

Ezra welcomes back Adam Elgar, a very fine translator of Italian. Welcome to Rob Hatt and his bold 3+ versions of the same Li Bai poem; Rob is a translator to be reckoned with. And of course, a sweeping bow to one of the deans of translation—certainly the dean of translation from Rumanian in the United States—Adam Sorkin. He is this issue’s featured writer.

Of special note is the work of Roberto Arlt, one of the great writers of the *vanguardia* in South America (1920s-1930s). He comes to us because Alex Ross labored over Arlt’s one act play, *The Desert Isle* (the heirs only allow us to excerpt it). Ross submitted this work in the competition of “In Other Words,” the translation festival in Minneapolis (2009) sponsored by *Ezra*, and his fine effort made him the winning translator.

Two very special conferences are upcoming: Diálogos is a bilingual conference for writers, inaugurating in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, July 31 to August 2, 2010. It promises to mix genres and offer a great meeting place for writers—and it has a special emphasis on translating. www.dialogossanmiguel.com. “The Author-Translator in the European Literary Tradition” takes place at Swansea University (England), June 28-July 1, 2010. Papers are no longer accepted, but the site is www.author-translator.net.

While *Ezra*’s head usually lolls in cumulo-nimbic altruism, there is a practical side to the recent rise in literary translation’s fortunes. We thank Catherine Porter, President of the MLA, for her latest commentary, urging that “translation of literary and scholarly works should be acknowledged as scholarly activity and assessed as such in decisions about hiring, promotion and tenure.” This standard should be melded with the Boyer standards in the ongoing revision of the tenure process.

Go forth and spread this word..

TRADUTTORI/TRADUTTRICI:

Adam Sorkin, Antuza Genescu

Wendy Hardenberg

Adam Elgar

Alex Ross

Allan Johnston, Guillemette Johnston

William Cobden

Rob Hatt

FEATURED TRANSLATOR: **ADAM SORKIN**

Adam J. Sorkin is the most active and honored translator of Romanian writing in English. His most recent publication is *Memory Glyphs: Three Prose Poets from Romania*—Radu Andriescu, Iustin Pan?a, Cristian Popescu (Twisted Spoon Press, 2009), done with a number of different translators including Andriescu, Mircea Ivanescu, and Bogdan ?tefanescu. He has two other books in press: *Rock and Dew*, poems by Carmen Firan (The Sheep Meadow Press), translated mostly with the poet, and *Lines Poems Poetry* by Mircea Ivanescu (University Press of Plymouth, UK), translated with Lidia Vianu. Ruxandra Cesereanu's *Crusader-Woman*, translated mainly with Cesereanu (Black Widow Press), came out in 2008. Other publications of his include Radu Andriescu's *The Catalan Within* (Longleaf Press, 2007), translated with the poet; Magda Cârneli's *Chaosmos*, with Cârneli (White Pine Press, 2006); and Mariana Marin's *Paper Children*, with various collaborators (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2006). Sorkin's recognitions number among them The Poetry Society's Poetry Translation Prize for Marin Sorescu's *The Bridge* (Bloodaxe Books, translated with Vianu), the *International Quarterly* Crossing Boundaries Award, and the Kenneth Rexroth Memorial Translation Prize, as well as National Endowment for the Arts, Rockefeller Foundation, Academy of American Poets, Arts Council of England, Romanian Cultural Institute, and Fulbright, Soros, and Witter Bynner Foundation support for his translation activities. His Bloodaxe books, Liliana Ursu's *The Sky Behind the Forest* (1997, translated with Ursu and Tess Gallagher) and Ioana Ieronim's *The Triumph of the Water Witch* (2000, done with the

poet), were shortlisted for the Weidenfeld Prize. Sorkin is Distinguished Professor of English, Penn State Brandywine.

Side by Side With The Runaway Bride

~~translated by Adam Sorkin and Antuza Genescu

within four walls solitude gives me the impression
of a close-knit family to whom I can admit my regrets
every Sunday for the trains
derailed on the plain
after all I've never spoken the truth
because there were too many kinds of trains
good bad brazen blasé
ready to rummage through my pockets
ready to take me to a movie
(the title was THE BRIDE'S BED CHAMBER)
after it got dark THE GROOM
(he was sort of squishy) turned into a pie poetically related
to the clocks (painted by Salvador Dali)
so necessary in a marriage
and promoted after the honeymoon
so they can be enjoyed by other grooms IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD
for two or three folkloric weeks (orgies)
FOR THE FIRST THIRTY DAYS IT'S NOT REALLY A SIN
IF YOU UNLOCK THE WRONG DOOR
reported another groom who arrived (vaulting the fence)
to check out the answer
like parrot-vendors
YOU LOVE ME YOU LOVE ME
.....
maybe
I should have been a rebel
side to side with the runaway bride
I should have stepped right into the groom's photograph
sleeping IN THE SUN on a chariot drawn by herons
herons would have become scared anyway
they were sold on silver trays carried high
above the heads of the throng of wedding guests

