

FALL 2008 ISSUE

Volume 2, number 2

Ezra heads into the colder weather, and the snows of Pasternak and Ryhor Krushyna (this issue), well bundled in brilliant translations by new contributors. A tip o' the cap to Daniele Pantano, whose *The Possible is Monstruous: Selected Poems by Friedrich Dürrenmatt*, is forthcoming from Black Lawrence Press, New York.

The recent American Literary Translators Association (ALTA) conference in Minneapolis was stimulating and full of rich work. The panels—conversation ranging from Alter to Weinberger—were as good as the bilingual readings. The collegiality of this conference is unmatched. Ezra was delighted to meet Adam Sorkin and Edward Morin, former contributors.

We welcome the first **In Other Words: Midwest Translation Festival**, in Minneapolis/St Paul, May 2009, and its host, Commedia Beauregard. Ezra is a sponsor, and will print some of the competition winners. Contact the founder, Chris Kidder, for details. (cokidder@gmail.com)

Ezra embraces the freedoms many translators have recently discussed and made part of their method. A Norman Shapiro thought, from “A Satisfying Condition,” *Translation Review* no. 74, 2007, applies:

Total freedom with total “unfreedom.” It’s a wonderful compromise between the two extremes of total responsibility and total freedom. You’re totally responsible to the text because you can’t write a different text, but you’re totally free within that responsibility, which is why there are many translations of the same work. No two are the same. That’s kind of a satisfying condition.

FEATURED TRANSLATOR: Michael Gizzi.

Michael Gizzi has been a force on the American poetry scene for thirty years. He currently teaches at Roger Williams University, and continues to edit Qua Books (with Craig Watson).

Gizzi's earliest books came from such distinguished publishers as Copper Beech and Burning Deck. *The Wizard of Osmosis* is forthcoming from Burning Deck in 2008. In between are such startling and high-energy books as *No Both* and *My Terza Rima*.

Along with a Writer-in-Residence position at Brown University, Gizzi has been honored with a Distinguished Lectureship at the Fondation Royaumont.

The current translations are from Milli Graffi's *Embargoed Voice*.

I traduttori/traduttrici

Michael Gizzi

Anna Steegmann

John Lawson

Daniele Pantano

Ibrahim Ibn Salma

James McCormick

Diane Furtney

Ihar Kazak

Asuka Itaya

Olga Zilberbourg

THE TRAIN

~~translated by Michael Gizzi

I saw you boy

at intermittent bursts of train windows

startled by lightning

of nude smiles mirages

enthralled trembling shouts

and the coziest touch

fingers

retractile crab-like

a space far away

half-seen while rolling

in bursts, the milk

sparks

lanterns on the lake

eye frozen in looking

long darkness

melt and away
you satiny swarm

I saw you boy
on the tracks of this train
that bolts away from us

MILLI GRAFFI

GRAVEYARD

IN THE ARABIAN DESERT

~~translated by Michael Gizzi

vase sherds

poor numbers stones

thin shadows

of low relief

that keep

with solicitous wisdom

evaporated in sand

the name do not mourn

the white silence

and lightness intrepid

MILLI GRAFFI

FIRST SNOW THAT WILL UNDOUBTEDLY MELT

~~translated by Olga Zilberbourg

They opened the door, and in to the kitchen, steaming

The backyard air rolled in,

And everything aged in a moment,

As in childhood, in the evenings like this.

Dry, quiet weather.

On the street, five steps away,

The winter, blushing, has paused,

She hesitates to enter.

Winter, and everything is anew again.

Into the grey depths of November

The willows are departing as the blind

Without a stick or a guide.

The river and trees are dressed in ice,

And across the naked ice stream,

As a mirror on its stand,

The black sky is resting.

In front of him, on the crossroads,

Which lies half buried in snow,

Stands a birch tree with a star in her hair,

And watches herself in his glass.

She suspects, secretly,

That unbelievable wonders

Fill the winter in the house on the corner,

Just as they do at her height.

BORIS PASTERNAK

SNOWFLAKES SINGING

~~translated by Ihar Kazak

Sultry sadness

Snowflakes singing sounds

Spent soil

Suffering scarcity.

