

VOLUME 7 Number 2

Ezra bows somewhat theatrically, and, with a sweeping 19th century gesture, ushers you into a seventh spring.

Abdelkébir Khatibi, who is so often startling, alerts us to the divisions that happen within a writer. “Writing French, translating it while writing it, deep within that active division where literature plays out. It feels to me like a simultaneous translation, through a rapid association of signs and images” (*La Langue de l’autre*, Editions Les Mains Secrètes). Though Khatibi is speaking within the postcolonial context, and often refers to his bilingual situation, this passage really makes us think of how any writing is a translation. Of the thicket of signs and images that any writer negotiates, and of how they (only roughly) translate the writer’s impulse.

Martha Cooley, in “Berlin Alexanderplatz and the Music of Novels,” tells us that “Good translations allow us to hear something in our own language’s music that we might not otherwise have caught” (*Writer’s Chronicle*, October/November, 2012). But it might be more a question of adding to our music, or playing it in a key we are unfamiliar with. There is a sense of division, of two musics at once, or of a kind of harmony.

There: Ezra has twisted both passages to a new end. More on all this, by an Ezra staffer, in an interview on translation: Buried Letter Press, (May). That issue is out this week, at www.buriedletter.com. Matt Mackey and crew do a great job over there—already an Ez fave.

Another lovely e-zine is Poetry Pacific, at www.poetrypacific.blogspot.ca. Lovely and prolific, edited by Chanming Yuan and Allen Qing Yuan, and now in a quarterly format.

Do note that our featured writer, Donald Wellman, has triumphed with his hefty translation of Prados. It is the first, and joins the José-María Hinojosa that first appeared in these pages—both friends of Lorca, in the Generation of 1927. The book, *Enclosed Garden*, is at Diálogos Books, a fine translation press (diálogosbooks.com and lavenderink.org).

Featured Writer: Donald Wellman

Donald Wellman, poet, editor, and translator lives in Weare NH. His books of poetry include *The Cranberry Island Series* (Dos Madres 2012), *A North Atlantic Wall* (Dos Madres, 2010), *Prolog Pages* (Ahadada, 2009), and *Fields* (Light and Dust, 1995). Originally a medievalist, he has written on the poetry of Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Charles Olson and on poets associated with both Black Mountain College and with emergent contemporary practices. For several years, he edited O.ARS, a series of anthologies, devoted to topics bearing on postmodern poetics, including volumes entitled *Coherence*, *Perception* and *Translations*:

Experiments in Reading. His translation of *Enclosed Garden* by Emilio Prados is available from Lavender Ink / Diálogos. His translation of Antonio Gamoneda's *Gravestones* is available from the University of New Orleans Press. His translation of Gamoneda's *Description of the Lie* is forthcoming from Talisman House Press. A bilingual selection of his poetry, *Remando de noche / Night Rowing*, is in preparation for the Biblioteca Javier Coy in Valencia, Spain.

In 1937, Edna Saint Vincent Millay published her translation of a poem by Emilio Prados, "The Arrival (To Garcia Lorca)" in Spain Sings. Since the period of the Spanish Civil War, little attention has been paid to his work by readers of English. In Spain he is thought to be next to Garcia Lorca with respect to the depth of his song. In the years before the Spanish Civil War, working with Manuel Altolaguirre, Prados established the press Litoral which is deeply associated with the many authors of the Generation of 1927: Lorca, Cernuda, Aleixandre, to name only a few. Prados died in exile in Mexico in 1962. Jardín cerrado // Enclosed Garden reflects the loss of homeland and a beautiful gentleness of spirit.

IX

Nostalgias of Water and Dream

Who knows, if the water dreams
and if in the dream, the flower
is only a thought?

(Above the olive grove the sun;
under the olive tree my body,
between my body and the sun
time's interrogation.)

Who knows, if silence is the flower
of the water of thought?

2

The sea sleeps...

Sleeps the wind.

–Who is going to keep watch over the water
so Time robs it not?

3

Grove of silence:

So much quiet in your leaves

in order not to disturb the dream!

Oblivion stepped upon love.

From its footprint

springs a river...

XIII

Insomnia

People sleep: Are they alive?

