

VOLUME 17 number 3

Ezra exhorts you to get down to the ALTA translators' convention in Tucson, November 8-11. It's not too late, though the hotel is booked up. Downtown hotels are available and an easy, free streetcar ride to our venue. www.literarytranslators.org

We've been reading Rachel Careau's new translation of Colette (*Chéri* and *The End of Chéri*, one volume). While not as perfect as the rave reviews suggest, it wisely keeps Colette's choppy syntax and severe concision. Perhaps as a result of the new liberties translators grant themselves, Careau has felt no need to create a typical, early 20th century literary English style. She has translated from non-standard to non-standard.

This puts us in mind of David Foster Wallace's long review, twenty years ago, of the Garner *A Dictionary of Modern American Usage* (in *Harper's*). He inserts an especially apt disquisition on what he (not alone) calls SWE, Standard Written English. By way of a nod to sociolinguistics, he stresses that this is a language among other languages, and not necessarily native to every English-speaker. This raises key choices for the translator.

We translators know the set of choices that face us at each outset, and the need to narrow these down. Whether it is always appropriate to make SWE the target language would be a less common quandary, but an occasional choice, no?

Picture the SWE of Trollope, writing in Victorian England. And try translating it into French. Putting aside the issue of the gap between spoken French and written French that is wider, and different, than the gap (gaps) between spoken English and SWE, it would be a fraught decision—trying to put Trollope's English into some kind of equivalent. We are free to modernize—as long as editors and buyers know what they're about, and choose to read a modernized language. But there is always the other choice: to try to keep the style, including the style of quoted speech, consonant with the era of the original. So, in French, this might be the speech and writing of austere, upper-class Huguenots, Ezra thinks.

Trollope (*Olney Farm*):

To this somewhat transcendental question Mrs. Furnival made no reply. That a high tone of moral sentiment, as a thing in general, for the world's use, is very good, she was no doubt aware; but her mind at the present moment was fixed exclusively on her own peculiar case. That Tom Furnival should be made to give up seeing that nasty woman who lived at Hamworth, and to give up also having letters from her—that at present was the extent of her moral sentiment.

And speech:

“Oh yes; I remember it very well. I do not easily forget words such as were spoken then.”

“You said that you would never turn away from me.”

“Nor will I—that is, with reference to the matter as to which we were speaking.”

“Is our friendship, then, to be confined to one subject?”

The problem(s) might be obvious, and too obvious to be stated here. Let this essay, then, serve in praise of “adaptations” in translation; the whole cultural picture of these scenes has to be re-made in a French version (of the era, if that is our choice). Ezra isn’t sure there is any era of French discourse, written or spoken, which is quite so stilted. And then—class considerations also pushed to the side for the moment—there’s that whiff of Victorian stiffness of more than one kind.

Ezra’s present observations, then, go beyond encouraging the freedom to “adapt.” We are throwing more weight against those who say “great literature isn’t translatable”; there might be a way to adapt Trollope to a cultural milieu and time which has French near-equivalents in speech and third person narrative prose, though we still see the challenge here. If so, it would seem that very little is “untranslatable.”

There are three reviews in this issue.

FEATURED WRITER: John Taylor

John Taylor’s most recent translations are, from the French, José-Flore Tappy’s *Trás-os-Montes* (The MadHat Press) and Philippe Jaccottet’s *Ponge, Pastures, Prairies* (Black Square Editions), as well as, from the Italian, Franca Mancinelli’s *The Butterfly Cemetery: Selected Prose 2008-2021* (The Bitter Oleander Press). His most recent books of poetry are *Transizioni*, a bilingual volume published in Italy by LYRIKS Editore and illustrated by the Greek artist Alekos Fassianos, and *Remembrance of Water & Twenty-Five Trees* (The Bitter Oleander Press), illustrated by the French artist Caroline François-Rubino. He lives in France.

— poems excerpted from **Désincarcération** (Éditions L’Âge d’Homme, 2017)

1

by **Charline Lambert** (Belgian, contemporary)

Breakups happen.