a third of whom had been part of the nudist movement

BOTH SEXES

to improve the species in test tubes

.....
solitude spins like A MEANING learned

BY HEART

it's eight past ten

.....
**HE WHO FLIES AND IS NEITHER BIRD
NOR ANYTHING ELSE**

XL-Size Tartan Outfit

I ran all night

in spring the relatives sacrifice gentle kids

I lie down on the railroad tracks

when I stand up

I'll be as happy as

a sharp double-edged luxury object

IS IT PAST NOON? YES IT'S PAST NOON!

the itinerant violinists are gabbing away

these boys have always copied their music theses

Miru? a the line inspector hired them to fiddle in the clover

TRAIN? TRAIN TEST!

they cast lots to see who's to look in the mirror

who's to make love with the frigid scarecrow

on whose door someone wrote in phosphorescent block letters

TUNNEL FORBIDDEN!

I lie down on the railroad tracks

the gate is lowered in the mirror

DO YOU MISS ME? HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN ME?

on the telephone the cocky man

exhales / a sigh tries hard

not to swallow the candy he keeps in reserve

obscene symbolic sound pertaining to the locomotive

CH CH CH CH CH CH CH CH CH CH CH CH CH CH CHHUUHHH

DO YOU MISS ME? MISS ME?

the violinists have begun to play

the clover has grown over them

the scenery offers a vast panorama

DO RE MI SOL

DO RE MI SOL

they cast lots to see who's to dash off to the phone
the ringing wakes the killer storks at the linesman's cabin
(the orchestra is attacked / kidnapped to the clouds
released at a predetermined hour)

WHAT TIME IS IT? HOW MANY ARE MISSING?

a man can be heard on the phone

MAYBE YES MAYBE NO

men wearing caps

from the Living Photograph Foundation

trucked cruise ships and sailboats

through my blood

to wait for the tide

SO MUCH BLOOD!

YOU COULD PRIVATIZE YOURSELF!

I could privatize myself!

I could take my own path with my tools

and marine taxes

five o'clock sharp / lying on the railroad tracks I give

interviews in my XL-size tartan outfit

IS YOUR BLOOD TALENTED? HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN PRACTICING?

yes, tonight's moon will be huge!

My Hair's Grown So Long

I lie down on the railroad tracks

YOUR HAIR'S GROWN SO LONG

the man on the phone tells me

then much more softly

YOU'RE IN THE DESERT

THE RAILROAD TIES HAVE COME TO AN END AT LAST

THE DRESS NEAR THE ENGINE DOOR

NEVER MADE YOU YOUNGER

YOUR HAIR'S GROWN SO LONG

.....

I lie down on the railroad tracks

every time someone comes to shout

HOW ARE YOU? YOO-HOO! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

hello my hair

has wound tightly about the engine

HELL... O

(he curses the butterflies he picks his nose)

I'M THE ENGINEER I CAN'T GET OUT

RODICA DRAGHINCESCU

Open Sky

~~translated by William Cobden

The thread descends. From high in the sky, the thread descends, heavy, straight, black — descends upon the top of the bare head — the head of the old man who stops in his tracks. He's in a garden, caged and surrounded by fences, and the world is outside. The other people turn round, alongside the trees. Time is heavy, eyes, sparks illuminate the black night, or is it the light of the film? — this light which is no longer in his head. A cloud of soot swells, waterless cotton avalanche; the house swells also; the chest and the trees swell, and the head is lost. Skin – under the stems of fire — streams — and the water flows away from the oil, which glides, which plays — the hinges of the largest door turns. The sky splits — the thread descends — the flash. Glimmers of the world are barely glimpsed.

Old Harbour

One more step towards the lake, on the quays, in front of the well-lit tavern.

Propped up against the wall, the sailor sings; the woman sings. The boats rock, the ships pull a bit more on the chains. Inside there are deep landscapes drawn on the glass; clouds are in the room, along with the warmth of the sky and the sound of the sea. Every

vague adventure moves them. The water and the night are waiting outside. The moment to leave will come soon. The harbour extends, the inlet stretches towards another climate, all the surroundings are full of memories, the slanting roads, the rooftops that will sleep.

But nevertheless they are always standing, ready to go.