Is it from avarice that night works
under the dream, complicit with rest,
on account of sadness, anxiety and its imperfect love,
or does she bend her haughty shadow with abandon
observing only those bodies of her oblivion?

The sky is quiet and time flows in its channel
dragging the sphere of the world, yet incomplete.
Each blood in its bed, each corpse in its tomb,
continues to weave the star of its secret universe.

Neither bird, nor wind, nor ocean spray is a limit
that reveals the source of a wound in the earth.
Water keeps changing form in its incessant embrace
and is born and dies and is born without knowing eternity.

The echo of the moon, like an uncertain light,
over the skin, consoles that which we call life today.
For there is no assured flower or constant heart,
or peace without crime or sun without misfortune.

The wheat field blooms, the tormented grain goes bad.
The child is born and perishes without the touch of a kiss.
No one knows if a dead one lives in his arms,
nor if a kiss is a haven for the beginning that he seeks.

Between fountain, tree, ashes and hatred,
man is ensnared upon the earth of his day;
he names the rock that does not know he exists,
and with each step denies bread and word.

The night is a desert when time bends her,
like an enormous hand that threatened to sink us;
but while her shadow crushes us, in sleep,
involuntarily, we love and join together.

Do we sleep? Do we wake? Each blood to its bed,
each corpse in its tomb, she weaves her enigma,
the light and the heavens her destined path.

With abandon let us enter night
without voice or intention, only desire for her!

EMILIO PRADOS

I traduttori/traduttrici:

Diane Furtney

Judith Pulman

William Wolak and Maria Bennett

Pamela Carmell

Ye Chun

Man and woman

~~translated by William Wolak and Maria Bennett

your voice

fight

against the martyrdom

of the wounded androgyne

And heals the rest without a scar.

ANNELISA ADDOLORATO

On occasion

~~translated by William Wolak and Maria Bennett

desire

can't be restrained

but

it can be transformed

into another thing

New necklaces of light

molded and carved

like a hard, precious stone.

ANNELISA ADDOLORATO

Rain

~~translated by Ye Chun

Rain taps my window

I get up to bring in the clothes hanging outside

and look at the distance

The small piece of cement covering my father's tomb

must be struck loudly

Is father also looking into the rain

thinking of the suffering in this world

Are there other living creatures on those wild paths

faces covered by water

Some things can never be brought indoors

They always stay in the rain

YI LU

Father in a Basket

~~translated by Ye Chun

My younger sister said on the phone
she and my older sister had put father's ash urn
in a basket
carried it up the mountain
and placed it in a cemetery that resembles unit apartments

Chest pressed
by the work at hand
I imagine the basket
unsteadily
climb steps circle around mountain bends
the fragrance of grass and flowers before and behind it
and our father inside turns
into a nest of bird eggs a jar of spring water a few wild cherries

I remember father
once told me

he'd wished to have the time
to do some ink-and-brush calligraphy
but he always had been busy
and there wasn't really a place at home for him to do it

YI LU

Myrtho

~~translated by Diane Furtney

It's you I think of, Myrtho, goddess
of enchantments on tall Pausilippe, dressed

in a thousand bright lights, your face
with the shimmer of wet pearl. . . My praise

for the grape-black, mixed
with gold, of your hair. . . It's

from your myrtle cup
that I've drunk drunkenness itself, at the lip

of your curved cup. . . and I look

for your eye-lights, hidden, then smiling back

from the glittering wine when

you see me sprawled again

at my prayers, every day at the feet

of Bacchus. . . for the Muse also has made me

one of the sons of Greece! The doomed

gods you mourn, Myrtho, whom

you've wept for, are not dead,

they will return; it will come back, the sacred,

ancient world, its disordered pieties, erratic

and wild with breaths of the prophetic. . .

But no: the young sibyl with the face

of old Rome is asleep, forced

to sleep beneath the stone

arch of Constantine

—that gate that is no gate,

that austerity! And nothing will ever move its weight.

GERARD DE NERVAL

Small Eternity

~~translated by Pamela Carmell

Small eternity where gods invent us
those beings whose glassy eyes
watch us from their altars
still
imploring
alone
perhaps awaiting
a miracle
from us.

YANIRA MARIMON

The Butterfly

~~translated by Judith Pulman

I.

Shall I say, that you are dead?

But you lived just a day.

