

EZRA: An Online Journal of Translation

Spring 2007 Vol. I No. 1

We are very fortunate to have Moratín's play, *The Young Ladies' Consent*, on the 200th anniversary of its publication in Spain. Chris Kidder's translation is excerpted here and will be produced by the *Commedia Beauregard*, in St. Paul, this coming fall. Ezra is thrilled to make the acquaintance of contemporary Brazilian poets *Bandeira* and *de Andrade*, along with contemporary Czechs *Ajvaz* and *Stroblova*.

It's always good to have George Michael Palmer's work. He edits *Strong Verse* ([www.strongverse.org](http://www.strongverse.org)).

Ezra invites you to strike once again the intimate notes of the early modern Italian *Giovanni Pascoli* and hopes you will be disquieted by spiritual and linguistic experiment in *Craig Perez's Chamorro* (Pacific islands/Guam).

If translation is hurling yourself into the breach, well then, onward, into the breach!

i traduttori,

Philip Krummrich

G.M. Palmer

Craig Santos Perez

Chris Kidder

Carrie Petri

Emily Van Buskirk

Greta D'Amico

Charlie

—translated by Philip Krummrich

Now what, Charlie?

The party's over,

the lights are out,

the people gone,

the night grown cold,

so now what, Charlie?

Now what, pal?

You, nameless you,

who make fun of others,

who make up your verses,

who love and complain?

Now what, Charlie?

You've got you no woman,

you've got you no loving,

you've got nothing to say,

you can't drink any more,

you can't smoke any more,

any more, you can't spit.

The night's grown cold,

the day didn't come,

the bus didn't come,  
the laugh didn't come,  
nor any utopia,  
and everything ended,  
everything flitted,  
everything mocked,  
so now what, Charlie?

Now what, Charlie?

Your honey-sweet word,  
your feverish moment,  
your feast and your fast,  
your book-lined study,  
your service of gold,  
your set of fine crystal,  
your incoherence,  
your hate—so now what?

With the key in your hand,  
you'd unlock the door,  
but there is no door;  
you'd die in the sea,  
but the sea's gone dry;  
you want to go to Minas,  
but there's no Minas now.  
Well Charlie, now what?  
If you were to holler,  
if you were to whimper,  
if you were to finger  
a Viennese waltz,

if you were to slumber,  
if you were to weary,  
if you were to die...  
But you're not going to die,  
you're a tough one, Charlie!  
Alone in the darkness,  
a bug in the bushes,  
without a theogony,  
without a naked wall  
to back against,  
without a black stallion  
to flee at a gallop,  
you're stepping out, Charlie!  
Charlie, where to?

Carlos Drummond de Andrade (Brazil, 1902-1987)

Loving

—translated by Philip Krummrich

What can a creature do except  
among the other creatures, love?  
love and forget,  
love and mislove, love, unlove, and love?  
always, even with one's eyes gone glassy, love?

I ask you, what can an amorous being do,  
lonesome, amid the general rotation,  
but rotate with the rest, and love?  
Love what the waves wash up on the beach,  
and what they bury, and all that, in the sea breeze?  
is salt, or need of love, or simple anguish?

Love the desert palms most solemnly,  
love all surrender, or expectant adoration,

and love the forbidding, or expectant adoration,  
and love the forbidding, love the harsh,  
a vase without a flower, a metal floor,  
a torpid breast, street seen in a dream, a bird of prey.

This is our fate: love beyond reckoning,  
shared out among things treacherous or worthless,  
a limitless gift to complete ingratitude;  
and in the empty shell of love the timid search,  
the patient search, for more and yet more love.

Loving our own lack of love, and in our aridness  
loving latent water, silent kisses, boundless thirst.

Carlos Drummond de Andrade

Mozart in Heaven

—translated by Philip Krummrich

On the fifth day of December, 1791,  
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart entered into heaven, like a circus performer,  
cutting extraordinary capers  
on a gaudily-trapped white stallion.

The dumbfounded angels asked: “What was it? What could it have been?”

Never-heard melodies soared in the extra lines above the staff.

Ineffable contemplation stopped for one moment.

The Virgin kissed him on the forehead

and from then on

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was the youngest of the angels.

Manuel Bandeira (Brazil, 1886-1968)

Preface to Y Salmo Sija

—translated by Craig Santos Perez

While reading Y Salmo Sija, I heard another voice. It was not my grandmother's voice, nor was it the psalmic voice I remember from childhood. It was a voice translating the Chamorro into English, rendering the violent pulse and colonial of currents of the language itself forced into psalm. This voice emerges in these translations, fragmented psalms held together by silence, omissions, and ellipses.