Then you open breaches

in words to widen

this gap in you

to card a light there

feeble from your fissure

*

You seek to reach the point where

you become irrevocable,

where there is nothing left

of you

or your vertebrae

to spell out

*

You, muted,

are a diastole

slowly wearing down.

And I have finished with it,
already, there,

with you.

*

An effacing arm, wing
and abrasion.

—circulate from now on

only in ample undoings.

*

Crumbly ground, ground from which

2

a face surfaces

persists on your body in
the vague form
of a cloud.

from Lambert's *Une Salve* (Éditions l'Âge d'homme 2020)

Never again the blackness, its hand of anguish; never again on me that dark star-heavy
body—that lunar crust scraping my soul for an obol of light.

Inhabit the night.

Never again the evening, its descent from the auroral plateau, that vise biting into sparkling splinters and shattering my bright core like a stone.

Never again willfulness, its talons hoeing my lips; never again that dark body on me—those gums extracted from the nocturnal bridle bit when tightened verve arms itself to the teeth.

Inhabit the night.

Never again sight, its eyes aborting the horizon, that rude roughness in the psalms of the hand from which the song of the clouds is removed.

Never again knowledge, that sacredness soiled with false airs; never again that star-heavy body on me—that spit profaning the purple water subdued in the pagan's hearth.

Enter the sea.

*

Impious, smug, implacable: enter the sea.

Wash myself in it—at its jetty, at its breakwater tense in me like a blade. Then, nothing will better express pain than *sharpness*.

Washing oneself in it—between me and myself, a secular gap, friction, sparks, fire immolating my identity. Ever since, nothing better expresses effacement than *ashing*.

Washing oneself in it, between me and myself, an infinite moiré, a salvo of blood sews my name back up. Nothing will ever better express the episiotomy than the *enlargement*.

Washing oneself—while seeking a flesh in which to be, a skin to embody oneself in. A swim. A lapse of time. A parturient's dawn. Then, nothing will better express thickness than *fraying and fleetingness*.

Washing myself at last—still between me and myself, in a tongue-orgasm, I carry out the work of the flesh: as soon as I penetrate a word, I taper my torrents,

my salvations.

*

Inhabit the night—and this cage in which grow a thousand muffled angers becomes a *thorax*.

Enter the sea—and these wounds which waiting has opened in my eddies become *tridacnas*.

*

Inhabit the night—and this bed explored fold by fold while pruning my soul becomes *large*.

Enter the sea—and this night in which a thousand aphrodites exult becomes *pulp*.

*

Inhabit the night—and this self-restraint lynched with bellows becomes *flame*.

Enter the sea—and this breathing which lifts only itself becomes *wind*.

*

And this body, this river of fire quirted by the tongue, becomes hearth.

*

How precarious flesh is
when language

is overflowing.

Enter the sea
because this

is my blood.

*

A word, a shadow,

moves forward and breaks open
the hymen of silence:

cosmogony.

Traduttori/traduttrici:

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| E.J. Papadogia | (Griva) |
| Hüseyin Alhas | (Karacaoglan) |
| Grant Shutzman | (Joshua) |
| Patrick Williamson | (Bekri) |
| Dan Alter | (Ben-Moshe) |
| Ethan Chua | (dela Cruz) |
| Louis Hunt | (Bhartrihari) |
| Leith Jones | (La Ville de Mirmont) |

poem from the collection Demons, Melani, 2020

~translated by Erophile Josephine Papadogia

A.D. 421

Eudocia's coronation

Everyone found her pensive
and believed the din
from the crowd
was a distraction
but she couldn't hear a thing
besides her one thought:
Leaving Athens was a mistake
its academies
the discussions
and the sacred light.
It was a mistake.

Now where would she
find incense
made of rich fruits
where to find
statues of gods
with beautiful shins and loins?
It was a mistake
leaving Athens behind.

Now she will stoop
below crosses and pray
and she must for no reason
ever bare her heels

and thus give away

that she is a descendant
of Achilles.