PIERRE REVERDY

Sonnet 10 – “On the Death of his brother, Giovanni”

~~translated by Adam Elgar

One day, if I no longer have to flee
from land to land, you'll see me on your stone,
my brother, mourning your nobility,
your fallen flower of youth. I'll sit and groan,

and stretch my yearning hands out fruitlessly
to our poor mother dragging out alone
her days, telling your mute remains of me:
alone I greet those roofs that were my own.

I sense the hostile gods and secret cares
that made a tempest of your life, and pray
that I may come to harbour where you lie.

I ask so little when hope disappears!
You foreigners, do this at least – convey
these bones to my sad mother when I die.

Sonnet 6

Since I abandoned you, it's my own fault

if I now cry out to the trembling seas
that beat against the mountains, and my pleas
are drowned by the Tyrrhenian winds' assault.

I hoped (since I endure this long exile
from men and Gods among the enemies of truth
while you stay, sighing out your guilty youth
for me, in our sweet homeland) for a while

I hoped that time, hard knocks, the rocks I pant
across, and these black, everlasting woods,
rough chamber for my feral sleep, could heal

my bleeding heart – but what's the point?
when love will follow me down to the shades,
immortal and omnipotent, of hell.

Sonnet 7 (1824 version)

“Self-portrait”

A chiselled brow; eyes brooding and recessed;
red hair, white cheeks, a look that's bold and proud;
lips full and slow to smile; a hairy chest;
on my fine neck I carry my head bowed;

my limbs well-shaped; my clothing fine but plain;
rapid in step, thought, speech; in action free;
stubborn, lavish, sober, sincere, humane;
at odds with life; events at odds with me.

Always pensive, I sadly stand apart;
I have no time for either hope or fear.
Debased by shame, enraged I'm at my best.

My reason counsels caution but my heart,
rich in both vice and virtue, cannot bear
restraint. You, Death, will bring me fame and rest.

Sonnet 4

To quieten the rattle of my chains
I live on hope and silence, love and tears;
silence the most, for tenderness constrains
my speech, my thoughts, my writing – all are hers.

No one can hear me but the lonely stream
where every night love leads me by the hand.
Here I confide my grief, vent my extreme
distress, and spell out how I am unmanned.

I tell the tale of laughing eyes, so bright,
that burned my heart with an immortal ray,
I tell how glistening and scented hair,

two arms fit for a goddess, and so white,
a rosy pair of lips and all they say,
taught me at last to love and to despair.

UGO FOSCOLO

Untitled

~~translated by Wendy Hardenberg

Another day, gray and mysterious, on the Pont de Grenelle,

ah, you leave your mouth entirely

to become one with

your breath and the mist

that half veils the Eiffel Tower. You vanish with them.

This is happiness.

White Homeland

Death with its path always before us
among the modern arches and the cars.

From a heartbeat onward
toward the horizon.

From a fissure in the clouds.

In the evening
a softness suffuses the world.

When the moment is almost too late
and yet filled with our life gone by

when we are at the brink of ourselves and the earth
is fruit ready to fall
death will turn toward us with the true face of Eurydice

It will join us.

Together we will roam
our wide, white homeland.

Untitled

The wind dwells in gardens, streets.

Middle of the city. January. Their hair
like at the seaside, people walk
and forget what they have. An old love
rolls in their mouths. There was
the joy of seeking refuge in a body
*(the woman's memory: enclosing the sex of the man,
but encircled by arms).*

There was a harbor, a holiday.

And once again the wind no one can see
beneath birds
beneath love
gusts deep into the body.

MARIE-CLAIRE BANCQUART (b. Paris, 1932)

Chan Gan Ging

~~translated by Rob Hatt

Translation 1: formally mimetic poem (30 lines of 5 characters is same in both original and metapoem)

I, with young girl's hair
Plucked petals by the door
You, on bamboo hobby horse
Ran round, fruit in hand
In Chang Gan we lived
A pair, innocent and trusting
I married you at fourteen
But shy, I never opened
My lowered face, facing walls
Not turning, a thousand calls
My face opened at fifteen
My ashes were now yours
You held my trust, safe
Why do I seek you?
You left me at sixteen
To far Qu Tang gorge
Five months hasn't moved me
Monkeys above share their sorrow
Footprints from day of leaving
Each by moss is covered
Moss too deep to clear

Autumn winds come early, leaves
And yellow butterflies of August
In couples flutter through grass
Touching your wounded lady's heart
She sits, pines, flushes, ages
Early, late, when you return
Send word to your home
To face, welcome, I will
Straight to Chang Feng Sha.