As a result, my translations are neither objective nor transparent. Often, a phrase will be translated into its 'colonial reality' ("Dichoso y taotao", literally "Blessed the people", becomes "we are cursed"). Other times, a phrase will be omitted to show disbelief ("ya todo y finatinasña mumemegae", which roughly means, "and all he does shall prosper", becomes "[...]"). Finally, a phrase will often be translated to question its very meaning ("Sa si Jeova jatungo y chalan manunas: lao y chalan manaelaye ufanmalingo" means roughly "God knows the righteous path; the path of sinners shall perish", but is translated to "will the Landlord of our path ever perish?"). Although this free / open / subjective / experimental translation methodology does not cleanly translate meaning from one language into another, my hope is that these translations clearly translate the voice I hear in the Chamorro psalms, a voice that has been burned and lost and forgotten.

Salmo 10

why so distant, O Lord? why hide in the territorial sun?

the evil persecute us [...] with their imagined devices

[...] the heart desires, yes, the Lord's love

the evil use God in all their thoughts; there is no God

[...] always, not far from sight, the military [...]

he said in his heart, I will not be moved [...]

his mouth full of curses, deceit, and fraud; his tongue

in the dark places of the village; in the secret places, he murders the innocent; his eyes

as a lion snares us in his net

[...]

he said in his heart, God has forgotten us, he hides his face, he refuses to see

rise, O Lord, O God, lift your hand, don't forget us

[...] in his heart, we witness

do you see? [...] your empty hands; we are fatherless

break their hands [...]

the kings have banished us from our land

our desire, our hearts will cause you to hear

the fatherless, the oppressed, landless

Salmo 11

trust the Lord? what do I say to my soul? a bird to your mountain?

for the army bends their bows at the ready [...] my heart

its foundations destroyed [...]

and they built the basilica to cover the sky, his eyes no longer see my people



[...]

rain covers the army, fire and stone and storm-winds [...]

[...]

Salmo 12

help, Lord [...] our faith has failed us

[...] we speak with burning lips and a dual-heart

the landlord cuts off our lips and tongues [...]

they say with our tongues we will prevail; our lips are not owned; who is Lord over us?

for the oppressed, for the need to arise, the Lord says nothing [...]

the Lord's words are pure, like money forged in the ear of this furnace [...]

O Lord, keep us, preserve us forever

on every corner, the army is exalted

Salmo 13

how long, O Lord, will you forget me? how long will you hide your face?

how long will my soul suffer? how long will the army be exalted over us?

hear me, O landlord, my God: light my eyes so I won't sleep

the army says: we have prevailed [...]

without mercy, my heart without salvation

will sing [...]

Poem 15

—translated by Carrie Petri

I enjoy your silence for it's as if you are absent,

and you hear me from afar, and my voice fails the expanse.

It seems that your eyes have flown from your face

and it seems that a kiss has sealed your mouth.

Just as everything is filled by my soul

you emerge from these things, filled likewise.

Dream butterfly, you resemble my soul,

and you resemble the word melancholy.

I enjoy your silence and you are as if distant.

You are as if lamenting, cooing butterfly.

You hear me from afar and my voice doesn't reach you:

Leave me to be mute in your silence.

And leave me to speak to you with your silence

clear as a lamplight, simple as a ring.

You are like night, quiet and constellated.

Your silence is of a star, as remote and austere.

I enjoy your silence for it's as if you are absent.

Distant and dolorous as if you were dead.

But a word, then, and a smile suffice.

And I am happy, happy of what is uncertain.

Pablo Neruda

The Song of Despair

—translated by Carrie Petri

The memory of you emerges from the night about me.

The river ties its obstinate lament to the sea.

Abandoned like wharves at dawn.

It is the hour of departure, oh deserted one!

Cold flowers rain on my heart.

What a rubble pit, a harsh cave of shipwrecks!

Wars and flights accumulated within you.

From you, the wings of songbirds took flight.

You swallowed everything, like distance.

Like the sea, like time. You collected shipwrecks.

It was the happy hour of the assault and the kiss.

The hour of stupor that burned like a lighthouse.

The pilot's anxiety, the blind diver's dread,  
love's tumultuous delirium, you collected shipwrecks!

In mist's infancy, my soul winged and wounded.  
Lost explorer, you collected shipwrecks!

You clung to pain, you seized desire,  
sadness conquered you, you collected shipwrecks!

I made the shadowed wall recede,  
I walked beyond desire and the act.