ANNA GRIVA (Greek)

Karacaođlan – Song 40

~~translated by Hüseyin Alhas

How would I know the truly valiant one?
He should be merry, yet also imposing
When his head is shadowed with sorrow
There should be someone to lighten his heart.

I speak to the truly valiant one
The one who heeds advice
I look for the one who can rout an army,
Against all odds should stand the valiant one.

The truly valiant one glares like a wolf,
Rises when he sees the enemy,
Grasps his spear and rushes to battlefield,
There should be someone to stand behind him.

Not all who are beautiful are good
A valiant one without courtesy does no good
Earnestly he asks for his weapon and horse
He should burn out rather than fade away.

Karac'ođlan says no one enjoys suffering
No hyacinth is sown in fallow fields
Cunning strangers are hard to handle
There should be someone with a heart beating for truth.

KARACAOĐLAN (Turkish, 17th century)

3 from Mozambique

~translated by Grant Schutzman

There's a small room before the flight
heads tilt slowly towards the sky
to come up against the insane side of the wall
in the room
the scattered furniture become statues
before one's eyes and their veins
on the shelf, time gnaws the backside of bone
Agh! What's this doing here?
These furnishings have gone out of their way for such a tiny thing that barely
has a soul.
Yes, let's call it: petit or miniscule it doesn't matter.
Here, names don't change the way the soil combusts.
This terrestrial condition, a fusion of chemistry and physics or electrons and
gravity. It's obvious: true gravity is the door that hits the low notes
as it sings the high-pitched substance of being. And who is there
to hear it?
Who is there to feel it? Our fingers, gone, our head, gone,
all of biology, gone. All of science, gone. What's left is "ecneics,"
the inverse matters to me, if this is what we might call:
systematic knowledge; putting beneath it the motor of
metaphysics.

I await the age-old tradition of a hungry penis. To avenge this worldly
fever. There's an invisible metaphysics at the tip of the ministry. We die
in so many ways: either letting the days pass by, or reading the centuries
from their inside. The law of movement must be obeyed. And nobody
can escape this unshakeable destiny. The flesh.

The book was born from blood. Then it left for the insides of other worlds.

Man's fingers were black. His head like a blacktop of war.

-- Complete illiteracy: good enough for everyone on Earth. We had the essential in life:

the ripened darkness visible on the superficial plane.

And then the wild Letter was born, between the savagery of our hands and teeth.

Writing. The superlative voice. The raw song. Everything born as quickly as the universe in fever.

-- And he couldn't see it.

Each and every day, rather than understand, he misunderstood the verb's sacred movement.

For he was a stranger to himself in that urgent and sudden state, and his desires became victims of his wanderings.

You could imagine anything about him: anything but this ruby-liquid art.

And finally there were no oaths to swear, we have made of ourselves something criminal;

Because it was just enough to see. Or to be blind.

HIRONDINA JOSHUA

Six from **Les Songes Impatients**

~~translated by Patrick Williamson

Purified, the dance on the tongue of sea,

the iguana crossed the roads on mornings

when the sap invites the light, run,

there is ardent earth in the arms of the river,
the island will have all the spindrift as finery.

He freed the dreams proscribed in punished
savannas, haggard marabouts, huts like plumage
for the spinner-queen, watering places weaned
of their stillborn calves, crevasse after crevasse, heedless
the road dried up the skin of wild evenings.

The sea, from afar, the sea close to, the waters
mingled his veins with moving inks,
there are songs like ardent lovers, sobs
as rebellious as garnets, earth upon earth,
the petals remember the offense of steps
unrestrained.

Sometimes, the trees covered up with his shivers,
an errant fugitive, friends could he, stealing the mazes
from days, he held back distraught branches,
ragged footsteps, the penurious voice, in the chorus
of silences, lightning dedicated its swallows.

It was in Boston, Copley Square, he met
the madman, the prophet, exile and seagulls, sand
and foam, marble and copper, violin and far-off flute,
petrified, he defied the skyscrapers
“I am like thee, O, Night, dark and naked;
...whenever my foot touches earth
a giant oak tree comes forth”,
who will remember the poet?