Translation 2: analogical poem (effect and reception in target culture aims to be similar to that of source text)

As I, a girl, sat plucking petals bare,
Charged you, my good lord in on bamboo steed
Of all but play we two were unaware
To venture from Chang Gan we had no need
As I, a wife, at once abashed and pale
Began to warm, to love, and more, to trust
Left you, my man, to seek a distant trail
How now will husband's ashes join wife's dust?
Your footprints, greened by moss, your leaving told
An early autumn wind incites the leaves
To dance in pairs with butterflies of gold
But watching from too close, this sad heart grieves.
When distant trails decide to lead you near
Send word ahead, and I, your girl, shall hear.

Translation 3: Organic poem (concentrating on semantic material of source text rather than form or reception)

A young girl played a young girl's game
Picking flowers for her boy
As he galloped round her on imagined horse.
She and he played together in Chang Gan
Two of them, small and trusting.
Fourteen saw the game change
He called her but got no answer
A thousand times.
Fifteen saw her raise her head, she joined him, ashes and dust to ashes and dust.
With him she need not seek him.
Sixteen saw him leave, saw you leave.
Five months with only howling monkeys on my side.
Your footprints are disappearing under deep deep moss,
Not touched by the autumn wind, early this year
Not touched by the dancing yellow butterflies in pairs.
As I am touched, and aging, straining
To hear news of your return.

Translation 4: Extraneous poem (the poem is in no way derivative from source text, if that is indeed possible)

It should be me.
Smug couples skip too close, smirking
As I strain to join them.
They're in my place.
Our feet were once as theirs, tapping
As his reflected mine.
That song is ours.
Just lately learnt the steps, laughing
As we swept round the room.
Why have you gone?
All patience, never haste, waiting
As I slowly faced you.
Is it my fault?
I wasn't always sure, shaking
As you taught me to move.
You left me here.
A stack in circling seas, standing
As all around me sways.
And now it's quiet.
Smug couples catch their breath, slowing
As they, like me, are still.

LI BAI (China, 701-762 A.D.)

The Princess of the Seas

~~translated by Allan Johnston and Guillemette Johnston

The tempest, strong as speeding horse, strikes
The three-mast ship that hurtles with the wind.
The rigging, thick with death, sings like a lyre.
A furious blizzard overwhelms the bar;
One senses, rising from the ocean's depths,
The gulf's fell hunger, black leviathan.
The siren on the oaken prow, her breast
Erect, aflame before the liquid blue,
Appears to scream in horror at the foam.
The laughter of the thunder crashes down;

Mad swarming devils dart their whitish tongues.
An avalanche of waves, coming behind
An avalanche of foam, batters the bridge.
Ginevra, queen of Britons, haughty-eyed,
Left naked by the winds which torment her,
Stands on the deck among the sea's bridegrooms—
More than a hundred corpses raped by fire.
Her fair flesh twists around the groaning mast;
in fierce despair her hand lifts toward the skies
Flamboyant with startled lightning, and she cries:
“Terrible God, accomplish your designs,
But spare the infant growing in my womb!”
Among the whirling, flying waves her words
Are carried by the madly spinning winds;
The scythe of lightning, as an answer, strikes!
A heavy hiss ingurgitates the deck;
The woman's bowels are burst apart by flames.
And in the sulfuric hug of rolling waves
A child is born, a girl whose strange eyes
Reflect the monstrous horror of the heavens.

FRANÇOIS BROUSSE (France, 1913-1995)

I Sat on a Stone

~~translated by Allan Johnston

I sat on a stone
with my legs crossed — bone on bone —
sitting all hunched up there, and
I kept my head up with my hand
curling on my chin and cheek.
I was stymied, trying to seek
the noblest way to live on earth.
I could find neither wisdom nor worth
in how three noble goods could be had
without at least one going bad.

Take, for example, wealth and honor —
if you have one, the other's a goner;
the greatest good, the third, God's grace,
puts the others in their place.

I gladly would enshrine all three,
but sadly, it can never be
that earthy opulence and fame
and holy favor in God's name
can ever meet within one heart —
no path can link them there, no art,

for everywhere words hide deceit,
and brute force lords it on the street,

peace and justice barely survive:
these three will have no guide or guard
unless the last two can revive.