The joke played

by the Creator is so sad.

I can barely pronounce

“She lived”—that unity, between
your birthday and the moment when

you came unbound

in my cupped palm, it makes

me ashamed to subtract

one from the other, tacked

within the limits of one day.

II.

That’s why the days for us—

are nothing. They are just

nothing. You can’t pin them up,

they aren’t a feast for the eyes:

on that white

canvas, they don’t possess

a body, they pass

invisibly. Days go by like

you—or, to phrase

it better, already when

they're diminished by ten,
what could be used to measure the day?

III.

Shall I say, that you are no more
at all? Then what is in my
hand that looks so like
you? And that color
is not the fruit of nonexistence.

Who hinted that the paint
be thus laid?

It couldn't be me, since
I, a muttering lot
of words and an alien
hue, could never imagine
such a palette.

IV.

On your little wings
are eyelashes and pupils—
birds, damsels—
of whose leavings,
tell me, and of whose visage
are you a fleeting portrait?
Tell me, for what

do these scraps engage
in a still-life: formed by
the fruit or by the dish?
Even those who fish
can lay out a trophy.

V.

Perhaps you are a landscape,
and, with a magnifying
glass, I will find dancing,
nymphs, or a sandy cape.
Is it light there, like at daybreak?
Or is it grim
like night? What sun
has staked
its claim to rise as your dawn?
And which are those figures?
Tell me, from what life were
you yourself drawn?

VI.

I think that you are
both that and this—
from the stars, objects, and faces
that I trace in your features.

Who was that jeweler
with a placid brow,
who took your wings and laid down
a world in miniature
that drives us nuts,
who takes us in his tongs, where you
are like a thought of a thing, a residue,
and suddenly, the thing is us?

VII.

Tell me, why was such
a pattern given
to you for a day, living
in the land of lakes; what
amalgam can preserve
this expanse?
You were deprived of your chance
during your short term
to get caught
in a net, to tremble
in the hands, to charm a pupil
in the moment of pursuit.

VIII.

You will not answer me,

not because you are
shy, and not for
maliciousness, or even
because you have died.
Alive or not, no matter:
each of God's creatures,
as if a kindred sign,
was given a voice to relate
and sing: to prolong
the seconds,
minutes, and days.

IX.

And you, you are deprived
of this guarantee.
Though, speaking strictly,
this is better: why
be indebted to heaven
and on its register?
Don't be disturbed,
your weight and lifespan
make your muteness fit fine.
Sound is a burden, too.
Sans flesh, you

are even more silent than time

X.

Not sensing a thing nor
living long enough to dread,
you whirl overhead
lighter than dust over flower
beds, outside of both the past
and future, which look
as if they were in the choke-
hold of some prison. Now, as
you fly in the meadows, looking for
fodder, the air
itself has suddenly acquired
a form.

XI.

This is how a quill does it,
gliding across the smooth
surface of a ruled
notebook, not knowing the fate
of its line, where wisdom
and heresy blend,
but trusting in the hand's
little pushes, where dumb

speech thrusts
against the fingers,
not as pollen taken from flowers,
but burdens from the chest.

XII.

Such beauty
and a so short a time
have unified: such a surmise
rouses a smirk. Indeed,
the world was
not fashioned
with a goal, and even
if it were, it would not be us.
Friend, entomologist—
in the haystack that's well-
lit you can't find the needle,
nor can you in the darkness.

XIII.

Shall I say to you, "farewell"?
As a day's form?
Some wits get torn
up by forgetting, all
those sores of the mind, but see:

for that, blame
their past, with no days
of ruffled sheets
for two, no lures
of a good night's
rest—only what seems like
swarms of your sisters!

XIV.

You are better than Nothingness.
Rather, you are closer
and more visible. Inside, you are
one hundred percent
kin to It. In your
flight, It achieved
flesh—I believe,
therefore,
that in the hubbub of daily
life, you deserve a glance, there
as a delicate barrier
between It and me.

JOSEPH BRODSKY

~~translated by Pamela Carmell

Small eternity where gods invent us
those beings whose glassy eyes
watch us from their altars
still
imploring
alone
perhaps awaiting
a miracle
from us.