Here the river sleeps, winter covers
its murmur, ice upon ice, bridges
languid under the dreamer's step, the maple
dreams of the cardinal, red wings and frail
rodents, like a sibyl, the light

split him in two, oh come back river!
in the sparkle of prisms or intoxicating
fragrances, the fervent sea awaits you.
In the linden tree walk, your shadow is here,
coming and going, under snowy skies,
the thinker is there, a Japanese apple tree
amid ferns, gray stones and rivers,
there used to be trees here, she said.

TAHAR BEKRI

To page reality backwards

~~translated by Dan Alter

Stavit didn't hold back, & called again:
"Since we broke up,
I can't stop crying when I touch."
I didn't answer. Nor when she arrived with a box of tissues
& sat on the bed. "So, you coming?"
Only after, when I was left alone, did I dare look out the window.
The horizon was spread open like a photo album
hung upside down. One eyelash dropped from the sky.

Yahali tried to talk me out of marrying her

"As a friend I'm telling you, even as a girlfriend,
why do you need to parachute in on me with pajamas?"
I stammered that I like marrying stubborn women,
but she quickly added "Anyway, I have a little girl
so find someone else, a blank, who will have your babies
& that's that, my phone battery's draining
into my ear. We have nothing more to discuss."
I came over to her house & played with her girl.
We did a puzzle with a picture of a house & garden. I explained
that the sun is flat as a plate & that her mom is a monster.
Suddenly she called "daddy" & hugged my neck.
I ran around the house, the girl dangling like a bell,
"you see!" I yelled, "the battery's recharged!"

Sarit, tonight I dreamed I was riding your schedule

Suddenly I halted.
Submerged in clear water, my chest rising & falling
to the sound of your heartbeat, your schedule.
Free of worries, innocent of distances,
my dream cast onto the gleam of your shore.

BEN-MOSHE

Flame

~~translated by Ethan Chua

I missed the crack
of the door when you departed
the house. The canvas left
lying on the floor, stretched
to the posts, the four corners
of your discarded easel.
Light dripped from holes in the roof,
it was light that flooded
the image you drew:
sharded bulbs,
doorframe kneeling below
the beams, ceiling
colored in with charcoal and ash.
When I ran outside after you,
the canvas tore—

my feet woke with water, we kept losing
what we left behind.

CHRISTA I. dela CRUZ

Poem (*from (The Three Hundreds)*)

~~translated by Louis Hunt

A jewel ground smooth by stone,
A victor in battle felled by a spear,
An elephant exhausted by his rut,
The dry banks of a river in autumn,
The last sliver of the crescent moon,
A girl worn out after making love,
Grow slender in their decline -
As do men whose wealth beggars have stolen away.

BHARTRIHARI (Sanskrit)

Diane, Selene

~~translated by Leith Jones

Diane, Selene, moon of precious metal,
Which reflects around us, by your vacant face,
In the deathless tedium of the celestial calm,
The condolence of a sun whose loss we mourn.

Moon, I blame you for your clarity
Damaging to the needless chaos of poor souls,
And my heart, always tired and always restless,
Yearns for the peace of your nocturnal flame.

JEAN DE LA VILLE DE MIRMONT

REVIEWS:

LA CLARTE NOTRE-DAME and THE LAST BOOK OF MADRGALS, by Philippe Jaccottet, translated by John Taylor, with an afterward by José-Flore Tappy. Calcutta, India: Seagull Books, 2022. 124 pages.

This volume presents the poet's final two manuscripts, which might normally seem odd. However, when taken as a study in contrasts, you begin to see what the poet might have been after in doing so.

"...[T]he bristling of [the mountain's] sharp points couldn't even be sensed as a threat in that they rise rather far above the thick prairies and the dense foliage, like a prolonged suspension of big white migrating birds; like, and I won't avoid saying this since the thought of devils had come to those who had long ago named the peaks in this way, a procession of angels whose wings would have stopped beating for ever..."