Oh flesh, my flesh, woman I loved and lost,  
in this humid hour, I invoke you and sing.

As if a jar, you harbored infinite tenderness,  
and as if a jar, infinite oblivion shattered you.

It was the black, black island solitude,  
and there, loving woman, your arms received me.

It was thirst and hunger, and you were the fruit.

It was pain and ruins, and you were the miracle.

Oh woman, I wonder how you held me  
on the earth of your soul, in the cross of your arms.

My love of you was most terrible and short,  
most untidy and blind, most tense and eager.

Cemetery of kisses, fire burns on in your tombs,  
birds still peck at your fruited boughs, blazing.

Oh the wounded mouth, the kissed limbs,  
oh the hungry teeth, the woven bodies.

Oh the mad coupling of hope and endeavor  
to which we tied ourselves, in which we despaired.

Tenderness, slight like water and flour.

Words scarcely begun on lips.

That was my destiny, in which my yearning took flight,  
and in which my yearning fell, you collected shipwrecks!

Oh rubble pit, in you everything fell,  
what pain did you not exude, what waves did not drown you.

From blow to blow you still called and sang  
on foot like a sailor on the prow of his ship.

Still you flowered in song, you broke in currents.  
Oh rubble pit, open and bitter well.

Pale, blind diver, unfortunate hondero,  
lost explorer, you collected shipwrecks!

It is the hour of departure, the long, cold hour  
that night fastens to each clock.

The sea's rustling belt cinches the shore.  
Cold stars alight, black birds emigrate.

Abandoned like wharves at dawn.  
Only the tremulous shadow turns in my hands.

Oh, farther than anything. Oh, farther than anything.

It is the hour of departure. Oh, abandoned one!

PABLO NERUDA

She calls you

—translated by Greta D'Amico

That night your old ones (hear? The beloved  
mother calls: at the smoke of the brown  
pot, with restless longing,

The children brawl: hold back, severe,  
hence an anxious hand, thence  
a shrill mouth, empress to the small populace;

So that in peace, amidst the grand clatter,  
you shake and gather the whimpering little family)  
that night your old ones, a necessary pain,  
will smother against the sheets.



Giovanni Pascoli

The Intelligence Of the Artist

— translated by G.M. Palmer

The intelligence of the artist  
is the same intelligence  
in the peach pit,  
in the heart of grain, in the carrot seed.

It is the vein that leads  
to diamonds, the cancer  
to the pearl.

It is God creating beauty,  
A prophet seeing truth,  
An adventurer of the spirit  
in unbound spaces.

The generous artist takes  
starvation and avarice,  
heals them, and leads us  
with words.

Mary de Rachewiltz

In the Cave

— translated by G.M. Palmer

We are in the cave;  
he and I and all the sheep  
  
that have not  
gone down in rows  
to the crosses at Golgotha

I am him,  
he is me  
and in our wound

I ponder.

Mary de Rachewiltz

Sirens' Song

— translated by G.M. Palmer

Wonder thrives here! Wise and wiley, prized Odysseus,  
Great glory of the Achaians, Avast! Set your ship,  
Here, by our place, where you can hear our wonderful words.  
For up to now, not one blackened ship has driven by  
Who has not at least heard our melodious voices  
And did not steer cheering to our shore to know much more.  
For let us tell you, we knew all that was great in Troy,  
We knew of the toil for the goddesses' desires;  
We knew this, and we know all that is borne, that passes  
Upon the jagged face of this all nourishing Earth.

Odyssey XII.184-191

1/20/2

THE YOUNG LADIES' CONSENT

Act I, Scene 8

~~translated by Chris Kidder

RITA backs into the room, fiddling with the doorknob.

RITA

It's best to lock up. Don't want anyone to steal our clothes.

(Struggles to get the key to turn)

Well, this key is in a fine state!

CALAMOCHA

(Drawing himself up against her)

Would you like me to put a hand to it, my darling?

RITA

Oh!

(Intrigued)

Why, thank you, dear.

CALAMOCHA

(Covering her mouth while turning her to face him)

Keep quiet.

(Notices that it is Rita)

Rita!

RITA

Calamocha!

CALAMOCHA

What a discovery!

RITA

And your master?

CALAMOCHA

He is with me. We have both just arrived.

RITA

Seriously?

