA class on translation recently, you start to wonder who these litterateur inputters will be. The youngish candidates we have in mind have not, in fact, read enormous amounts of anything. Ezra's just sayin'. Gives one pause.

Our feature is a special treat, not only because of the importance of **Edward Morin's** *Red Azalea* in 1990, but because he was in the very first issue of *Ezra*, thirteen years ago. An extra feature is the Tian Hao essay on Cai Qijiao. We have put this under our Archive tab, in Special Editions.

We're proud to announce that **Peter Filkins** has an Ezra residency this year. His work will appear within a year.

There is a review and four publication notices in this issue.

FEATURED WRITER: **Edward Morin and co-translators**

Cai Qijiao

Cai Qijiao stands out as a rare poet who extricated himself from the meshes of Socialist Realism under Mao Zedong, survived ostracism before and during the Cultural Revolution, and persisted in writing individually inspired, high-quality poetry. During four decades, he produced a large, masterful corpus whose literary merit ranks him as a major poet and among the most important living in China until his death in 2007.

Born in 1918 in Fujian Province, Cai Qijiao immigrated with his parents to Indonesia and returned to China by himself at age eleven. After high school, he went home to Indonesia, returned to China again in 1938, and later walked with friends several hundred miles from Wuhan to Yan'an, where he joined the forces of Mao

Zedong. As a cultural worker with the New Fourth Army, Cai began to write poetry in 1941. He married in 1943 and had several children. After the Communist Party came to power in 1949, he entered Lu Xun Arts Academy where he studied literature. When the novelist Ding Ling founded the Central Literature Training Institute in 1952, she picked Cai Qijiao to head its teaching and research office of foreign literature.

Cai had the rank of military officer dating back to the years of the Sino-Japanese War, yet he associated very little with military people after 1950. Because of a liaison with a high ranking officer's wife, he was convicted in 1965 of "disrupting a military marriage," an offence sometimes arbitrarily and severely punished. After a year and a half in prison, he was released on parole and later sent to a "forest farm" for reform by labor. He lived under the cloud of being "politically irrelevant" and a "hooligan" until the conviction was overturned in 1985.

In the 1950s, Cai published three collections of poems focusing on rural life in a folk style encouraged by the Communist Party. Officials criticized Cai's poems for concentrating on scenery, people, and love, and for showing little regard for promoting political objectives. Chastised after the Hundred Flowers and Anti-Rightist traps of 1957-58 for expressing personal feelings in nature poems, Cai continued writing poems, but kept them out of sight and published no books of poetry for more than twenty years.

Cai Qijiao has the rare distinction of having written personal poetry during the Cultural Revolution (1967-1976) and preserving it until it could be published afterwards. The Communist Party required all writers to produce only morale-building, "spears and dragons" poetry in support of government programs. Poems expressing personal feelings were considered seditious, so nearly all poets stopped writing personal poems. While China endured thought control whose severity has become legendary, Cai improved his art with the study of classical Chinese and foreign literature. Holding the work classification of "professional writer," Cai had leisure for study and the means to travel extensively throughout China. For years he made his home in Beijing and spent winters in the milder climate of his home province, Fujian.

In the late 1970s, when the "obscurist poetry" (*menglong shi*) of young writers attracted official criticism against their unauthorized magazine *Today (Jintian)*, Cai Qijiao did not join other established poets in censuring them. He had been a teacher and mentor of the Fujian poet Shu Ting, an important member of the Obscurists. Cai became friends with the young poets and encouraged their work. While very popular with readers in China, his poetry has been less well received there by scholars and critics, who avoid putting him in any category with his peers. They do not know how to fit him into their existent poetic discourse.

Cai Qijiao's prolific output since the Cultural Revolution includes poetry collections *The Double Rainbow* (1981), *Praying* (1981), *Fujian* (n.d.), *Songs of Life* (1982), *Facing into the Wind* (1984), and *The Drunken Stone* (1986). Compilations of his poetry include *Selected Works of Cai Qijiao* (Hong Kong: *Wenxue yanjiushe*, N.D., preface dated 1979); *Lyric Poems* (Hong Kong: Modern Press, 1993); and *Selected Poems of Cai Qijiao (Cai qijiao shixuan)* (Beijing: *Renmin wenxue chubanshe*, 1997). An edition of his collected works in eight volumes, entitled *A Gallery of Poems (Cai Qijiao shi ge hui lang)* and edited by Liu Denghan, was published by Straits Press, Fuzhou, in 2002.