In such ways, the most mercilessly real world sometimes compels us to invent unreal figures without whom we could not fully report on it."

One might recall what the necessary angel Wallace Stevens speaks of on reading this passage, which is taken from the prose manuscript, *La Clarté Notre-Dame*. (For clarity, I'll state here that *The Last Book of the Madrigals* is written in verse.) It represents well what impression the volume forms in placing the two side by side; it represents well the dividing line between life and the supreme fiction.

In *La Clarté Notre-Dame*, the persona takes a mere walk:

“...[P]erhaps at the end of winter...while walking with friends and barely talking in a vast landscape...to a remote valley, under a grey sky...empty fields where no one is working yet... An ample, colourless space disturbed by no noise, to that extent that it could even seem sad, so deprived as it is of life...”

The world of *La Clarté Notre-Dame* is like the world we live in as it's described by Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism*; viz., it's a world that's “mostly dead.”

In *The Last Book of the Madrigals*, on the other hand, we get the music of verse and what Harold Bloom tells us, in many a volume of criticism, is the gift of literature; namely, “more life.”

After the darkness is removed by a singer's voice that has caught fire, (this is in the manuscript's beginning,) we get:

“...a moist / night-time meadow...// now there's nothing but oaks and violets.”

Instead of a grey sky, like that of the world in *La Clarté Notre-Dame*, we have in these madrigals a sky with a “lunar pearl...the buckle of the Pleiades.” We also see “angels...those sisters of the earth, its finery” along with “eagles...those princely raptors.” These are not representations of mere life, these are celestial, familial and royal beings; the highest (if I may, in one sense of the word, say so) of life forms.

Not only more life, but a livelier world is created by the second manuscript. A “feast” is wrapping up, wherein the people speak of “Alexander's distant ventures.” (Much more ambitious, daring and bold – much more romantic – than a mere, even if meaningful, walk.) They're a lustful group, “peering at each other through their eyelashes.” Compared to the action of *La Clarté Notre-Dame*, what takes place in *The*

Last Book of the Madrigals seems closer to dancing than it is to walking, and it makes the action in the prose seem more like standing still (pure meditation) than it actually is. The persona, observing what's happening around him in the second work, says to himself:

“So now we're born again, / baptized by the long summer night.”

One need only look up the etymology of madrigal – it has the same derivation as matrix, from the Latin for womb, so madrigal means literally “of the womb” – one need only look this up to see what the poet might have been after. And on a related note, in the other title we have “Our Lady.”

There is an unmissable similarity between the two manuscripts: a musical sound, like an imperative, commences both. In *La Clarté Notre-Dame* the persona anticipates hearing the convent bell in the “vast, grey, silent landscape,” coming through “the grey distance of the air.” He hears “the pure, weightless, fragile, yet crystal-clear tinkling,” and implores himself to “keep it alive”; that is, keep alive the sound of a bell. (In this, it goes without saying, he's asking himself to first breathe life into non-life, like Orpheus and the stones.) *The Last Book of the Madrigals* begins with a poem entitled, “While Listening to Claudio Monteverdi,” which itself begins with the following:

“When singing, he seems to call to a shade
whom he glimpsed one day in the woods
and needs to hold on to, be his soul at stake:
the urgency makes his voice catch fire.”

While the persona wishes to keep alive the sound he holds onto in the prose manuscript, in the verse of the work that follows we get a singer who, if the shade be a classical (i.e., ghostly) type, is going to attempt a resurrection. What the personae have in common is the need for something to hold onto; for

their own sake and for that of the held thing. Also, to both, a painful awareness comes, which forces each moment to its crisis, so to speak.

In *The Last Book of the Madrigals*, the persona, at one point, breaks into prose. Therein he's reminded of a failed attempt at integrating an admired work of Dante's into one of his own. He's also reminded, while admiring three ladies in an idyllic setting, of his age when "I had seen my hands already spotted with [it]." (While the other "old" characters of this manuscript, like "the old Blacksmith," appear forever young and "with courtly glory.") Thus ends the first part of that manuscript, and its second part (back in verse) starts with "The streams have awakened." The persona returns to the world where, "At every dawn charitable Penelope / reweaves the blue cloth of the sky," where the world, even in "the violent daytime glare," is "raw green, angelic pink and iris blue." Where the world is made every day anew.