Scod's susurrations

Slow, sere serenity.

Silvery swirled snow

Spreading, sweeping streets.

Snowflakes singing.

Sooty sun saddens.

Sunlight slumbers.

Sanctuary salutes.

Soul spiraling

Strange, secret springs:

Surreal selenites,

Snowflakes singing.

RYHOR KRUSHYNA

UNTITLED

~~translated by Ihar Kazak

That book, they tell me, is yours.

The author of that book that is me.

Every page, can't you see,

Every line one explores,

Every letter it has

Builds a bridge,

Melts the ice

Of your heart

With its warmth.

My joy

Is my book,

The author of that book that is me.

LAST YEAR'S SNOW

~~translated by Diane Furtney

Tell me where, in what land,
is Flora now, that lovely Roman,

or Archipiades, or Thaïs, so
exactly like her cousin Echo,

who had a more than human
beauty and would reply so soon

to any call
across a river or a pool.

But where did it go,
where is it, last year's snow?

Heloise, the grave, the serious,
for whom Abelard chose

self-castration and monastery

life at Saint-Denis—where is she?

It was love, of course,
which brought that course

of fate to him. Not much differently,
where is she,

the queen who commanded
that Buridan

be thrown in the Seine
in a sack? But then,

where did it go,
where is it, last year's snow?

Queen Blanche, that white lily,
who sang like a siren; and she

who was Big-Foot Bertha; Beatrice;
Haremburgis, ruler of Maine; Alice;

good Joan of Lorraine, burned
by the English at Rouen:

where are they,
sovereign Virgin, tell me,

where? Where did they go,
all of last year's snows?

Prince, do not ask me
where they are or may be,

don't ask this week or next or
any time this year, for

I will tell you what remains
is only this refrain:

Where did it go,
last year's snow?

FRANÇOIS VILLON

HE GOES TO CHAPEL

~~translated by Diane Furtney

If I go to the little chapel

often, it's to see that beautiful,

fresh, new rose of a girl.

There's nothing to prattle

about, let them gossip as they will

about why it is I go to chapel.

There is no road or hill

or lane that I will

walk or travel

unless I think I'll

see her there. And it's a fool

indeed, any man who'd call

this man a fool

for going so often to chapel.

CHRISTINE DE PISAN

THE HOURGLASS

~~translated by Diane Furtney

This dust you see
marking your hours constantly

—dust that runs, then
turns to run again

down a narrowed space:
it used to be, in another place,

that I was Damon. It's
because of Phyllis,

the graceful, divine, for whom
I burned, that I became

like this, and was set here.

A secret fire

gnawed at me

and tore me

to this powder, which never knows

a stillness or repose.

Lovers, learn from me:

your fate will seal away

your life from any rest,

your death from even the hope of rest.

CHARLES VION DE DALIBRAY

SOMETHING LOST

~~translated by Diane Furtney and Asuka Itaya

I've lost something trivial.

It's not something

I'd be bothered without;

I don't have much sentiment

attached to it.

I can buy a new one

at the store around the corner.

But because it's lost and hidden,

every drawer here

has been turned inside out.

An unending maze:

I've been lost in it

for three hours already.

When, discouraged, I stepped

down into the garden

and looked at the evening sky,

the first star began shining

just at the edge of the roof.

What am I living for?

Suddenly it was there in my mind,

that utterly meaningless question,

and immediately I remembered

that it had occurred to me before,

a couple of decades ago.

There is still no ready answer.

So, to begin the search again

in at least a graceful way,

I've straightened my clothes

and am encouraging myself.

Just now, as I went back into the room,

I felt the tiny, familiar thing

was about to disappear in dimness . . .

SHUNTARO TANIKAWA

ONE OF THE HANIWA

~~translated by Diane Furtney and Asuka Itaya

All emotions as well as quiet,

moss-covered Time

are raining behind your face,
which bears the weight
of two thousand years
behind your deep eyes.
Your mouth is tightened
by a great secret.

You do not cry or laugh
or become angry because
you are always crying,
laughing and angry.

You do not have thoughts
or feelings. You absorb those
continuously. Then they
precipitate in you forever.