YANIRA MARIMON

Alexander Dickow, *Caramboles*. Argol Editions, 2008, 136 pages

Urged to define his “bilingual blues,” American-Cuban novelist and poet Gustavo Perez Firmat confided that the feeling of not having one true language has been fertile ground for his poetry and writing¹. *Caramboles*, Alexander Dickow’s 2008 poetic suite, seems to stem from the opposite feeling, the pleasure of possessing foreign tongues exclusively. As he warns us in his provocative back cover blurb, in the process of pairing the American English and French versions of his poems, he molested both tongues equally: barbarisms and solecisms abound; dissonances and malapropisms proliferate; and slang and formal diction cohabit. Anticipating discontent, the poet does not hesitate to give voice to an imagined reader whose horizon of expectations is uncomfortably disturbed by his uncanny syntax and stylistics: “What

¹ www.npr.org/2011/10/17/141368408/for-a-bilingual-writer...

incommodious goof/and some more lamented/diction of yours make me! Qu'est-ce que suis-je rendu/brinbezingue de je me plains/que les erreurs de ton style !” (24-25)

Yet, for all those transgressions and much more, *Caramboles* is a most felicitous read.

The collection is composed of a first series of short poems that represents an “Invitation au Voyage,” punctuated by the recurring verse “we had no choice but to continue/ nous n’avions d’autre choix que de poursuivre.”(16-17-18-19) Follow two versions of a tale (II and III), that of a love triangle involving the allegoric figures of the Princess, the Prince and the Dragon, narrated in the form of successive interviews of the husband and the wife, each in turn in the role of the Dragon, while the interviewer/notetaker is none other than the Prince in disguise, as identifiers reveal. The mood of Part IV is that of *Ennui* and *Nonchaloir*, a medieval brand of spleen that permeates the poetry of Charles d’Orléans (1394-1465), author of the verse quoted by Alexander Dickow: “Un jour m’avint qu’a par moy cheminoye.” (118) This final series of short yet interrelated poems revolves around the fragility of hope and nature’s correspondence with one’s inner landscape; it evokes also boats, departures and “flabby denouements”. And even when everything has been said --“The curtain fell, the play is over” in Heinrich Heine’s phrase (129) – it is inconclusively so, and the goodbyes are “not for good” (131), though in English only. It may well be that, just like Charles d’Orléans, the poet in *Caramboles* is “l’homme esgaré qui ne scet où il va/ [this] “errant man who does not know where he is heading,”² and whose wandering step will flush more smarmy grackles, caring magpies and talking rainbirds along the way for his readers’ continued enchantment.

A translator and a poet, Alexander Dickow is both an insider and outsider of what Walter Benjamin calls the high forest of language, using its resources for expression, yet standing at its margins, attentive to the many echos and reverberations between the two languages he handles so brilliantly. The poetry in *Caramboles* (cf. the French *carambolage*, crash) surges from the clash between these two mandates, these two languages and their various registers. Indeed, while reading the collection, we are reminded of Walt Whitman’s take on the ability of American English to absorb other languages, dialects and slangs: “Profoundly consider’d,” he writes, “[slang] is the lawless germinal element, below all words and sentences and behind all

² <http://www.poemes.co/ballades-ballade.html> “En la forêt d’ennuyeuse tristesse”

poetry...”³ Moreover, Dickow’s poetry bridges the existential gap between two dimensions of the individual experience, namely the necessity to preserve an apparent continuity, the desire for the stability of meanings (“Really, I assure you, everything is fine between us. Non, je vous assure, tout va bien entre nous.” 90-91); and the incremental loss of faith in self, others and language, occasioned by daily misinterpretation (“Sand go among the fingers/for all the time, yes. Pour tous les jours/glisse le sable parmi les doigts, oui.”64-65).

Caramboles is an event, and not because poetry is notoriously impossible to translate. Personally pondering this matter, Dickow wrote: “it is legitimate to think that the translator can catch occasionally in another language the pertinent and effective meaning of a sentence. But should this happen, nobody would know.”⁴ In the case of *Caramboles*, we do know: the author’s presentation of the French and the English versions of the same poem *en vis-à-vis* leaves no doubt about his art of chiseling correspondences and affinities across languages in terms of breath, rhythm, rhymes and even calligraphic design.