The crisis experienced by the persona in *La Clarté Notre-Dame* is acute and mostly psychological (as opposed to the mostly biological and insidious nature of aging) and brought on by a news report. (At this juncture in the text, the persona is no longer walking, but still; an audience to another walker's distant venture.) A journalist has come back alive from an experience in a Syrian underground prison (Bashar al-Assad's, to be exact) during a time of great civil unrest. On television, the man describes walking down a corridor and hearing the screams of other men being tortured. The persona looks at his life – the life of a poet, with its "gathering of signs" – and contrasts it with "the growing fright of one who walks in a corridor of a prison in Syria and will never be able to efface from his mind the screams that he has heard rising from the lowest circles of Hell."

(One might juxtapose this imagery with that of "the bristling of [the mountain's] sharp points" alluded to above, and perhaps feel like they've gotten a glimpse of what the poet is after. And one might even wonder what the poet means when he says "fully report on [the real world].")

Freud says that “the essence of neurosis is the inability to tolerate ambiguity.” However, tolerating ambiguity is what negative capability – that thing a poet needs, according to Keats – is all about. Now some have said the person is not the poet, but the poet is *in* the person who composes poetry. The moral ambiguity of the real world, created by knowledge of the scene from Syria when its facts are contrasted with his own experience, wrestling with this awareness, is a great struggle for the persona (is it Jaccottet?) in *La Clarté Notre-Dame*. He asks:

“After that, how can one still believe in enchantments? How can one not see *beneath* them...”

(Emphasis mine.)

Thinking about this volume, and how both manuscripts are initiated by a musical sound, I was reminded of what Ezra Pound says in his *ABCs of Reading*:

“Music rots when it gets too far from the dance. Poetry atrophies when it gets too far from music.”

If we use Pound as an additional lens for studying the contrasts presented in this volume (enhancing, one hopes, the effects of the lenses provided by Frye and Bloom, that we’ve thus far made use of), we can see how the world, and the life therein, in *The Last Book of the Madrigals* is far from rotting, far from atrophied: the musical verse (referring back to the first manuscript and its scene from Syria: when the persona is seeking psychological protection, first he considers “one of the most beautiful poems ever written,” but then, reconsidering, he says, “or, seeking an even more effective protection, would you have the purest song that a musician has ever been able to produce...?”); the living, “awakened” streams; the “ripe stars” by the flying chariot, and the other, eponymous chariot ridden by the personification of Grace or Pleasure; and the old (presumably celestial) blacksmith, whose “volute and flames” are the metaphorical representation of dancing, because, as the persona says, “we must climb higher / until we

can't see anything any more, / the beautiful target and the tenacious hunter / blended in the jubilant light.” That's unification, blending of the sort you see with a pair of dancers under the spell (or auspices) of music, its harmonies; the opposite of atrophy. But then also, from Pound, we get the sense that *La Clarté Notre-Dame* is about a world that's strayed from the dance (it's a walk in a silent milieu that slows to a television viewing; that is, a sedentary persona outsourcing his distant ventures), and strayed – in a spiritual sense – from the music (it's in prose). The persona doesn't ask if it has strayed too far, only if – when he implores himself to “keep it alive” – he can keep it from doing so, if he can help life imitate art better, like the singer with the shade in the second manuscript: “be his soul at stake.”

To rephrase the central crisis that emerges from the side by side placement of these two manuscripts: Does the persona choose to be the poet, one who can live with ambiguity, or does he choose to be the neurotic non-poet who cannot? It's a crisis very near to Hamlet's. The same Hamlet that, (I hesitate to add this but find it unavoidably worth noting,) when speaking of Alexander's distant ventures, speculates the conquering hero's remains are being used somewhere to stop a bunghole.