Born directly out of the earth,
you were a human thing
before human beings.

There was a shortness
in one of God's breaths,

and therefore, incomplete,

you can take pride

in a beautiful simplicity

and health.

You store away the universe.

SHUNTARO TANIKAWA

Note: During the pre-Buddhist Kofun period in Japan (ca. A.D. 250-ca. 600), the huge, round burial mounds of the ruling military elite were surrounded by unglazed clay figurines along the perimeters (“haniwa” = “clay rings”). Two to four feet high, these symbolic sculptures were shaped like horses, houses, ships, pillows, fans, sunshades or, more often, armed and helmeted male or female warriors.

DAYS WHEN THE EARTH IS TOO VIOLENT

~~translated by Diane Furtney and Asuka Itaya

Those days when the Earth is too violent,

I feel like shouting to Mars:

It's overcast here,

the atmospheric pressure is low,
the wind grows stronger and stronger!
Hey, hello!
How is it on your side?

The moon keeps watching,
but is completely disinterested.

And the gaze from so many, many stars
is painful.

They are still such small children
when looked at from Earth.

On a day when the Earth is too violent,
warm is the red of Mars.

SHUNTARO TANIKAWA

KHAYYAM

~~translated from Farsi to Arabic by Ahmed Rami, and from Arabic by Ibrahim Ibn Salma

A voice in the dusk of the night,
Calling from beyond the world of thine:
Wake up and fill the cup of life
Before the cup of death engulfs your vine.

Preoccupy not your mind
With time past or future light.
Seize the present as it unfolds,
No security in the dark of night.

Today is yours but
not to-morrow,
Beauty savored with living the moment,
Disappointment rises with future sorrow.

With the love of beauty the heart expands,
And the chest is unable to contain.
Water is for the thirsty to drink
And love is for the heart to attain.

This heart is beating and

In the fire of love is burning.

Wasteful is the day you live

With no love and no love-making.

Spend your nights awake and

On the strings of desire, vibrate.

Your life on earth never lengthens,

When your nights are slept away.

The nights chase the days,

And the stars orbit the dark skies.

But the earth plane is lightly trodden

By dancing bosoms and entrancing eyes.

So, delve into the lusting fire,

The days pass by like a cloudy flight.

Immerse your fancy in tasting the vine

Before your youth perishes from sight.

You have worn a dress called life,

And lost in this vast ocean of plight.

The day will come when you undress, still puzzled

Why you came and where you may flee.

Pleasure-seeking is never lasting,
The nights end with sunrays rising.
Say farewell to worldly fleeting surmise,
And fly upon the wings of infinite divine.

So journey my friend to the beloved Allah,
Where you find your eternal home.
Like drops of water seeking to unite
With the vast ocean of bliss.

from RUBAIYAT AL KHAYYAM

SOUL LOVE

~~translated by Ibrahim Ibn Salma

I ask the eyes,
Why my sleepless nights are long?
I ask the eyes,
Why the pillows drown in flood of tears?
I ask the eyes,
Why my beloved has left me and gone?

I have loved my love for her,
I have followed her like the day follows the night.
I have elevated her in a pedestal high in the sky.
Now I cannot reach her.
My soul has built a temple of love, high above
To house and guard her.
I have lighted the candles for her to illuminate her path,
Even though their flame is burning me inside.
I have loved her with my soul,
The soul love is eternal,
While the physical love perishes.
My soul will always long for her, to eternity.

song (Arabic) by HUSSAIN SYED

HEIGHTS OF MACCHU PICCHU X

~~translated by John Lawson

Stone upon stone, but man, where was he?

Air upon air, but man, where was he?

Time upon time, but man, where was he?

Were you, too, the broken shard
of man incomplete, of the empty eagle
that through the streets of today, following the footsteps,
that through the leaves of dead autumn
goes on battering the soul, driving it toward the tomb?

Poor hand and foot, poor life...

Days of light unraveled

in you, like rain

over banners at the fiesta.

Did they drop, petal by petal, their dark food

into your gaping mouth?

Hunger, coral of humanity,

hunger, secret plant, woodcutters' root,

hunger, did your reef-line rise

as high as these tottering towers?