CALAMOCHA

No, I'm just giving you a hard time. He'd just received the letter of Doña Paquita...I don't know where he went, who he talked to, or how he arranged it, but... we left Zaragosa that very afternoon. We rode like two flashes through the night. We arrived in Guadalajara this morning, but the birds had already flown on the first stagecoach. Back on the horses, back to the running, and the sweating, and the cracking of the whip... Finally, the nags bushed, us half-crushed, we stopped here intending to go again tomorrow. My Lieutenant has gone to the University to see an old friend while supper is being prepared. And... that's the whole story.

RITA

So, he's here?

CALAMOCHA

And more in love than ever, jealous and threatening lives... He's going to put the hurt on anyone who disputes his claim to his Paquita.

RITA

What are you saying?

CALAMOCHA

Nothing more, nothing less than what I've just told you.

RITA

What pleasure you give me! Now I'm sure he loves her.

CALAMOCHA

Love? Ha! Compared to my master, Romeo was a sissy, Don Juan was a good-for-nothing, and Cyrano was a mere child in matters of the heart.

RITA

Oh! When my lady knows this!

CALAMOCHA

But, on to other things... How is it I find you here? Is there anyone with you? When did you get here? What—

RITA

Let me tell you! Doña Paquita's mother had taken to writing letters and more letters, saying she had arranged for a wedding in Madrid to a rich, honest, well-liked gentleman. In short, you could not ask for a more exactly perfect man. The girl was so harassed by her mother's plans, and incessantly bothered by the sermons of her aunt—that blessed nun—that she saw that it was necessary to declare that she was ready to do whatever they ordered. I can't begin to tell you how much the poor child cried, how heart-broken she was. She wouldn't eat or sleep. At the same time, she had to hide her feelings, so her aunt wouldn't suspect the truth of the matter. It was then, after getting over the first shock of the news and having a chance to talk about ways to get out of the situation, that we found no other option than to notify your master, hoping that if his affection were as true and honest as he had told us, he wouldn't allow his poor Paquita to be given to a stranger, losing forever so many caresses, tears, and starry sighs on the fence of the corral. No sooner had our letter left for its destination, than we saw the mule drawn wagon and its driver... Gasparet and his blue stockings! ... and her mother... and the new suitor. They'd come for her. We packed up our stuff as fast as possible, tied the coffers shut, said goodbye to the nuns, and quick as a whip we made it here to Alcalá the day before yesterday. We are detained while the young lady visits another aunt who lives here. Another aunt, who is also a nun, and as wrinkled and deaf as the one we just left behind. Paquita has already seen her, and has already given her a kiss of her own, as well as one for each of the rest of the order. So, I believe we'll be on our way early in the morning. But, by chance we—

CALAMOCHA

Yes. Say no more... But... So, the suitor is in the inn?

RITA

(Points to Don Diego's room)

That's his room.

(Indicates Doña Irene's and Doña Francisca's rooms, respectively)

And that's her mother's and this is ours.

CALAMOCHA

Ours? Yours and mine?

RITA

Of course not. Here we sleep tonight, the señorita and me. Because last night, all in that one room, there wasn't space for three of us standing up, let alone to sleep... or breathe.

CALAMOCHA

(Picking up his stuff as if to go)

Well. 'Bye.

RITA

And where are you going?

CALAMOCHA

I know what I'm doing... But, the suitor... Did he bring with him any servants? Or friends? Or relatives? You know... anyone who might save him from the first sword thrust that threatens him?

RITA

One servant came with him.



CALAMOCHA

Little help that'll be! Look, as an act of charity, tell him to be prepared, for he is in serious danger.

(turns to go)

Goodbye.

RITA

Will you return soon?

CALAMOCHA

I suppose... these things require speed and, although I can hardly move, it is necessary that my lieutenant leave his visit and return here to claim his property and prepare for that man's funeral... You say that's our room, huh?

RITA

(Flirting)

That's right...

(Seriously)

Doña Paquita's and mine.

CALAMOCHA

You minx!

RITA

You ass! Adiós.

## CALAMOCHA

Adiós... wicked woman!

CALAMOCHA carries all of his things off to Don Carlos's room, room number 3.

L. Fernandez Moratín

## THE PLAYWRITE

—translated by Emily Van Buskirk

It seemed to him he had been writing for centuries

Gradually it became impossible to think up the next plot

Everything had already happened

In any case

what can we do with love

and jealousy

sweet revenge tender murder

the uniqueness with which feelings break a leg  
and what are we going to do  
in the increasingly savage blood-letting of wars in an inexorably  
unfeeling state of love in the indifference  
which modernity let out of the cage  
and with the old-world  
victory of the magnanimous over wrath what to do with the instructively happy  
ending on the proscenium

Yes he was an antiquarian  
he had lost heart  
in space-time without plot  
indeed under the heavy tread of invariable scenes  
every plot snapped like a brittle bridge  
he (a Master) could no longer manage to abridge for the stage  
evil's innumerable reprises in life

How, though, was he supposed to renounce his yearning for applause  
for the auditorium's roar

Not only for glory

Above all he longed to let himself be burned by beauty too

He must have suspected

that this too had already happened  
but somewhat differently and in another history  
when in the final play  
in the final tableau  
he set fire to the stage that signifies the world

And his world burned.