Does he let the “bristling of [the mountain's] sharp points” continue being “like a prolonged suspension of big white migrating birds” and “like...a procession of angels,” or rather, does he opt for real toads and decide to put away imaginary gardens?

This volume almost feels like a religious experience, like putting one foot in the physical realm, and the other squarely in the spiritual. As poetry readers, we, by our very natures, can only follow the poet.

~~*Jake Sheff*

ConQuest, by Arash Allahverdi. Translated by Ali Araghi. Coimpress, 2022. pp 176.

ConQuest by Arash Allahverdi, translated by Ali Araghi, is two books in one. The first one, *Conquest*, is a collection of poems of anger, alienation, and absurdity in reaction to the political and social situation of Tehran and the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War of 1980s. The second “book,” *ConQuest*, is a bilingual edition which includes text and commentary exchanges between the poet and the translator, under the form of marginalia.

The poet was part of The Matrod Poetry Circle, a literary blog that published poetry and critical work, which was the catalyst for his first poetry collection, *Anger* (2007). The next collection, *The Book of Blood*, was released in electronic format in 2012. However, the poet does not consider either of these collections his official ones since he did not receive a governmental permit for publication. The third collection, *God Gracious is Left* (2013), appeared in print and benefited from the blessing of the official route. The current compilation, *ConQuest*, includes his poem “Anger” which gave the name to his first eBook.

In the introduction, the translator points to the arc that the poet makes by moving from being part of The Matrod Circle, a blog living on the margins, to publishing his work in print, and having it translated in German and English. Such a movement into the mainstream, central literary context is not something the poet embraces, yet it is one of the wonderful consequences of translation.

The same introduction is remarkable not only in explaining how the translator came to consider the value of footnotes or marginalia but also in addressing the translation process. It is interesting

to read about the decisions Ali Araghi has made to stay faithful to the richness of the original text, address the importance of the cultural, historical, social, linguistic associations between Arash Allahverdi's poems and his Tehran, while also refraining from bringing his own memories of the place into the text. Such decisions raise the issue of fidelity to translation, as well as the role of the translator.

Thus, the first part of the bilingual collection, *Conquest*, includes the translations of Allahverdi's poems, deprived of any notes from the translator, "as if written in English for an English-speaking audience" (XIV). The second part contains the same translations in conversation with the Persian text, with marginalia. In the translator's words, these commentaries can be read as "informational, personal and conversational." These added notes clarify the translation process but also point to the essential relation between a poet and his translator.

This dialogue that appears in the second part as speech bubble, with timestamps, took part on Facebook, Telegram and WhatsApp between the translator who was in the States and the poet who was in Iran. Thus, the second part becomes a rich terrain for discussing everything from commas to etymologies, to word order and imagery. In a sense, the first paper belongs to the avid reader of poetry or poetry in translation, whereas the second is for the translators or poets interested in witnessing the unfolding of Ali Araghi-Arash Allahverdi collaboration. It provides context to the poems and the process of writing poetry, while also providing a deeper knowledge of the Persian culture and history.

It becomes a hybrid product reflecting on how form is fluid and versatile, enhancing the potential of the content. In *Family Resemblance*, Marcela Sulak quotes poet and editor, Andrew Monson, on the manner in which the container is not a static receptacle but rather willing to morph and show its porous quality: “A hybrid is a thing that’s not entirely comfortable with the container it’s placed in” (XXIII). Ali Araghi introduces the container and its clear content in the first part of the collection while also showing the reader how form can bend and twist into the right hands to reveal the rich promise of languages.

Arash Allahverdi’s poems are both conversational and visual. Whether addressing an unknown audience, divinity or himself, the poet beautifully renders the urgency of his lines. In “Fist”, the narrator is beaten by an invisible fist, in the street, behind the couch or in bed, and each punch feels like “a prayer” (61). The poem is vivid in the way it uses imagery, guiding the reader’s eye from the bruised body to the room, and the street. The repeated movement is suggested by the use of the anaphora, “I am getting punched,” which intensifies the emotions in the poem. In the second part of the book, the poem is framed on the page by the conversational exchange of the translator and the poet, and the cultural references, adding to its visual quality.