BIOGRAPHIES OF CO-TRANSLATORS

Edward Morin, originally from Chicago, has an M.A. in English from the University of Chicago and a Ph.D. in English from Loyola University (Chicago). He has taught English and creative writing at four U.S.

universities, including the University of Michigan and Wayne State University in Detroit. He edited and, with Fang Dai and Dennis Ding, co-translated *The Red Azalea: Chinese Poetry since the Cultural Revolution* (U. of Hawaii Press, 1990), an anthology of 120 poems by 24 contemporary mainland Chinese poets. Over 100 of his own poems have been published in North American magazines, including *Hudson Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, and *Poetry Northwest*. Collections of his poetry include *The Dust of Our City* (1978) and *Labor Day at Walden Pond* (1997), and *Housing for Wrens* (2016).

Fang Dai was born in Shanghai and graduated from high school during the Cultural Revolution. He received a B.A. in Chinese Language and Literature from East China Normal University and an M.A. and Ph.D. in comparative literature from The University of Michigan. He has had three novels—*The Third Desire* (1998), *The Curtain of Night* (1998), and *Boasters' Room 303* (1991)—and several stories published in The People's Republic of China. With Edward Morin and Dennis Ding, he co-translated *The Red Azalea: Chinese Poetry since the Cultural Revolution*. He has been a visiting assistant professor of Chinese at The University of British Columbia and The University of Oregon. Currently he is Associate Professor of Chinese at Hunter College in New York City.

Dennis Ding (Ding Tingsen) was born in southwest China and graduated in foreign language and literature from Guiyang Normal College and Guizhou University. He has studied as a visiting scholar at Oakland University in Michigan (1985-86) and at Oxford University, England (1988). He has taught English for several years at Guizhou University, where he has been Dean and Chairman of foreign languages. His translations from English to Chinese include over one hundred works by T.S. Eliot, Pound, H.D., Frost, W.C. Williams, Roethke, Bellow, Hemingway, and a few other novelists including Agatha Christie. Many of his translations have appeared in leading Chinese publications. He has also edited textbooks of English and American literature for use in Chinese universities. He is a co-translator of *The Red Azalea: Chinese Poetry since the Cultural Revolution*.

Michael Zhai has a B.A. in English from University of California-Berkeley and an M.F.A. from Mills College. He has taught English at The University of Michigan.

THE DOUBLE RAINBOW

A spectacle like this is rare indeed--

two vast seven-colored columns abreast over the water;

behind them light yellow drizzle not quite dissipated,
in front a well-timed setting sun chins the mountains.
Crimson banyan trees sparkle atop dark green bluffs,
crimson ferry boats rise and fall on crystalline waves,
crimson water plants drift in the evening tide,
and crimson egrets cross the dusky sky. . . .
until distant mountains turn to smoky blue mist,
until the curtain of night falls upon the river.

1961

WAVES

This never-ending movement
must be the shape of nature's breathing,
everything came to life because of you,
O Waves!

Without you, how monotonous sky and ocean would be,
without you, the ocean road would be terrifying and lonely;
you are every sailor's most intimate companion,
O Waves!

You caress the ships, shine on white sails,

splashing water spray bares your snow-white teeth

Your smile accompanies the shipboard sailor

walking to the edges of sky and sea.

Today with a joyful heart I remember

occasions when you glowed in soft light while clouds

colorful as dancing gowns flowed over your mirrorlike surface,

your breath gentler and more alluring than the rose's.

But when thunderstorms strike,

why does your heart turn so turbulent?

Why do you raise awesome steeped peaks

And show a face more fierce than hurricanes?

Is it because you hate disasters?

or else despise coercive power?

My brave, freedom-loving heart,

who would dare exercise dominion over you?

I can't tolerate brutality or shouting either,

even less, evil's repression;

how I envy you that temper

O Waves!

You murmur tenderly to the algae,

yet you oppose the fierce wind.

Everywhere, life should be full of sounds like yours,

O W--a--v--e--s!