Jana Štroblová (Czech Republic, 1936--)

The Composer

—translated by Emily Van Buskirk

The music rushed along just above the strings  
but even if it resounded from inside the violin  
to him it was coming from elsewhere

Stretched between two violin pegs  
absorbed in two different compositions  
(he listened to one and played the other)

in the sanctified silence of the hall  
he heard the inaudible even more clearly

But sooner than he managed to admit  
this was an ethereal composition  
he was awash with pride that he alone was creating this enticing melody  
As the sounds swirled above him he grasped for them  
not just with his soul  
but involuntarily with his fingers too

To reach out above himself to have the notes in his fist  
(to hold on for a while  
and then on the beat  
to release them hungry for the world's pastures)

Yet when he let the fingerboard go he came up empty-handed  
didn't catch the notes, scared them away  
and henceforth the sonata he was playing fell apart  
he cast a false note right into the face  
of refined taste

The moment is still to come when tone by tone  
He gathers up again

his

good old composition

in front of an audience

but try as he might

the fragments won't assemble

into a composition played beyond an instrument

Jana Štroblová (Czech Republic, 1936--)

Theory of Knowledge

—translated by Emily Van Buskirk

Real knowledge is born only when

we have forgotten what is known. In the dusk of forgetting

external content is saturated with the sap of a mysterious unity, changes

into a meaningful shape, ripens into a living word.

I read *The Critique of Pure Reason*,

*The Phenomenology of Mind* and *The Crisis of the European Sciences*:

the content of these books, once I had forgotten it, changed

into a massive erotic adventure novel

taking place in Prague, Istanbul, and Malaysia

and ending with a scene where the main character  
—an outlaw, pursued the world over by a detachment of Japanese ninjas—  
is lying in bed with his two blond lovers  
aboard a yacht as it rocks  
on the smooth nighttime Vltava near Strelecký Island,  
the last ninja has perished in the depths of a Brazilian swamp,  
they listen to the quiet lapping of the waves, the barking of a dog on the embankment,  
above them the lights of Malá Strana vanish in the dark gardens.

Michal Ajvaz (Czech Republic, 1949--)

PetRín

—translated by Emily Van Buskirk

Coffee costs eight crowns forty at Café Slávie,  
although they brew it from beetles' wing-cases.  
They know how to provide for amusement, however:  
a miniature piano stands in the middle of each table,  
a dwarf sits there on a little stool  
and plays sentimental melodies.  
The dwarfs have a habit of stealing sips of coffee from the cups;  
but the customers don't like this,

since the dwarfs are said to have various diseases.

Basically customers detest dwarfs and dwarfs customers,  
each complaining constantly about the other to the staff.

This causes a muddle, especially when (like right now)  
a herd of reindeer is passing through the place.

They should do something about these reindeer once and for all.

I'm not against actual reindeer, but these  
are usually artificial. One has broken down  
and is standing next to my table, showering little cog wheels.

I prefer the koalas,  
who keep crawling over the patrons,  
even though official circles continue to claim  
that the last one was captured twenty five years ago.

(But we know the real story.) It is night now, I listen to the quiet melody  
tapped on the little keyboard and I look at dark slope of Petrín,  
at the mysterious lights projected onto  
my pale face in the window like menacing constellations,

I recall my girlfriend, who left years ago  
as the psychologist on an expedition whose mission was to map  
the hitherto unexplored regions of Petrín.

Is she now sitting in the palace of legends and looking across the river  
into the illuminated windows of Slávie?

Or was she carried off by Petrín's savage natives,



who are always threatening the city?

In the middle of the night, residents of Malá Strana often hear  
their distant, drawn-out song.

It is not proper etiquette to talk of these things.

People pretend not to hear the gloomy hymns

mingling into their conversation from afar,

and yet they know that the unacknowledged menacing music

is seeping through their words, liberating ancient meanings from the primeval forest.

What was it we were actually talking about?

It's clear that everyone eventually would like to drop the conversation

and join the distant song.

But the rules of polite behavior prevent it.

Michal Ajvaz (Czech Republic, 1949--)