“Decay” is a persona poem written in the voice of Mohammad Mokhtari, an Iranian poet and activist, killed in the late 80s in the “chain murders of Iran” (79). The first-person narrator of the poem is slowly turning into an onion and detailing the process to his wife and son: “an onion is a being, and the essence of every being is its soul” (83). The poem is filled with cultural and historical references, including lines or words from the most important contemporary Persian poets, Forough Farrokhzad and Nima Yushij. The poem stands both as a form of political protest

and a metaphor for the metamorphosis the poet goes through in his creative endeavors: “I am in a hurry to skin from the depths of blood” (81).

In the end, Ali Araghi successfully reaches the goals he names in his introduction: facilitate an encounter with Arash Allahverdi’s poems, address the remnants/the hidden in the translation process, and challenge the assumption that the translator is “the best reader of the work”, thus opening a potent space for a conversation between the source and the target texts.

~Clara Burghilea

BRIEF HOMAGE TO PLUTO and other poems, Fabio Pusterla. Translated by Will Schutt. Princeton University Press, 2023. 180 pp.

These are forty-five poems of the well-known Italian poet, collected by Schutt from six previous works. As the Princeton press release says, Pusterla was born in Switzerland but lives in Italy; he “engages the pressing moral concerns of his age and excavates the hidden realities of our concrete world. These are poems of disquieting Alpine landscapes and rift zones, filled with curious fauna, lanced with troubling memories, built ‘from the bottom, from the margins, from outside’ the mainstream.” The prize-winning poet is himself a translator; he translates Jaccottet, one of whose works is reviewed in the current *Ezra*.

Originals are *en face*, and the poems are in two groups, marked 1994-2004 and 2010-2019. Schutt provides a lengthy and richly informative introduction. In it the “Pluto” title is explained,

as well as the non-chronological order of the poems—Schutt choosing an order which “give[s] readers a sense of a continuous and tonally consistent work.”

We are happy to see some prose poems (“Witness” and “Palace Beach”), one page in length—welcome, reminiscent of Max Jacob, and a form under-explored these days.

The poetry is vivid; it is poetry of the concrete, the landscapes flinty. The images are immediate, of land intimately known, “home-bound and boundless” (introduction). They are also suggestive of moods and the moral, though happily the latter is rarely explicit (an exception is the “bombs over Baghdad” short poem, p. 55).

Without startling effects, the poems are modern. Some end with lines that are almost cute in their suggestive incompleteness:

[...] and one of them
turned a moment to face me. p. 7

Then there’s me,
carrying cucumbers and a roll of TP. p. 17

Compare these effects (making no judgment, here) to gorgeous suites like the following:

[...] The way everything falls,
and falls apart, every leaf
laments its destiny, then abates
and gives way to the mild high
of apathy. So many stories
get tangled up, and longing
for another light appears vain.
Hope? Maybe,
if there’s still time, strength, and most of all
patience to attend to each voice. p. 27

Inevitably, a reviewer finds a word or two to improve on, or so this reviewer thinks (p. 31):

“vaga lo sguardo stancamente attorno” is not, to me, “the eye wanders sleepily.” “Stancamente”

is more “wearily,” which is more consonant with the “nulla” and “tristezze” of the poem. At the same time, Schutt has the skill to pull off improvements. In the same poem, his “idle in the evening” is at least as sonorous and good as “languidi nella sera”; his “looming over our column” is distinctly better than “a precipizio su di noi incolonnati.”

The first poem of the second group (“Twilit Stanzas”) offers a new, more political register. With good effect, it shows the confidence of an award-winning translator. “[S]ono piena come un uovo di Pasqua” (full as an Easter egg) becomes “I’m stuffed as a goose/a Christmas goose!” Most of these poems do not require wrenching cultural adaptations, but to be quick on the draw when such is needed is the mark of an experienced translator. As with everything in Princeton’s Lockert Library series (poetry in translation), there is consummate skill on every page of this book.

~*Peter Thompson*

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