Unmistakably, *Caramboles* is a superlative example of what Sherry Simon calls “une traduction déviante,” a deviant translation, which she defines as a praxis whose goal is not to exchange or transmit a cultural product, but rather to take advantage of the ambiguous space between translation and writing. A “deviant translation,” she adds, places the translation inside the text itself, creating a hybrid composition that challenges established classifications. We can infer that as such, *Caramboles*, along with *Transfiguration* by E. D. Blodgett and Jacques Brault, *My Paris* by Gail Scott and *Ô cher Émile, je t’aime ou, L’heureuse mort d’une Gorgone anglaise racontée par sa fille* by Agnès Whitfield, heralds a profound cultural change, one that emphasizes the unpredictability, incompleteness and creolization of the translation process today. *Transfiguration* for instance is a suite of “poèmes dialogants”: Blodgett writes a poem in English, which Brault translates into French; in turn, this poem inspires another one in French, which Blodgett translates into English, and so on. In *My Paris*, Gail Scott inserts in the English text French fragments, separated from their English counterparts by a comma --a tribute to Gertrude Stein and Walter Benjamin. As for *Ô cher Émile, je t’aime*, Agnès Whitfield presents

³ <http://grammar.about.com/od/classicessays/a/whitmanslang.htm>

⁴ “Parlez-vous jacobien ? Exégèse d’une traduction” *Cahiers Max Jacob* 10 (2010): 85.

this collection of poetry as a translation without an original, which makes her the author of a text written in a foreign language.⁵

Arguably, these three manners of “deviating translation” coexist in *Caramboles*. Any notion of an “original text” is, so to speak, lost in translation; pluralized, the poet’s voice summons several systems of referentiality (thus the polysemic nature of the title; the many versions of the same tale; and the quotations in early modern French or in German left untranslated.) Based on the same concept of an “architecture du double” (architecture of doubling) as *My Paris*, *Caramboles* relies on the spine of the book, instead of a comma, to visually separate languages that nevertheless keep on tossing and tumbling together on each page, just like Amandine and you (“who you were/ gotten all knotty/into the trouble with. toi qui vous tombais/ensemble dans le désordre.” 30-31) The linguistic *tohu-bohu* is such indeed that, like Whitfield, Dickow could purportedly lament that his collection “smacks of translation.”

As readers soon realize, by triturating a literal translation into English or French to the point of clumsiness, then proceeding in the same way with the other language, and vice-versa, *ad infinitum*, the poet exposes new ways for each language to signify. New and forceful images emerge out of clichés: “examining/attentively, just previous to my/eye, crouched among the flowers,/a rose and little adorable pink birds touching and miniature/charming prints/of the table cloth. je regarde/attentivement, juste avant/mon oeil, accroupi parmi les fleurs,/un rose mignon oiseau petit touchant et miniature/motif/de la nappe.”(54-55 & 88-89: note variants) Additionally, his use of deponent verbal forms, reinforced by contextual clues, can blur agency (cf. “Sometimes he would be chased/me after all the while to breathing the fire...But I always fight back however/I could able, with a wits alike the muscle! Quelquefois/ nous nous étions poursuivis à tout cracher/ le feu... J’ai toujours résisté de n’importe/quoi je pouvais, par l’esprit et de la force !” 80-81). His use of tenses tends to undo the linearity of time (“I’m sure you’re not remembered/When we’ll first met. Probablement tu ne te souviens pas/la première fois nous nous serons rencontrés.” 114-115).

⁵ Sherry Simon “Pratiques déviantes de la traduction.” *Francophonies d’Amérique*, 10 (2000): 159-166.

Dickow once wrote that Max Jacob's writing may seem "strange, uncanny, *other*," adding that "one has to learn his language... while renouncing to know it..."⁶ Will we then hunt for improprieties in *Caramboles*, attempting to "readjust" them, or will we learn instead to unlearn the rules of proper and efficient speech, enjoying the way Alexander Dickow refreshes language? Hopefully we will learn to read for the new creolized millennium, as *Caramboles* invites us to do, turning our attention to the rich interstices between lines, pages and languages.

Reviewed by Sylvie Kandé

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⁶ "Parlez-vous jacobien ? Exégèse d'une traduction" *Cahiers Max Jacob* 10 (2010): 84