WALTHER VON DER VOGELWEIDE (Germany, c. 1170-1230)

THE DESERT ISLE

A Fantasy in One Act

By Roberto Arlt

Translated by Alex Ross

Characters

| | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| The Boss | 1 st |
| Female Office Worker | |
| Manuel | 2 nd |
| Female Office Worker | |
| María | 3 rd |
| Female Office Worker | |
| 1 st Male Office Worker | Cipriano (Mulatto) |
| 2 nd Male Office Worker | Director |
| Bookkeeper | |

A very white rectangular office with a large window occupying the entire width of the room and framing a warm, blue, infinite sky. Seated at their desks, and lined up in rows like army recruits, the office workers are bent over their typewriters, working busily. Upstage center, THE BOSS sits at his large desk, concealed behind a pair of dark glasses, and with his hair cropped short like the bristles of a brush. It is 2:00 in the afternoon, and an intense, oppressive brightness weighs down upon these poor wretches, whose hunched silhouettes complete the desolate symmetry of the tenth-floor office.

THE BOSS: Another mistake, Manuel.

MANUEL: Sir?

THE BOSS: You've made another mistake, Manuel.

MANUEL: Sorry, sir.

THE BOSS: So am I. (*Handing him the document.*) Correct it. (*A minute of silence.*)

THE BOSS: María.

MARIA: Sir?

THE BOSS: You've made another mistake, María.

MARIA: (*Approaching the Boss's desk.*) Sorry, sir.

THE BOSS: I'll be sorry too when I have to get rid of you two. Correct it.

There is another minute of silence, during which the smokestacks of ships are seen passing by outside the window; tugboat whistles and the harsh bellowing of a ship

horn can also be heard. Automatically, all the office workers sit up straight and gaze, transfixed, out the window.

THE BOSS (*irritated*): Let's hope the rest of you can manage to get through the afternoon without slipping up!

Pause

FIRST MALE OFFICE WORKER (*with a muffled cry of anguish*): Oh, no! This is impossible.

Everyone turns to look at him.

THE BOSS (*in a venomous tone of mock-cordiality*): What, sir, is impossible?

MANUEL: It's impossible to work here.

THE BOSS: It's impossible to work here? And why, pray tell, is it impossible to work here? (*Slowly*) Are there fleas on your seats? Cockroaches in your inkwells?

MANUEL (*standing up and shouting*): How can we not make mistakes? Is it possible to avoid making mistakes here? Answer me. Is it possible to work here without making mistakes?

THE BOSS: Watch your tone of voice, Manuel. Your seniority with the company doesn't give you the right to be insolent. What are you getting so worked up about?

MANUEL: I'm not getting worked up, sir. (*Pointing at the window.*) If we make mistakes, it's because of those damn ships.

THE BOSS (*puzzled*): The ships? (*Pauses*) What do they have to do with it?

MANUEL: That's right, the ships. The ships that come and go all day long, screaming in our ears, assailing our eyes, filling our lungs with their fumes. (*He falls back into his chair.*) I can't take it anymore.

BOOKKEEPER: Manuel is right. When we worked in the basement, we never made mistakes.

MARIA: That's right. This never happened there.

FIRST FEMALE OFFICE WORKER: For seven years we've worked here.

FIRST MALE OFFICE WORKER: Has it really been seven years?

SECOND MALE OFFICE WORKER: Of course it has.

BOOKKEEPER: Sir, I think these boats passing back and forth all day are a detriment to our bookkeeping.

THE BOSS: You think so?

MANUEL: We all think so. Isn't that right?

MARIA: I've never been on a boat, but I think so.

ALL OFFICE WORKERS: We all think so.

SECOND FEMALE OFFICE WORKER: Sir, have you ever been on a boat?

THE BOSS: And why would an office manager need to get on a boat?

MARIA (*to the other employees*): Do you see what I mean? No one who works here has ever been on a boat.

SECOND FEMALE OFFICE WORKER: It's hard to believe that none of us has ever traveled.

SECOND MALE OFFICE WORKER: And why haven't you ever traveled?

SECOND FEMALE OFFICE WORKER: I was waiting to get married first...

BOOKKEEPER: If I've never traveled, it hasn't been because I haven't wanted to...

SECOND MALE OFFICE WORKER: Same here. Traveling: Now *that's* the way to enjoy life.

THIRD FEMALE OFFICE WORKER: Working inside these four walls every day is like living in a dungeon.

MANUEL: How can we not make mistakes? We're in here adding up numbers from dawn to dusk, and outside our window ships pass by all day long, headed for distant lands. (*Pause.*) To places we've never seen. When we were young, we dreamed of visiting those places.

THE BOSS (*Irritated.*): That's enough! Enough chattering! Get back to work!

MANUEL: I can't work.

THE BOSS: You can't work? And why is that, Manuel?

MANUEL: No. I can't do it. The port makes me sick at heart.

THE BOSS: It makes you sick at heart. (*Sarcastic.*) So it makes you sick at heart, does it? (*Holding his anger in check.*) Back to work. Get back to work now.