1982

WRITING

Take hold of life as instinct dictates

Convey understanding and express feelings

Use language to make intellect dance with imagery

Lead reality on to the dawn of the unknown

Acquire individuality by letting the great be your teachers

Show compassion for cosmic and human misfortunes

The spirit's agile thoughts flow in and out of the heart

Strive throughout life for freedom and beauty

1993

MANDARIN DUCK LAKE

Wordless landscape

quiet and translucent

Light plays over early-blooming cotton roses

Wintertime love perches under heaven

Even the migrant birds prefer no-man's-land

for they don't trust mankind

They hide themselves dreaming in the forest

All activity occurs beautifully in silence

Human beings should love the whole natural world

Wisdom and morality would become malleable

wakening a past condition that has been forgotten

that protects all things and helps them coexist

1986

CARP STREAM

Perhaps it was fear of a torrential flood

a hope that the fish god would sound
the alarm before an impending disaster
There must be a dam for fish farming somewhere
on a brook by a mountain village in northeastern Fujian
which offers a unique prospect for sightseeing

The years of great change and torment lasted too long
Cruelty, the vilest side of the human heart, manifested itself
How many rivers have nearly dried up
How many local customs have disappeared without a trace
Only villages of peace and unity
show any ardor for keeping traditions alive

Only in remote, isolated Zhouning
do I see the childlike souls of our ancestors
Women wash rice and vegetables beside the river
where fish vying for food debris churn the water
This comradeship between fish and human beings
has brought together the old and new civilizations

If efforts to destroy nature and society continue
allowing unscrupulous selfishness to kill Spring
then damage and desolation interact as cause and effect
Backwardness and a poverty that is almost extinct must follow
Treachery against all living things advances

until a late awakening finally happens

When human beings regain kindheartedness

even fish and birds begin to get so close and beloved

that spring occurs in the union between nature and humankind

Let fish have free-running streams and birds have shadows of trees

In the harmony each life has with other lives

we are all going to go ahead flourishing

1986

SELF-PORTRAIT AT SEVENTY

A physiognomist said

a third eye lies hidden on his nose

between the sprawling hill and transverse waves

He watches the world vertically

unobstructed and unhindered

exposed to the wind and shining sun

with neither hatred

nor tears

This world's many yellow flowers of yesterday

needn't be fussed over
So talent is venerated
and authority and power scorned
Whatever gained gets lost quickly
and whatever is lost will be replaced by joy
No attention paid to other goings on
devoting his homage and respect only to poetry
expressing in silence what may be hard to say

Perhaps life has so much suffering
that the heart is always seeking pleasure
from nature, clouds and water
from flowers, grass and charms in any shape
Wonderful things appeared and then vanished
during the bitter wait for the new destiny
without knowing old age would come so soon

Grief is like gloomy daybreak
and despair is a night of heavy rain and wind
Hope is like a green field moistened by dew
Those doves are roses in mourning
that fall from a straggly green forest
Today a calm has descended slowly
from the curtain of dusk
Can he travel far even in yearning?

1988

CAI QIJIAO

Traduttori/traduttrici:

Arben Latifi (Alisa Velaj) Himanshi Handey , H.S. Komalesha (Kedarnath Singh)

Stuart Frieber (Ute von Funcke) Ranald Barnicot, Felipe Botero Quintana (G. Quessep)

Alexis Levitin (Salgado Maranhão) Brishti Guha (Gatha Saptashati)

Jake Sheff (Lorca)

*Poems from Salgado Maranhão 's book with Alexis Levitin (translator), **Beneath The Gaze of Will Barnet**, illustrated by Will Barnet:*

Nightfall

Pierced by her own
beam of light,
the woman in black
lifts up the painted
evening sky
and gives herself,

a present,

to the crows.

Serene and skeptical,

she surrenders

to the bloody love

of raptors.

Maybe there is music

in her muse's

pergola;

Maybe there is just the weeping

of the outlaw wind.

And yet her hidden face

retains the freshness

of the unattainable.

A woman dwelling

flush with canvas and its colors.

Eternal and alone,



Nightfall

©Will Barnet Foundation, courtesy Alexandre Gallery, New York.

Self-Portrait

What does this labyrinth reflect

that lands us on the shore

of colors and of questions?

Is there an ancestral kingdom

that invents us

beyond the voice?

There is no way to grasp

within one's fingers

that landscape

that is both

the seeking and the end.