I interrogate you, salt of the roads:

show me your spoon; allow me, architecture,

to pick at your stamens of stone with a little stick,

to climb all your stairways of air up to emptiness,

to scrape at your guts until I touch man.

Macchu Picchu, did you place

stones upon stone on a foundation of rags,

coal upon coal, and at the bottom a tear?

Fire in the gold, and in him, trembling, the red
dropper of blood?

Return to me the slave you buried!

Rip out of the land the hard bread
of the miserable. Show me the clothes
of the serf; show me his window.

Tell me how he slept when he was alive.

Tell me if his sleep was
rough, opened into itself, a dark hole
worn in the wall by exhaustion.

The wall. The wall. And whether over his sleep
all those levels of stone gathered, and whether he fell down under that stone
to sleep, as if under a moon.

Ancient America, drowned bride,
your fingers, too,
leaving the forest for the high emptiness of gods,
under the marriage banners of light and ceremony
mingling with the thunder of the drums and of the lances,
your fingers, too, your fingers,
the ones that the abstract rose and the line of cold, the ones

that the bloody breast of the new crop interwove
into the fabric of radiant matter, into the hard hollows--
did you, America, buried, hunker down so deep
inside that bitter gut, to guard, like an eagle, your hunger?

PABLO NERUDA

THE NOVEL

~~translated by Anna Steegmann

Small discount shops line Vienna's busiest streets, the word NOVELS is written in large bold letters above their entrance doors. To their customers, literature is a provision, just like TOBACCO and LIQUOR in the stores to the left and right of the dime-novel shops. It hardly matters that no great literature is offered here. The novel survives because it is life's companion. This has not been true for plays for example for a long time. The theater summons people still convinced it has something important to say. We no longer believe this gesture's self-importance. In contrast the novel does not draw attention to itself. It sits on the shelf, together with five hundred others and consents to be undiscovered, unread. For that reason, we always seek it out.

WILHELM GENAZINO

ONLY NOTHINGNESS STANDS

~~translated by Daniele Pantano

Furious and wet

I slid out of my mother's body

without ever knowing why

or on whose order

I later blinked in the light

and became distrustful

so I am still

satisfied with myself; the world

outside

is uncertain. It doesn't belong to me.

It's an incomprehensible mercy

or

an evil curse. Who

knows

To be prepared for anything.

That's why I collect the bottles of wine

smoke the dried brown

leaves

Transience

only nothingness

stands.

FRIEDRICH DÜRRENMATT

WHEN I WALK THROUGH

GERMAN CITIES

~~translated by Daniele Pantano

When I walk through German cities,

getting lost

with every fourth step

Through these black and gray

wastelands that

like giant cesspits

had to be burnt down

Stuck in the monotonous mass of its

denizens,

hearing their language, knowing

they despise us provincials

Although it is they who are

behind the times,

mankind's prime in every imaginable

situation

Once world champions in poetry and thought.

Oppressors, not out of primitivity

but presumption, proud even

of their afflictions

Relieved I return to my country

And put all the trash
that surrounds me here
back onto my shoulders. With my head
held high I begin again
to fight the windmills.

Always a Don Quixote, I love my country
by castigating it
affirm the world by negating it

Speaking a better German than the Germans.

FRIEDRICH DÜRRENMATT

TERCETS ON LOVE

~~translated by James McCormick

Look at those cranes in a great bow!

The clouds, along together,

Drew up alongside them as they flew

From one life into another.

At the same height, at the same speed,

Both only appear to be beside each other.

So let crane share with cloud

The sky across which they briefly fly;

Here let nothing else thus abide

And see nothing else but the sway

Of the other in the wind that both sense,

Lying by each other as they fly.

So let the wind carry them off into nothingness;

Only so long as they don't pass on, so long as they don't change,

Can nothing touch the two of these,

Can they both be driven out of every place
Where rains threaten and shots ricochet.
So under the sun's and moon's hardly different disks

On they fly, lost in each other—utterly.

Where to, you two?

To nowhere.

From whom?

From everybody.

You ask, *How long have they been together already?*

Briefly.

And when will they part?

Straightaway.

So love seems—to lovers—a stay.

BERTOLT BRECHT