There is no way to contain

the holdings of the eternal

that flash through

our lives

and that deny to us

the mirror's other face.



Self Portrait

©Will Barnet Foundation, courtesy Alexandre Gallery, New York.
SALGADO MARANHÃO

La Aurora

~~translated by Jake Sheff

—after “Dawn (Go Away)” by Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons

New York dawns on four
Columns made of mud and
Hurricanes of blackness
Pigeonholed in splashes

Decomposed. Dawn is New
York's groan as fire escapes
Immensely search for spikenards
On edges drawn by anguish.

Nobody enters dawn by mouth,
Where hopes consume tomorrows.
Coins, occasionally, swarm and furiously
Devour, after perforating, all the orphans.

It dawns on comprehending bones, the future
Lacking paradise or love beneath the leaves.
They're going to the numbered muck and laws;
To artless games and fruitless sweat.

Subaltern, the imprisoned light, with noisy
Impudence, erases rootless science.
The barrios and sleep begin their footrace;
Memories of shipwreck on a scab are there.

FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA

Lost Words

~~translated by Randal Barnicot and Felipe Botero Quintana

The street detaches itself
through the sky's deepest.

In its penumbra
lost words stumble
but cannot find
their small space in time.

The street devises
a new color,
in memories men scrabble
for some fable.

We walk on our way
towards absence
as ghosts walk
in living shadow.

GIOVANNI QUESSEP (contemporary, Colombia)

Your Philosophical Shadow

~~translated by Stuart Frieber

Seen from the tower, your shadow's
at bottom an arrow in the wrong direction

almost like a clock's hand in a stone mosaic's circle
a willful one, which can't be fixed

even by your own movement,
your shouts, your desperate command

it's broken with you, doesn't hurry after you
doesn't even turn around toward you

tries to attach itself to the next best person
without including you in its choice

its Homeric laughter, because you
don't want to accept its loss

what will the shadow of the person do
when yours throws itself at it, overlying it

steals its job, what this other human does,
when his shadow doesn't resemble him,
doesn't at all behave as if it was a shadow
how will he get rid of it

you and your shadow have read too much Schopenhauer
whose pessimism was even too dark and onerous for it

rather it sides with Nietzsche, his will to power
wants to be the shadow of the powerful, very different from you

only in one sense are you alike
there's no trace of stoic tranquility

UTE VON FUNCKE (contemporary, Germany)

The Dust of the Town

~~translated by Himanshi Handey and H.S. Komalesha

The last bus of the day leaves

filling the town with dust

I have seen it, the dust

smooth and thick

I know

the dust of this town

and my entire country

is the most living

and loving thing,

the most restless

and the most active.

The earth's most fresh

and ancient dust

which works here

all day long

among the men

spinning the cotton

making the slurry

warming the water

kneading the dough

grazing the goats...

And trust me,

in this entire scenario

the truth is

it's the dust

only the movement of which

has saved my conviction

in salt,

and in water,

in the future of the earth,

and in fables.

KEDARNATH SINGH

A Duo Of Violins

~~translated by Arben Latifi

He hurries in the wind with a violin ashoulder;

raindrops hurry behind him.

Midnight, at a train station, she appears barefoot,

with a violin ashoulder

and goldilocks on a dress of scanty moonlight,

feeling the earthly thirst deep to the marrow...

They never met before, nowhere;
nor did their violins.
They each often run to where they didn't intend to;
hence, they will certainly meet one day,
curled up like tulip petals...

Amsterdam, August 2018

ALISA VELAJ (contemporary, Albania)

From Gatha Saptashati

~~translated by Brishti Guha

Emerald green against ruby red,
The flock of parrots descends from the evening sky
A jeweled green necklace slipping
From Dusk's lovely throat.

(Sanskrit, Gatha Saptashati verse 54).

The captive woman quickly wipes away the tears
Of her fellow prisoners. Help is at hand, she thinks –
She's mistaken a loud thunderclap

For the twanging of her husband's bowstring.

(*Gatha Saptashati* verse 56).

REVIEW:

SELECTED POEMS OF GIOVANNI PASCOLI, translated by Taije Silverman and Marina Della Putta Johnston. Princeton: 2019. 178 pp.

This work is a dream for any professor of Italian: poetry, literature, even upper level language. Beautifully organized, the book offers to its reader, Italian or no, the essence of Pascoli's melancholic view of life, of beauty, of nature, of his deep spirituality and social conscience. A selection of his poems is translated with accuracy and most importantly, a deep sensitivity to his literary purpose and ethereal style. The translators have succeeded in capturing his language, which speaks in textures of softness, often with the synesthesia for which he is so admired.

Silverman's Introduction reads as thoughtfully and seamlessly as any piece of perfect literary criticism. She walks the reader through the various periods of Pascoli's all too brief life helping to give the background that renders his poetry more accessible. Despite his simple language, his intentions are deep, and these translations transport even the novice to the physical places of his past, as well to that part of Pascoli that is his essence, in the watercolors of his mind that he paints with words, instead of brushes.

From *Myricae*, Pascoli's *Allora* in the original evokes that sense of memory that is almost painful in its very beauty, knowing that it will be so, but must be revered for its tenderness. That is the nature of faraway memories that we cling to, even knowing they will never be repeated. The poem and its translation read like the account of a perfect summer love, which by its very nature cannot be sustained. He touches that sense of nostalgia and wistfulness in every human with the simplest of verses. Silverman and Della Putta Johnston have flawlessly captured that elusive but recognizable sense in their translation:

"Back then...I was happy, so happy.

That's gone. But still,

Such sweetness reaches me here

From the infinite sweetness back then.

The translation captures, as does the original, that sense of longing for what has gone before, and reads like Dante in that sense of remembering a perfection, which again, by its very nature cannot be repeated.

In chiesa (At Church) reads like a Millet painting. We hear the soft hum of conversation upon leaving (like humming bees) and in the following we find his best:

As if on petaled floats they move

In clusters through the chirping grass;

The shuttered huts in town below

Wait sleepily, in silence.

That idea of petaled floats adds to the feeling of peace the entire poem evokes, and allows the reader to feel in this simple portrait the depth of the participants' spirituality. Just as Pascoli "paints" in a sense this portrait of the simplicity of country life, the original, and the translation, elevate the work to a level that surpasses sentimentality, almost serving as a metaphor for the soul at rest.

In sum, the translations are so satisfying, and the introduction and notes so well-researched and crafted, there is nothing not to love; for the seasoned lover of Pascoli as well as the novice, this work gives the poet the attention and justice he so richly deserves.

Karen Abbondanza

PUBLICATION NOTICES:

THE RUBAIYAT OF OMAR KAYYAM, translated by Juan Cole. Bloomsbury: 2020

A repository of subversive, melancholic and existentialist themes and ideas, the rubáiyát (quatrains) that make up the collected poems attributed to the 12th century Persian astronomer Omar Khayyam have enchanted readers for centuries. In this modern translation, Juan Cole elegantly renders the verse for contemporary readers, updating Edward Fitzgerald's classic but idiosyncratic 19th century version. The critical introduction, notes and epilogue provide crucial context for the composition and collection of the poem, and explain how

the *Rubáiyát* came to such fame in West – attracting a global audience including American and British poets and writers such as TS Elliot, Arthur Conan Doyle and Jack Kerouac.

GOD’S WIFE, Michalopoulou, Amanda, translated by Patricia Felisa Barbeito. Dalkey Archive, 2019.

“It may sound like a lie: I am His wife,” is the arresting opening declaration made by *God’s Wife’s* unnamed narrator, who will always be known through her role as an appendage, “at His side.” This premise immediately raises issues of power, domination, truth and belief.

God’s Wife is a stunningly brilliant book. It is a moving love story that unfolds with the rigorous intellectual logic of a piece of first-rate theology. Highly recommended.

– Simon Critchley, author of *The Book of Dead Philosophers*

THE MAGIC MIRROR OF LITERARY TRANSLATION, Eric Sellin. Syracuse: 2020.

“Accomplished translator Eric Sellin has distilled the wisdom gained over six decades of translating poetry into this informative and entertaining collection of essays. Always instructive, thought-provoking and illuminating, personal and practical, at times self-ironic, humorous, irreverent, this book will resonate with and please everyone who cares about language. For aspiring translators, it’s a must read!”—Thalia Pandiri, Smith College

THE MUSIC OF TIME, John Burnside. Princeton: 2020

This is a personal, and indispensable, compendium of thoughts and citations (not generally about translation).

“A master of language.” –London Review of Books

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